

Songs of Life

ALONG THE WAY

“Most scripture speaks to us, while the Psalms speak for us.” (Athanasius) Is there anybody here today who struggles with living their Christian life? Is there anybody here today who struggles to know what to do about the fact that they struggle with their Christian life? We know, because M. Scott Peck told us, that “Life is difficult.” Many of us, probably all of us, live in one way or another in second choice worlds. Second choice worlds are circumstances that are not the way we want them to be, not the way we would choose. Second choice worlds are worlds we would change if we could – but we can’t. Second choice worlds are the real world, and whether we like it or not, second choice worlds are the worlds in which we live. Sometimes they are our fault – we made a bad choice or decision and bang we plunged ourselves into a set of circumstances we now have to live with. Mostly though, second choice worlds are not our fault. They come about through circumstances beyond our control, and like it or not, that’s where we have to live. Now, we can pretend life is otherwise, but it doesn’t change the truth, and we have to continue the struggle of living our Christian lives in the real world. Many of us pretend though don’t we?

When was the last time you opened your heart 100% to someone Just poured out what was really going on for you? If I’m honest (and it’s easier to be honest about some things than others!), I don’t remember the last time I did. When was the last time you faced the real world head on and got someone to help you figure it out? When was the last time someone opened their heart to you – shared their burden?

Friends, truth is, there are things I don’t know how to talk about. Sometimes life is raw and the truth about life is raw. “Most scripture speaks to us, while the Psalms speak for us.” Friends, in the Psalms, we have a tool for knowing how to

be honest about what's really going on in life. The Psalms give us a way to express the struggles, the tension, the waiting, the pain, the silence, the guilt, the wonder – all the mixed emotions and experiences that life gives us and throws at us.

The word Psalm literally means 'song' and the beauty of these songs is that they come from the lives of real people living in second choice worlds! The Psalms provide us with the longest, steadiest, and deepest look into life, and as one writer says: "The Psalms stand unchallenged as the supreme expression of the human spirit in search of understanding and obeying the will of God; the human spirit struggling to relate God in every arena of life."¹

The Psalms are songs of life that act like a mirror for us; they are the songs of the lives of those who have gone before us. They are like a mirror because these people, the writers, the Psalmists, experienced life in second choice worlds; the pain, the frustration, the anguish, the waiting, the disillusionment, the rejoicing, the moments of awe and wonder, the profound moments of doubt and despair, the anger, the heartache, the continual wrestling... of a life of faith following the God we can't see but would love to; the life of faith that sometimes leads us to a place of deep and profound worship of the living God – when we know his powerful presence without cloud or shadow. The life of faith that sometimes leads us to question everything – whether God is there at all! These songs of life are for us, a mirror - they don't so much as speak to us but for us! We are in these songs; they are our songs, songs we can sing!

John Calvin, among others wrote that the Psalms had been like a mirror for him: what is reflected may not always be good, but it is accurate. These songs are God's gift to us, through his people. They are a gift, lovingly given because God wants us to live an honest, vulnerable kind of lifestyle which is neither self-deceptive nor lived out in pretence. God longs for us to have the deep satisfaction of fulfilled lives. So we are going to take a plunge into these songs of life – the Psalms. We'll start at the beginning – with Psalm 1.

Psalm 1 is a statement of what life is meant to be, what it can be and what God desires it to be for his children, and Psalm 1 (along with Psalm 2) forms a doorway

to the songs of life. Right at the beginning we are presented with how to live a fulfilled life. We are shown how to sing the song of life and sing it well.

There are, as we've already said many different songs that will follow. I wonder what song you are singing right now – what's your song of life? Psalm 1 says: "you want to know how to sing life's song well? Well here's how." Psalm 1 offers a song of life inspired by the Holy Spirit and friends.... this is a song you can sing! Oh yes!

Psalm 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. 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, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

Right at the start of these songs of life, friends, we are presented with a choice. Blessed is the man...! The original language of the text here suggests a man among a thousand who lives for the accomplishment of the purpose for which God created him - it is only that man who is blessed. The NIV inclusive language version translates it: "Blessed are those..." Are you one of those? What choice have you made about how to live your life? Have you made the choice to sing God's melody – what life is meant to be, what it can be and what he desires for his children?

We sing Chris Tomlin's song:

"There is an endless son,
Echoes in my soul
I hear the music ring,"
And in the next verse are the words:
"And I will walk with you

Knowing you'll see me through
And sing the songs you give"

It's Psalm 1's challenge!

Which song are you singing – an endless song that echoes in your soul? Is that the choice you've made – to sing the songs of life as you follow Christ? Friends, if you have – Psalm 1 says you will be blessed! There will be a marked and observable difference in those who choose Christ and make following him their priority. They will be blessed! Life will not always be easy – but it will be blessed. Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount by saying a very similar thing: "Blessed are...." You're not blessed because life is difficult, but because you've made the choice to follow Christ and because he can reach you with the enormity of his love and grace and mercy – wherever you are or whatever is happening.

Often the best way to make a point is to draw a contrast: and there's a contrast in Psalm 1. Those who are blessed don't walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. See the progression here of being drawn away from following Christ. We first allow ourselves to be tempted, then we make a conscious decision about something and before we know it we are immersed in the world. The world is the master of deception – and we can so easily be deceived. But, it doesn't lead to a blessed life – it's the wrong song! Where are you walking, standing or sitting right now? Which song is it?

But there is a contrast. What do you delight in? What brings you delight? To delight in the law of the Lord means to throw yourself wholeheartedly into everything the Lord has said and done. The law here means "thinking God's thoughts after him." Discovering God, who he is and what he does. To mediate means to chew the cud – chew it over – to chatter about it! Day and night means in the good times and the bad times – whatever the song is!

Those who will be blessed don't have it all together;

- They know sin, but they confess and repent in honesty
- They don't always understand what's going on

- They don't always agree with God and what he seems to be doing

But... they delight in God. How about you? Friends, we become what we dwell on – life is a living song! Those who have chosen Christ and who delight in his law are the tree in verse 3. This tree has been planted – it is not an accident. Planting is a deliberate act, one that the master gardener does with great care and affection. Friends, you are chosen by God, precious and special, and when a gardener plants, his desire is to see growth. God so longs to see his children grow and become strong trees. God longs to see you flourish and reach the potential that he has graciously and with great wisdom placed within you, and in order for you to grow and flourish and live a fulfilled life, the master gardener provides you with streams of living water. This literally means irrigation channels – lots of them.

God provides many ways for you to be nourished, so great is his desire to see you grow and flourish. That's why you should come to worship regularly, get stuck into a small group, read the bible, pray, talk to one another.... And when we are nourished by God's supply we can bring forth fruit in season. Bringing forth fruit in season means the fruit God expects in the particular life cycle or season of that tree. We can only bring forth the fruit of patience in season – when we are in a situation in which we are least likely to be patient. Joy isn't the fruit in season when life's going well! When things are going well the fruit in season is stewardship! What a wonderful song to be able to sing – the song of bringing forth fruit in season!

Friends, life does not end here – it's going somewhere – it has purpose. You cannot be blessed in life unless you sing the song of Psalm 1. Unless you choose to follow Christ and sing the song he gives. So what song are you singing along the way?

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday 6th September 2009 by Rev. Ian Phillips.