

Ps 1; Jer 17:5-10; 1 Cor 15:12-20; Lu 6:17-26

Last week I was one of twenty-odd people who gathered for a healing academy. We went out to lunch and dinner together, so had time for lots of interesting conversations. One conversation was about God's attitude toward souls that die after only a few days or weeks of life. This would include newborns who are ill and babies who are aborted. What is God's view of these souls? We discussed a variety of opinions and ideas, mostly to do with the legal status of a soul.

My feeling, as far as I know my heavenly Father and the grace and love He showers upon the whole creation, is that **there are no babies in hell**. The children who die too soon are in God's presence forever by God. We included in our discussion that many nurses and doctors, knowing a baby isn't going to make it, bring water, pray and baptize that little one, if they are Christians. This is the outward sign of the abundant grace God has for the ones who can't choose.

I bring this up because our Scriptures today refer to the choices that individuals, families, tribes,

nations and even the whole of humanity make. Once we mature and have the ability to choose – that’s just what we do – we choose. Not choosing is a choice. The Apostle Paul, a faithful and knowledgeable Hebrew, calls us to receive and believe that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. In Jesus’ death, resurrection, ascension and soon return, we draw our hope for fellowship with Jesus and one another now – and then eternal fellowship with our Creator. We journey through this life following Jesus as closely as we can. This seeking and pursuit of Jesus defines us. You are set aside, marked and sealed in the Holy Spirit. We want to walk the Kingdom Road – every day here in the world – and then without hesitating, to pass over the speed-bump of our death into His eternal life. Walking the Kingdom Road just gets better and better as we go along.

There is, of course, a fly in the ointment. And who is the Lord of the Flies? *Ba'al zēbhūbh*. Yes, that name means “lord of the flies.” Always standing ready to drive a wedge in the fellowship if he can. Always ready to accuse and tempt us into taking the next exit off the Kingdom Road – toward some darker destination. We choose this

exit because of a million thoughts, perceived needs, ideas or just unexamined fascinations. I'm not here to condemn. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Ro 3:23) Satan can and will tempt us into wickedness.

The Prophet Jeremiah is telling the people, especially the rulers of the nation that, "I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings." (Jer 17:10) What does our action produce? What comes of our activities and plans? We do choose every day – and a kingdom principle is always at work in us and in things we encounter – in people we encounter.

Please open your Bible to Psalm 1. There is a kingdom principle illustrated in this first psalm. Our journey takes us through a fallen world. The Scripture says, "Blessed (or happy) is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked." The pilgrim is traveling the Kingdom Road. And there are messages coming at the traveler every step of the way. Influencers speak through all kinds of media: "You should do thus and so. You will be smart if you (fill in the blank)." The psalmist says

that blessing comes to those who discern good advice from bad advice – good advisors from bad advisors. As you journey, you may hear the words of ungodly advisors. Keep walking, don't stop. Don't link up with temptation going forward.

There it is in the middle of the first verse – somebody is **standing** in the way of sinners. The beloved pilgrim has stopped to hear a particular message. The psalmist teaches that the one promoting wrong action is a committed sinner. Wisdom says, “Do not stand for long, do not stand for someone who is tempting you, who recommends a sinful thing.”

As we journey on the Kingdom Road, we will choose good counselors – or we will choose wicked tempters. You may have a good word for the wicked – but wicked words and wicked ways hold nothing for you. Back to the Kingdom Road!

As we journey we may stop to talk to a tempter. Do not pause for long. You are pursuing Jesus – wanting to walk with Jesus – to listen to Jesus – to be in His presence. The psalmist is saying that

the longer you and I stand around with the tempter, the more likely we are to exit the road for a closer association – a longer talk – perhaps putting those wrong-headed ideas, finally into action.

And then, there is the temptation of mockers who say, “Stop awhile. **Sit** here with me.” Perhaps this would-be friend takes a dim view of faith in God – or the gospel message of Jesus Christ. It could be this influencer wants to scoff at the resurrection – or deny the truth of the Bible. “Science has disproved the Bible.” The psalmist teaches, “Do not sit down with this one, no matter what reward is offered.”

First walking, then standing, finally sitting – the sequence suggests we become more and more accustomed to these words – used to these ways. In the Proverbs, and in many other Psalms, Wisdom (Pr 1) says rather than dallying with influences that lead to sin, “Delight yourself in the law (the Word) of the Lord, meditating on that word day and night.” And the psalm teaches finally that the man or woman, boy or girl who stays faithfully on the Kingdom Road is like a tree

planted by streams of water, bearing fruit, prospering spiritually.

The wicked have made other choices: sinful words and actions – mocking and holding the things of God in contempt. This one is like the chaff that blows away when the wheat is winnowed. No fruit. No wholeness. No nourishment. No joy in the Lord.

This prosperity the psalmist speaks of: **Is it** material prosperity? – extravagant living? – getting every luxury we wish for? Not at all. We may have to budget our money in this life. We don't seek our satisfaction or our happiness in things of the fallen world. This is what Jesus teaches the disciples in these beatitudes (Lu 6).

The Kingdom Road is the road home to God's eternal presence, both now and then. Jesus has made this way for you and me. He **is** the Way, the Truth and the Life. I pray today that we soak up God's wisdom from His Word. This calls for a plan to read God's word daily. May you always find great joy in walking with Him. Amen.