

Hugo Bouter

# Jesus Christ the righteous

## *A meditation on Psalm 1*

Psalm 1

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### The way of the righteous and the end of the ungodly

There are two different ways. You could perhaps also say: two sources, from which people draw. In the Psalms we find all kinds of teaching, including practical teaching for ourselves as believers, although it is still the old dispensation. But if we find here a righteous one and an ungodly person, then two types of people are contrasted, and we can also see in the righteous a picture of ourselves as New Testament believers, because we know that we have been justified by grace and through faith. We are declared righteous by virtue of the finished work of the Lord Jesus, who died for our sins and was raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25).

But even in the Old Testament, of course, people knew the principle of justification by faith. We see this already with the patriarch Abraham. We thought about this recently, and we also see it with David, who in Psalm 32 speaks of the happiness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered: "Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity" (Ps. 32:1-2).

Justification is the remission of our sins, but it is also acquittal. We can go out free on the basis of the finished work of the Lord Jesus, because God does not impute our iniquities to us. Someone else has stood in our place and fulfilled what could be expected from us. So we can also think of ourselves as justified people when we read the Psalms.

## The Righteous One

It is even more beautiful to think of the Lord Jesus Himself, the Righteous One with a capital letter. He is the Holy One, the Righteous One. The apostle John says that we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He is also the propitiation, or an offering for our sins (1 John 2:1-2). So it is in itself a good study to read the psalms with an eye on the Lord Jesus. Where in the psalms can I learn something about Him, the Righteous One? The psalms that speak specifically about Him are also called Messianic psalms, that is, songs that speak specifically about the Messiah.

And then we don't have to go far in this book, because Psalm 1 and 2 speak clearly about the Lord Jesus. Psalm 2 perhaps even more than Psalm 1, because there we have the anointed King, who is appointed by God over Zion and will reign in righteousness. His dominion will extend to the ends of the earth. I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. "Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession" (Ps. 2:6, 8). So we see right at the beginning of the book that the Spirit of God, when He paints a picture of the Lord Jesus as the Anointed King, actually goes on into the distant future and gives us a picture of the glorious end time when the Lord Jesus will reign here on earth. In that glorious Kingdom of Peace, the law will go forth from Zion and all people will submit to the Lord and His Anointed.

We read the following in the book of Revelation about this moment in history, at the very end, after the judgments: "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come" (Rev. 11:15; 12:10). This is the anointed King we read about in Psalm 2, who was appointed by God: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You" (v. 7). But also in Psalm 1 we can see an image, not only of ourselves, but also of the Lord Jesus Christ. We see Him here as the perfect Man, the Righteous One who went His way on earth in dependence on God and was constantly guided by the Holy Spirit. From moment to moment His heavenly Father kept His eye on Him.

## Walking, standing, sitting

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful" (Ps. 1:1). Actually, this refers to the righteous, which is evident from the last verses of the psalm, but the first verse speaks only of the man who does not walk etc. So the righteous one is contrasted

with three groups of people, one could say: Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, who does not stand in the path of sinners, who does not sit in the seat of scoffers. There are ungodly people, sinners and scoffers. And the righteous one is contrasted with these three types of people.

There is a certain ascent in this. An ungodly person is one who lives without God in the world, who does not know God and is separated from Him. A sinner is one who is not only separated from God, but actually sins, does things that are contrary to God's will. The fact that he is separated from God is reflected in all kinds of actions that are contrary to the will of God. And then the third group of scoffers, they go one step further. A scoffer is someone who not only does not want to take God into account, but who also ridicules and mocks the things of God and the Word of God, the things of eternity.

We also see the scoffers in the New Testament. They appear particularly in the last days. We can read this in the second letter of Peter, that the apostle warns about this. We read in 2 Peter 3:3, "Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming?" So there is a certain growth, a certain progression in these three kinds of people: the ungodly, the sinners and the scoffers. Scoffers – this is, as I said, a characteristic of the time in which we live. These people do no longer want to take God into account, but they also mock the things of God and of the Word of God, everything that is holy and good. It is outright rebellion against God.

There is also a certain order in the activity described of these people. It speaks of the counsel of the ungodly, the path of sinners and the seat of the scoffers. Perhaps you could say: it begins with your thought life, with the things you are engaged in and considering in your heart, what you are thinking about. With that everything in our life begins, because out of the heart spring the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). The first activity is walking in the counsel of the ungodly. And then in the second there is mention of the pathway where sinners stand. So there are several things mentioned here. Walking, standing, sitting, and then there is actually no hope. Then you are in the seat of the scoffers and you feel at home there. That is actually the end of the wrong pathway.

## Blessed

So where are we walking, on which road do we stand, where are we sitting? In what company of people are we? All these questions we should ask ourselves. And then it is so nice to read here in the first verse: Blessed, or happy is the man who does

not walk etc. So the first Psalm begins with a beatitude, and that means: You are happy if you distinguish yourself from these kinds of people, from the ungodly, from the sinners and from the scoffers. If you do not walk in their counsel, if you do not stand in their way, if you do not sit in their company. Then you are happy! For then there is a clear distinction between ourselves as believers, and the world that is sadly facing destruction. That is important when God calls us happy, when He can praise us. God sees what is in our hearts, what we think, what we deliberate. He also sees on what pathway we are standing. He sees where we are.

And how then is the righteous one different from all these other people, we might ask. That is actually what we sang about and what we read about in this Psalm: "Blessed is the man who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates in His law day and night" (v. 2). So the believer has a quite different object in his life than the ungodly, the sinner and the scoffer. And we could think very specifically about what is going on in the world and what people in the world are occupied with. The things the hearts are full of, that people's minds are focused on. And then you could say concretely, what is your heart focused on? Are you busy with these races, or do you have something else going on. Do you have the Word of God in your hands? Do you find your joy in the law of the Lord and do you meditate His law day and night. Do we occupy ourselves with the Word of God? Is this the treasure we enjoy?

## Planted by the rivers of water

God sees what we are doing. He knows everything about us. He calls us blessed and happy, when we sit by the springs of living water, when we find our joy in God's Word. When we think about it, and ponder His Word by day and by night. That actually reflects what you read in the precepts of Leviticus 11 about the clean animals, which had to ruminate. The food had to pass through them again, as it were. And it is the same with believers that the food of the Word of God has to go through you again. You have to think about it. You cannot take it in once, but you have to process it in your heart, in your innermost being. God calls "ruminating" a characteristic of a clean animal.

And it is the same with the other characteristic that is mentioned in Leviticus 11 concerning the cloven hooves: that gave a stable walk, a steady pace. Well, the walk of a believer is clearly addressed here in Psalm 1. He should not walk in the counsel of the ungodly and not stand in the path of sinners. He must have a walk in accordance with God's will, which He can consider pure. For he is like a tree planted by the rivers of water. It is evident that the Word of God, the law of the Lord, as it

is called here, is compared to those rivers, those vivifying, refreshing streams. And the righteous one is like a tree standing by those rivers, he is planted there. He takes in the living water and is nourished by God's Word.

So when we find our happiness and comfort in God's Word, we will think about it day and night. Perhaps you too sometimes think about a certain part of the Bible and then go to bed and get up the next day and think: That's how it is, that's the meaning of that text or that part. That's the positive thing about pondering on the Word of God by day and by night. Then we read in Psalm 16:7 that we are instructed even by night: "My heart also instructs me in the night seasons." This is said here specifically of the Lord Jesus, for this is also a Messianic psalm. But it also applies to us that even by night God is teaching us, if we think about His Word, if we read it for ourselves and ponder on His law day and night.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season. This is a fruit bearing tree. So the righteous person, the true believer, is a tree that is nourished by the living water of the Word of God and bears fruit. The grass that sprouts from the field is also compared to man, but there the aspect of man's impermanence is involved. Like the grass, our life is short, says a rhymed psalm (Ps. 90).

## Fruit in its time

But this tree is more useful. It is impressive and it shows firmness. It can bear fruit, and that is also a wonderful characteristic in the life of a believer, who feeds on the living waters. Such a person is led by the Holy Spirit and produces fruit of lasting value. We can think then of the ninefold fruit of the Holy Spirit, about which we read in Galatians 5. Fruit in God's timing!

You all know that parable in the New Testament of the owner of a vineyard, who came looking for fruit. But there was no fruit to be found on the tree (Luke 13:6-9). And how is it with us? Is there fruit in our lives, in our hearts? Fruit in due season, as it says here. When God looks at our lives, when He comes into our lives and deals with us, can He find fruit in our lives? There is also foliage here, green leaves. They shall not wither. That is also important, because it speaks of what can be seen outwardly in the life of a believer, that is the confession of a Christian. Are the green leaves not withered in our lives? If we feed on the rivers of water from God's Word, if we use enough of it for ourselves, then our leaves will be always green.

We actually read about these same things in the book of Jeremiah. First, in Jeremiah 17, a curse is pronounced on "the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness" (Jer. 17:5-6). And then we see the contrast: "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but her leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit" (Jer. 17:7-8). It is the same imagery.

So as long as you stand by the waters and have your roots spread out far enough and are firmly rooted, so that they can drink from the water in the stream, then the leaves remain green and the tree will not cease from yielding fruit. Fruit: that is the fruit of the Spirit. And the leaves speak of our testimony, our confession to the outside world. So there is fruit in His time, fruit for God, and also a good testimony in our surroundings. "Whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." That is the Lord's blessing.

I don't know whether we can always say that. I think there are many things in our lives that we undertake but do not succeed. But if we truly act in dependence on the Lord, if we feed on the living waters and allow ourselves to be led by the Word of God and the Spirit of God, then what we undertake in dependence on the Lord will also prosper in His strength. The tree will remain standing. But the ungodly are like the chaff which the wind drives away, nothing remains of it.

This is an enormous contrast in Psalm 1. But the ungodly are not like that. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, when God comes with His judgments. And God *will* come with His judgments on this world, and then the ungodly will be like the chaff that is blown away. But the tree gives firmness, it stands firm in the earth, and has spread its roots deep down to the streams. It remains standing, even when a storm comes. And when heat comes, the heat of the tribulation, then it still bears fruit for God.

But the ungodly are like the chaff that the wind blows away. When God comes with great storms, His judgments in the end time, there will be nothing left of the wicked; that is serious. But the righteous are the wheat, which the Lord will gather into His barn. The wicked will not endure in judgment. There will be an eternity, there will be a divine judgment. No sinners remain in the fellowship of the righteous, for the Lord knows the way of the righteous. So the latter is contrasted with the way of the sinners in verse 1. "But the way of the ungodly shall perish,"

says verse 6b, and nothing remains of it. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous.

Isn't that a tremendous encouragement to us. Isn't that a comfort to us that the Lord knows us and that He also knows our pathway? And that He is attentive to us? That already begins with the beatitude of verse 1. "Blessed," says God, "if you do not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, if you do not stand in the path of sinners, if you do not sit in the circle of scoffers. But if you belong to Me, then you are happy. The Lord knows the way of the righteous. He knows us and He knows the way we go. He will also reward us for all we do for Him in this life. But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

The two ways, the two sources. That wicked one also has his sources, from which he feeds. He also occupies himself with all kinds of things. But it has no value for eternity, nothing remains of it: the way of the ungodly shall perish (v. 6). Two ways, but which way do we go? Do we belong to these righteous people, who have been justified by faith, and have been absolved from their guilt. If we belong to the righteous, then it makes sense that we also live and walk righteously before God.

We find this so beautifully in the letter to the Romans, which speaks at great length about our justification by faith. The first eight chapters are well known, then you get the problem of Israel, the ancient people of God (Rom. 9-11). But then there are four more chapters, Romans 12 to 16, which deal with how someone who is justified, a true believer, can actually live and walk righteously in this world. The Lord knows the way of the righteous. So in those chapters we see how we can actually walk righteously in this age. What are the conditions for that, and what are the characteristics of such a walk.

And when we think of the Lord Jesus Himself as the tree planted by the rivers of water, giving its fruit in its season, we see things in their perfection. With Him all this was present. For the heavens could open above Him, and God the Father testified of Him, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Here is the perfect Righteous One, the Lord Jesus, and whatever He does shall prosper. For He is like a tree planted by the rivers of water.

May the Lord be gracious to us to take sides with the people who are distinct from all the others: the ungodly, the sinners, and the scoffers. Because we know we have heavenly resources, which God Himself has given us in His Word and by the Spirit. The Spirit, on whom we depend to walk to the glory of God and bear fruit to the glory of His Name. In His time when you can expect fruit to be there. The Lord expects to find that in us as well.

*There we shall drink the stream  
of endless bliss above:  
There we shall know, without a cloud,  
His full unbounded love.*

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