

Two Roads from Which to Choose

Ps 1 (text)

2 August 2020, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

About 250 years ago,¹ the government of the USA wrote their Declaration of Independence.

The main reason why they wrote this declaration was to announce and explain why the United States were separating from Great Britain.

Well, do you know what the second sentence of this declaration says?

It says, "...that all men ... are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness..."²

Did you hear the last four words – "the pursuit of Happiness"? The pursuit of happiness is an unalienable human right!

Wow! It sounds all good and democratic! And, in a certain sense, we can agree with that!

But here comes the question: "What exactly *is* happiness?"

Is it the so-called "American dream"? Is it like the slogan of one NZ bank which used to go, "Living the good life"? Will we be happy only when we are rich and able to have whatever our heart desires? Will we be happy only when we own the company – then no one will be able to tell us what we should do? Is it so that if I cannot own a certain make & model car – and if I cannot have that yearly summer holiday in the Bay of Islands, I cannot be/stay happy?

Well, sadly, that's exactly how man, by his sinful nature, thinks! It's all about happiness on *my* terms – happiness for me and *my* "kingdom"!

And who can honestly say that such an attitude is not to be found even among God's church-going people!?

Yes, although you & I are not total pagans, is it not true that, deep inside our hearts, we, too, think of happiness as the state I'm in when all my physical needs are met – and abundantly so, with the assurance that this happy situation will never change?

Well, the message of our Bible text is totally different to this kind of happiness.

You see, here is the main message of Ps 1: "Happy/blessed are those who delight in God's Word!"

Our text gives us the following three points...

- The Road of True Happiness
- The Road of Feigned Happiness
- Their End-Stations

The Road of True Happiness (vv.1-3)

Verses 1, 2 and 3 describe the man/person who is blessed, who walks on the road of happiness!

¹ 4th July 1776

² "...We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness..." (cf. <https://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/> [Emphasis mine])

The Hebrew word for *happiness* can also be translated as *most blessed* or *deeply happy because of a joy firmly founded in one's reverence for (and submission to) God!*³

What does such a happy/blessed person do? How does he live?

Well, to start with, verse 1 describes what the most-blessed person does *not* do...

He does not *walk*, let alone *stand*, let alone even *sit* in the company of the ungodly!

See the degrees by which this happy-in-God person dissociates himself from evil!?

Perhaps someone might say, "But hang on, pastor, if we are not allowed to walk, stand or sit with the ungodly – yes, if we're not allowed to be in the company of unbelievers – then how will we ever reach out to them with the Gospel; yes, how will we then ever win the unrighteous over for Christ?" "Are we to be like those holier-than-thou Pharisees of Jesus' day? Or are we to go live behind the high walls of monasteries?" "Pastor, did not our Lord Jesus Himself walk, stand, sit – and even eat – with sinners?"⁴

My brother & sister, the message is not to avoid all contact with unbelievers, but rather that *we do not choose their way of life!* Look, is that not what v.1 means when it says, "...***blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel (i.e. in the advice)***⁵ ***of the wicked...***"?

Indeed, the believer – provided he is strong and mature in faith – can (and must often) prayerfully walk, stand and sit with unbelievers, but not so that *walking, standing* and *sitting* make him choose their way of life and following their destruction-bound advice!

Well, that's what the most-blessed man does *not* do!

But what *does* he do?

Verse 2 tells us! And, look, is this not what Ps 1 is all about? Yes, is not this the very reason for (foundation of) this man's deep happiness? Verse 2 says that this man's delight is in the "Torah" of God!

What does "Torah" mean?

Well, at the time when Ps 1 was written, God's people understood "Torah" to mean the first five books of the Old Testament – covering the Law of God! However, by the time of our Lord Jesus, the Jews often used the word "Torah" (law) to refer to *all* of Old-Testament Scripture – i.e. to *all of God's Word* that they had available to them!⁶

³ Sæbø (1979:258) points out that this Hebrew word has the meaning 'Glück, Heil.' The root appears also as a verb but then only in the pi. and pu. and as a denominalised form. A translation like 'Most happy is the man...' would do justice to the Hebrew word which could describe happiness due to a variety of reasons. However, it is to note that, whatever the reason for happiness, the general semantic field of *ashrey* will always include a joy firmly founded in the reverence for God ('...doch allgemein gilt, daß der zu beglückwünschende Mensch nicht die feste Ordnung Gottes zerbricht, sondern sich ihr einordnet ..., und daß zugleich der Heilszustand ein von anderen zu beobachtender Ausdruck der erwiesenen oder erhofften Segnung Gottes sein kann' [Sæbø, *ibid*:260]). SÆBØ, M. 1976. *יָצִיחַ* pi. glücklich preisen (*In*: Jenni, E & Westermann, C. eds. *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*. Band I. München : Chr. Kaiser Verlag. pp.257-260.)

⁴ Cf. e.g. Mk 2:16-17 ***And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"***¹⁷ ***And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."***

⁵ From the Hebrew word *etsāh* (עֲצָה) **counsel, advice** (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). [Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon](#) (p. 420). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

The NIV 2011 reads, "***Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked...***" (Emphasis mine)

⁶ Cf. e.g. "Torah (/ˈtɔːrə, ˈtoʊrə/; Hebrew: תּוֹרָה, "Instruction", "Teaching" or "Law") has a range of meanings. It can most specifically mean the first five books (Pentateuch or five books of Moses) of the 24 books of the

But, look now, now that Christ has fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures, what does “Torah” now mean for us Christians?

My brother & sister, it means for us *all of God’s Word* – yes, all of the Old Testament and all of the New Testament!

And so, how does v.2 translate into New-Testament terms? Well, in this way: “Blessed is the man... whose delight is in the whole Word of God!”

Question: What does John 1 say about the Word of God?

Well that, in its most poignant (moving/gripping) form, God’s Word is *Jesus Christ our Lord!*

And so, again, how does Ps 1:2 sound in New-Testament terms? Well, this way: “The man/person who is deeply blessed is the one... whose delight is in the whole Word of God as it comes together in all that Christ is and has taught!”

Delight!

Delighting in God’s Word!

Delighting in Jesus Christ, the Son of God – THE Word!

Question: What does one *do* if you delight in something?

Well, is it not so that, if we delight in friends, we will want to be with them? If we delight in a certain song, we will want to sing it?

So, what if we delight in all of God’s Word and in THE Word!?

Well, verse 2 gives the answer: We will then want to read and *meditate* on God’s Word!

Actually, the Hebrew word for *meditate* means to make soft murmuring sounds⁷ – to soliloquise; yes, to softly *talk to yourself* by repeating words, phrases, and sentences from the Bible (from Jesus)!

Perhaps you have done this in times of great joy in the Lord – or even in times of great suffering!

In fact, one of the great tips for personal devotions is that, when you read your Bible, to, with intervals, stop and pray along the words you have read!⁸ This is taking God’s Word to heart and making it your own!

Well, v. 2 says that this deeply-blessed man is doing this day & night! Of course, this does not mean that you & I must never sleep,⁹ but just that, if we delight in God and His

Hebrew Bible. This is commonly known as the Written Torah. It can also mean the continued narrative from all the 24 books, from the Book of Genesis to the end of the Tanakh (Chronicles), and it can even mean the totality of Jewish teaching, culture, and practice, whether derived from biblical texts or later rabbinic writings. This is often known as the Oral Torah.[1] Common to all these meanings, Torah consists of the origin of Jewish peoplehood: their call into being by God, their trials and tribulations, and their covenant with their God, which involves following a way of life embodied in a set of moral and religious obligations and civil laws (halakha)...” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah>).

⁷ “...1. of inarticulate sounds: **a.** *growl*, of lion growling over prey, ... Is 31:4. **b.** *groan, moan*, in distress (like dove), ... Is 38:14; 59:11 ...; *sigh for* ... in sorrow, mourning, *moan for* Is 16:7 ... so also Je 48:31. **2.** *utter*, ... ψ 38:13; subj. Jb 27:4 (|| דָּבַר) ψ 35:28; 71:24 Is 59:3; ... ψ 37:30 Pr 8:7.... **3. a.** (*soliloquize*) *meditate, muse*, ... Jos 1:8 ψ 1:2; 63:7; 77:13; 143:5; c. acc. Is 33:18,” (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 211). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

⁸ Cf. e.g. “End with a prayer which especially responds to what you have just read...” (Cammenga, A.A. No date. Facing Faith’s Challenges: defending the Faith and answering life’s important questions. Chino, CA : First United Reformed Church. p.10).

⁹ Like the Qumran community (of about 100 BC), who lived at the NW corner of the Dead Sea, and read and meditated on God’s Word 24/7, taking shifts through day & night!

Word, we will continuously think of God Triune and often repeat His Word to ourselves – Deuteronomy-6 style,¹⁰ and, as our Lord Jesus once said “abide in His Word” (See Jn 8:31-32, “*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*”).¹¹

If you abide in My word...!?

My brother & sister, from v.3 we learn that this most happy man was, at first, not doing so well! Yes, at first, he was like a tree that grew in a dry land! But then, by grace, the “Gardener” did something beautiful, i.e. the tree got transplanted¹² onto the banks of streams of water!

Of course, this is a mere picture of a person who, by the grace of the heavenly “Gardener,” got plucked out of a sinful/fruitless life (of feigned happiness), and then got transplanted into a life which drinks deeply & constantly from God’s Word – indeed, into a state of *abiding in Christ’s Word* (cf. again Jn 8:31)!

Well, up until now, we have seen...

- 1) what the most-happy (deeply blessed) man does *not* do,
- and 2) what he *does do*!

But now, what’s the result of this “transplanted” man’s life?

Well, 3) he bears fruit – fruit that, so typical of fruit, blesses not himself, but the “Gardener” and others!!

And, just like that tree’s leaves don’t wither, so does the faith of this deeply-blessed (most happy) man never wane! Granted, during times of suffering, the Christian’s fruit might not always be seen so clearly – just like the tree which is out of fruit-bearing season!

However, just as the *leaves* of the tree planted by streams of water – just as those leaves never wither, so does the *faith* of this most-blessed man (the man planted in the streams of God’s Word) not wane!

So, such a most-happy man drinks from the water which Christ spoke about to the woman at the well; yes, he drinks from the living water of the Word! And so, he will never get thirsty!¹³

¹⁰ Dt 6:6-7, “*And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.*”

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 8:31–32). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹² Indeed, the Hebrew word *shātal* (שָׁטַל) means **transplant** (NH id.; Aramaic שְׁטַל, שָׁטַל (*štal*); Vulg.Ar. شَتَّل (*šatl*) *plant*, شَتْلَة (*šatlat*) *slip, cutting*, Dozy (loan-words?)...; Assyrian *šitlu* appar. = *shoot, slip*) (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). [Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon](#) (p. 1060). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

¹³ Cf. Jn 4:9,10,14, *The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” ... ¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*

Also cf. Jn 7:37-39 *On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ ” ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

Well, so far re the very long point 1, which was all about the first of two roads: “The Road of True Happiness.”
Here is the much shorter point 2...

The Road of Feigned Happiness

My brother & sister, whereas the psalmist spent three verses, packed with beautiful things, on the deeply blessed man – the righteous¹⁴ man – he spends only two short verses describing the way of the ungodly – yes, those who, all the time while they were on this earth, had a superficial view of what happiness is – a feigned happiness, one that caters only for the physical needs!

And the world is full of people who have the world’s wealth and, yet, they remain utterly unhappy!

Well, look, just as the psalmist used an agricultural image to explain the life of the *most-happy man*, so, now again, he gives an agricultural image of the *ungodly/wicked* – yet an image which is so different to the fruitful tree that symbolised the righteous/believer!

Here’s the image...

The wicked are like chaff – worthless!

Picture this: at harvest time, in Ancient Israel, the farmers would bring in the sheaves of grain, and lay them on the threshing floor. Then they would crush the grain with a threshing sledge.

And then?

Well then, they would take a winnowing fork and toss the grain into the air!

Of course, grain is heavy, but chaff is light!

So, the *grain* falls back onto the threshing floor, but the *chaff*? Well, the chaff gets blown away by the wind!

See? See what contrast chaff is to fruit?

As someone has said so well: Chaff is “without root below, without fruit above, devoid of all vigour & freshness of life, ... a prey of the slightest breeze – thus utterly worthless and unstable.”¹⁵

Sadly, such is the unbeliever!

He is not grounded in God’s Word – does not believe in (nor love) Christ!

What a shock! The life of the wicked – even though that life might be filled with the happiness this world offers – is a life lived apart from God – is ultimately just as empty; just as meaningless and worthless as the chaff which gets rejected!

Well that was point 2: “The Road of Feigned Happiness (of Fruitlessness).”

Here’s the last point...

Their End-Stations

Both roads will come to an end.

What is that end?

Well, v.5 mentions it – judgement! Ultimately, this refers to the *final* Day of Judgement!

On that day, the wicked will not remain standing!

Yes, the wicked/ungodly (unrepentant sinners) will not be placed in the assembly of the righteous who will be standing at Christ’s right hand!

¹⁴ A word which is not used until the very last verse (verse 6).

¹⁵ Well-said words of Weiser, *The Psalms*, 106. Cf. Ross, *Commentary on the Psalms*, I, 191, “The figure shows that the ungodly are not only of no value, but also will eventually be removed” (apud Greidanus, S. (2016). [Preaching Christ from Psalms: Foundations for Expository Sermons in the Christian Year](#) (pp. 46–75). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company).

And look, did not John the Baptist prophesy what Jesus would do? This is what John said, ***“His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”***¹⁶

Dear Wainui member, will you & I envy the ungodly and their feigned happiness – for the American dream, for living the good life?
No, for look how Ps 73 answers...

I was envious of the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked....Such are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.... But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end.... Indeed, those who are far from You will perish; You put an end to those who are false to You (Ps 73:3, 12, 16–17, 27).

On Judgement Day, the wicked – even the happy wicked – will not stand!

But why is it that the *righteous* will stand?

Verse 6 gives the answer: Because the LORD/Yahweh *keeps on knowing*¹⁷ (and knowing intimately) the way of the righteous. And so, the LORD cares for (watches over / preserves) the way of the righteous!¹⁸ The LORD protects their life so that they do not perish!

We want to conclude...

My brother & sister (Dear children), have you noticed that there's something missing from this psalm?

You see, it does show the two roads: the road of true happiness versus the road of feigned happiness.¹⁹

¹⁶ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Mt 3:12). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

¹⁷ In the Hebrew, this verb has been placed in its participle form – meaning ongoing action.

Yes, **יָדָעַתִּי** is a Qal Participle Masculine Singular Active of **יָדָעַתִּי** “know.”

¹⁸ For the fact that God's *knowing of the righteous* means He *preserves* the them in their earthly walk of life, cf. Greidanus (ibid) and also cf. Ps. 31:7 ***“I will rejoice and be glad in Your lovingkindness, because You have seen my affliction; You have known the troubles of my soul.”***

Also, Ps 37:18, ***“The Lord knows the days of the blameless, and their inheritance will be forever.”***

Also, Ps 144:3, ***“O Lord, what is man, that You take knowledge of him? Or the son of man, that You think of him?”***

And Nah. 1:7, ***“The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him.”***

Also, cf. John 10:14, ***“I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me.”***

And 2 Tim. 2:19, ***“Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.”***

(Emphases are all mine)

¹⁹ Our Lord Jesus also preaches about the two roads: Jn 3:16 ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”***

Also cf. Mt 7:13-14 ***“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it”*** (emphasis mine).

But look, nowhere in all of its verses does this psalm give a *command* to choose between the two!

Why is that so?

Well, is this not in sync with how God always works?

You see, God never forces anyone to receive Him against that person's will! He never carries anyone kicking and screaming against his/her will into heaven!

Rather, God moves/draws (and strongly so)²⁰ their hearts so that by the time they receive Christ, they receive Him because they want to!

So, here's my prayer...

That this whole congregation (from the youngest to the oldest) will look at these two roads, and will by God's Spirit be moved to choose correctly – either for the first time, or again & again; yes, to choose the road of true happiness; the road firmly founded on (anchored in) the “Torah” – the Living Word most poignantly seen in Jesus Christ whose supper we are about to enjoy!

AMEN (2,340 words excluding footnotes)

²⁰ See Jn 7:37 & 44 “***All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out... No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day***” (emphasis mine).