

## Sermon 2, What Are the Psalms?, Psalms 1-3

**Proposition:** The first three psalms teach us that the Psalms are the songs of God's anointed king, teaching His people how to worship and how to be blessed.

- I. A Triple Introduction
  - A. Psalm 1: God's Torah the Source of Blessedness
  - B. Psalm 2: God's Anointed King the Source of Blessedness
  - C. Psalm 3: God's Anointed King the Mediator of Blessedness
    - 1. Through his sufferings
    - 2. Through his psalms: "To the Choirmaster"
    - 3. Through his victory, 3:7
- II. A Triple Truth
  - A. Psalm 1: Psalms Are About Torah (Scripture/Instruction)
  - B. Psalm 2: Psalms Are About Christ
  - C. Psalm 3: Psalms Are the King's Songs for Us to Sing
    - 1. In private
    - 2. In public worship
- III. A Triple Blessing
  - A. The Blessed Man, 1:6
  - B. The Blessed Refuge-Taker, 2:12
  - C. The Blessed People, 3:8

### Introduction

"If only I had a curriculum! I don't know enough to teach my children well about God. I don't have anything short and memorable that sums up everything they need to know about their Savior. We're not good at memorizing things, I'm terrible at writing music and making up songs, and the Bible is so big and complicated!"

To all the moms and dads who have ever felt that way, this sermon is for you. Would you believe it if I told you that God has provided ready-made, memorable, theologically precise and aesthetically gorgeous teaching and memory aids that the most humble Christian can use to learn about Him and to teach her children about Him? That these aids have been used in every church, in every country, in every century, and that to know them is a passport to instant Christian fellowship? That you can not only know what was on Jesus' playlist, but you can sing those same songs? All of that and far, far more is to be found in the one hundred and fifty Psalms that lie before us this morning. Sisters, mothers — you have everything you need to be a theologian, right here in these Psalms. They are literally for instruction, as we will see in a moment discussing Psalm 1. Let them set your priorities in teaching your children. Let them be what your family memorizes, what you sing together, what serves as the soundtrack to your most important

moments. Why are we letting Nashville, Motown, and Hollywood create the music that accompanies our lives and trains our desires when we have the songs of the great king to guide us in the ways of righteousness?

You see, brothers and sisters, how a book starts is your best clue to its contents. If you recognize what the first three psalms are about, you'll see what the Psalter is about. That's why we are going to look at these three psalms this morning as a triple introduction, a triple truth, and a triple blessing. With God's help, we will see that the first three psalms teach us that the Psalms are the songs of God's anointed king, teaching His people how to worship and how to be blessed.

### **I. A Triple Introduction**

The first thing I want you to see is that the first three psalms stand at the gateway to the Psalter as a triple introduction. They each highlight a major theme that continues through the rest of the book.

#### **A. Psalm 1: God's Torah the Source of Blessedness**

Psalm 1 makes the essential point that the Torah is the source of blessedness. I use that Hebrew word because it captures more than its typical Greek and English translation "law." What is the Torah? The word literally means "instruction." It is the Old Testament's name for itself, signifying that God's instruction is the source of blessedness. Thus, Psalm 1 begins with an announcement of blessing: "Blessed is the man." Just as the book of Revelation tells us that the one who reads it aloud is blessed, and those who hear it are blessed, so Psalm 1 tells us that those who think carefully and long about the word of God are blessed.

In other words, the Psalter is a book of blessing. That is its first word. As we will see at the end of this sermon, all three of the first psalms contain a blessing.

What is a blessing? It is a good word. From a fellow human being, it takes the form of a wish — a wish that God would use His power to make your life good. But from God, it is not a wish. It is the actual action of making your life good. To be blessed by God is to have Him give you what you need for flourishing, happiness, and satisfaction.

What does blessing consist in? In knowledge of God's word and delight in it. That's what the first psalm tells us. In so doing, it provides the first part of the introduction to the psalter. This book is going to teach you God's word, and help you delight in it. The psalter is designed to be an aid to meditating day and night in the Torah of Yahweh such that you can be the blessed man firmly rooted by the river of the water of life. The psalter is also going to train you to reject the other way, the way of sinners. That way will perish. It will be blown away by the wind when the wheat and chaff are separated. That makes meditation on God's word all the more compelling: not only is it the path of blessing, it is the opposite of the path to cursing.

So the first psalm is a Torah psalm whose goal is to teach you what blessedness looks like and to point you to God's instruction as the source of blessedness.

#### **B. Psalm 2: God's Anointed King the Source of Blessedness**

But when you glance down the page to the next psalm, you see another line of thinking opened up — a line of thinking as important as God's Torah. This is the Anointed King. Indeed, his position of prominence here in Psalm 2, as magnificent as it is, almost undersells his importance

for the rest of the Psalter. As we will see in Psalm 3, the speaker in all of the psalms should be taken to be the king — the king, with his words adopted by the choir and thus by the congregation for public worship. But before we get to that, let's look a little more at Psalm 2.

Psalm 2 does not begin with blessedness; it begins with chaos. We are far from the unmoving, unwithering tree of life represented in Psalm 1; instead, the nations rage, kingdoms totter. The rulers of earth reject the rule of Yahweh and His Christ. By the way, it is not New-Testamentizing at all to use that word here. It is simply the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Messiah” or the English word “Anointed” that appears at the end of v. 2. God's Christ is the central speaker in the Second Psalm. As we will see, when you understand all of the psalms as the songs of the king, then you know that they are all about God's anointed King — His Messiah. But Psalm 2 explicitly ascribes part of itself to the words of God's Christ. That Christ is also identified twice in the psalm as the Son of God. He notes that the Father addresses Him as Son, and the narrator of the psalm commands the rulers of the earth to kiss the Son. The poem ends by pronouncing blessing on all who take refuge in this Son who is the Anointed King.

So now we have a second source of blessedness. Remember, the Psalter has announced up front that it is a book of blessing. It is a book that describes, pronounces, and creates blessedness in the lives of those who read, sing, and keep it. How does it do this? Through the combination of Torah and Messiah. Psalms is a book of Torah — a book of instruction. Psalms is also a book of Messiah — a book about God's Anointed. The word of God and the Son of God join forces in the Psalter to bring blessing to you.

The one who meditates on the Torah is blessed. The one who takes refuge in Christ the Son is blessed. These are not two different kinds of blessing, a Torah path to blessedness and a Messiah path to blessedness. They are one and the same kind of blessing. The psalter is not teaching that Torah and Messiah are identical, but rather that they work together to bless the meditator, the refuge-taker.

### **C. Psalm 3: God's Anointed King the Mediator of Blessedness**

Now, the books I read preparing for this sermon universally speak of the first two psalms as the introduction to the Psalter. Why do I add the third psalm? Because it descends from the heights of perfection and the ideal, the perfection of Christ as the one who consistently and perfectly meditates on the law and reigns from Zion, down into the nitty-gritty failures of human existence. Even God's anointed king, David, is attacked by his own son. The rod of his strength may be stretched out from Zion, but he is most certainly suffering. Yet the third psalm, like the first two, ends with blessedness — and this time explicitly ascribes that blessedness to the people of God. I just spoke of the meditator and the refuge-taker. They are indeed blessed. But how? Psalm 3 makes it clear that they are blessed through the work of the Anointed King. He is the mediator of blessedness; when God conquers the king's enemies, then He saves the king and blesses His people. The deliverance of the king is how the people find blessing. In short, the third psalm highlights the theme that goes almost unmentioned in the first two psalms: mediation, representation.

## **1. Through his sufferings**

In his sufferings, the anointed King wins salvation for his people. Driven out from Jerusalem, fleeing from Absalom his son, with many foes and many rebels, the king hardly seems to be rejoicing in the strength of God. The ideal vision of the first two psalms has been replaced by the all-too-real trouble and misery of running from the usurper Absalom. The anointed king appears to have been defeated; not even God can save him from this, at least not in the opinion of “many” (3:2).

Yet it doesn't end there. The sufferings of the anointed king are in reality his people's path to blessedness. Dominion over the nations is not quite so simple a matter as Psalm 2, taken alone, would make it appear. That's why the triumph of Christ the Son in Psalm 2 is juxtaposed with the sufferings of David in Psalm 3. Both are the Lord's Anointed — and both must suffer before they reach glory.

## **2. Through his psalms: “To the Choirmaster”**

There's one other feature of Psalm 3 that is supremely important for our understanding of the psalter — so important that I am convinced Psalm 3 is equally part of the introduction to the psalter with Psalms 1 & 2. That feature is its subscript. In your text, you will find the subscript printed as the first part of the superscript on Psalm 4 — but as the example of Habakkuk 3 shows, this phrase is rightly appended to the end of the psalm rather than the beginning and thus should be taken as part of the text of Psalm 3.

I'm talking, of course, about the phrase “to the choirmaster.” If you're like me, you have read that phrase a million times and never thought about its theological significance. Why do I think it's a big deal? Because it appears in 55 psalms and in Habakkuk 3. It is a note saying “This composition is to be given to the man who is in charge of the music in the tabernacle/temple so that he can use it in public worship.”

What's so significant about that? It's a way of deliberately taking a highly personal poem, like this one (Psalm 3) written when David was fleeing from his son, and universalizing it for the worshiping congregation. The song of the anointed king has now, with this one word in Hebrew, become the song of all his people.

How does the anointed king bless his people? In part, at least, by giving them his own words to sing. He writes the lyrics to the soundtrack of their lives. He teaches them with theologically correct, aesthetically gorgeous words that they can sing all day long, that can be running in their heads when they wake up in the night, that can be on their lips when they sit in their houses, when they walk by the way, when they lie down, and when they rise up. The king's suffering saves us; the king's songs teach us.

## **II. A Triple Truth**

And thus, brothers and sisters, as we begin to look at the Psalter I want you to see the triple truth that it teaches. Each one of these three introductory psalms highlights one facet of this triple truth.

### **A. Psalm 1: Psalms Are About Torah (Scripture/Instruction)**

The first psalm tells us that psalms are about Torah. Again, this is best translated as “instruction” or paraphrased as “Scripture.” The psalms are about the word of God. They tell us what God’s word says and what it does. It reveals God to us, and it brings blessing to us when we meditate on it and obey it by fleeing from the ways of the wicked.

Which psalms are about Torah? The obvious one is Psalm 119. The biggest by far of all the psalms, larger than several of the books of the Bible, this psalm weighs in at 176 verses. It was with this psalm that I began my ministry in this church. We spent the better part of a year looking at Psalm 119 in Sunday School because I wanted to drive home the point that we need to listen to the word of God! If you are not in the habit of listening to God’s word, my ministry will be of no effect. All I can do is present the word. That’s my job, and that is what I endeavor to do every Sunday. But if you don’t know how important the word is, how crucial it is to hear and remember and believe and obey it, you won’t care about receiving it. So read Psalm 119 and Psalm 1 and know that is the word of God that is the source of blessedness, and that without God’s word you simply will not be blessed.

### **B. Psalm 2: Psalms Are About Christ**

The second facet of the triple truth is found in the Second Psalm, which teaches us that the psalms are about Christ. If you prefer to avoid the Greek word, you can call Him the LORD’s Messiah or the Son of God, but regardless of the name, He is the same person yesterday, today, and forever. Psalm 2 loudly declares that the Psalter is going to be about Him. It recounts God’s decree by which He promised to give the nations to His Son, the kings of the earth as His inheritance. The political rulers of the earth must and will submit to Christ — or they will be crushed by His rod of iron. Thus, if you see Jesus in the blessed man of Psalm 1, and in the suffering king of Psalm 3, you are not imposing some later, New-Testament-era truth onto the Psalms. Psalm 2 is crystal-clear in its insistence that these songs are about Christ. Whatever you see in the psalms that is applicable to Him as the Son of God, the Lord’s Anointed King, is not something you’re making up. It was intentional from the beginning.

### **C. Psalm 3: Psalms Are the King’s Songs for Us to Sing**

And thus, the third truth the psalms present is that they are the kings’ songs for us to sing. As we saw, the king wrote these songs for his own use, but he shares them with his people. Thus, the psalter is the prayer book of Jesus. Just as the gospels tell us what our Lord did and said and Proverbs tells us how He thought, so the Psalms tell us how He prayed and worshiped. They are by the king, about the king, and specifically about Yahweh’s Christ. Do you want to pray as Jesus prayed, sing as Jesus sang? Then pray and sing the Psalms. And yes, if you want to think like He thought, study the Proverbs.

#### **1. In private**

Why do I say they should be sung in private? Because of the opening words of Psalm 1, which pronounces blessing on the man who meditates on God’s Torah. To meditate is a private activity. To think about something from every angle, to turn it over and over in your mind, is hard to do in

a crowd. Thus, the psalms are the king's songs — delivered to the choirmaster — but they are also for us to sing aloud and to repeat over and over in the privacy of our own homes, minds, and closets.

## **2. In public worship**

Again, that direction “to the choirmaster” tells us that we must sing the psalms in public worship. They are God's own gift through His king to us for our use in worship.

### **III. A Triple Blessing**

And when we use the psalms, we find a triple blessing.

#### **A. The Blessed Man, 1:6**

Meditate on God's law, and you will be the blessed man. Notice the characteristics of this man: He sucks up God's word night and day, summer and winter. He produces lots of good fruit. He prospers in every undertaking. These are all aspects of the blessing that come to the one who uses the Psalms to help him delight in and meditate on God's law.

#### **B. The Blessed Refuge-Taker, 2:12**

You will also know the blessing of salvation. To be saved by Jesus is described as taking refuge in Psalm 2. You will be protected from the whips and scorns of time. You will, above all, be saved from the wrath of God.

#### **C. The Blessed People, 3:8**

And finally, you will dwell among the blessed people. The individual blessed man of Psalm 1 and the blessed company of refuge-takers in Psalm 2 become the people of God in Psalm 3. All of this is through Christ's meditation on God's instruction, His rule as God's Son-King, and His suffering in His people's place.

I'm not making this up or importing it from the NT. It's all right here in the first three psalms, the gateway to the psalter that set the tone for the rest of the book. What are the psalms? They are the songs of the king, for our instruction and use in teaching and worship. They are about Christ. And they bring blessing to those who use them to learn and worship. God has provided ready-made, memorable, theologically precise and aesthetically gorgeous teaching and memory aids that the most humble Christian can use to learn about Him and to teach her children about Him. Use them, brothers and sisters. Use them hard. Be a psalm-lover, a psalm-singer, and psalm-quoter and a psalm-memorizer, and you will be rooted, fruitful, and not easily intimidated or turned aside from the truth.

Stop feeding your soul with Taylor Swift, and start feeding your soul with the king's songs. Amen.