

23 October 2011

Reading: Psalm 1 (OT page 543)
Reader: Robert Alexander

Background of the reading

In our very sensitive environment that we live in today the words of Psalm 1 may be experienced as quite offensive. I mean can you just imagine yourself calling your boss —wicked, even —unrighteousness because of his/her lack of faith! I mean in our society we are so afraid to label people and be sensitive to their ways. In the time of this Psalm it was quite a different story. The context of this Psalm was the Jewish way of life. All the people that listened to this Psalm were part of the Jewish community within the borders of Israel. The Jews had very strict religious laws like:

- Obeying the 10 commandments because that was the will of God,
- If you were a male, attending the temple regularly & Practising the prescribed sacrifices at the temple.

All of them did what Deuteronomy 6 ordered them to do namely to apply the rule of obeying God with everything they did. It is called also the *Shema* prayer: —Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. This prayer was written on every doorframe of their houses and on the gates/entrances of every town. They obeyed all the religious laws as best as they could because it contained the will of God. The Psalmist says everyone that obeys God's commandments is righteous. It is thus no surprise that everyone who did not obey these laws, stood out. They were the foreigners, the outsiders. Most of the times they were considered as unclean and no-one would speak to them. If you would touch them you would become unclean and miss every opportunity to go to the temple. In short the words of Psalm 1 bear witness to everyone who was not a Jew, who did not obey God's law and who did not share the same religious sentiments. They were the sinners, the wicked, or the unrighteous.

And if you were a Gentile male you could never become a Jew! Conversion to Judaism was only possible for gentile women who married a Jew. This was allowed since the time of Ruth. But she had to prove her Jewish faith by obeying the commandments of conversion. These women had to go through a process where they would be refused at the temple three times. After they stood fast in their new belief, they could be Jews and fit into the society of the rest of the Jews. It is no wonder that the Psalmist says that if you were the outsider you could not expect any favours or grace. If you were involved in a lawsuit, all the rest that resembled witness would be the righteous. You would be totally outnumbered. You would have no chance to defend yourself. And there would be only two witnesses to get you convicted! You had no place, in both the temple and in the meeting places of the rest of the society, the righteous!

Prayers for others: Janice Anderson

MP 449

Love divine, all loves excelling

Sermon

The text for the sermon verse 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.

² But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.”

People often ask me: what is the will of God? Well in the Old Testament God made His will known to His people through the 10 commandments. If you obeyed the 10 commandments, then you did what God wanted you do and you were indeed “blessed”.

But God saw that no human could ever redeem him or herself and send Jesus Christ to the world. And when Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment in the law He said: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸
This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the

^a Deut. 6:5

second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Jesus Christ did not only reveal God to us as a God of love but He also told us what the will of God is. If we want to know whether we are doing God's will then we must ask ourselves: Is this what we are doing a reflection of our love for God or in other words, is our action glorifying God or not? And secondly we must ask ourselves, is our action for the benefit of my brother and sister in faith or is it a selfish, loveless action of revenge/greed? But most importantly: we must constantly ask ourselves: are our actions with regard to others a reflection of what we would expect ourselves?

God expects you and me to love - full stop. But is it so easy and straightforward? Well no because the love He expects from us is sacrificial love, love for the sake and benefit of others just like He did through Jesus Christ on the cross. We are celebrating the sacrificial love of God

^b Lev. 19:18

this morning. And through this meal we are once reminded of God's will for our lives.

We need more love, sacrificial love not only in this congregation, but also in our churches, in our villages, in or schools, in our workplaces...every place we can think of. I am sure when we do indeed obey this commandment we will look like green trees planted by waters, yielding the fruits of the Spirit and whose leaves will not wither, not even by the frost of this world that we encounter as Christians every moment of everyday.

Imagine the sight of this. A tree with green leaves and full of fruit, amidst a winter landscape! And this must be our aim in everything we do and say. Because then we will convince the world through our selfless actions of love that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation, redemption and the Eternal kingdom of God.

May God help us in all our relationships, in all our conversations in all our actions do LOVE unconditionally for the sake and benefit of others, just like we love

ourselves. May we spend the same amount of time that we spend on ourselves, with God and others .

Amen