

Exposition on Psalm 1

by St. Augustine

The sermon emphasizes the blessed state of the righteous, who delight in the law of the Lord and bring forth fruit in their season, while the ungodly man does not rise in the judgment.

Scripture: Hebrews 3:6

Topics: "Persevering Faith", "Christian Salvation"

Description

In this sermon on holding fast, the preacher emphasizes the importance of believers adhering firmly to traditions, convictions, and beliefs, as a proof of their genuine faith. The term 'catecho' is explored in its literal and figurative uses, such as restraining from evil, taking possession, and being bound by the law. The message highlights that our salvation is secured by Christ holding onto us, with our holding onto Him serving as evidence of His grip on us. The sermon underscores the significance of perseverance in the Christian life as a demonstration of true faith and belonging to God's house.

Transcript

Blessed is the man that hath not gone away in the counsel of the ungodly" (ver. 1). This is to be understood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Man. "Blessed is the man that hath not gone away in the counsel of the ungodly," as "the man of earth did," who consented to his wife deceived by the serpent, to the transgressing the commandment of God. "Nor stood in the way of sinners." For He came indeed in the way of sinners, by being born as sinners are; but He "stood" not therein, for that the enticements of the world held Him not. And hath not sat in the seat of pestilence." He willed not an earthly kingdom, with pride, which is well taken for "the seat of pestilence;" for that there is hardly any one who is free from the love of rule, and craves not human glory. For a "pestilence" is disease widely spread, and involving all or nearly all. Yet "the seat of pestilence" may be more appropriately understood of hurtful doctrine; "whose word spreadeth as a canker." The order too of the words must be considered: "went away, stood, sat." For he "went away," when he drew back from God. He "stood," when he took pleasure in sin. He "sat," when, confirmed in his pride, he could not go back, unless set free by Him, who neither "hath gone away in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of pestilence.

"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law will he meditate by day and by night (ver. 2). The law is not made for a righteous man," 4 says the Apostle. But it is one thing to be in the law, another under the law. Whoso is in the law, acteth according to the law; whoso is under the law, is acted upon according to the law: the one therefore is free, the other a slave. Again, the law, which is written and imposed upon

the servant, is one thing; the law, which is mentally discerned by him who needeth not its "letter," is another thing. "He will meditate by day and by night," is to be understood either as without ceasing; or "by day" in joy, "by night" in tribulations. For it is said, "Abraham saw my day, and was glad:" and of tribulation it is said, "my reins also have instructed me, even unto the night."

"And he shall be like a tree planted hard by the running streams of waters" (ver. 3); that is either Very "Wisdom," which vouchsafed to assume man's nature for our salvation; that as man He might be "the tree planted hard by the running streams of waters;" for in this sense can that too be taken which is said in another Psalm, "the river of God is full of water." Or by the Holy Ghost, of whom it is said, "He shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost;" and again, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink;" and again, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that asketh water of thee, thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water, of which whoso drinketh shall never thirst, but it shall be made in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Or, "by the running streams of waters" may be by the sins of the people, because first the waters are called "peoples" in the Apocalypse; and again, by "running stream" is not unreasonably understood "fall," which hath relation to sin. That "tree" then, that is, our Lord, from the running streams of water, that is, from the sinful people's drawing them by the way into the roots of His discipline, will "bring forth fruit," that is, will establish Churches; "in His season," that is, after He hath been glorified by His Resurrection and Ascension into heaven. For then, by the sending of the Holy Ghost to the Apostles, and by the confirming of their faith in Him, and their mission to the world, He made the Churches to "bring forth fruit." "His leaf also shall not fall," that is, His Word shall not be in vain. For, "all flesh is grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass; the grass withereth, and the flower falleth, but the word of the Lord abideth for ever. And whatsoever He doeth shall prosper" that is, whatsoever that tree shall bear; which all must be taken of fruit and leaves, that is, deeds and words.

"The ungodly are not so," they are not so, "but are like the dust which the wind casteth forth from the face of the earth" (ver. 4). "The earth" is here to be taken as that stedfastness in God, with a view to which it is said, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, yea, I have a goodly heritage." With a view to this it is said, "Wait on the Lord and keep His ways, and He shall exalt thee to inherit the earth." With a view to this it is said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." A comparison too is derived hence, for as this visible earth supports and contains the outer man, so that earth invisible the inner man. "From the face of" which "earth the wind casteth forth the ungodly," that is, pride, in that it puffeth him up. On his guard against which he, who was inebriated by the richness of the house of the Lord, and drunken of the torrent stream of its pleasures, saith, "Let not the foot of pride come against me." From this earth pride cast forth him who said, "I will place my seat in the north, and I will be like the Most High." From the face of the earth it cast forth him also who, after that he had consented and tasted of the forbidden tree that he might be as God, hid himself from the Face of God. That his earth has reference to the inner man, and that man is cast forth thence by pride, may be particularly seen in that which is written, "Why is earth and ashes proud? Because, in his life, he cast forth his bowels." For, whence he hath been cast forth, he is not unreasonably said to have cast forth himself.

"Therefore the ungodly rise not in the judgment" (ver. 5): "therefore," namely, because "as dust they are cast forth from the face of the earth." And well did he say that this should be taken away from them, which in their pride they court, namely, that they may judge; so that this same idea is more clearly expressed in the following sentence, "nor sinners in the counsel of the righteous." For it is usual for what goes before, to be thus repeated more clearly. So that by "sinners" should be understood the "ungodly;" what is before "in the judgment," should be here "in the counsel of the righteous." Or if indeed the ungodly are one thing,

and sinners another, so that although every ungodly man is a sinner, yet every sinner is not ungodly; "The ungodly rise not in the judgment," that is, they shall rise indeed, but not that they should be judged, for they are already appointed to most certain punishment. But "sinners" do not rise "in counsel of the just" that is that they may, judge, but peradventure that they may be judged; so as of these it were said, "The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall then suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

"For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous" (ver. 6). As it is said, medicine knows health, but knows not disease, and yet disease is recognised by the art of medicine. In like manner can it be said that "the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous," but the way of the ungodly He knoweth not. Not that the Lord is ignorant of anything, and yet He says to sinners, "I never knew you." "But the way of the ungodly shall perish;" is the same as if it were said, the way of the ungodly the Lord knoweth not. But it is expressed more plainly that this should be not to be known of the Lord, namely, to "perish;" and this to be known of the Lord, namely, to "abide;" so as that to be should appertain to the knowledge of God, but to His not knowing not to be. For the Lord saith, "I AM that I AM," and, "I AM hath sent me."

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