

**Chaff or Fruitful Tree?**  
**Psalm 1**  
**4th September 2022**  
**Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers**

Psalm 1, our Scripture reading this morning, wants us to come away saying, *“I want to be a fruitful tree rather than worthless chaff.”* This Psalm describes the only two ways to be and to live and asks us which one we want to be: a fruitful tree or a worthless piece of chaff?

**The Two Images**

Imagine it is harvest time; a man gathers in the crop that has grown in his field that year but before he can sell the precious seed on, he must separate the seed from the indigestible chaff, the outer shell. In Bible times—and still all around the world—farmers would separate the valuable seed from the chaff by the process of winnowing. As the evening breezes blew they would throw the mixture of seed and chaff up into the air. The wind would take the lighter chaff away while the heavier seed would fall to the ground where it would be gathered and sold. The worthless chaff, of verse 4, would never be seen again.

Then there is the fruitful tree! Not any old tree, but a tree planted by streams of water, by a river, verse 3. It's Strong - because it has deep roots, no autumn breeze will blow this tree away! It's beautiful —it's leaves do not wither! In our recent drought, the leaves of many trees have withered. And the trees look straggly and unattractive, but this tree is beautiful because it is planted next to a continual source of water. It's Fruitful—lots of fruit grow on the tree for the benefit of others who pass by - Fruit isn't for the tree, fruit is for others!

Which are we, which do we want to be? Chaff or a fruitful tree? I am sure all of us would say, “Tree.” We want to be spiritually strong. So when the winds of trouble howl through our lives, we're not blown away like the chaff, but stand firm like the tree. We want to be beautiful, bearing in our characters the fruit of the Spirit like Jesus; so that others looking on can see the beauty of Jesus in us. And we want to be useful, not like indigestible chaff, but like a tree which bears lots of fruit! We all want to be like the tree; strong, beautiful and fruitful, not like chaff which is weak, unattractive and useless to the world. So what is the key to a fruitful life? Or as verse 1 calls it a “blessed” life? A life lived under God's favour! A life God is pleased with.

**The Key to a Fruitful Life?**

The Psalmist says there are two keys to a fruitful life. There's a negative one and a positive one. The negative one is avoiding evil influences and the positive one is loving God's Word,

*“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.”*

The first step to a fruitful life blessed by God is a negative one.

Did you know there is always a “no” across the life of a godly Christian, a negative, a something we don’t do, words we won’t say, attitudes we run from, paths we avoid, website we stay clear of, people we won’t hang out with. Daniel and his three friends wouldn't eat food offered to idols, his three friends wouldn't bow down to an idol. Are there “nos” across our lives?

Look at the downward progression, from stand to walk to sit. A man starts “walking” in the advice of unbelievers—listening to ungodly podcasts or song, filling his or her mind with the advice, the philosophy, the worldview of unbelievers, “Walking in the counsel of the wicked.” Before they knew it they were “*standing* in the way of sinners.” Way always refers to lifestyle in the bible. They had been listening to the ways of the world, and now they began to hang out with unbelievers—going where they went, doing what they did. And finally, before they know it, they are “*sitting in* the seat of mockers.” How shocking! They are so thick with unbelievers, their spiritual sensibilities are so shot up that when their friends mock God they’re no longer shocked, don’t bat an eyelid, they just sit there with them!

If you and I want to be a strong fruitful tree, there must be a NO about our lives: No to ungodly counsel & advice, No to making unbelievers our best friends and No to mockers.

Christians in the past used to talk a lot about avoiding worldliness. In my parents’ generation, Christians frowned on going to the movies or the pub or the theatre. Why? To avoid the negative influences of the world. Some of that may have been legalism, but has the pendulum swung the other way, has it not? Paul said “*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers... Therefore come out from among them, and be separate says the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 6)

Can I ask you, what do you fill your mind with during the week? Who are your best friends? Who do we love to hang out with? Why do we have coffee after morning worship? Why home groups? Why youth groups and 18-30s? So that we can spend time with God’s people! We become strong beautiful fruitful trees by saying no, that’s the negative, but now for the positive.

*“His delight is in the law of the lord (bible); and on his law he meditates day and night.”*

He loves the Bible—delight; she thinks about it, meditates; It’s there all the time—day and night. A strong beautiful and fruitful life is one filled with God’s word: that’s why preaching is the most important thing that happens on a Sunday morning, that’s why we study the Bible in home groups, that’s why we encourage everyone to read their bibles on own - and read to their kids. That’s why when the kids go out they learn bible stories, and why every single work we do, from Explorers to HBC, from Seniors and More, to Trailblazers must be shot through with God’s powerful Word.

God’s Word read, loved, heard and obeyed is what makes a Christian, Strong—when the winds of adversity blow; Beautiful—leaves do not wither, Christ like in character; Fruitful—useful to the world.

## Three Questions

This psalm encourages us to ask three questions:

### *Where is the Gospel of Jesus in Psalm 1?*

On the surface it sounds like if we do the negative and the positive, then a godly life will come from our works. Someone could say it sounds like works not grace! No, what the psalmist is describing the outcome of a life that has been transformed by God: a life that has been born again by the Holy Spirit and given faith in Christ. If we trust in Jesus, if we truly follow him, then our lives will be transformed by his grace. David is describing what automatically happens to someone who is born again. (And of course we are called to actively participate in our sanctification!) If this morning, listen, you are saying to yourself that your life is more like chaff, weak, ungraceful and useless, perhaps you need to ask the solemn question, are you a Christian at all? And if the answer is no, then today is the day to become one, by asking God to forgive your sins, by turning away from them, and by believing that Jesus is the Son of God who came into the world to save you from sin.

### *Do you want to be a stronger, more Christ-like, more useful Christian?*

The key is both the negative no and the positive yes: are we being too influenced by the world? Are we committed to God's Word?

### *Did we know that the arrow of eternity is set in time?*

And finally, the Lord reminds us through Psalm 1 that the arrow of eternity is set in time (verses 5-6). What we are in this world continues beyond the grave. If we have trusted in Jesus Christ and that true faith is demonstrated by avoiding evil and embracing God's word, we shall stand on the day of judgement and be welcomed into heaven. But if we allow evil to shape our lives and if God's Word has no place in our lives, then we shall be assigned to hell on the last day, for such a godless life reveals that we were never true believers.

What a beautiful psalm, what a challenging psalm, what a sobering psalm. May the Lord speak to every heart, by his Holy Spirit.