

Soul I: *Soul Man*

Good morning!

Last week I spoke to you about where we, Baxter Road Bible Church, are going as a local body of Christ.

I talked about our vision, to reach out to our community with the love of Jesus, and to help lead them into a relationship with Jesus and then, to guide them on their path to becoming genuine disciples of Jesus.

I spoke of our mission, that is, how we're going to accomplish our vision. I said the mission of this church is to equip you, the saints, to reach the lost of our community.

Now, this vision and mission aren't some new-fangled approach to doing church. It's not some new revelation God just dropped on me... on how to be a church. These are simply the marching orders Jesus has given all of us who would be His disciples!

It's the Great Commission of **Matthew 28:19-20**, Where Jesus tells us to, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you..."*

So, that's what we're going to do!

In order to do that, in order to get where Jesus is calling us to be, there are a couple of basic items, tools, that we'll need to make sure we're all equipped with along the way.

First, we need The Bible - God's Word! This book is the road map without which, we cannot possibly make this journey!

We are a Bible believing church! And we are a Bible believing church out of necessity! Our faith comes from, and is based on, what God has revealed to us about Himself in this book!

Romans 10:17 tells us; *...faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.* The Bible is the Word of God! It is our map!

Now, as anyone who has ever navigated using a map knows, once you have the map, in this case, the Bible, in order to proceed on your journey, you need to know where you are on the map!

How do we know that? How can we know where we are on this journey we've been called to in our relationship with God, as individuals and, as a local church? How do we orient ourselves on this map God has provided us with?

That's the second tool we need!

And it comes to us by way of the principles God has laid out for us to live by in this book!

Knowing these principles and following these principles, will indeed help us to locate ourselves, individually and collectively, on this map God has given us to guide on our journey!

What's a principle?

A principle, according to the dictionary, is a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.

Basically, a Biblical principle is a truth, something that is true of all people for all time.

Principles can't be broken. We can break ourselves against a principle, and we often do, but principles can't be broken!

That's because principles are truths put in place by God, and reflect the reality in which we live. All principles were established by God and a lot of them are found in the Word of God.

Principles often function as equations; if you do this, you can expect to get that. If you don't do this, you can expect to not get that.

One example is the principle of sowing and reaping; whatever you sow, that's what you're going to reap.

Another principle is the principle of communication and trust; that is, the more communication in a relationship, the higher level of trust. The lower the level of communication, the lower the level of trust in that relationship.

There are financial principles, an example of that is that the borrower is always a slave to the lender. God tells us that in Proverbs 22:7.

Principles govern all relationships; marriage, friendships, church life, and especially our relationship with God!

That's why examining our hearts to see if we truly are living by those principles is perhaps the best way to orient ourselves on the map, the map of this journey we've been called to take!

God has called us to, *"Turn and take your journey... ..See I have set the land before you. Go in and take possession of the land..."*

(Deuteronomy 1:7-8)

To take this journey and to stay on the right path of this journey, we need to familiarize ourselves with the map, with God's Word, and we need to make sure we're living according to and by the principles God has put in place to guide us on the journey He's called us to take!

Today's message is the first of a three part series we're calling ***Soul***.

In this message, I'll be focusing on the principles God has given us to live by, this message is titled ***Soul Man***. Next week Grant will focus on how we familiarize ourselves with the Word of God, the Bible, in a message called ***Soul Food***. And on Sunday, January 27th, Pastor Erik will finish this series with a look at how we plug into the power of God to accomplish our journey with a message called ***Soul Power***.

So, let's talk about principles.

Open your Bibles to the book of Psalms, chapter one.

While you turn there, let me tell you a little bit about this book.

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 psalms, which are poems and songs. The word psalm literally means *harp song* or *the twanging of bow strings*. Most of the psalms were written by David, many of them actually bear his name.

In David's day there weren't libraries for people to go and check books out to read. Books were scrolls and they were hand written, making them very expensive and hard to come by. So if you wanted to memorize something, one of easier ways to do that was to incorporate what you wanted to memorize into a song.

We still do that in some ways. How many people can, off the top of your head, tell me Pizza Hut's phone number?

Right! 337-2323! How do you know that? Because of that annoying song in their commercial! It's annoying, but, it's effective!

So even though we don't know the tune of Psalm 1, or really, if there was a tune for it, we can still read it. So let's do that! Psalm 1, starting in verse 1:

1Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; 2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. 4 The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; 6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalm 1:1-6)

That is Psalm 1. These six short verses set the tone for the entire book of Psalms. I'm not the only one who thinks that, a lot of people way smarter than me must have thought so too, because they placed Psalm 1 as the first of the 150 Psalms. While it's called Psalm 1, it wasn't necessarily the first Psalm ever written. But, for some reason, Jewish scholars and religious leaders felt it was worthy of leading off this collection of psalms.

I believe one of the reasons they put this psalm at the front of the book, was because of its very clear statement of some very basic principles for a Godly life.

And remember, principles are our way of orienting ourselves on the map of the journey of our lives.

And we can't intelligently determine the direction of that journey, that is, we can't intelligently determine policy or philosophy for our lives, if we don't bring into the equation the universal truths, the principles which God has given us for that purpose!

Listen! For the decisions that we make, in determining the direction we're heading in our journey, to be profitable and prosperous, they must be tied to Godly principles!

Policy not tied to principle can never be productive in the long run! And that's what David is saying in the first part of this psalm!

He starts out with the baseline of human contentment, *Blessed is the man.*

One of the definitions of the word blessed is *blissfully happy or contented*. To be blessed means to be happy, to be *divinely favored*. And who doesn't want to be favored by God?

So, David, what do we do to be blessed? What principles do we follow in order to live in the favor of God?

Interestingly enough, David starts out by telling us what not to do.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

You need to know, you and I, each of us, all of us, have been given the choice to choose the direction we go on this journey of life.

Here, David is showing us the results of choosing the things of this world over the things of God.

And notice how that pattern works, notice the progression. The people who choose to follow the things of the world go from walking to standing to sitting.

Their journey eventually ends with no movement, no direction... No life! These people experience the three degrees of separation from God. They start by accepting the advice of this world. You've heard that. *"There is no God. Only a fool believes in an invisible man in the sky!"*

Once that advice is internalized, these people begin to do the things the world approves of. They become party to the ways of the world. It's OK to cheat on your taxes, it's OK to cheat on your spouse. It's OK to neglect or abandon your children. It's even OK to abort your babies!

And that's all OK, because you making yourself happy, is all that matters in this life!

Then, once they've stood in those sinful ways, the ways of the God rejecting world, they begin to experience the dissatisfaction of their choices. And then they do what hardened sinners always do, they sit right down in the middle of the mess they've created of their lives and they blame God for their situation! They become the scoffers! They blame God for their dissatisfaction. They move from not believing in God to openly hating God! And they find themselves in the farthest position from repentance! And for the devil and his ilk, that's mission accomplished!

By choosing to ignore the principles of God these people didn't break the principles of God, they broke themselves against the principles of God!

With this passage's three negatives; wicked counsel, acts of sin and cursing God, David is basically declaring whatever shapes a person's thinking, shapes their lives.

Now that's a principle for you!

Proverbs 23:7 says exactly that! *For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.*

Perhaps you've heard it stated this way; *"Garbage in – garbage out."*

Then David does something interesting. Instead of following these negatives with their opposing positives; *blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked, but walks in the counsel of the Godly. Blessed is the man who doesn't stand in the way of sinners but stands in the way of the righteous. Blessed is the man who doesn't sit in the seat of the scoffers but in the way of true worship.* Instead of doing that, David cuts right to the chase! He points us to the very source of all right thinking... the Word of God!

Look at verse two: *...but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

If the Word of God is our road map on this journey God is calling us to take, then on that map, just like on any good map, is a key, a compass to let you know on that map, which way is north.

David is saying in verse two, God's Word is not only the map, but the map's compass!

And the more you get to know the map and where you are on the map, the better, the easier, the more productive your journey will be!

In fact, David says that man who is blessed, he delights in the Word! He delights in the map and meditates on it day and night.

I always find that a pretty amazing statement. Because the Word of God that David had, the law of the LORD that David is talking about; is that part of your Bible you never, ever read!

At the time of David, the law of the LORD was basically, the Books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy!

Just about every Christian, at one point or another in their lives, decides *“I’m going to read through the whole Bible!”* So we start in Genesis, and it’s great, the creation, Adam and Eve, Noah. Then we get to Exodus and that’s exciting, Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea. Those are easy reading! And then you get to Leviticus and suddenly, all the excitement is gone! And you wonder, *“What is this? Slaughtering animals cutting the fat off their kidneys and... yuck!”* And so you skip ahead to Numbers and it’s not much better! You’re like, *“Who are all these people? They don’t have last names... which is good, because I can’t pronounce their first names!”* And then you get to Deuteronomy... and you think *“Goodness! This is just like Leviticus!”* And so you just give up!

But let me tell you, those are the books that David said he delighted in!

So we ask, *“David, what do you see that we’re not seeing?”*

David saw the law of God in a unique way. He saw that the law of God was the outworking of the principles of God in his particular society.

David realized, as a king, that the law of God, the Word of God that he had at that time, was a practical reflection of the universal principles that governed all things.

What David understood that we need to understand, is that the Word of God represents the character of God in a practical way.

David says in **Psalm 119:24**, *Your law is my counselor...*

In **Psalm 119:98** David says; *Your law makes me wiser than my enemies*

And in the next verse he says; *Your law makes me smarter than my teachers* (**Psalm 119:99**)

David understood that the law of the LORD, God's Word was the source for right thinking, and that living by the principles given to us in God's Word... is the only way for us to live a blessed life. The only way to live life in the favor of God!

And the favor of God, is a pretty good place to live!

Listen to verse three and David's description of the person who lives in God's favor. David says, *He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.*

Sound like that's the place to be!

The man or the woman who lives their lives by the principles of God and His Word, they are like a tree! But not just any tree, a tree planted by rivers of living water. The roots of their faith are fed by that living water. They produce fruit in their season. And their fruit is always prosperous for them, and for the kingdom of God!

Notice it says of this person... this tree, *its leaf does not wither*. That's not to say the tree is protected from its environment, but rather from the crippling effects and damage from drought.

See, in Scripture, God often used drought as a way to get people's attention. God uses the drought to draw the attention of people whose roots are growing away from the source of water, to try to get them to grow to the source of water!

Godly people are like trees that have roots fed by rivers of living water and in the drought, though they suffer from the heat, their leaves don't wither. And these trees, despite the drought, still produce fruit in season! The ungodly, the lost see that and hopefully they're moved to come to the Godly people and ask, *"How can you be like this? How can you be producing fruit while the rest of us are scorched and dying of thirst?"*

People! That's where we need to be as disciples of Christ, as His Church! We need to be the ones the lost notice in the drought! We need to be the people they ask the magic question, *"Why?" "Why are you doing that? Why are you doing that, that way?"*

In that way we will be living out the command of **1 Peter 3:15**, *always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,*

And when the lost ask and you answer, your words, are backed up by the way you live, you will be the witness of the gospel, the good news, that Jesus has called you to be! And in being a faithful witness, whatever you do will prosper!

Because through your witness, people will hear about Jesus and people will choose Jesus. And because of that, through your witness, you will be building the kingdom of God! Which, for the Christian - the disciple of Christ - is the very definition of prospering!

That's how those who are blessed will live! David says that's God's promise to those who live their life by the principles of God, those who make their decisions based on Godly principles!

But that's not so for the wicked, those who ignore principles and ignore God. How does life go for them? David paints a pretty grim picture of those folks. In verse four David says, *The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*

The people of David's time understood that picture immediately! Chaff was the straw and husks and trash and plant parts of a crop that were useless. When the people of David's time harvested their crops of wheat and barley, they would pile the harvest up and wait until the wind started to blow, usually in the late afternoon or early evening. Then they would take these big pitch forks and throw the wheat up into the air and the wind would act as a separator, blowing the chaff away. While the kernels of wheat would fall straight down until what was left, was what they were looking for.

Chaff in this setting is what is useless and rootless and to God, is worthless!

That's why verse five says, *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.*

That's a pretty stark contrast! And David means for it to be that way! That's why he repeats that contrast, underscores it, in verse six! *...for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

Loved ones! You are either living by the principles of God found in His Word and you're blessed. Or you're breaking yourself against the principles of God and you will perish!

David is clear here! It's an either/or proposition!

You either choose option A or option B! There is no option C!

That's the beauty of the gospel, its simplicity!

I think a lot of times we humans like to make things appear to be more complicated than they are. And a lot of times we do that as a way to excuse our poor choices.

But God has gone out of His way to make a relationship with Him simple!

In **Romans 10:13** and **Joel 2:32**, God tells us that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Jesus tells us in **John 14:6**, *"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one come to the Father except through me."*

Where are you with that? Have you called on the name of the Lord?
Is Jesus your Lord and Savior?

If not, what are you going to do about that? Are you content with sliding down through the three degrees of separation from God?
Are you OK with being the useless chaff that is blown away?
Is that what you want from your life?

If it's not, then let's take care of it today! Come forward at the end of this service! Be bold! Talk to one of our elders, let them know you desire to live a blessed life, a life lived in the favor of God!

If your response is; *“Yes, I’ve called on Jesus! He’s my Savior!”* Then let me ask you, How’s your journey with God going? Where are you on the map? Are you a disciple of Christ who’s making other disciples of Christ? When’s the last time you checked your spiritual dipstick? Can you honestly say; *“I am living faithfully in line with the principles of God!”*

For the believer, those are questions we need to be asking and honestly answering about our lives and doing it on a regular basis!

It’s too easy to slip into the trap of; *“I’m going to get around to being a disciple... eventually.”*

Too often, people like that aren’t followers of Christ at all! What are you doing with your faith? Anything? James tells us to, *be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (James 1:22)*

And it’s so easy to deceive ourselves!

Sundar Singh was born into a Sikh family in northern India in the late 1800’s. He was educated at a Christian school, but he didn’t connect with either the Sikh or the Christian lifestyles. His lack of connection with religion left him desperate and he resolved to kill himself, because he felt without God, what was the point of life?

So Singh called out to any God who would listen and asked them to reveal themselves to him, or, he would throw himself in front of a moving train! That night Singh had a vision of Jesus Christ. As a result, he became a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ.

Singh visited Europe at one point in his life and when he came back to India, he wrote; *"One day I was sitting on the banks of a river. I took from the water a round stone and I broke it. Inside it was perfectly dry. That stone had been lying in the water for a long time but the water had not penetrated it. Then I thought that the same thing happened to men in Europe. For centuries they have been surrounded by Christianity but Christianity has not penetrated, does not live within them."*

Loved ones! We cannot be like rocks in a river... having the love and grace and mercy of God continually wash over our lives, but never penetrate our lives!

Instead, let us live lives in accordance with the principles of God! And when we do we'll be as sponges!

Sponges that soak up the blessings of God until they completely saturate our lives and pour out from our lives into the lost world around us!

It's only by living that way that we will truly be taking this journey that God has called us to take the way God has called us to take it!

It's only then that we will become the disciples Christ has commanded us to be! It's only then we will become the church God has called us to be!