

The Road to Happiness

Psalms 1-2

What do you think will make you happy?
What is the key to happiness?

Your answer will fundamentally change how you live your life.

When Jesus was being tested in the wilderness, He spoke these words, quoting Deuteronomy 8.

Matthew 4:4 ⁴ But he answered, "It is written, "' Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Jesus was committed to "every word that comes from the mouth of God".
He was committed to this path because He knew that it was the path of life, and happiness.

Jesus also taught His disciples to pray: Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...

The Kingdom of God is a worldwide kingdom over which Jesus is sovereign Ruler. It is a kingdom in which all His subjects do His will all the time.

Our eternal happiness coincides with our perfect delight in God's Law and perfect submission to Jesus' will.

These truths are eternal. They cannot be altered. To do so would be to overthrow the God of the Universe.

The tragedy of our current culture is that it believes that God can be overthrown.

Psalms 1 defines to us the path to happiness.
Psalm 2 declares to us the certainty of the Kingdom of God.

As such, they establish the two pillars of truth that are fundamental to making sense of the other 148 psalms.

The 150 psalms of the Bible were not brought together in their present form until the time of the Exile.
Most of them were written during or after the time of King David.
The Psalms arise out of the experiences of God's people over a 500 year period.

Many of the psalms express the experiences of king David, both good and bad.
Many arise from the disappointment over the demise of the Davidic kings and the destruction of Jerusalem.
Many arise from the heartache of God's people living in exile in Babylon.

As God's people face their own rebellion...
As they face the disappointment of their own rulers...
As they face the dominion of their enemies over them...
As they face the lives of suffering and unhappiness...

... they face a far more sinister enemy...
... They face they enemy of no longer believing the truth of Psalms 1-2.

The psalmists wrestle with the realities of a broken world, while stubbornly refusing to let go of the promises of the Covenant.

The Covenant begins with God's promises to Abraham. With Abraham God establishes the foundational principle of faith. To be in Covenant relationship with God is to live by faith in God's promises of blessing.

The Covenant continues with the Law given through Moses. The Law includes both moral and ceremonial commands. To be in a Covenant relationship with God is to live under Him as Lawgiver and King.

The Covenant continues with God's promises to David as God's chosen king. The promises of blessing and the establishment of the Law of God throughout the Kingdom would come to pass because God would establish a human king in the line of David to rule.

God's Anointed Ruler would bring about God's perfect kingdom in which all God's people would always delight in God's perfect Law.

This is the expectation presented in the first two psalms.

The 150 psalms are divided into 5 separate books.

Books 1 (Psalms 3-41) and 2 (Psalms 42-72) establish the foundation of the Davidic Kingship = In these books we see David as God's anointed king wrestling in his thoughts as he struggles against his enemies. In Book 1 we see the reflections of David himself.

- Psalms 3-41 all begin with "A Psalm of David"
- Psalms 10 and 33 have no title, but were most likely originally joined with Psalms 9 and 32.

Psalms 1-2 do not follow this pattern. They do not have the title "A Psalm of David".

This is one reason why we see these Psalms as an introduction to the entire Psalter.

Book 2 (Psalms 42-72) = Book 2 may also include the Reign of Solomon.

At the end of Psalm 72 we have this statement.

^{ESV} **Psalm 72:20** The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.

This is true even though there are a good number of Psalms in books 3-5 that are attributed to David.

Book 3 (Psalms 73-89) is generally set in the time of the failure of the Monarchy = In this book we see a very realistic picture of defeat and devastation. These Psalms have the perspective of the failure of the Davidic line and the Exile.

Books 4 (Psalms 90-106) and 5 (Psalms 107-150) = Here we see a more mature hope of the Coming of the Kingdom and a call for thanksgiving and praise.

Each of the 5 books ends with a doxology.

“Psalms 1 and 2 are like two grand pillars, one on each side of the entrance gate into the books of the Psalms.” Christopher Ash 15

Looking at this broad structure, we can begin to see the big picture message of the Psalms. Honestly deal with the realities of a broken world while continuing to cling to the promise of God’s happiness.

Psalms 1 and 2 begin with a declaration of happiness.
And Psalm 2 ends with another declaration of happiness.

Read Psalms 1-2.

^{ESV} **Psalm 1:1** 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; ² but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Psalms 1 sets up a contrast between two very different paths that you can take in life. This psalm very purposely calls each one of us to choose the path that will result in happiness.

There are two Hebrew words translated by the English word “blessed”. The word used here is less common. “Asher” The more common word is Barak. And it has a larger range of meaning. It is often used to describe God’s favor over someone or something. “And God blessed them...”

Asher has a more limited range of meaning. It is used to describe what a person feels when they are in a “state of well-being”.

^{CSB} **Psalm 1:1** How happy is the man who does not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path of sinners, or join a group of mockers!

^{YLT} **Psalm 1:1** O the happiness of that one, who hath not walked in the counsel of the wicked. And in the way of sinners hath not stood, And in the seat of scorners hath not sat;

I believe that the psalmist is very purposeful in choosing Asher here.

He chooses the same word at the end of Psalm 2.

¹² 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.

^{CSB} **Psalm 2:12** Pay homage to the Son, or He will be angry, and you will perish in your rebellion, for His anger may ignite at any moment. All those who take refuge in Him are happy.

^{YLT} **Psalm 2:12** Kiss the Chosen One, lest He be angry, And ye lose the way, When His anger burneth but a little, O the happiness of all trusting in Him!

The psalmist does not teach that happiness will occur after this life. He is teaching that the person who follows his counsel will experience happiness. He or she will live life in a state of happiness.

Without this expectation of happiness, many of the expressions of frustration in the psalms do not make sense.

If the Bible promised misery in this life and happiness in the next, we would have far less disappointment.

The psalmists are wrestling with the tension of the truth of Psalms 1-2 and the realities of their lives.

Is this not a similar struggle to the one that you face?

Do you not feel this tension in your own life?

Young people, the world is telling you that Christianity is a fraud.

And because you are daily faced with your own unhappiness, of which God has done little to fix, you are tempted to believe that Christianity is nothing more than a human attempt to control you.

Instead of presenting the path to happiness, Christianity is a tool of oppression.

The world's path to happiness is one of following your own heart.

Our own Declaration of Independence establishes "happiness" as a goal that every human should have the freedom to pursue. We consider it an inalienable right: Life, liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness...

And yet, having the right to pursue happiness, is not the same thing as obtaining happiness.

Very few Americans are happy. Armand Nicholi writes:

"No aspect of life is more desired, more elusive, and more perplexing than happiness. People wish and strive for what they believe will make them happy – good health, attractive looks, an ideal marriage, children, a comfortable home, success, fame, financial independence – the list goes on and on. Not everyone who attains these goals, however, finds happiness."

(Armand M. Nicholi commenting on the debate "The Question of God: C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life." 97)

But Psalm 1 does not encourage us to figure out for ourselves the road to happiness. Psalm 1 establishes that there is only one path to happiness.

How is happiness found?

Happiness is found in bringing your life into accord with God's established Law. (Psalm 1)

And happiness is found by bringing your heart into submission to God's anointed king. (Psalm 2)

Laws demand conformity.

And a King possesses authority over you.

The road to happiness begins with a rejection of the mindset of the wicked.

Wickedness is a mindset that resists God's Law and is unwilling to submit to God's anointed King.

Another way to say this is that true happiness is not gained by being autonomous!!!!

Autonomy = self-rule. There is a limited sense in which "self-rule" is good. We are all called to rule over ourselves such that we have what we call "self-control".

But this is not what I mean by autonomy.

Autonomy is living as if you are the king of yourself. You are on the throne of your life. You are your own master. And you determine your own rules.

Once you understand this, you can begin to see how this path is fundamentally opposed to God's Law and God's King.

The person who wants to experience happiness will see God's Law as beautiful. He will delight in God's Law. That means that he will feel great emotional attraction to God's Law.

And because he delights in God's Law, he has no problem meditating on that law throughout the day and into the night.

By meditation he means a purposeful reflection upon it so as to gain a proper understanding of the meaning of the Law.

^{ESV} **Joshua 1:8** 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.

Not only is he happy, but he is also fruitful and prosperous.

³ 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 one who is rightly related to God's Law is a never withering tree, bearing its fruit in season. In other words, he is a model of health and vitality.

And in whatever he works to accomplish, he succeeds. He is consistently prosperous. He does not fail in any of his endeavors.

I am purposefully not adding any qualifiers to these statements. I know that there are all sorts of qualifiers that must be made. But this psalm does not make any of them. The writer simply presents the unfiltered expectation.

Happiness, fruitfulness, and prosperity are found on the road of bringing your life into conformity with the Law of God.

In contrast with this road is the road taken by the wicked. And the road of the wicked ends in destruction.

⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. ⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; ⁶ for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Instead of a never withering tree, the wicked are described as the husks of wheat that are blown away in the wind.

As husks they never really bear any true fruit. But it is not so much the fruitlessness as the fact that they must face the judgment of the LORD. The wicked are not able to stand up against this judgment. And this judgment results in their being cast out of the congregation of the righteous.

As you read the rest of the Psalms, you will find that the psalmists maintain a belief in the opposite destinies of the wicked and the righteous. At the same time, you will also find the psalmists expressing frustration over the present reversal of these destinies.

Psalm 2 sets up the expectation of God's rule over the nations through his anointed king.

^{ESV} **Psalm 2:1** Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, ³ "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."

Psalm 2 expects that the nations of the world will oppose the rule of God's anointed king. God's anointed king represents God's divine rule over all men.

Just as sinful men want independence from God's Law, so they want independence from God's king. The nations see the rule of God's king as bondage. And they want to be free from it. And so, they plot and scheme of ways to throw off the yoke.

But if this rebellion is to be expected, Psalm 2 also paints a picture of the futility of this rebellion.

⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. ⁵ Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, ⁶ "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." ⁷ I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

God is not threatened in the least by man's rebellion.

He laughs. It is not so much that He thinks it is funny. It is more that it seems so small and insignificant to Him.

The LORD's derision of the rebellious makes use of the same word in Psalm 1 for the scoffers. The rebellious may scoff at God's Law and King, but it is God who will have the last laugh.

The battle between the rebellious nations and the LORD's anointed is not an even fight.

This is not to say that the nations are feeble. From our human perspective they are immensely powerful. But from God's perspective, they are nothing, ants on the pavement to be squashed.

These nations will be crushed by God's anointed king.

God is the one who has set His king on His holy hill, meaning Jerusalem.

At the coronation of God's anointed king, God adopts the human king as His own son.

"Today, I have begotten you" does not refer to the eternal sonship of Christ. It refers to God adopting the human king as His own son.

Because of the king's newfound relationship of being made a "son of God", he is now able to ask God for the nations. It is important to see that the human king is not only ruling over the boundaries of Israel. He is ruling over the ends of the earth. They belong to him as a possession.

The means of ruling over the nations is described as the king's breaking them with a rod of iron. And it is said that he will dash them to pieces.

Other than saying that this conquering will happen, little is given to us as to how it will happen, or when it will happen.

What is more important to the Psalmist is that he calls the kings of the earth to heed the warning while there is still time.

¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. ¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹² 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.

It is a matter of wisdom for human kings to submit to the authority of God's anointed ruler now. In submitting themselves to God's king, they are submitting themselves to God. It is pointless to resist the sovereign rule of God. Therefore, they should "kiss the Son", meaning to embrace him, and his rule over them, to give your fealty to him.

To fail to submit to the Son will ensure the same destiny as that of the wicked in Psalm 1. You will perish in the way.

The wrath of the Son will be quickly kindled.

On the other hand, blessed "or happy" are all who take refuge in him.

Of course, everyone accepts that the true anointed king is Jesus Christ. He is the king whose kingdom will extend to the ends of the earth.

But for the sake of understanding the psalms it is important to see that this psalm applied to every king in the Davidic dynasty.

And it is an attempt to understand the failure of this Psalm to come true that is the source of many of the rest of the psalms.

In the very next psalm (3) which we will look more at next week, we see David, who rightly can claim the promises of Psalm 2 for himself, on the run from his own son, Absalom.

David is trying to honestly connect his present struggles with the truth of Psalm 2.

Psalm 3:1-8 A PSALM OF DAVID, WHEN HE FLED FROM ABSALOM HIS SON. O LORD, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; ² many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God. Selah ³ But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. ⁴ I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill. Selah ⁵ I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustained me. ⁶ I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. ⁷ Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked. ⁸ Salvation belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people! Selah

In this Psalm, we see David honestly dealing with the reality of being on the run from his son. At the same time, we see David maintaining a firm belief in the truth of Psalm 2.

He may not know everything about how God will bring it to pass.
But he finds great comfort knowing it to be true.

Let's do our own theological reflection.

Do you believe delighting in God's Law and submitting to God's king is the way of happiness?

Experience often teaches you otherwise.
Godly people are not always happy.
Ungodly people are sometimes happy.

We might argue that their happiness will end.
But as we look at them right now, many of them have more health than the righteous.
And many of them are certainly more prosperous than the righteous.

Psalm 73:3-5 ³ For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. ⁵ They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

Experience challenges whether Psalm 1 is true.
In fact, one commentator wrote:

"Psalm 1 is simple, problematical and, on the face of it, patently untrue." Ash 16.

The tension between the expectation and the reality forces us to ask questions:

Who is at fault? Me or God?

Many of the psalmists admit their failures.

Even though neither Psalm 1 or 2 speaks clearly of the gospel message, Psalm 2 does mention taking "refuge" in God's anointed king.

And future psalms expand on this idea.

Psalm 31:1-5 In you, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! ² Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! ³ For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; ⁴ you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. ⁵ Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

Psalm 32:1-5 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ² Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. ³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah ⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

The heart of our sin comes from our failure to delight in God's Law and our refusal to submit to Christ as our king.

What are we to do with our own rebellion?

The psalms teach us very clearly what to do.

Psalm 51:1-12 . Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. ⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

But the Psalmists do not see every failure to experience happiness as the result of their own rebellion.

The psalmists often pray for relief without any mention of sin.

And then they struggle to wait patiently for God to reverse present circumstances.

It is common for the psalmists to ask “why?”

Sometimes they express their feelings that God has somehow forgotten them.

Psalm 13 – How long O Lord? Will You forget me forever?

But when the psalmists question God, they do not let go of God as their hope.

And they acknowledge God’s past goodness to them with thankfulness.

Psalm 13:5-6 ⁵ But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. ⁶ I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

How do I apply Psalm 1?

1. I use it to examine my own heart.
 - a. The saved person delights in God’s Law and submits to Christ’s rule.
 - i. God’s law reveals God’s character.
 - ii. Christ is ruling over you now through providence.
 - b. As a saved person, I continue to struggle with an old nature that remains in rebellion and must be conquered.
2. I use it to show me Christ.
 - a. Jesus was born under the Law and perfectly fulfilled that Law.
 - b. Jesus always did the will of His heavenly Father.
 - c. Psalm 1 does not explain how a rebellious person can become a righteous person.
 - i. That can only happen by acknowledging your sin and trusting in Jesus Christ for forgiveness and a new heart.
3. I use it to give me hope.
 - a. This is my destiny in Christ.
 - b. I continue to press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of me.
4. I use it to help me understand my own present unhappiness.
 - a. The Kingdom of Christ has not arrived in its fullness.
 - b. Our lives are full of suffering and pain.
 - c. It is appropriate to feel bad because the world is not yet right.

How do I apply Psalm 2?

1. I use it to encourage my heart to submit to Jesus.
2. I use it to overcome my discouragement when I witness evil and rebellion.
3. I use it to encourage my heart to not fear the powerful rulers of this world who hate Christ.
4. I use it to encourage me of the importance of warning people that Jesus will return and judge all men.

Jesus is ruling.

And Jesus will come again rule over the earth.

He will rule according to God's perfect law.

Our eternal happiness depends upon it.

Amen.