

Mark 9: 30-37

James 3: 13-18

General History of Psalms

As we encounter the text, we recognize that the Psalms are the Hymns of Israel. They are the music of the people of God. They were compiled over many centuries, and passed down from generation to generation. The Psalms highlight God's kingship, and demonstrate how God delights in rewarding His people. The Psalms are filled with praises, laments, and wisdom. The Psalms also highlight the consequences of what a life apart or absent from God looks like. The Psalms focus on God as one who is present with His people in times of joy and times of sorrow.

The Distinction shown in Psalm One

When looking at Psalm 1, distinguished theologian Walter Brueggemann states, "Psalm 1 urges a life that finds its source in the Creator. The Psalm speaks of life as a path, or way and of divine instruction as nourishment for the way."

Psalm 1 also draws a *rather* sharp distinction identifying the way of the righteous, and the way of the wicked or ungodly, highlighting their particular fates. *It's such a sharp distinction that it might make readers and hearers a bit uncomfortable.* It underscores the joy of studying the Torah and reinforces the positive benefits of those who do.

Three Movements: Walk, Stand, Sit

There are three movements in this passage: walk, stand, and sit. The author highlights that happy or blessed is the person who does not want to walk with, stand with, or sit with the ungodly.

Walk

The word walk in this passage, when you look at its Hebrew origin, has a deeper meaning. It means to accompany, to become, to go along with continually. Thus, the text is saying: blessed is the person who refrains from walking, continually going along with, or taking the advice of the wicked.

Stand

The passage then shifts to standing, or staying in the way of, or taking the path or that sinners march. And in the Hebrew it emphasizes being in step with, being in attendance with, being set in a place, enduring, remaining, or being present. Therefore, blessed is the person who forgoes the way or path that the ungodly go.

Sit

And lastly, the passage highlights that the righteous person must disavow sitting with, living with, dwelling with, or inhabiting spaces with those who have tongues of trouble, which refers to tongues with evil intent.

The Movements are Intentional for the Psalmist

So, I believe that the Psalmist in these three actions - walking, stand, and sitting, is potentially giving us a hint of what meditating on the law and dwelling with God actually looks like. It must be our companion when we are walking, it must be our companion when we are standing, it must be our companion when we are sitting. The meditation the Psalmist is suggesting encompasses the totality of our lives. It is not compartmentalized or done in a certain way, but becomes a part of everything that we do.

There is a Distinction in the Two Ways

I believe the author suggests that the blessed person refrains from these specific movements in order to aim for a full and faithful life, because when you begin walking in step with the wicked, or standing in the way that the ungodly take, or sitting in the company of mockers, there becomes no distinction between the way of the righteous and way of the wicked. The path becomes the same. You begin to be in step with, you begin to dwell with, you begin to inhabit, you begin to have a tongue of trouble, you begin to mock.

Not Walking in This Way is So God Receives Glory

I do have to insert that this does not mean that we give up on the lost. But I do believe that there is a distinction between these two ways and the distinction is not for our Glory or praise, but so that God might be glorified through us.

Meditating and Dwelling with God Has Benefits

There is something about the ungodly being blown away like chaff. Chaff is the leftovers of dust and hay; it has no roots so when the wind comes it is easily blown away. In contrast those who meditate and find their dwelling place in God are rooted; planted by streams of living water. Because of this meditation and dwelling on the word of God, day and night there begins this process of transformation, there begins a yielding of fruit. But this fruit is not their own fruit; it is the fruit of the Spirit. This fruit is the gift of God given to his people when they dwell in Him; in times of drought and adversity, they do not.

The renowned author C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* defines distinction and transformative work of the Spirit by proposing that we-

“Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house

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about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.”

Transformation comes for Dwelling and Meditating

This is why the Psalmist places such a great emphasis on delighting and meditating on the law of the Lord, day and night!

The Process

There is something that transpires in us when we meditate and study something! There is something that takes place internally. The hope here in the scripture is that if we meditate daily and study the word of God, it may get in our DNA!

I remember one of the toughest yet most fulfilling classes in seminary. It was my senior Credo class. In the class, the seminary wanted us to take everything that we had learned and write a 25 to 40 paged comprehensive paper. This paper would summarize and define our systemic theological journey. This was a ginormous endeavor that would take a semester to accomplish. Yet I vividly remember our professor telling us that in order to pass this class, we not only had to complete our Credo, we also had to memorize and recite Heidelberg Catechism Q&A #1 without any errors. I remember struggling to memorize the specific words of this ancient creed. For some reason my brain was not willing help me. I tried all the study tricks that had learned from countless hours of study, yet nothing seemed to work. I was nearly at my wits end when I remembered talking to my father. He said that in order to memorize this catechism, I would need to become one with it.

In my academic brain I did not realize what he was talking about, and I told him I was doing everything in my power to memorize the text. This is when my dad gave me the simple advice of reading Psalm One.

This, my friends, was when I realized that if I was going to fully memorize this text, I was going to have to do more than the twenty minute study sessions that I was doing at my desk. I was going to have to meditate day and night on the words of this beautiful catechism, when I was walking to class, and when I was walking to the beach. I was going to have to meditate on these words when I was standing in line at the movie theater, and

when I was standing in line at the grocery, I would have to meditate when I was sitting down to eat dinner, and when I was sat down with my friends to discuss life.

This, my friends, is when I realized the transformational power of meditating on something day and night. When I began do these actions the words began to come off the page and became part of my identity. It began to be written on the tablet of my heart. It shaped how I perceived the good and the bad. It gave me hope of God's unfailing hand, and it assured that I indeed was saved, and not saved by my doing or not doing, but by my faithful savior Jesus.

And by the way I passed my Credo class!

Confirmation

This concept of meditating and dwelling with our understanding is vital to our foundation. This is why we encourage our young people to confirmation! A designated time where we attempt to lay a foundation of faith in their lives! In this time and space we provide an opportunity for them to learn, to meditate, and to wrestle with questions of God, of faith, and of tradition. The goal is that by the end of this process young people might have an established profession of faith.

"The Shema"

If you look at the tradition of the people of Israel, they had a special prayer that they daily prayed. This prayer is called the "The Shema." Many regard this as the most important prayer in Judaism. The Shema is taught to children from a very early age and repeated every day! The hope of this repetition is that this prayer might become a part of their identity.

She-ma yisrael, adonai eloheinu, adonai echad

Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.

This, my friend, is what I believe the Psalmist was talking about!

Anglican Bishop and theologian N.T. Wright in his work, *The Case for the Psalms: Why They are Essential*, states, "Sing these songs, and they will renew you from head to toe, from heart to mind. Pray these poems, and they will sustain you on the long, hard but exhilarating road of Christian discipleship."

There is transformative work that takes place when we meditate on the law of God. When we do so, we become like "trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper."

The prophet Jeremiah in the 17th chapter reverberates the benefits of dwelling with God.

*But blessed is the person who trusts me, God,
the woman who sticks with God.
They're like trees replanted in Eden,
putting down roots near the rivers—
Never a worry through the hottest of
summers,
never dropping a leaf,
Serene and calm through droughts,
bearing fresh fruit every season*

This Psalm can be read with rose colored glasses. But if we really get to the root of the matter, it affirms that by making God our dwelling place and continuously meditating on His word, not only are we transformed, but we learn to trust God in times of both joy and sorrow and truly comprehend what it means to be like trees planted by streams of living water.

To the Glory of God!

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