

# OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

## *Lesson 40*

### Psalm 1: A Song of Glorious Satisfaction

*(Guest Speaker: Rev. Jared Richard, Associate Pastor)*

#### TO BEGIN

Who wants to be happy? Who wants to have an indescribable, infinite joy that forms the foundation of who you are? Doesn't everybody? Isn't everyone looking for happiness? Isn't everyone looking for a joy that will sustain them and give meaning to their life?

Of course, the obvious answer to the above questions is "Yes!" Everyone is looking for happiness, both temporally and eternally. We, as humans, are looking for temporary instruments of satisfaction that give us moments of levity as well as eternal things that more fundamentally shape our worldview and define our experience on this earth.

We look for these seemingly scarce sources of substantial satisfaction in a number of places. Let's consider for a moment some of the items you and I look to on a regular basis for our joy, some of the things in which we delight that we hope will provide us with a temporary happiness and lead us to a more long-term satisfaction.

I went to the wonderful, incomparable, prestigious academic institution of Louisiana State University for my undergraduate studies, and in my time there I watered and cultivated my previously childish fascination with LSU football (at least by comparison) into a full-blown obsession. Coming from a small town in Louisiana, I had never experienced a spectacle like that of a Saturday night in Death Valley (the affectionate name LSU fans have for their stadium). It truly was overwhelming. 90,000 of my closest friends (3 times the size of my home town) gathered together in a focused passion, placing all of our hopes as a school and state upon the broad shoulders of 18 to 22 year olds. You may laugh at our folly, but this certainly is no exaggeration for a number of attendees. Truly, after a win the whole city felt alive and excited, whereas after a loss, the city felt cold and dreary, as if the opposing team had come and sucked all of the life out of our city. The devotion to Tiger football only increased with the coming national championships, 2 in the past decade if you are keeping count 😊, to the point where any mistake by a player or coach was scrutinized throughout the local and national media and successful seasons by comparison to years past became inadequate, failing to allow the fan base to find some surrogate success in that of their team.

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I remember specifically a loss to Ole Miss, one of our most hated rivals, 2 seasons ago, I think, in which a clock management issue at the end of that game cost us the game. Unfortunately, this error in coaching and execution was not the first time (nor the last) we gave a game we deserved to win away. I was so frustrated at the end of that game that I literally could not sleep and had to go run a few miles just to release some of the tension I had built up throughout my viewing experience. Now, some of you might laugh at the prospect of placing such stock in a football team. I imagine you would be fans of Texas A&M or some other BIG 12 team and not understand what it means to live and breathe championship football like we have in the SEC, but I assure you my experience was not isolated. I remember taking a step back one day and realizing how ridiculous it was for me to place my hopes and happiness in the performance of a group of young men on a football field. Truly, I had allowed an enjoyable thing to have an improper impact on my emotional well-being.

Now, of course, I have used a little creative license and exaggeration in the retelling of my devotion to LSU football, but I assure you there are men who do hold college football in such high esteem. Why else would they risk the reputation of their respective NCAA football programs and their jobs to entice high school seniors to come and play at their school? They have decided that the success of their school's football program is more important than legality or morality, because they have placed their faith in a child's game for happiness and meaning. We could survey the room in the Lanier Class at Champion Forest Baptist Church and find other events, relationships, ideologies, or activities that we turn to in order to find a satisfaction that truly can only be found in the Lord. A boyfriend or girlfriend, a job, a salary, a political affiliation, a particular house or car, a hobby such as hunting or shopping, or a host of other options can become idols in our lives if we turn to them for what only God can provide.

God is our ultimate satisfier! He created us to be satisfied by him, and turn that joy found in being satisfied by him into worship, giving him glory for his infinite provision to those he loves. Truly, then, there are only two ways to live this life, as the psalmist shows us in our psalm for today: satisfied by God (righteous) or satisfied by something else (wicked). Remember the essence of sin! Sin inherently is saying to God, "You don't satisfy me. You are not enough for me." What could be more offensive to this God who has given us so much and is the infinite resource for every basic need we have? How could we turn to some other source for love, when God is infinitely and perfectly love? How could we turn to something else for peace, when God is infinitely and perfectly peace? How could we turn to a false idol for hope, when God has given us infinite and perfect hope? And this list could go on and on. How could God not be offended at the core of his being by his creation looking to other facets of creation to fill a longing he created in us to make us turn to him?

May we recognize today that God created us unsatisfied to freely turn to him for satisfaction, and when we refuse to delight in his way and turn to other created things to satisfy us, we arouse the just wrath of God against us as traitors and adulterers, sinners who deserve to perish.

## PSALM 1

- <sup>1</sup> 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;  
<sup>2</sup> but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.  
<sup>3</sup> 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.  
<sup>4</sup> The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.  
<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;  
<sup>6</sup> for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

## A PSALM AS PROLOGUE

Many scholars believe Psalm 1 to be intended as an introduction of sorts to the entire collection, advising the reader of the importance of knowing the heart of God toward his people as revealed in his written word.<sup>1</sup> If one desires to be righteous, as one who would read the psalms would likely desire, then he must delight in the law of the Lord. If one fails to delight in the law of the Lord, then he will delight in other things and will not be blessed; rather, he will be considered wicked and worthy of the wrath of God. This truth is seen throughout this collection of poems. Consider the story of David's interaction with Bathsheba. David chose to find satisfaction in the arms of a woman rather than God, and Psalm 51 is the result. He chose to wander away from God and suffered the consequences of sinning against the Most High. His psalm is one of contrition, having seen clearly that the only true path worth following is that of the righteous.

My argument today, though, builds upon this preliminary idea, suggesting that psalm 1 is not merely a guide for reading the psalms, but is further a prologue to our lives, describing for the reader how to find true, sustained happiness by living as God created us to live: for his glory, which we accomplish by being fully satisfied in him.

## A CLOSER LOOK AT PSALM 1

Let's take a few moments and consider the more basic teachings of this psalm. As we do this, remember the concept of "parallelism" that Mark taught you a couple

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<sup>1</sup> Rogerson, J.W. and J. W. McKay, *Psalms 1-50 in The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 16.

of weeks back and allow it to guide your understanding of the psalm as the psalmist outlines the 2 basic ways to live. As you read, connect the points that are applied to those who are blessed together to see a complete picture of the benefit of delighting in the law of the Lord and by comparison connect the points of the wicked to see the psalmist's warning against such behavior.

<sup>1</sup> 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;

<sup>2</sup> but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

In these first 2 verses, the psalmist establishes a dichotomy of sorts within humanity between those who are blessed and those who are not, reminiscent of the beatitudes of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. While such a limited categorization of people may seem naïve to some, certainly in our experience as people transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ such a division is more than appropriate. As one of the “wisdom psalms,” the goal of the author is not to please or pacify but rather in truth “to guide, educate and press (the reader) for a decision.”<sup>2</sup>

The approach is rather brilliant, really, for the author appeals to a common desire in all men: we all want to be blessed. Like a treasure map to an explorer, the psalmist places the “x” on the spot, suggesting the key to being blessed is delighting in the law of the Lord.

The word for delight in Hebrew, *שָׂדָה*, carries with it a feeling of intense value. The idea would be that the law of the Lord to the righteous man is like that of royal jewels, an item considered so precious that no substitute could be made.

I have in my possession a treasured item that could help us understand this concept a little more clearly, I think. When I was younger, I was a huge fan of the great Reba McEntire. Honestly, how could anyone not have been at one point in their life? What's not to like? Huge, red hair; great storytelling abilities; dynamic personality; and classic country music...count me in! Plus, she was one of the few really big artists to come to Monroe, LA in concert. One day, when I was much younger, I accompanied my mom and some of our family to an outdoor craft market right before Thanksgiving. I, of course, was not incredibly excited about attending the event, but I was promised a nice meal out as compensation for going. To my surprise, however, God had sovereignly guided me to that market for other reasons. As I turned the corner down one of the aisles, no doubt contemplating how I could speed up our departure from what had been to this point an exercise in patience-building, I saw what for me was the holy grail of Reba artifacts. In this

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<sup>2</sup> Weiser, Artur. *The Psalms: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1962), 102.

particular booth, there stood a Reba McEntire clock! Now, it was not simply an ordinary clock. Oh, no! This clock was fashioned by the artist, and I use that term intentionally, by sealing a carefully cut poster of Reba onto a piece of driftwood and mounting a clock in the bottom corner of the masterpiece. Obviously, I was enthralled and, being an only child, I had to have it. Of course, my mom said “no,” a word I rarely heard as a child, and panic mode set in. How could I allow such a treasure to slip through my young, impressionable fingers? I had to throw a fit and show my mom how precious this clock was to me. Yet, the fit did not seem to work, for my mother escorted me with maternal authority from the site of the great find.

I dreamed about the clock for weeks thereafter and had almost given up hope until I woke up the following Christmas morning and turned the corner into our living room and saw underneath the Christmas tree that Santa had not let me down as my mother had. No! Santa had come through in the most incredible way possible. He had brought me my Reba clock! And I have it to this day.

As much as I love this clock and consider it a treasure, the psalmist challenges me to see the law of the Lord as precious in a more superlative sense. The word of God is a treasure of the highest order. We should hold nothing of greater value, for our view of the word of God says something about our view of God himself. If we treasure him above all things, we will treasure his revelation above all things as a consequence.

This kind of perspective on the law of God is precisely how one can meditate on its goodness day and night! We meditate on the things we love. The psalmist is challenging us to examine the things on which we meditate and consider their importance. Is the law of the Lord my chief delight? Do I meditate on it day and night? If the answer is no, then I need to do some self-examination, knowing that the law of the Lord must be a delight of the highest order, taking a place of supreme importance in my life; for when it holds that place of supreme importance, I know God more intimately and am consequently blessed.

<sup>3</sup> 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 psalmist further illuminates the blessings and joy of a life lived in devotion to the law of the Lord in some beautiful “simile imagery” (my own term). The blessed man, the one who finds joy and delight in the law of the Lord, is paralleled to a tree with a limitless supply of sustenance. The tree, then, is seen to be highly fruitful because of how the stream takes care of it. The trees continual satisfaction from the stream allows it to prosper and bear much fruit!

So it is with our lives. When you and I plant ourselves firmly near God's living water, we find limitless satisfaction for all of our needs, and as we are satisfied by God, our fruitfulness is the joy of the Lord revealed in our worship of him. Consider for a moment the number of ways God has satisfied our needs. Consider the many ways we see his provision in our lives, not the least of which is what he did for us on the cross. Truly before Jesus you and I were unable to "plant" ourselves near his infinitely satisfying stream, for our chief aim was to reject God and make ourselves the chief authority of our lives. Because of the beautiful gospel of Jesus, however, you and I now have the ability to be transformed from children of wrath to children of the Most High God.<sup>3</sup> Our aim no longer is selfish and pointless, seeing now that nothing we can find on our own can satisfy us the way the Lord can. Rather, our aim is to glorify God in all things, finding in every moment and in every need that he is exactly who he promised he would be and proclaiming that truth to the nations.

<sup>4</sup> The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

<sup>6</sup> for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

After championing the way of the righteous, the psalmist turns to a warning against the way of the wicked. The wicked, as opposed to the righteous, have neither a firm foundation nor a true source of satisfaction and as a result will be overwhelmed by the coming flood of God's wrath.

The wrath of God is not a concept we love to talk about, nor should it be as the consequences for the wicked are significant and eternal. Let us not, however, in our discomfort ignore the full counsel of God, the totality of his character, and the clear teaching of his word. Part of understanding where true joy and happiness come from is understanding the fullness of God as revealed in his law. God is not just love, even though sometimes we like to pretend he is that alone. We like that aspect of God because it is approachable and comfortable. But God is the Greatest Possible Being (GPB), and part of being the GPB is having no deficiency in character whatsoever. By necessity, then, God must be as wrathful as he is loving. He must be as holy as he is merciful. He must be as righteous as he is peaceful. God exists in perfect balance, thereby prohibiting one part of his being to be more important than another.

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<sup>3</sup> When I say "gospel" here, I mean the entirety of Jesus' earthly ministry and its reflection of God's eternal plan to reconcile all things to himself. This includes, of course, Jesus' perfect, sinless life, his substitutionary death, his propitiatory work as wrath-bearer, his resurrection from the dead, and his anticipated return in which he will unite all things in him (Ephesians 1:3-14).

This truth, by the way, shows the significance of the cross, for on the cross we see the perfect balance of God's wrath and love poured out on his son, Jesus. God had to satisfy his wrath, because his wrath was offended by the way of the wicked; he also, however, desired to put his love and abundant mercy on display by pardoning those who would come under the sacrifice of his son and find reconciliation and transformation.

Ultimately, in as much as there are only two ways to live, there are only two ways to account for the many times you and I have followed the way of the wicked into sin. Either we will be judged by God himself in eternal condemnation or we will come under the judgment Jesus already took for us as our penal substitutionary atonement and allow his righteousness to become our own. Make no mistake about it: Judgment is coming! The psalmist warns us that we must make a decision, then, about how we will prepare for this certain future. Will we plant our roots firmly in God's provision or will we continue to ignore this God who loves us so and follow the way of the wicked all the way to eternal destruction?

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

God has created us to glorify him, meaning we are to be completely satisfied by him and show the joy of that satisfaction back to him in worship. Worship, then, is simply our joy, our complete satisfaction in the Lord, expressed.<sup>4</sup> If we want to be blessed, if we want to find sustainable, eternal joy, if we want to be truly happy, then we need only look to the author of all good things: our infinitely good God! How pointless it is for us to look for satisfaction in his creation, when that creation is by design simply meant to be a reflection of God's greater reality. All of his creation has elements of his being, but that presence does not mean that creation should be worshipped as God is worshipped, for that is idolatry. Rather, let us be a people who plant ourselves on the shores of God's limitless provision, dwelling upon his word day and night and showing everyone the joy and happiness that flow from the children of God who have made the pursuit of their heavenly father their chief desire.

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<sup>4</sup> This is my personal definition of worship, although I'm sure I owe its formation to a number of influential individuals in my life like John Piper, Tim Keller, David Platt, Mark Driscoll, Matt Chandler, and the like. I will provide an additional reading list of some of their books that have greatly influenced me.

## POINTS FOR HOME

1. All of us allow aspects of God's creation that were never meant to satisfy us take the place of God's provision in our lives. What are some idols in your life that you need to remove so that you can plant your tree firmly near the stream of God's provision?
2. As I'm reflecting upon this study, I think you and I must deal with a bigger question as well. Last year at the Passion conference, John Piper delivered a message that has caused me to spend much time in reflection.<sup>5</sup> Piper challenged his listeners to consider the motivation behind every single action you and I perform in life. Every action we perform has its root in either a desire to glorify God or to glorify oneself.

Let me share with you an example like the one Piper used in his message. Let's say a college student gets an "A" on a psychology exam and is very happy about getting said "A." Suppose, though, you pressed her on the source of her joy in getting an "A" by asking her (and let's say her name is Ashley), "Ashley, why are you so excited about this grade on a psychology exam?" Ashley would respond, "I'm excited because I need to make good grades in order to get into the graduate school I want to go to." You see already we have stepped down a level of joy on our way to its true grounding. Then you might ask, "Why do you want to get into that specific graduate school?" And she would reply, "Because I want to be trained at the highest level possible in counseling to help people the way I was helped when my family was walking through some issues together." And upon hearing that answer, you have gone down even further toward the core of her joy. She was excited about the "A" because it will help her achieve her goal of helping people the way she was helped. Having come very close now to the true source of her joy, you could ask Ashley if she truly desires helping people as she was helped because it makes her feel good about herself and gives her meaning or if she wants to do help people because of how it continues God's redeeming work in her life as she shares it with others.

Do you see the difference between the two choices? Truly, every action in our lives can be traced to that final question. What is the true source of your joy? Have you truly been transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ so that your focus is solely on glorifying God, or are their remnants of your

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<sup>5</sup> To listen to Piper's sermon entitled "Getting to the Bottom of Your Joy," go to the following website: <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/listen-to-pipers-message-from-passion-2011>

desire to glorify yourself still present that need to be put to death? Remember, those desires have no place among the way of the righteous.

When you and I can come to the point where every action we perform is solely for the glory of God, then we know that we have come to be fully satisfied by him.

3. Finally, if we know that God's coming wrath is the certain future for all of those outside of Christ, how could you and I not proclaim with the fullness of our being the innumerable ways in which we have been blessed and rescued by this most gracious and holy God? When you and I consider the opinions of others more pertinent to our well-being than that of God, what we are saying is that we are more concerned with our reputation than God's and that does not communicate an unyielding satisfaction in the provision of God.

Who do you need to tell about Jesus that you have been resistant to tell because of how it may affect you?

### **A WORD OF THANKS**

As we conclude our time together, I would be remiss to not thank Mark Lanier for the privilege of standing in for him. I am so grateful to know him and join him in serving our worthy God. While I would never claim to be as knowledgeable about biblical things as he is, I do hope you have enjoyed that which I have to offer. I pray God's blessings upon this ministry and our church as we seek to proclaim the glory of God to the nations together.

### **ADDITIONAL READING**

For those of you who would like some additional reading/teaching that has influenced the formation of the above ideas, here are some recommendations from me. Certainly this list is not exhaustive, but I hope these books and sermons will be a good starting point for you in more clearly understanding God's provision:

Graham, Billy. *The Secret of Happiness* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 1955).

Keller, Tim. "The Secret for Happiness," a sermon delivered at Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City on April 1, 2011. This sermon is accessible on iTunes in the Redeemer podcast.

Packer, J. I. and Sven K. Soderlund. *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Bruce K. Waltke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000).

Piper, John. *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997).

Piper, John. *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1986).

Piper, John. *Taste and See: Savoring the Supremacy of God in All of Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1999).

Platt, David. *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2010).