“The Blessed Man”

Psalm 1 & 2

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Introduction

Everyone has asked the all too familiar question, “WHY?” at sometime or another. Why is sometimes more than merely a simple question! It is a simple three letter words that is often used as one of those proverbial “four letter” words. It is the question that tends to consume us in the midst of our tragedies.

If you think about it, it is a relevant question expressed toward God in the midst of injustice. Why is this happening to me? Why would you allow an innocent child to die? Why am I struggling when I have worked so hard? Why doesn’t my wife love me anymore? Why do so many innocent people suffer and die in war torn countries? Why do so many people go without the basic necessities of life when others have so much? The questions go on and on.

If God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving; why do these kinds of things happen? Why do sinful people prosper while those who seek to live right suffer?

This is the question that arises at the very beginning of the book of Psalms to which the psalmist then seeks to provide the answer.
Psalm 1 & 2

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.”

He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”

I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”
Context

The book of Psalms, sometimes referred to as the Psalter; is a well loved book. Often even by those who do not fully affirm the gospel of Jesus Christ. One of the best known passages of Scripture in all the Bible is Psalm 23. The Psalms are filled with an immense variety of emotion and expression. From victory to defeat, joy to sorrow, confidence to fear, etc. Too often the Psalms are read as nothing more than a devotional compilation of poetry that seeks to convey a particular emotion. The New Testament, however, reveals that the Psalter is much more than the musings of those who contemplated the Lord in the midst of victory and defeat, joy and sorrow. The book of Psalms is the most quoted book in the New Testament and almost every occurrence of a quote or an illusion to these particular writings is conveyed as prophecy, and most of these; prophecy concerning Jesus Christ.

If the New Testament writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit read the book of Psalms as prophecy concerning the Messiah, then we too should consider how it is that we approach this book. There are those, including myself, who hold to the view that not only are the psalms inspired Scripture, but the process of collecting and organizing the psalms is inspired as well. In other words, the book of Psalms is an inspired collection of songs that seek to unveil God’s promised Messiah.

As the introduction to the book of Psalms, Psalm 1 & 2 orient the reader to read the subsequent psalms with a Christological perspective. In other words, as the introduction, they provide us with the way we should understand the Psalms. While the psalms can be read and understood to some extent, each in isolation, many of them require a broader scope of context than just the individual psalm in order to gain the intended meaning. Such is the case for Psalm 1 & 2. Another good example would be the reading of Psalms 22, 23, & 24 together to view the full scope of the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of the Messiah.

With this in mind, the question of Psalm 2:1 is raised in response to the declaration of 1:5–6. And the blessings promised to those who take refuge in Him in 2:12 point back to the blessings of the man of Psalm 1.

I want us to consider Psalm 1 & 2, this morning in light of their role as the introduction to this Divinely inspired collection under 5 headings:

1. The Question of Injustice (2:1–3, 1:5–6)
2. The Ideal Man (1:1–3)
3. A Sovereign Response (2:4–9)
4. A Gracious Warning (2:10–12a)
5. A Gracious Promise (2:12b)
The Question of Injustice

Psalm 2 begins with a emotionally charged question, “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?” In light of the promise recorded in Psalm 1:5–6 this question is relevant. If indeed the wicked will not stand and God knows the way of the righteous, then why does much of what we experience here and now seem quite the opposite. One of the reasons we love a good hero story or the story of the underdog prevailing is because they are the exception. We don’t have to look very far in order to find clear examples of how injustice seems to win out. Innocent people face tragedy while bad people seem to prosper. Chaos prevails more than we would like to admit in our own lives.

The psalmist was very aware of the injustice in this life. Those who had the power to do right and provide justice for the masses were instead seeking to live by their own rules. The psalmist expresses this by quoting them as saying, “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us” (2:3). This is just another way of saying, “we are not going to live by God’s standards but instead determine for ourselves what is right and wrong.” In many ways, this was the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden. They too sought to make their own rules instead of living under the sovereign rule of their creator. Since that time, this attitude has only grown more deeply rooted into the heart of man. We see this taking place in our own day as those whom we have given power to govern the affairs of our life seem to push further and further away from any semblance of godliness. To the psalmist and often to us, it seems as though these people are succeeding in their endeavors to burst apart the bonds of God’s lordship over His creation.

But the truth conveyed in these first two psalms doesn’t end here . . . The book of Psalms opens with a declaration concerning the blessed man. This ideal man is said to be successful in all that he does. This includes success over the wicked who would seek to undo all that God has purposed and seek to live outside the sovereign rule of God.
The Ideal Man

The psalmist suggests that there is a way in this life to experience real success by presenting a picture of “The Blessed Man.” This ideal man is faithful in his walk and in his dedication to God’s Word.

The psalmist describes this character as one who keeps himself from every appearance of evil. He does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, he does not stand in the way of sinners, and he does not sit in the seat of scoffers. This is merely a threefold way of describing one who is above reproach and lives a life of faithfulness to His God.

Not only does this ideal man live faithful in his lifestyle but he does so because of his dedication to God and His Word. This ideal man meditates on God’s law day and night. This phrase does not merely suggest that he reads God’s Word often but that it saturates every moment of his life. Day and night is simply another way of saying “all the time.”

The result of this ideal man’s dedication is that he stands firm through the ups and downs of life like a tree planted by streams of water and his life bears consistent fruit without fail. Most notably, this ideal man is successful in “ALL” that he does. Be careful not to miss that simple word “ALL.” This ideal man is not successful some of the time or even most of the time, but in ALL that he does, he prospers.

Now, while there is much encouragement for us to model our lives after this description of the ideal man, we don’t want to miss the ultimate point that rests here in this text.

The final verses of Psalm 1 declare that “God knows the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish.” This sounds great initially as long as you are in the first category. But how can you be sure you are? If the description of the ideal man is the criteria by which we qualify for the category of righteous then we should probably be a little concerned.

How many of us live consistently by the description of the verse 1. Can we say that we never walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of scoffers? How many of us can say that we meditate faithfully in God’s Word day and night? I guess we could determine our status by the results we experience? How many of us find ourselves standing so firm that we never waiver in the ups and downs of life? Finally, how many of us can say that we are prosperous in EVERYTHING we do?

If we utilize these characteristics, I would say that all of us would fail miserably. If we simply consider the text of this particular psalm and take it
for what it says, we might find ourselves wondering if we could reasonably believe that we of all people would be among the righteous. To add injury to insult, Paul clarifies this issue for us in Romans 3 when he quotes psalm 14 declaring that there are none righteous!

So then, what are we to make of such a reality. The righteous will stand but yet their are none righteous. This is the very issue in the midst of this chaotic, sin infected world; that Psalm 2 seeks to respond to. Under divine inspiration, he provides us with a Sovereign Response.
A Sovereign Response

So why then, does injustice continue in this life? Why are the wicked allowed to have their way and subvert the ways of God? Why are they allowed to plot and plan against the Lord and His anointed?

The psalmist reveals God’s response to these scoffers. “He who sits in the heavens laughs.” God is not concerned in the least that there are those who seem to succeed in this life while living in rebellion to His ways. God has decreed the end from the beginning and will accomplish His perfect plan for the ages. Therefore, He remains unmoved by the seeming momentary injustice because everything will face ultimate justice before the Sovereign King of the Universe!

This certain outcome, God declares; will have its fulfillment in the King that God has established. God declares, “I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill” (2:6). All the kings of the earth may enjoy a temporary and limited reign of power and influence, but this king, God’s king is the King of all kings.

Not only does this king enjoy the exalted status of God’s King, but He also claims the name of “Son of God.” This will be no ordinary king but one who enjoys a unique relationship with God Himself.

This king will not merely rule a particular kingdom but will be granted the nations as his heritage and ends of the earth as his possession (2:8). When the psalmist recorded these words, how and when this declaration would come to be a reality was a mystery.

God’s people were continually looking for such a leader. One who would lead them as Moses once did, or provide victory over the enemy as Joshua once did, or provide them with a life of peace and prosperity as David once did.

Moses declared that one day God’s people would have a king and in addition he declared:

““And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom,”

(Deuteronomy 17:18–20 ESV)
When Joshua came on the scene as Moses’ replacement God spoke these words:

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

(Joshua 1:8 ESV)

Joshua was successful in much and provided great leadership for God’s people, but he did not live up to the words of Psalm 1. What was declared to him as possible is presented as being done perfectly by the Ideal man of Psalm 1. What was commanded to be done by Israel’s king according to Moses was followed to some extent by a few kings, but not perfectly.

God’s King of Psalm 2 would fulfill both the words written by Moses and declared to Joshua perfectly. Through this King, God’s people would one day see the justice declared in Psalm 1:5–6. This King, who enjoys the status of Son, will “break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (2:9).

Because of the promise of this King, the psalmist provides a gracious warning for those who stand in rebellion to God.
**A Gracious Warning**

In light of God’s coming king, verses 10-12 provide an exhortation to the kings and rulers who set themselves above God and counsel together against the Lord and His Anointed. This exhortation is one of wisdom and warning. All who are opposed to the sovereign rule of God are wise to consider this King and His authority. They are warned of the judgment that will befall them if they persist in their ways.

This warning exhorts us all to “serve the Lord” and “rejoice with trembling.” Just as God’s justice will be dealt out through this promised King who is declared to be the “begotten Son,” serving the Lord is fulfilled through submission to the Son. The psalmist declares, “Kiss the Son.” This is simply another way of expressing submission and worship. Those who would desire to serve God must do so by submitting themselves to “the Son.” While the audience to whom the psalmist first wrote did not have a clear picture of this reality, we do today. We can clearly recognize the reality of this King who is the Son in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus declared that “all authority has been given to me.” God’s judgment has been handed over to Jesus Christ the Son of God. One day, all of humanity will stand before Christ as judge. It is then that the reality of Psalm 1:5-6 will clearly come to pass, “God knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

Yet, the rest of Scripture makes clear that doing acts of service for God does not make one righteous. So then, if there are none righteous, how does the revelation of this King who is the Son of God do us any good. While it is certain that the wicked will perish and all things will be made right, how does one guarantee that they do not come up short and find themselves in the category of the wicked.

Psalm 2 closes with a gracious promise concerning the dilemma of the ages. How do sinful unrighteous people gain a favorable standing before a righteous king?
A Gracious Promise

In the final statement of Psalm 2 we come full circle with the blessed man of Psalm 1. It is clear that the righteous will stand and the unrighteous will perish. It is clear throughout Scripture that all humanity is born in rebellion with God and persists in that state due to our sinful nature and are therefore unrighteous. Scripture is also clear that there is nothing that we can say or do in order to make up for our unrighteousness and therefore justly deserve to be condemned as the wicked sinners that we are.

The Blessed Man of Psalm 1 however will find himself among the righteous! If only we could live up to that description. But even if we could from this day forward, how would we make up for the many years that we lived in rebellion before? It is an impossible dilemma!

The description of the blessed man of Psalm 1 is not merely a moral pep rally recorded in God’s Word in order to get us to do better. It is the description of the man who WOULD live a completely righteous life. His entire life would be characterized as one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of scoffers. He would perfectly and continuously meditate in God’s Word day and night delighting in His Word. His life would be marked out by living in accordance to God’s law perfectly. He would be like a tree bearing fruit in its season and . . . He would be truly successful in ALL that he does.

There is but one who is truly righteous! Jesus Christ lived a perfectly sinless life fulfilling the law of God. Something no mere human being is capable of doing. With His perfect righteousness, He gave His life on behalf of unrighteous sinners like us making His perfect righteousness available to us.

It is for this reason that the psalmist declares in 2:12, “Blessed are ALL who take refuge in Him.” Our hope is not in our ability to live up to the character of Psalm 1, we will all fail miserably. But Jesus lived that life for us. Our only hope is taking refuge in Him. He offers His righteousness freely to ALL who will take refuge in Him. And ALL who do so, will find themselves declared righteous and stand in the day of judgment. All who refuse will find themselves justly condemned under the righteous wrath of God.
Conclusion

Martin Luther captured some of the reality of Psalm 1 & 2 in the hymn entitled “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” take special note of the second verse:

1. A mighty fortress is our God,  
a bulwark never failing;  
our helper he amid the flood  
of mortal illsprevailing.  
For still our ancient foe  
doth seek to work us woe;  
his craft and power are great,  
and armed with cruel hate,  
on earth is not his equal.

2. Did we in our own strength confide,  
our striving would be losing,  
were not the right man on our side,  
the man of God's own choosing.  
Dost ask who that may be?  
Christ Jesus, it is he;  
Lord Sabaoth, his name,  
from age to age the same,  
and he must win the battle.

So, while we should be compelled to live a life characterized by the blessed man of Psalm 1, we must recognize that all of our attempts to do so will ultimately end in failure. In the midst of the chaos of this sinful world full of injustice and filled with a culture that seeks to subvert the way of God, all humanity finds themselves in an impossible dilemma! How will sinful man become righteous? But what is impossible with man, is possible with God! In spite of what may seem to be reality in the here and now, justice will be meted out in the end and all will be made right. The question that remains is, “in which group will we find ourselves?” Will you be among the righteous whose ways God knows or among the wicked who will perish? If you are depending upon your own righteousness, you will face a rude awakening when you stand before the King of kings.
God in His mercy and grace has provided a way for unrighteous sinners to stand among the righteous. He has given us the perfect King, His own Son! All who would desire to gain the status of righteous before a righteous God must do so on the basis of this ideal king who is the fulfillment of the blessed man of Psalm 1. On the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, sinners like you and me can be declared righteous. And so comes to pass the declaration of the psalmist, . . .

BLESSED ARE ALL THOSE WHO TAKE REFUGE IN HIM!