

“Finding Our Roots”, Rev. Doug Ashley
May 3, 2020

Good morning! I'm Pastor Doug and I'm glad you've joined us again for our virtual service today. Throughout this pandemic, nature has been a really good reminder for me. The birds are still singing, the rain is still falling, and spring is still springing up everywhere you look. What a great picture for us as we take some time in the very first psalm today. We are going to concentrate on only a couple of verses today, but I want to read all six for you now.

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 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.

Will you please pray with me? Loving God, thank you for these words of life that we need for today. Would you please show us yourself in these words? Would you show us Christ in these words? Speak to us, now, for we are listening. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen

The Roosevelt Arch stands at the north entrance to Yellowstone National Park. The cornerstone was laid in a special ceremony by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903, hence the name. Etched in the stone above the arch it simply says: "For the Benefit and Enjoyment of the People". What a beautiful reminder of why a national park like Yellowstone exists! It is there for the enjoyment of the people. What was seen by people 100 years ago will be there for others to see 100 years from now. Why create a national park? It was as if those who worked hard to conserve that space knew our tendency as humans was to focus on the present at the expense of embracing what will last. We want to find relief now. We want to be comfortable now. We want to be satisfied now. But life in God has a different timetable.

Those things that are preserved for us in a national park are a delight to us. They bring us enjoyment because of their beauty and their timelessness. In Psalm 1, we have a picture of the beauty and timelessness of God's Word preserved for us. In verse 2, when it talks about "the law" what the author is telling us is more than the 10 commandments and more than the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. He is referring to all that God has communicated in order to reveal who he is and how he works. This is his instruction on living. What he is talking

about is ALL of God's Word, which is available to us in the Bible. **God has preserved his Word for us so that we can invest our lives in what lasts.**

Today we are going to focus most of our attention on just a couple of verses to really understand the benefits of delighting in and meditating on God's Word. When I talk about delighting and meditating, I'm not talking about doing anything that we don't already know how to do. And I'm also not talking about doing anything without the Spirit already at work.

Delighting means to greatly favor something like enjoying a good meal. Meditating means to reflect deeply about but there is also a speaking aspect to it like one who is reviewing something important aloud. We do both of these things all the time. We delight in things we enjoy and we meditate on things that are important. But what difference does this make when we delight and mediate on God's Word? What does it produce in us? We will see that what Psalm 1 that delighting in God's Word produces faithfulness and fruitfulness in us.

This brings me to the first point: Delighting in God's Word produces faithfulness. Trees need water and nutrients to survive and this tree has been placed in such a way that it will always be receiving this nourishment. But how was it planted? And by whom? It doesn't say here, however, what is important to note is that it WAS planted. This is not a tree that happened to appear here, the text says it was planted here. This is so very important for us to know when it comes to faithfulness developing in our lives.

As people loved by God, we must recognize the intentionality of these words. No one is physically born as a Christian. You do not become a Christian because you have been in church for many years. You do not become a Christian because your parents were Christians. You do not become a Christian because water was put on your head as a baby. You do not become a Christian because your spouse is a Christian. No. Instead, you became a Christian because you were planted by God. God is the only one who can transform your life. God is the only one who can call you to himself. He has to "plant" you is what this psalm is saying.

There is something else we have to see here, too. WHERE this person is planted is also important. As it says, this person is planted by streams of water. This verse could also be translated as "channels" of water. In other words, the tree is planted in such a way that it will be nurtured and fed by the water that has also been intentionally placed there for its benefit. This tree is firmly rooted because it has been intentionally placed and intentionally nurtured in order to grow strong and sure.

What incredible intentionality is displayed here in the first part of this verse! Think about it, when Psalm 1 talks about the blessed one and the righteous one, this is not a description of their efforts. Instead, what the psalmist is saying is that this person has been purposefully

placed and compassionately nurtured by God in order to produce faithfulness in them. This person does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers because he or she is naturally a good person, but because of what God has done for them and in them.

When we brought our oldest son Landon home from the hospital, I remember Julie Lynn and I setting his car seat on the coffee table of our home and thinking: “Wow, this little person is completely and utterly dependent on us for anything”, which was a little daunting at the time. I know Dallas & Allie, Mason & Melissa, Jon & Amanda, and soon Colin & Lauren know in very real and fresh experience what I am talking about! They are all taking care of babies right now—or will be soon. And those babies need food, they need warmth, they need changing, they need baths, they need to be held, they need lots of things that they cannot provide for themselves. And unless their parents are intentional and purposeful in providing those things that they need, a baby will not thrive and will not survive.

You need to know that God’s Word is there for us on purpose. God put it there and he put you with it. As Christians, it provides for us the food, the challenge, and by the work of the Holy Spirit the nurture of our hearts for God. It produces faithfulness in us. It develops a steady and durable awareness of God’s ever-present work and care.

When we think of Bible reading and meditation, sometimes “delight” does not come to mind for us. We think more in terms of duty rather than delight. What I am trying to do is to come at it another way with you. I want you to see what the psalmist is describing here is happening in you if you are a follower of Jesus. What if you embraced that God is that intentional with you? What if you considered the truth of God’s purposeful work on your behalf? How can you let that change your view of time in God’s Word? What if God were up to something in you through what he has revealed to you about himself?

In Psalm 1, we see that **God has preserved his Word for us so that we can invest our lives in what lasts**. We have seen that delighting in his Word produces faithfulness. What else does it produce?

In Psalm 1:3, there is not just faithfulness that is produced in this person there is also other “fruit”. We can look at Galatians 5:22-23 to see what this fruit looks like: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, & self-control. This is what happens when God’s Spirit is at work. In other words, delighting in God’s Word produces fruitfulness. It is what comes out of a person who is intentionally nurtured by God. But I want to note something specific it is talking about here. The psalmist says that the tree yields its fruit “in season”. That’s important. Because apple trees, peach trees, plum trees, among many other

fruit-bearing trees have a season in which they bear that fruit. Fruit-bearing takes time. Fruit-bearing shows itself in season.

It is easy for us to see what season a tree is in, but it is hard for us to see the seasons we are in as people. And so, we may not entirely know the fruit that is being produced in us until we reach a season in which that fruit is required of us. And then, suddenly, and seemingly without any preparation, it's there. Love when we did not expect it for someone difficult for us to love. Joy in the midst of a devastating circumstance. Peace in an unexpected season of change. Patience when the person we are relating to pushes all of our buttons. And on and on. We know what is going on though—God is producing fruit in its season in us.

Notice something else it says here that relates to the seasons of fruitfulness in our lives. It says that its leaf does not wither. There are only two reasons why a leaf will wither: when a tree dies or when a tree goes dormant. What we are seeing here is that for the righteous person—the person whom God has made righteous by his intentional and declarative work—there is no such thing as death and there is no such thing as dormancy.

That is a powerful statement now that we think about it. What the psalmist is saying here is that this tree is ever-green and ever-producing. Because of God's living and active Word in the life of this person, growth is constantly taking place. There is no such thing as a dormant time in the life of a Christian, even though there may be dark times and there may be times where God feels distant and when sin feels like it's ready to pounce and addictions are feeling nowhere near under control. For the Christian, God is still at work. It may look small. It may feel small. But he is still at work. And, again for the Christian, that growth will never end. Even though physical death is real, spiritual death will never happen. So in our most difficult season, in our darkest days, in our hardest moments, God is still at work. Moisture is gathering in the roots, nutrients are being absorbed into the living tissue of the tree, photosynthesis is still gathering light and turning it into food. All that is happening with God.

That is what it means to prosper. Not that we have a successful vocational life, though that might be what God gives us. Not that we have great kids, though that might be what God gives us. Not that we have great fame, though that might be what God gives us. But prospering is about a deep abiding hope that we are God's and he is ours. It is salvation. It is life forever with him beginning in the present. What a delight!

I first learned to drive at Disneyland. It was on the Autopia ride. When I was old enough, my dad made a big deal about me getting in the car and doing the driving. I was so excited and I was so nervous. And then the time came. I climbed in the car and put on my seatbelt and away we went. I was pushing the pedal, I was turning the steering wheel, I was driving! My dad was so proud of me when we got to the end of the trip. He let me know that I did a great

job. And I felt good about that. But little did I know that the car was steered for me, taking me through the whole route. And the gas pedal, it was regulated for me so that I did not go too fast. All I did was take my foot off of it and it stopped. I was so excited about how much I had done, and yet it had all been done for me. Things were at work beyond my control! In a similar way, God is at work producing faithfulness and fruitfulness in us in ways we may not see.

When it comes to God's work in our lives, sometimes we think that he is absent or ignoring us. This psalm tells us otherwise. What if we anticipated the growth this psalm is pointing to in us? How can we approach God's Word in such a way that faithfulness and fruitfulness are on our minds?

God has preserved his Word for us so that we can invest our lives in what lasts. As we look at this psalm, the truth is that Jesus is the ultimate picture of faithfulness and fruitfulness we see here. He never took his eyes off his destiny. He never veered from a perfect life. He never veered from his perfect sacrifice. He never veered from his perfect resurrection and ascension. He is the blessed one. He is the one who makes the Word flesh. He makes it active. He animates it in our lives. When we delight in the Word, we are delighting in Jesus.

As we come to this time of The Lord's Supper, delighting in him is why we are here. We would normally do this in person so it is strange to be partaking in our homes, for this is a community table. It is a free and extravagant gift to all those who believe in Jesus!

For those who are followers of Christ, this table is for you to receive the bread and drink from the cup knowing Jesus is with us. For those who have not been baptized and are not followers of Christ or are too young to understand, this table may not be for you to commune with Christ, however, this time certainly is for you to consider what the Bible says about Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross for you. If you would like to talk more about what this all means, please contact Pastor Shelley or myself. We would enjoy connecting with you about knowing Christ personally.

Please join me in this prayer of confession as we enter into The Lord's Supper together

Dear Heavenly Father, we lower our heads before you and we confess that we have too often forgotten that we are yours. Sometimes we carry on our lives as if there was no God and we fall short of being a credible witness to You. For these things we ask your forgiveness and we also ask for your strength. Give us clear minds and open hearts so we may witness to You in our world. Remind us to be who You would have us to be regardless of what we are doing or who we are with. Hold us to You and build our relationship with You and with those You have given us on earth. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

And now Pastor Shelley will lead us in The Lord's Supper together...