The Straight Path

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Preacher: Zac Story

[0:00] Please excuse this time of setup. It is good to be in the Lord's house on the Lord's day and with the Lord's people because hold on.

When I say Lord, I mean Yahweh, the personal Savior, creator God of everything, who made all the galaxies in a day almost as an afterthought. The God that for his own glory and for our benefit became one of us so that he could die an inhumane, unjust death and rise triumphantly and anew from that death, conquering all the enemies of our fallen universe.
The God who could make a nebula or a black hole or a mountain a million light years tall his temple and yet decided to dwell in and with us instead.
The God that has left us sacred writings so that we can know all of that. That is what I mean when I say Lord. So let's try again. Amen. It is good to be in the Lord's house on the Lord's day and with the Lord's people because it's all about the Lord.
Amen. Indeed, it is all about the Lord. Thank you for humoring me on that. I've already prayed that that would be beneficial for y'all as well as for me. Regardless, it is good to be with the Lord's people to discuss the Lord's word and I will begin shortly.
[1:42] First, for those of you who don't know, note that I often use the term Yahweh interchangeably with the noun slash name God.

Yahweh is the actual personal name of the personal triune savior creator God of the Bible. It is the one that he gives us in his own word. I like it because using it both demonstrates the personal nature of our God and makes it very clear which God I am talking about, or at least I'm trying to talk about.
Second, last, and related, I bring back my most important caveat, my most important plea. Please be Bereans with me. That is, be like the Jews of Berea as they are described in Acts 17, 10 through 12.
That is, Acts 17, 10 through 12. The Jews found in the city searched our shared scriptures that is the Old slash Jewish Testament, part of our highest standard of truth, the Bible, and likely the very book found in that Testament that I'll be discussing today to see if what Paul said was true.
Paul was an apostle, a religious scholar, and the Yahweh sustained writer of a significant portion of our new slash Christian Testament. And yet it was still noble of the Jews to double check what he said.
[3:02] I, in contrast, am a modern non-elder layman of the church who barely survived a degree in secular theology and can do little more than study the English translations and pray that God will have the final say in what is said and understood.

I need my fellow saints saved by grace to hold me accountable. May the Holy Spirit's presence guide the process. And as an aside, sorry, Mrs. Fizer, that I still haven't discussed like my sermon a while back with you on that.
So I'm still in process. So all the more reason to be Bereans with me, to hold me accountable. On that note, let's begin with the reading of God's word.
The passage for today is Psalm 1, found on page 448 of your Pew Bibles. That is Psalm 1, found on page 448 of your Pew Bibles.
Please stand, if you are able, out of respect for the word of Yahweh.
[4:22] Listen to the words of our God. 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, but his delight is in the law of the Lord.

And on his law, he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.

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In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. So reads the word of God. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, the Lord above all, who sent his Son to die for us, so that you and him could send the Holy Spirit to dwell with us.
Thank you for this day. Thank you for the time to study your word. I pray that that is indeed what we do. I pray that the Spirit throughout this whole sermon is the filter for us, so that what is said and what is understood is only for your glorification.
[5:46] Whatever I say that is hopeful, helpful, fruitful, profitable for good works, to complete the godly man, may that be remembered. Whatever goes astray is not glorified to you, be forgotten.

In your precious name I pray. Amen. Personally, I've been on the wrong path before.
I believe each of you has been as well. Sometimes it is literal and amusing. For example, Carrie and I, while driving up to visit my parents in Estes Park last year, went for a coffee run that almost doubled the length of our trip.
Perhaps a bad idea if my almond butter mocha frappe wasn't so good. At other times, though, the wrong path has been not so literal and not so amusing.
Several times in my life, I have started and kept up a sinful but easily hidden pattern-slash-habit that could rightfully be described as a soft, gradual path to hell.
[6:52] Note that while the ladder is not a physical road-like entity, it shares an important feature. It is a connected system with a direction. The former follows road signs.

The latter follows actions. They both can constitute a path. I bring this up because what can be considered a strength of the Hebrew language is that its words are often defined by scenarios that can be envisioned and pictured and experienced.
The first word of the psalm, at least in English, is translated as blessed. However, the Hebrew definition is something like to go straight, to be on the right path, and or to go the right way.
We can look at a myriad of scenarios in our lives to get an idea of what this both does and does not mean, as we have been on both straight and crooked paths, have gone both the right way and the wrong way, and have done so to varying levels of literal and metaphorical.
However, what is this right path? It does little good to tell one to go on the straight or right way without making sure that one knows what that way is. What is that way?
[8:05] What is that path? To start with the largest context for that question, let me be explicit about one of our assumptions here. We are gathered together today because we believe that there is indeed a one true God that can be known through his word that he has provided for us.

And we believe that that word is the Bible. The Bible is the unique, collected, holistic, explicit word of Yahweh that gives us a general framework for everything, and a specific framework for how to have a relationship with him and be found right in his eyes.
The passage that we are discussing today is from that Bible, and that Bible is the largest context for understanding the right path. Still, we can zone in on several more specific levels of context.
All of the Bible can be put into two large categories. The Old Testament, the Old-slash-Dewish Testament, and the New-slash-Christian Testament. We need both.
The Old Testament is incomplete without the New Testament, but the New Testament is groundless without the Old Testament. Indeed, it was the Old Testament that Jesus himself, God in the form of man, used to justify who he was.
[9:25] And the early Christians did the same. Often, they did so from the very book that we are discussing. While some important things have changed, when believers went from just an Old Testament understanding to a both-testaments understanding, it is still a vital part of the word that Paul, in 2 Timothy 3, 16-17 says, makes a man of God complete, equipped for every good work.

Again, 2 Timothy 3, 16-17. It is worth devoting regular, worshipful, devotional time to the Old Testament, so that we may know, among other things, what this blessed, right path is.
We can get an even more specific context, though. Within the Old Testament, we are looking at the Book of Psalms. According to notes in my study Bible, the Hebrew title of this book means praises. And that is what these are. Specifically, the Book of Psalms is an 150-chapter Old Testament book where every chapter is a song designed to publicly praise the Lord.

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Many volumes have been made and can still be made regarding what this means, but at least one takeaway is fruitful for now. That takeaway is that the Psalms were designed for a corporate common understanding that one took on from his or her own perspective.
[10:56] They were designed to be sung out loud from one's own voice, heart, and mind in the presence of others. They are designed to be said individually, yet as a collective.

Because of this, it is part expressing true knowledge of God and part addressing our own concerns and emotional slash chemical states. It is all tied together in the act of worshiping Yahweh.
You see, the Psalms do very a lot. Some are more happy, while others reveal one's own English, like Psalm 42. Again, Psalm 42. Or even curses on enemies, like Psalm 137.
Again, Psalm 137. Yet, all are sung as an act of worship to Yahweh. The reverence is always found in at least that and their at least Old Testament consistency.
Psalm 1, the passage for today, is considered to be a psalm that is an introduction to the Psalms. While it is different to the others in many ways, I believe that is also very similar to the others, not only in the ways above, but also that, in that, it is a meta-psalm for the others.
[12:09] What it says can be applied to all the others. What it teaches is the theme that all teach. It is also the psalm we just read.

But since I spent over a page talking about other, the related matters, I will now read it again. May our understanding be blessed by the repetition. Here reads the word of God. 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.
But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. 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 wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
Therefore, the wicked will not stand in judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. So reads the word of God. I will now go through the psalm section by section.
[13:23] The psalm seems to naturally separate into three sections. Here's the first, verses one through two. Here reads the word of Yahweh. 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.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. So reads the word of Yahweh. This section is dedicated to defining the blessed man, both male and female.
See Genesis 1 on that. Again, Genesis 1. By his actions and desires. First though, note that in the Hebrew, the wording for blessed is in what is called the perfect tense.
This means that the action is completed. He has been blessed. He has been put on the right path. That action is done. The next three lines all work as parallel negative descriptions.
They define the blessed man by telling us what he does not do. A better scholar could perhaps go into the differences found in each, and there was some good talk about that this morning on the Bible study.
[14:38] But given my level, and perhaps the nature of the text, is best if I treat them as a whole. Not walking, standing, and sitting with the wicked, sinners, and scoffers, respectively, creates a holistic picture of a person who neither imitates nor associates with those who live to do wrong in the eyes of God.

He does not do the acts that they do. He does not go to the places that they go, and he does not gather with them and think like them. I do not believe that he never interacts with these people, even in the Old Testament setting.
Still, the blessed man clearly refuses to do anything that would make him be one of them. The last two lines of the section are dedicated to a positive understanding of the blessed man.
In this case, the first verb has more emotional, willful connotations. The blessed man delights in Yahweh's law. Now, aside, the term Lord, in this case, is actually a replacement for Yahweh here, as is also found in verse 6, found in section 3 of this psalm.
Using God's own given name is especially appropriate here. Anyway, it's not just that the blessed man does what is good rather than what is wicked. He delights in the good that is Yahweh's word.
[15:58] He loves it. Now, what it says that he delights in is the law of the Lord. This at least means the law given to Moses in the first five books of the Old Testament.

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But I believe it probably means more than that. Law is a term that can mean a variety of things. For example, the same term is used in Genesis 26.5 in reference to the laws given to Abraham. Abraham lived hundreds of years before Moses and was not given many law-like revelations, but he was still given some. Again, Genesis 26.5. As an example, on the other end of the spectrum, the first five books of the Old Testament are often called the law.
They serve the same purpose for the Old Testament that the Old Testament serves for the New Testament, as a foundation. You not only have the laws for the Jewish ethnic, civil, and worshipful state, but you have the background from the creation of everything to the exodus from Egypt that makes sense of such laws.
Together, they create a far more complete picture of what it means to worship Yahweh than what the specific laws give.
[17:15] They are also the section of the Bible most likely to be completed and well-known by the time that this psalm was created, as only one psalm is believed to be as early as Moses.

That psalm is Psalm 93. On that note, it is good to know that the psalms may have been written over a period of over a thousand years, from the time of Moses to around the time of the exile from the Jewish promised land.
This may assume too much from what can be known about the titles, but at least thematically makes sense, and there are definitely other factors that make this possible. Given that the Jewish people collectively experienced many events across such ages, it is far from impossible that their praises were made as powerful events played out for that people.
And even if they weren't made specifically at that time, they still reflect the thinking and the patterns that happened there. Anyway, back to the law. The first five books of the Bible are ultimately meant to be taken together.
To delight in all of it is to delight in its individual parts, at least as long as one does not pick and choose which individual parts to delight in. Because of that, one can delight on the law at all the levels recently mentioned, as well as ones found in the Bible that I haven't mentioned.
[18:34] However, since the first five books are called the law, and were the most common understood part of the Bible for all the Jews at the time that the psalm started, at least thematically, I believe that it best represents what the psalmist means.

It best represents the collective understanding that would be found in collective worship. So, moving forward, not only does the psalmist desire Yahweh's law, but his desire is turned into an action that contrasts the actions of the wicked.
He studies and thinks about the revelation that God has provided. So, by the end of the first section, we already have an understanding of what the right path is.
We do not act like the wicked, and we do not take their advice. Rather, the right path is to desire God's word and to seek to understand it. The blessed cherishes and seeks to understand God's word that God has given.
Now, to the next section, verses 3 through 4. Here reads the word of the Lord. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.
[19:49] In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like the chaff the wind drives away. So reads the word of our Lord.

The first four lines of this section are dedicated to describing the blessed man as a healthy tree that acts how and when it should. The last two lines are dedicated to describing the wicked as mere chaff.
This contrast is rich in details, but let me make a note on some of the wording first. We just read that the blessed man prospers in all that he does. The verb used in Hebrew for prosper is literally rendered as cause to prosper.
In other words, it is not the blessed man's doing. A blessed man is not one that prospers by his own initiative. God is not merely giving advice and watching the acts of man play out.
Rather, Yahweh is taking an active role. Also note that it doesn't say that he prospers in everything. Rather, it says that in all that he does, he prospers.
[21:00] Similarly, note that the tree in the analogy is always very tree-like. It produces fruit in its season. It doesn't do so in an unnatural season.

And it most definitely doesn't read, write, lead armies, and rule people. Like that tree, all people who have read and will read this psalm will be limited in many ways.

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The psalmist does not deny this, but that is also what makes this psalm more precious. For as long as we are on the path of the righteous rather than on the path of the wicked, God will cause us to prosper.
He meets us at where we're at, just like he met the throngs of the original Jewish people, from the kings to the beggars at where they were at.
The tree is fruitful, but at the end it's still a tree. Lastly, note that the verb prosper is imperfect in the Hebrew.
[22:04] God has not stopped causing the blessed man to prosper. Rather, it is an ongoing effort on God's part. To the extent that the simile holds is to the same extent that it holds for the blessed man.

God's completed act of blessing the man, found in the first section, leads to the constant act of causing him to prosper. It is almost as if God had a way to justify the blessed man.
More on that later. Actually, some of it now before I forget. Because as we discussed this morning, I almost missed a big, or at least potential, type slash shadow here.
Thank you to the people this morning that helped point that out. Here, we see a completed action of God, putting them on the right path, to a still ongoing action of them being made to prosper.
In the New Testament, we see the completed action of Christ's crucifixion lead to the constant action of our sanctification through the Holy Spirit as appointed by Jesus and the Father.
[23:10] So I believe the psalmist is very much capturing here a piece, a shadow, a foreshadowing of what is to come. Anyway, now more specifically to the comparison between the blessed man and the wicked.

Two similes are used, at least in the English. The blessed person, the person on the right path, is like a tree, while the wicked are like chaff. Here are at least a few things to note about these descriptions, both by themselves and in contrast.
First, the blessed section is twice as long as the one about the wicked. I believe that this is purposeful. There's just more to say about the blessed man, because the blessed man is more complete.
To be clear, the wicked are no less made in the image of God, and our New Testament ethic, though with nuance, requires a sacrificial nature towards them. However, man made in the image of God, see again Genesis 1, is designed to orient his or her life around seeking and worshiping God. To do otherwise is to limit and degrade oneself. The more we delight in and learn about Yahweh, the more fully we can be who we are meant to be, and the more there is to us that can be talked about.
[24:30] Through God, we are worth being described. Second and related, the blessed are described as a living, producing entity, a tree that bears fruit.

In contrast, the wicked are only defined as chaff, incomplete, dying if not dead plant debris, left over from the act of harvesting the grain. Not only is the blessed man complete in this picture, the blessed man is alive.
When we devote our lives to the living God, that is the creator and sustainer of all living things, we are made alive fully and eternally. In contrast, by going against the ways of the living, the wicked are alive only dysfunctionally and temporarily.
I do not mean to take this too far. It is not like the wicked have slower heart rates, and hell is a form of eternity. However, I still believe that this distinction holds.
The wicked are more likely to engage in self-destructive behaviors, and even if they don't, the constant denial of the undeniable God of Romans 1 has a real deadening effect on the soul and the mind, even if not the body.
[25:41] Those on the right path grow in God, but the wicked, in some way, shape, or form, will wither away without him.

Third and last for this sermon, and perhaps most sobering, the blessed are firmly planted, but the wicked blow away. To delight and study God's word is to secure oneself on the ultimate and only unchanging source of truth, Yahweh and his word.
To be the wicked is to try to have a foundation in anything except the only one that actually works as a foundation. When push comes to shove, that foundation will crumble, and ultimately, they will fade away from the real.

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This may be harsh, but it seems to be there in the text, and it seems to map well to our world. History is ultimately full of the damaging oddities that happen when God's word is not considered the source for blessings.
And the longer that that source is not the standard, the more that the damaging oddities escalate. I don't need to go into specifics. I believe that we, in our own shared time and space, can do this for ourselves, individually, but also with conclusions that we are likely to agree on.
[27:01] Many things have changed, but the fallen nature of humanity and creation in general is not one of them. The psalmist knew something that still applies now, and he wrote in a way that makes it easy for us to apply for ourselves.

Now, on to the last section, verses five and six. Here reads the word of God. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. So reads the word of God. First off, note the therefore at the start of this section.
It is a logical term that means a conclusion deduced from what has been previously said is now taking place. At least the comparison in the last section is in mind here.
It is the reasoning that leads to such a conclusion. However, the first section is also in mind, at least poetically. In the first section, the wicked stand together given their own twisted counsel, their own twisted advice, plans, and community.
[28:12] Because of the nature of the wicked and the way they stand together, they will not stand up to Yahweh's judgment, and they won't stand up to Yahweh's scrutiny, and they will not stand with those made righteous by Yahweh.

The last verse is a comparison. On the one hand, Yahweh knows the righteous. On the other, the wicked will perish. Recall that the blessed one, the one on the right path, is one who delights and learns about God's word.
To learn about God's word is to learn about God, and to delight in God's word is to delight in God. Desiring and studying God's word is to seek to understand God in a way that has relational significance.
And when God meets us with his words and deeds, a relationship takes place. While clearly not used in the exact same way, it is no wonder that the same term is used twice in Genesis 4 for the sexual relations that Adam and Eve had.
Again, Genesis 4. The term has intimacy as part of its definition. God intimately knows the way of the righteous. He intimately knows the way that they live their lives.
[29:28] In contrast, because the wicked are on a path that goes against God, his attributes, and his way, he does not have a relationship with them. Because they do not walk on a path founded by God, they walk on a path that cannot lead to good.

Whether in this life or the next, it will be a destructive one. The way of the righteous is the way of God, but the way of the wicked is a way away from God.
A note from this morning, one that I also missed. Well, I believe this does match to the blessed man, the righteous, and the wicked. The terms here are the way of each.
So in this judgment, in this total judgment, this holistic judgment of which, who's ultimately who and what they are, it's not just them on trial, it's their path.
So if we take this into conclusion, conclusive sense, like God's final verdict on things, the idea is that the way that the righteous are will be sustained, but the way of the wicked, their whole philosophy will crumble.
[30:36] Their worldview cannot stand. The way that they have built up as described in the beginning of the psalm will fall apart. I'm already falling apart now, but will definitely fall apart when God has the final say.

So, that's Psalm 1. How are we as Christians supposed to think about it? Honestly, I believe that this is a psalm that we can bellow out exactly how it is.
At least as long as it is not the only praise that we sing. That caveat is for two reasons. The first is now, is, I'm sorry, the first is that we now have a complete revelation from Yahweh.
We now have a complete testament that will lead us to an even more intimate and full relationship with God when we delight in it and meditate on it. In the time of the psalmist, they had one temple that Yahweh dwelt in.

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Now, each of us is a temple for God's presence. At least if we have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. I would not be surprised if, by law, the psalmist just meant whatever revelation had been provided to God's people.
[31:52] Regardless, we need to make sure that we do not mean only the first five books of the Bible. Second is that, in the full revelation that is the Bible, we can see why God can cause us to prosper.

Jesus, the Son of God and God incarnate, died for our sins, making us so righteous that the Holy Spirit can dwell in us as temples. In other words, God is with us.
He is in us. Remember how the first section of Psalm 1 talked about the way of sinners? Well, Jesus tells his disciples and us that he is the way, the truth, and the life in John 14, 6.
Again, John 14, 6. Before our religion was called Christianity and similar, it was called the way. See Acts 9, 2 and 9, 19.
Again, Acts 9, 2 and, oh, sorry, I said one wrong. See Acts 9, 2 and 19, 9. Again, Acts 9, 2 and 19, 9 to see two examples of this.
[33:02] Christ was not ignorant of the psalmist. Rather, by the way he lived, he gave the psalmist words, he gave the psalmist words a complete living example of what being on the right path looked like and how getting on that right path is accomplished.

accomplished. So, if you want to be the blessed man on the right path, be the man, both male and female, that delights and meditates on the full counsel of God.
Be the man that seeks to understand all of scripture. Be the man that follows Christ. Be the man that follows the way. Be the Christian to the glory of Christ.
Be a Christian to the glory of Yahweh. Let us pray. Our Father in Heaven, thank you for this complete text and thank you for the saints of old that in that text you've given us snapshots of what it's like to worship you, to praise you, and to trust in you.
Even at times when the end result wasn't known. Even at times before we knew what your full plan would be. when all we had were shadows and types.
[34:21] Lord, I pray that their faithfulness is not lost on us and what is said is rendered and respected and understood in the fullest way possible. Not just how it's said then, but what it points to and what that event that it points to says about what it said back then.

May your word reach us at every level and may it be a blessing to us. May we see the praise of your saints from former times and may it cause us to praise you all the more.
In your precious name I pray. Amen. Amen.

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