

“Blessed is” Psalm 1 / Matthew 5:3-12 (9/7/25)

When I was living in China, I had many unusual experiences for someone my age. I studied language at a school that was in a national park, and later I attended middle school in Beijing. The teacher who had taught me Chinese in South Korea had moved to Beijing, so I lived with my teacher. Her husband worked at the Bank of China. He spoke Korean well and often represented the bank in meetings with Korean companies. Because of that, they often had dinners with people who worked at big companies like Samsung and LG, and whenever possible, they would bring me along. I still remember that there were many gifts for Hyundai’s CEO and his team at my home. And when the South Korean president visited China, my teacher’s husband, as a bank representative, even had the opportunity to meet him.

At that time, my teacher was only 28, and her husband was early 30s. They were so young, and yet already doing such important work. I admired them deeply and wanted to be like them. I thought, “If I could grow up and live like them, that would be a blessing.”

But I never really saw true happiness in their lives. On weekends, they would drive around to see better cars and better houses. I can still remember my teacher coming home from work, looking across the street at a nicer house, and saying, “When will I ever be able to live in a place like that?” I could not understand her. To

me, their house was already huge and beautiful. Their house was at least four times bigger than my house, which I had grown up in South Korea. I could not figure out why they were not satisfied.

Everyone wants to be blessed. One thing I have noticed as a pastor in the U.S. is that when people know that I am a pastor, they usually become friendly. And if I say, “Can I bless you?” I have never had anyone reject. Even people with no religion or no interest in Christianity still welcome blessings. I have yet to meet someone who says no to blessings.

Most people think of “blessing” as some kind of power or force that makes life go well—no accidents, no sickness, success in the future, dreams coming true, everything smooth and peaceful. I used to think that too before I got to know God.

But after becoming a Christian and reading Scripture, I realized blessing in the Bible is something different. In the Old Testament, God tied blessing to meditating on God’s Law. In the New Testament, when Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, He listed eight kinds of people who are “blessed,” and none of them had anything to do with wealth or status. Maybe we can share more about the Beatitudes another time. For today, I want us to think about blessing through the Psalms.

At the time of Jesus, what we now call the Old Testament was the official

Scripture for Jewish people. The Jewish people divided the Scripture into three parts: the Torah, the Nevi'im (Prophets), and the Ketuvim (Writings). Psalms are part of the Ketuvim. So yes, the Psalms were already considered God's Word and had authority.

The Torah is the Law itself, the Nevi'im contain Israel's history and prophetic writings, and the Ketuvim also include teachings and prophecy. Psalms, though, are a collection of poems and songs by different authors. And that is one of the unique things about our faith: God's Word is not just information; through the Psalms, we can see God sharing God's heart with us. —songs of joy, lament, thanksgiving, and trust— the variety of Psalms let us step into the author's heart and see how they wrestled with God.

The Psalms are divided into five “books,” reflecting Israel's history. Starting today and through October, we will go through a series of Psalms, one book of five Psalms each Sunday. The first book of the Psalms mainly reflects David's period. If Samuel gives us the stories of David, the Psalms let us feel David's heart—how he poured out joy, grief, or fear before God, and how God responded to him.

Psalms 1 and 2 serve as the introduction, not just to Book 1 but to the entire Psalms. Psalm 1 begins with “Blessed is...” and gives us the description of the blessed person.

According to Psalm 1, the blessed one is someone who meditates on God's Law day and night. God told Moses to teach the Law to Israel, and when Joshua took over leadership, the first command was to meditate on the Law. Psalm 1 repeats this same truth: the blessed person delights in God's Word and meditates on it day and night.

But before describing that, the psalm warns us about what the blessed person does not do: "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked, or stand in the way that sinners take, or sit in the company of mockers." We should focus on those three words: walk, stand, sit. That is how a human falls into sin. At first, just walk by out of curiosity, then stop and stand on sin, and before long, sit down and settle into sin. That is humans' sinful nature.

By contrast, the blessed person delights in God's Law and meditates on it day and night. Now, we need to understand that the word "meditate" here does not mean what we think of today. In the Old Testament, meditation meant to read God's Word out loud, to recite it, to let it be on your lips day and night. [Slide 1] Meditation in the Old Testament was not about thinking and reflecting on the Word silently. It was about soaking in the Word, speaking it, hearing it, letting it shape you. When we read the Bible, some parts will be hard to understand, even harder to accept, but that's okay. The important thing is to keep reading. That is what biblical meditation is. My

hope for our church is that we become a community that reads, asks questions, and wrestles with God’s Word together. If you ever have questions as you read Psalms, bring them to me. I may not always have the answer right away—I’m still learning too—but those questions can help us all dig the Word of God deeper together. And for that to happen, we simply need to start reading the Bible.

Psalm 1 then gives us more description about a blessed person: “That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.” A blessed person is not just any tree, but a tree planted by streams of water. That image makes sense when you know Israel’s geography. [Slide 2] Around the Jordan and Galilee, [Slide 3] water is abundant and trees are big and grow well. But most of Israel is wilderness. [Slide 4] After a heavy rain, temporary streams—called wadis—appear, and plants grow quickly along Wadis. But when the rain stops, the water dries up, and those plants wither and die. Psalm 1 says the blessed person is not like those wadi plants but like a tree planted by a constant water source, fed year-round. That tree grows strong, fruitful, and enduring.

At first, I thought “whatever they do prospers” meant that daily Bible reading would guarantee success in life. But now I see it differently. Prosperity here is not about wealth or being well—it is about strength. A tree by the water still faces strong

heat, storms, wind, and cold, but it survives and endures suffering because its roots have grown deep. In the same way, when we are nourished by God's Word and God's life, our faith grows strong enough to endure and overcome our challenges in our lives. I believe that is real prosperity.

So, blessing itself is not prosperity, peace, or happiness. The true blessing is having God's life flowing into us without end. Out of that, yes, peace and joy come—but they are fruits, not the essence. The essence of blessing is Jesus Christ, the living water, dwelling in us. To delight in God, to meditate on God's Word day and night—that is a blessing.

So, who are we? Are we people who have unknowingly “sat down” in sin, or are we people who delight in God's Word? Are we trees planted in a wadi, or trees planted by streams? Actually, our answers to those questions are not important. Jesus has already called us to the way of life. Jesus already gave His life for us on the cross. We have already been transplanted by God's grace to streams of living water.

And today, the proof of that is here on this Holy Table. Instead of asking, “Am I stuck in sin? Am I a wadi tree?” I want us to receive Christ by faith. This Table is the evidence. As we eat and drink Jesus' body and blood, may God's endless grace and the life of Christ fill your heart. May you experience that miracle today. Amen.