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Sermon Notes

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Blessed by Fruitfulness in 2023

Psalm 1

This morning, we get to begin the New Year with a call to renewed faithfulness in God's Word

The central purpose of every sermon for me is to feed God's flock with the good food of his holy Word

That is always the case!

But this morning, I want to call on you to renew your commitment to feed yourselves God's Word throughout the upcoming year

I could turn to a lot of passages in the Bible to make this call

But this morning, I want to do it from Psalm 1

A magnificent little work of art for us

I begin by talking about your ROOT SYSTEM

I. Exploring Your Root System

A. The Astonishing World of Roots

Some of the most amazing things that God ever created are completely hidden from the eye. As a matter of fact, as we walk through a majestic forest of oaks, maples, elm, loblolly pine trees, we may never stop to contemplate the wonder which lies beneath our feet: the elaborate root systems of those majestic trees.

A tree is made up solely of living cells, the basic units of life. Each of these cells has physical needs: needs for nutrients, water, chemicals, oxygen... these needs are supplied by a most remarkable pump system... the roots which suck water and nutrients from the soil at an amazing rate.

An elm tree in England was found to have a root system which burrowed to a depth of 360 feet... a 36-storey building below the surface of the earth! The root system of such a tree is incredibly complex, for there may be as much as 14 million separate roots which may have a total of 14 billion tiny roots hairs. The roots grow every day, pushing soil and splitting boulders in the constant search for water. A single birch may give off through its 200,000 leaves as much as 900 gallons of water on a hot summer day. Each drop of water lost through evaporation must be replenished from the roots... the water passed from cell to cell like a bucket in a fireman's bucket brigade; water originating in the subterranean water table and pumped up naturally to a leaf 100 feet above the ground.

The tiny root hairs are ingeniously designed by God to filter out nutrients in a perfect balance, never too much of one thing or too little of something else... all of this guarantees the life and fruitfulness of the tree.

You may not think much of a tree's root system... that is until one of them fails in a hurricane and crashes into your living room. In the day of testing, the root system is everything.

Jesus said some people who listen to the word and immediately respond with joy are like seeds sown in rocky soil; no possibility of a good root system, and when the sun comes up the plants get scorched because they have no root... when trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

My question for you this morning: how is your root system?

B. The Vital Importance of Spiritual Roots

Jesus told the vital parable of the seed and the soils... the second soil type was the stony-ground hearer

Mark 4:5-6 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

He then explained this type of hearer:

Mark 4:16-17 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

Our context, overt persecution for our Christian faith is not likely, at least not yet

But it may well be coming in our lifetime, if not sooner than we imagine.

In any case, Jesus exposes the vital importance of a strong root system into the Word of God

C. Psalm 1 pictures a tree planted by streams of water with a beautiful constant supply of water and nutrients... a root system immersed in overwhelming ABUNDANCE!

II. Psalm 1: The Promise of Overwhelming Blessing

A. The Sign Over the Doorway: “Blessed...”

Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the man

1. The Psalter is God’s prayer book by which he instructs all his people in every generation how to pray... also how to worship
2. But fundamentally, it is God’s instruction on how to live a richly blessed life both now and for all eternity
3. And the sign as you enter is “Blessed”

4. Like the Sermon on the Mount... Jesus begins his teaching ministry in the New Testament with the Beatitudes... nine statements of blessedness

Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

5. What does “blessed” mean?
6. Hebrew = “Asher” ... happy, richly happy, deeply completely happy
7. God in the Bible instructs you in how to have a blessed, happy, rich life in him

B. The Blessedness of the Old Covenant

1. God set before the Israelites the constant choice... blessings or curses
2. The blessings are defined in ways that are very physical

Deuteronomy 28:3-8 “You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. The Lord will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land He is giving you.”

3. But the New Covenant brings those blessings into the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus

Ephesians 1:3-4 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

What are those blessings?

Full forgiveness of sins, adoption into God's family, the indwelling Holy Spirit, peace with God, freedom from all condemnation, guaranteed resurrection in a glorious body, the promise of a perfect life in a perfect world that will come, the blessings of living a good and fruitful life now – storing up treasure in heaven by good works done by the power of the Holy Spirit

4. Faith-filled obedience to the Word of God is essential to all the blessedness God intends to give us

Deuteronomy 32:47 They are not just idle words for you—they are your life.

C. A Way That Hates Evil

1. It's not enough just to say the happy, positive things
2. We need to wage war against evil while we live
3. The Psalmist introduces us right away to the two different ways to live... the way of the righteous is directly contrasted with the way of the wicked
4. So, amazingly he describes the purity of the righteous man from all the evil influences of people in this world:

Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

D. Does Not “Walk in the Way...”

1. The Hebrew expression of walking in the way refers to a daily lifestyle
2. The choices you make every single day
3. 2023 is in front of you... almost none of it has happened yet; if the Lord allows you to live and gives you these 365 days, what will you do with them? Your wise or foolish choices will define the year!
4. The righteous man of Psalm 1 does not

- a. “walk in the counsel of the wicked”... he is not imitating wicked people who live for the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life
- b. He doesn't seek advice from worldly wise people who are living for their stomachs
- c. He doesn't “stand in the way of sinners”... their lifestyle is repugnant to him and he doesn't want any part of it
- d. He doesn't “sit in the seat of mockers”

Our age is one of mocking of holy things... stand-up comedians and late night talk show hosts and social media celebrities all love to mock Christ and his Word and his people

It has been going on a long time... 18th century French enlightenment writer Voltaire was a great mocker of the things of God, as were Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Mark Twain, etc.

In the 20th century, HL Mencken raised mocking of the holy things of God to an art form:

H.L. Mencken: "What is the function that a clergyman performs in the world? Answer: he gets his living by assuring idiots that he can save them from an imaginary hell."

"The liberation of the human mind has never been furthered by dunderheads; it has been furthered by gay fellows who heaved dead cats into sanctuaries and then went roistering down the highways of the world, proving to all men that doubt, after all, was safe--that the god in the sanctuary was finite in his power and hence a fraud. One horse-laugh is worth ten thousand syllogisms. It is not only more effective; it is also vastly more intelligent."

"We must respect the other fellow's religion, but only in the sense and to the extent that we respect his theory that his wife is beautiful and his children smart."

So today, the internet is filled with influencers and talking heads that love to mock Christianity and the Bible

We should not be surprised at this:

2 Peter 3:3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.

We should also remember this:

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

Psalm 1 is clear: blessedness in life comes from staying away from the mindset and lifestyle of the ungodly... while we cannot avoid daily interaction with non-Christians, and while we are commanded to be the light of the world and witnesses for the love of God in Christ, we are to avoid following the ways and philosophies of the world

E. Instead... the Way of Blessedness is a Way Immersed in the Word of God

III. The Roots of Eternal Fruitfulness: Meditation on God's Word

Psalm 1:2-3 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

A. Delighting in God's Word

1. The Psalmist celebrates the heart delight the righteous take in the Word of God
2. It is a delightful thing for them to immerse their minds and hearts in the Word of God
3. See the word "delight"

Psalm 19:7-10 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The

commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. ⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. ¹⁰ They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.

Jeremiah 15:16 When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.

4. Heart attraction... deep LOVE for God's Word

What do you delight in? What brings you pleasure? What do you anticipate with great expectation?

In 2023, can you develop your delight in the Word of God... it gives you a stunning portrait of Jesus, your amazing Savior; it gives you beautiful promises for the perfect world to come; it gives you careful instructions for how to live blessedly now

How could you develop your taste for the Scripture in 2023?

The richly happy person described in Psalm 1 delights in God's Word above everything else

B. The Discipline of Meditation

Psalm 1:2 "On his law he meditates day and night..."

1. What is biblical meditation?
2. It's not the vanity of Eastern or Buddhist meditation which ponders empty conundrums in the hopes of emptying the mind of this world... "What's the sound of one hand clapping?" Those are called "koans"... mind-emptying riddles asked by a Zen master in the hopes of getting his pupil to transcend logic and reason and the five sense world into a world of enlightenment... of pure nothingness
3. That's NOT biblical meditation! Instead, we are seeking not emptiness but fullness. Fullness of TRUTH based on the Words of God

4. So, biblical meditation involves chewing over the words of God again and again until we have more fully plumbed their depths; deep pondering of each word, phrase, sentence, paragraph... each story
5. It's delight in proportion to understanding... discovering new things in God's word

Psalm 119:18 "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."

6. Not skimming over the text quickly as water passing through a pipe
7. But asking constantly "What does this passage teach me about God? What does it teach me about myself?"

C. Hebrew Word for Meditate: "Hagah"... to growl, mutter, groan, murmur

1. It's working over the words again and again and again... until understanding comes
2. It is a deeply rational and logical process, but also results in powerful emotions

D. Day and Night

1. Easy for us in our technologically advanced age... we have astonishing and easy access to the word of God
2. Smartphones... full text of scripture, instantly accessible
3. BUT in the Psalmist's day, very few people had physical copies of the Scripture... that would have been staggeringly expensive; the whole Bible had to be hand copied letter by letter; that's what the scribes did full time
4. Then the full scroll of the Word of God would only have been for the synagogue; the high priest and the king would have their own copies, and no one else would
5. The only way to meditate day and night would have been to MEMORIZE God's word

6. Yes, to actually MEMORIZE every word in the Law of Moses
7. I will come back to this topic, but I want you to consider memorizing a book of the Bible in 2023

E. Image: Perfect Rootedness for Constant Fruitfulness

Psalm 1:3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

1. The root system of this person is constantly immersed in life-giving water
2. The lack of water is deadly to any plant; conversely, a well-watered garden is always fruitful
3. This tree is constantly supplied by the water of life
4. I can't help but think about Jesus Christ as the water of life

John 7:37-39 Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." ³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit

5. The constant meditation on the Word of God brings us again and again into constant contact with Jesus Christ, the source of all life
6. The result: guaranteed fruitfulness
 - a. The text says it yields its fruit IN SEASON
 - b. Certainly, the full fruit of this meditation may be years away
 - c. You may be learning things that will not be fully implemented in your life till seven years from now!
7. The leaf does not wither
 - a. Droughts normally came in that part of the world
 - b. But this tree never needs to fear that drought

Jeremiah 17:7-8 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. ⁸ He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

8. Jeremiah speaks of the man who TRUSTS in the Lord, whose confidence is in him... that is the life of FAITH; the food of faith is the Word of God
9. Your intimacy with Christ is dependent on your constant intake of the Word of God

F. The Staggering Promise: Whatever You Do Will Prosper!

Psalm 1:3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

1. It's hard to imagine a more sweeping promise!
2. Comprehensive blessing... but on FAITH-FILLED, CHRIST-CENTERED OBEDIENCE!!!
3. Blessed in what you DO!

James 1:22 "Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves; do what it says... The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues to do this, not forgetting what he's heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does."

John 14:21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.

4. Storing up treasure in heaven every moment of every day
 - a. Certainly trials will come
 - b. The most blessed Christians in church history had the hardest lives

c. Look at the life of the Apostle Paul... stunning levels of suffering

2 Corinthians 11:24-27 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

d. But also stunning levels of eternal fruitfulness! How eternally impactful has Paul's life been; his epistles; his example!

G. Stark Contrast: The Desolation of the Disobedient

Psalm 1:4 Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

Chaff = impermanence; no lasting fruit; not even evidence that they ever lived!

2016 Mission trip to Nepal; saw the farmers threshing the wheat with old flaying tools and threshing forks

The chaff was lightweight and blew away; nothing left

Eternal condemnation await them on Judgment Day

Psalm 1:5-6 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. ⁶ For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish

God's Word alone is eternal:

Isaiah 40:6-7 "All men are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever."

IV. Practical Exhortations for 2023

A. Unbelievers: Let Scripture Bring You to Salvation in Christ

2 Timothy 3:15 the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

B. Believers: Recommit Yourselves to Constant Intake of the Word of God in 2023

1. Reading plan: knowledge in breadth
2. Scripture memorization: knowledge in depth

C. Store Up Treasure Within Yourselves and in Heaven

Matthew 12:33-35 "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

Matthew 13:51-52 "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied. ⁵² He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

Matthew 6:19-21 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

D. George Muller's Quiet Time Pattern

Daily goal: happy in Jesus (happy = blessed as in Psalm 1:1)

"I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify

the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished.... I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God, and to meditation on it.”

What is the food of the inner man? Not *prayer*, but *the word of God*; and . . . not the simple reading of the word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts.”

The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord's blessing upon His precious Word, was to begin to meditate on the Word of God; searching, as it were, into every verse, to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word; not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon; but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul. The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that though I did not, as it were, give to prayer but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less to prayer.

When thus I have been for awhile making confession, or intercession, or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it; but still continually keeping before me that food for my own soul is the object of meditation. The result of this is, that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and that my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart.

- E. So... let me finish with a direct appeal to you to memorize a book of the Bible in 2023
1. What book would you choose?

2. Ephesians has 155 verses... at a verse a day, you could be done by the end of June
3. Philippians has only 104 verses; at a verse a day, you could be done by the middle of April!
4. What is the Lord calling you to do?