

The Ideal Man -- Psalm 1

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon describes the ideal man as one who delights in the law of the Lord, is practical, fruitful, and useful, and has permanence in his life, and who is blessed in what he escapes, the spontaneity of his life, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, God's approval, and the future issues of his life.

Scripture: Psalm 1:1

Topics: "Righteousness", "Transformation through Christ"

Description

A.B. Simpson explores Psalm 1 as the portrait of the ideal man, ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He contrasts the characteristics of the ungodly, sinner, and scorner with the righteous man who delights in God's law and bears fruit in his life. Simpson emphasizes the blessedness that comes from living in accordance with God's will, highlighting the importance of the Holy Spirit in producing a life of righteousness and joy. He concludes that true transformation comes not from imitation of Christ but from allowing Christ to live within us, producing a life that reflects His character.

Transcript

It is usual to put a frontispiece in the beginning of a book; and if the book is a biography, the frontispiece is usually a portrait. The first Psalm is the frontispiece of the Psalter and the portrait of the man described in the course of these inspired Psalms. The perfect fulfillment of the ideal is only to be found in that Man of men, the Son of man, the Lord Jesus Himself. So it is not out of place among the Messianic Psalms, among which it was classified by the most spiritual of the Christian fathers.

It has another title to a gospel place. The word "blessed" with which it opens is the keynote of the New Testament and of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When He opened His mouth on Mount Hattin, to proclaim the righteousness of the new kingdom, His first word was "blessed," and He repeated it again and again until He had laid the foundation of New Testament righteousness in eight beatitudes. When He went away from earth, His hands were extended in blessing; and when He closed the revelation of His love in the Apocalypse of John, its last whisper was a benediction. So this word "blessed" brings the first Psalm down to gospel times and up to gospel heights. Indeed, the book of Psalms is a wonderful anticipation of the spirit of Christianity.

This beautiful Psalm contains the portrait of a righteous man.

I. BY WAY OF CONTRAST

In the distance is the figure of the ungodly man sinking into the darker, deeper shadows of the scorner. The course of the evil man is described in a very dramatic way by three climaxes which express the downward descent of evil.

1. We have the three words -- ungodly, sinner, scorner. These are three very different stages of wickedness, three very different kinds of men.

The ungodly man is remarkable rather for what he is not. He is a man of the world, perhaps a moral and respectable man, but he is ungodly; he has no supreme love for God; he has no interest in divine things; he is not saved; he is not consecrated; he is not living for God.

But the sinner is a very different character. The progression has deepened; the ungodly man has become the sinner; the man without God has become evil; he is now a wrongdoer, a transgressor, a man positively evil, speaking, acting, thinking, living unrighteously and in contravention to God's holy will and law. He may be a dishonest man, an immoral man, a profane man, a selfish man, a false man; but it matters little, for all sin is of the same kind if not of the same degree.

But there is a deeper gradation, the scorner. This is the reckless, presumptuous, abandoned, profane, and utterly reprobate man who has given up God, conscience, fear, hope, everything holy, sacred, and divine; who has sinned against the Holy Ghost, and has swept out on the awful current of infidelity and defiant wickedness. He is past feeling; he is given over to a reprobate mind; His heart is hardened. He despises the things of God, and he is waiting for his doom.

2. But there is a second climax, marked by the three words, counsel, way, and seat. The counsel of the ungodly is simply their example, their principles, their conversation, their ideas of things. But the way of sinners is their actual conduct, their deeds, their works of evil. The man has now come to perpetrate them, to share them, to do as they do.

But there is still a deeper descent, and that is the seat of the scorner. A way is something from which a man may turn back, but a seat is that in which he has sat down and made himself comfortable. He has committed himself to his evil course and does it without compunction, distress, or any sense of reproof or condemnation. He is a lost, willful man; and if a miracle of grace does not interpose, he is irrevocably lost.

3. There is still another climax: walketh, standeth, sitteth. The first describes an unsettled course of life. He has not yet committed himself to these principles, but is allowing himself to be thrown into contact with them.

But the next expression describes a more settled condition. He standeth. He has become settled in his evil course; he continues in it; he is determined in his spirit; he has taken his stand for evil.

But the third term is still more positive -- sitteth. It describes a man who has become at ease in his evil course, who has made himself comfortable in wrongdoing, who has fixed himself and settled himself forever in unbelief and sin. He has said to God: "Depart from me for I desire not the knowledge of your ways," and God has left him to himself, a poor self-castaway, awaiting the hour of judgment when his eyes will open with amazement and horror, and see the folly and madness of his sin.

These are the progressions of evil. Truly, the sinner cannot stand still. The descending avalanche gathers volume as it rolls. Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. It is an awful thing to begin to go down. You reach a point where you cannot stop. Like the poor driver in

California who had been accustomed to drive the stagecoach up and down the tremendous declivities of the mountains, and knew so well how to stop the wheels by pressing on the brakes; but as he lay one day upon his dying bed, conscious that he had oft neglected the great salvation, and indeed had rejected the Savior, he cried with bitter agony: "I am going down the mountain and cannot get my feet upon the brakes!" He could find no stopping place.

O brother, if you are on the downward road today, stop! It all begins with neglecting the great salvation. The second step is rejecting, and the third step is despising. Brother, stop now, and the hand of infinite love will grasp you and lift you up to righteousness and salvation.

II. THE RIGHTEOUS MAN'S POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS

1. "His delight is in the law of the Lord"; his life is in conformity to the will of the Lord; his character is founded upon God's revealed will. The law here does not mean the Ten Commandments, but the whole Mosaic revelation. The Hebrew word 'thorah' means instruction.

The only true foundation of any life is righteousness. Nothing else can bring blessedness. There are mechanical and material laws which cannot be violated; and if you try to build your wall off the plumb-line, it will certainly crumble in ruins about your head and leave you overwhelmed and crushed. Just as vain is it for you to attempt to build your spiritual house on unholy principles. The slightest deviation from spiritual righteousness will bring failure, danger, perhaps destruction. God expects men to be right; requires them to be right; enables them to be right. He has given us a perfect standard, and He is able to bring us up to it. Let us not try to lower it to accommodate God's will to ours, but let us hold it up in its high imperial grandeur and claim the grace to enable us to rise to meet it.

The New Testament is not less righteous than the Old. The very foundation of the redemption of Christ and the cross of Calvary is God's holiness, justice, and eternal righteousness. Nowhere does God's will shine more conspicuously than in the cross of Calvary. The very death of Christ was but a testimony to it. Even to save men God would not violate one tittle of its terms, but required the exaction of its utmost penalty, and the fulfillment of its minutest precept. Christ has come not to excuse us from the righteousness of the law, but to deliver us from the penalty of the law, and then so to deliver us from the power of sin "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

2. The second characteristic of this man is his delight in the law. Some men obey the law because they must; this man, because he wants to. Two little words express the high condition of two dispensations: the one is have to, the other is love to. The blessedness of the Christian life is that we love to do right, to be right. We delight in the law of the Lord. God writes it upon our inward parts. That service which we render without the heart's full consent is not right service. That righteousness which does not spring from the depths of our being is not complete or satisfying to the great heart of God.

He wants to make us so pure that we shall love the right and hate the wrong, and every instinct of our being shall choose the will of God, and cry, "I delight to do your will, O my God: yes, Your law is within my heart." Nothing but the infinite grace of Christ can give us this spirit. Here the Old Testament picture fails, and the New Testament Christ must come to realize the ideal only as His heart is in our heart.

3. This man is a man of practical fruitfulness and usefulness. He is not a man of theories and experiences only, but he lives in the great world of living men and women, and busy events and things, and

everywhere and always his life is a benediction. "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he does shall prosper."

A tree is not only a beautiful thing with its luxuriant verdure, but it is a most useful thing, especially if it is a fruit-bearing tree, and bears its fruit in its season. This man lives for others and for God, and makes the world his debtor. The age in which he lives, his country, his church, his home, his business, are all better for him. He is not a one-sided man, but he fits into all situations, and is faithful and fruitful under all circumstances. He "brings forth his fruit in his season."

Is he a business man? He carries his religion into his business. Is he an old man? He lights up the winter of age with the torch of faith and love and holy gladness. Is he a young man? He is bright, manly, enterprising, buoyant, a young man among men, but a man of God and a blessing to every one he touches. Is she a mother? She brings forth the fruit of her holy life among her children, and generations call her blessed. Is she a maiden? She adorns her youth and beauty with the loveliness of Christ's spirit and character, fresh, beautiful, springing, youthful, simple-hearted, child-like as a girl, yet sacred, white-robed, separated from the world and dedicated to God, making men and women to feel as she moves among them as if an angel had passed by. Is it a suffering Christian? There is fruit appropriate to the hour of sorrow, the time of temptation, the hard conflict, the hour of misunderstanding, loneliness, disappointment, desertion. All this is recognized but as an occasion to glorify God and show the loveliness of the Christian life. Is it a time of prosperity? There is also appropriate fruit for this, the spirit of cheerfulness, usefulness, unselfishness, and remembrance of the claims of God and the needs of men. There is fruit for childhood days, for the morning of youth, for the meridian of life, for the twilight of age, for the shadows of sorrow and death, for all possible situations, circumstances, and places; and the man whose roots are planted by the rivers of water finds in God support and strength for every possible condition.

4. The next characteristic of this man is permanence. "His leaf also shall not wither." His life is not a spasm of well-meaning effort, dying in weak reaction, but a steady, onward movement of constant and victorious power, his path shining more and more unto the perfect day. Of such a man the Master has said, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever you shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."

Such are the characteristics of the godly, the righteous, the ideal man. Oh, who can meet the lineaments of the picture? who but He, of whom the world's proud, heartless ruler had to say, "Behold the man," and of whom the Father proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

III. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THIS MAN

The Hebrew introduction to the Psalm is very full and expressive. Literally it may be translated, "Oh, the blessedness!" There are many blessednesses in this life. It is always blessed, blessed in every way.

1. He is blessed in what he escapes, the wretched lot of the ungodly, the sinner, and the scorner. For, surely, the way of the transgressor is hard, and he is happy indeed that shuns it.

2. He is blessed in the spontaneousness of his life. "His delight is in the law of the Lord." Anything is happy in life if we can enjoy it and take pleasure in it. The hardest cross is a joy if it is our delight. The blessedness of the spiritual life consists in this, that it is not an effort, a struggle, a painful constraint, a

burden of law; but it is a delightful freedom, a springing impulse, a spontaneous overflow, an artesian well rising ever from exhaustless depths, a great current of water to swim in, bearing us upon its bosom, and making all duty, and even trial, a luxury of joy, a luxury of love.

Oh, do you not long, heavy-laden ones, for the life in which it will not be 'have to' but 'love to'; for a life in which you shall always have your own way because you delight in God, and He gives you the desires of your heart; for a life that will fulfill His own sweet promise, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"; for a life in which you shall run in the way of His commandments when He has enlarged your heart? This is the life of the godly. This is the life of the first Psalm. This is the life of the New Testament saint. This is the life of Christ. This is the life of the Holy Ghost. This is the well of water which Jesus gives, to be within us, springing up into everlasting life. Oh, the blessedness of such a life!

3. The blessedness of such a life springs from the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. This is what is meant by the rivers of water where he is planted. These rivers refer to the blessed influences of the Holy Spirit. It is not one river, but many, the manifold streams that flow with all the fullness of the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of peace, of love, of joy, of holiness, of wisdom, of power, of prayer. This is the source of all blessedness. It is this that makes his life so spontaneous and his lot so easy. A power from above, a power from within fills all his being and divinely enables him to fulfill all the will of God.

He walks in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. He lives in that blessed kingdom which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. He is a tree in the garden of the Lord whose fruit is love, joy, peace. He is drinking of the fountain which is the source of the blessedness of God and the raptures of heaven. Blessed is the man who is planted by the rivers of water!

4. He is blessed because all that he does shall prosper. His life is not in vain. He accomplishes what he undertakes. His work succeeds. He may not be rich or great or prosperous in the sense in which the world understands and esteems. He may have many troubles and what the world calls failure, but no real evil comes to him. All things work together for good to him. God turns everything that comes to him into real blessing, and surely this is prosperity in the truest sense.

5. He is blessed because of God's approval. "The Lord knows the way of the righteous." This is enough to make any life happy and successful, for God to set His heart upon it and to take delight in it. The word "knows," according to a familiar Hebraism, means "to approve." The Lord does set His heart upon His people. He takes pleasure in them as a mother in her child. He looks with complacent delight upon their consecrated service and holy purposes to glorify Him. He loves to bless them. He says: "I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul."

In His favor is life, and His loving kindnesses are better than life. Oh, the blessedness of the man who walks in the light of His countenance, who walks in His favor! Oh, the happiness of "the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk in the light of your countenance!" What can harm those whom God loves, chooses, and uses? "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry." "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

6. He is blessed because of the future issues of his life in contrast with the ungodly, for there is a day coming when all lives shall be tested, and the transient prosperity of the wicked shall fade away like the chaff before the wind. Oh, then shall we know the blessedness of the righteous life, and truly appreciate what it meant to choose God as our God and to know His great salvation!

"When this passing world is done;
When has sunk yon glorious sun;
When we stand with Christ on high,
Looking o'er life's mystery;
Then, Lord, shall we fully know --
Not till then -- how much we owe."

In conclusion, where shall we look for the realization of this glorious picture? Who can fill up in his own life these perfect lineaments? Listen to the sad cry of God through the ages of the past! "I sought for a man among them . . . but I found none."

But at length the Son of man appeared; and as He stood upon the banks of the Jordan, the Father was satisfied. Humanity had reached its bloom and fruition and there was the Man on earth at last who met all the conditions of ancient prophecy and inspired Scripture. It was Jesus. But what avail is this to us? Can we imitate His holy character any more than we can fulfill the first Psalm? No! Teaching and example are alike unequal to the task of transforming man. We know the right but cannot rise to it. Thank God, there is a better way!

Here is a beautiful rose. How we wish we could copy it. The painter takes his brushes and he tries, and lo, there appears a very wonderful imitation. But you put it to your face, and there is no fragrance. It is a lifeless pigment. Or perhaps some gentle fingers carefully shape from wax or some finer fabric the exquisite petals, and tint them like the beautiful forms of nature. As you hold it in your hand, it looks like a rose; but, still, it is dead, and you throw it aside dissatisfied. It is not your rose. Ah, there is a better way!

Cut a little graft from that rose and put it in the warm nursery; or take one of its seeds and plant it in the ground. In a little while, opening its fragrant bud and breathing its sweetness into your nostrils, you have the offspring of your rose! It is identical because it was born of it. It is its own very self reproduced. Ah, that is the secret of the first Psalm! To imitate Christ and His example is but a painted or imitation rose; but to take the living Christ and let Him be born in your heart and reproduce Himself there, so that it is not you but Christ that lives in you -- that is the living rose. That is why He lived and died and rose again, that He might come into every open heart and become its life and purity, its love and joy, its righteousness and salvation.

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