

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Twenty One

August 16, 2020 • Sunday Evening

I am enjoying this time because of the questions being asked and the opportunity to answer them. We are considering how we might be able to continue this ministry in some form or fashion when the time goes back to meeting on Sunday nights. Any ideas you may have are greatly appreciated. I would like to start with a devotional from what is known as the beatitudes of the Old Testament.

The beatitudes in the New Testament are found in the Matthew 5:2–12 where Jesus addresses the being of a person saved by grace and the attitudes and actions of life. A distillation of this is also found in the Gospel of Luke, but it was Charles Spurgeon who said Psalm 1 is basically the beatitude of the Old Testament.

Psalm 1:1–6 says *[1] 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; [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.

This is what is known as a Psalm of life. It is the first Psalm and the first in the section called the Didactic Psalms, that is the teaching Psalms and it uses parallelisms. The first parallel of the blessed man are in Psalm 1:1–3 and then the next parallel is of the wicked man in Psalm 1:4–6. I mainly want to focus on the lifestyle of the blessed man in Psalm 1:1–2.

The metaphor of the blessed man is that he is like a tree planted. That is a transplanted tree, isn't it? We don't plant a tree unless the tree had been previously planted. That's what we are – for we are transplanted from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of Light and we can only grow if we're in the means of grace – the streams of living water. We will grow when we bear fruit in season and out of season, we're evergreens. Do you see the beautiful part of that metaphor?

Then we come back to the lifestyle of the blessed man. Blessed means truly happy. The lifestyle, the Psalmist says, has five elements to it – three negative, two positive. You have to put off to put on – the negative first and then the positive. Here is the negative, put off ungodly counsel, put off ungodly conduct and thirdly put off ungodly fellowship. Do not listen to the counsel of the ungodly. Pay close attention to the preaching, teaching, reading and listening that you do in life. Secondly, do not stand in the path of sinners. Flee temptation. Don't find your way in the conduct of sin whereby the temptation calls the internal old man to sin. Then thirdly, do not gather with or assemble with or find your fellowship with the deep scorner, mocker. So this deals with the conduct, the counsel and the company you keep. I Corinthians 15:33 says *[33] Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.”* But you don't want to put off and not put on which was like the one who was rid of demons but then came back seven times worse for you want to fill in.

So what do you put on? You put on the Word of God, the means of grace for when you put off the counsel, conduct and company of the ungodly, there is a delight, an emotional passion

for the Word of God. His delight is in the law of the Lord – that means the authoritative Word of Jehovah. And in His law (the authoritative Word of God) he meditates, chews and reflects on it day and night. It is a way of life. It is emotionally embraced. It is cognitively studied and it is relationally productive. It is mentally productive for you are in it day and night.

Who is going to be the teachers of our children? What programs do they watch? What music do they listen? What are their entertainment habits? The challenge is the church maybe gets 40 minutes of your child's life during the week and the rest is they are being inundated by the world. The truly happy man says, right counsel, right conduct and right company so that the Word of God is embraced emotionally, cognitively and relationally. What's the result? It is firmly planted trees by the streams of living water – the Word of God and the Spirit of God – bearing fruit as an evergreen.

I love that Psalm. I have to confess that I did a series on Psalm 1 and it ended up being 27 sermons. I just really love that Psalm.

Bruce: Before we get to our questions, we just communicated this past week about our interim ministry plan D, specifically it concerned the nursery being opened the next Sunday morning and the beginning of some congregational community gatherings. Any comments you have on this?

Harry: We're attempting to maintain ministry, mission and message of Christ's church under the Lordship of Christ, honoring Christ whenever it is right, whenever the civil magistrate stays in their lane, gives us direction for general welfare, we want to follow it and we don't want to political size things. As we said from the very beginning in this present distress, we want to live sensibly, righteously and Godly and that means we're going to trust God, not tempt God, we will be prudent but not panic, and we think our way through issues and Biblically respond to the honor of Christ in the contents of where we are here in Birmingham, Alabama. Then we want to be a witness for Christ not only in our nation but also to the world. We have been overwhelmingly encouraged by the intercessory prayer, the notes and have been faithfully led by our elders, deacons and pastoral staff. Bruce, I know how much time you and others have put in getting information for our elders, deacons, committees and teams. Your love for Christ, His church, His message, His mission and ministry is a blessing. I'm grateful as a pastor to benefit from it and I want to be supportive of it.

Bruce: I praise the Lord just hearing about someone giving their life to the Lord for it's like all that we are doing is so worth it just hear when a person comes to the Lord.

Harry: It was great to see 250 to 300 youth here at the church while the youth staff made sure of them social distancing. It's like they couldn't wait to get here. This is so encouraging. Of course if you shouldn't be here then we encourage you not to be as you follow the guidelines yet to see growth in the community and seeing those in our community being able to take advantage of our Lord's Day worship.

Bruce: So let's get into our questions for this time and our first question deals with carbon dating. This person has been watching a lot of the history channel and have heard a lot about carbon dating being used as proof that the earth is much older than is thought by the new earth theorists. So the question is, in your opinion what is the accuracy of carbon dating in dating the earth?

Harry: I think the radioactive dating issues are on various levels. This is not my field for I've just done my work as it effects my Biblical preaching, etc., but here is what you have to remember. Any dating system that you have in your pursuit of accuracy scientifically, you are going to build presuppositions into the dating mechanisms and there are two types. There is the type of dating that looks at more in terms of long term and even then there are presuppositions put in and also in the carbon dating approach. So if the presuppositions are right then the dates are right, but even if the presuppositions are right they don't take into account what God has done in the act of creation itself, such as the appearance of age. Adam didn't start out as an embryo and he hadn't lived the years he appeared that he had as an adult. The same goes for the bushes and trees of the Garden – they had not lived that time. Then you have the effect of cataclysmic intervention – the flood (during Noah's time), Sodom and Gomorrah, the sun standing still – all of those dynamics are not built into it. So I find dating mechanisms helpful but I don't assign to them infallibility. I do assign infallibility to God's Word.

Bruce: The next question has to do with praying for our nation. Many of us have been praying for the nation but this is a very specific question because they have gone to the Scriptures and have seen numerous times in the Scripture when people are praying for their situation that prayer and fasting is accompanied with sack cloth and ashes. The question is, is there something that equates to sack cloth and ashes that should accompany our prayers today?

Harry: In that culture the point of sack cloth and ashes exhibited two things – grief and lament. The person was basically saying 'nothing else matters to me for I am reduced to nothing out of the grief, consequences and lament of this sin.' In other words, the sin has produced consequences. King David sat in sack cloth and ashes because his son, by virtue of God's discipline in his adultery, was sick and facing death. The consequence, grief and simply the fact of his sin that comes with it is why the sack cloth and ashes.

When we look at this through the New Testament we ought to grieve, lament and recognize that sin has consequences, but when we lament it is never without hope. Our hope is in the Gospel for we don't hopelessly lament. We hope with the assurance of the redeeming work of Christ and nobody is so far away. The only unpardonable sin is to say 'no' to the Holy Spirit's call to Christ. That's unpardonable because if you don't come to Christ you can't be pardoned.

Secondly, our grief ought to be deep over sin and its consequences. An illustration of this is if you get drunk, get in a wreck and lose your arm, you get forgiven – praise God – but you still don't have an arm. And there will be grief and lament over that consequence as you own your sin and confess your sin. So with confession comes grief, lament and a recognition of the consequences of chaos – death, disease, destruction, etc.

Now I don't live in the first century. We don't go buy sack cloth and burn ashes but in the context of that culture it is telling us that sack cloth and ashes was the way so what would be comparable to that with us today? That is what you work through. You wouldn't be throwing parties during a time of confession of sin, repentance, lament and grief. You would be reflecting. You would be doing deeds appropriate to repentance and then what I call the three 'R's'. You would be seeking reconciliation, restoration and renewal in terms of your relationships with others. This is what I think you would do in that context.

We don't want to become like the Roman Emperor, who when he was supposed to grieve, as grief is related to tears, so someone would bring a vile and make sure a tear went into it and say 'you can tell them there are two tears in it.' No, you don't want to legalistically go to something and say here are the symbols of lament. Whatever is symbolic is fine but it's not we do the symbols for we need to focus on lament with hope, with confession and repentance that exhibits lament over sin with the hope of forgiveness and renewal and with the recognition of the consequences of sin but yet pursuing restoration, renewal and restitution and then grief. Yet let our grief be informed by the Word of God that God can take our grief and despair and turn it into joy because of the work of God's grace.

Bruce: Many people praying for our nation use the verse from II Chronicles 7:14 which says *[14] if My people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.* The question comes from this verse, we are using this verse as a guide when we pray for our nation, is that appropriate to do or are we using it out of context?

Harry: I think it's appropriate to learn from it but most people apply it out of context. When God says 'My people' He is talking about His covenant people. In the Old Testament God had a covenanted relationship with one nation – Israel. He does not have a covenanted relationship with any other nation. In fact, now His covenant people are found in every nation. His covenant people are the elect of God, who are redeemed and now are coming from every nation – Jew and Gentile. So when you see terror in the land, the consequences of sin in a nation, then God's people need to call upon Him and repent. What will that do? That will renew and revive us. As God heals us, then He would bring blessing to the uncovenanted nation where we dwell – America, England, or wherever we're dwelling – because now the salt is salty and the light is shining.

In the Old Testament there was a theocracy that God ruled it because He had a covenant relationship so He called His people to repentance. In the New Testament God is calling His people to repentance as they live for Him in every nation so now we add another step. As the people of God, His church, repent they are revived and when they're revived God uses them for the nation where Gospel awakenings can break out and the salt becomes salty again and the light shines bright again.

Bruce: That's a powerful paradigm shift. So many times I would pray that passage of Scripture expecting God to do something a part from me that blesses the land instead of praying that an understanding that I may very well be the application of the prayer – the salt and light – where the blessing to the land is me walking in His way and Him doing that.

Harry: I think the church in America has made that prayer as the church, not on behalf of America which is what has blessed America with Great Awakenings through the church as it has been revived. I understand God in His providence and I give talks on how God's providence has blessed this nation but this is not a covenanted nation for there has only been one – Israel. But God's covenant people have been an instrument of blessing in this nation.

For instance, how do the many become one? Here we're trying to balance multi-culturalism. Actually when America has been blessed, it's been when the church has done its work and the multi-cultural and ethnicities have come here, have come together. In other words,

now we're trying to bless America by making it a quinsy smorgasbord whereas before it was not a hyphenated America, you wanted to be an American and it was a melting pot. I believe the church was the instrument, imperfectly, that would turn the heat up to make certain values stand out and that's where the cultures would melt into this notion of a nation that wasn't supposed to be defined by any ethnicity. It was defined by a concept embedded in our founding documents of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence. And in God's grace because of the church's continued growth it matured America into greater faithfulness.

I love the original Civil Rights Movement because I've read many times the letter Dr. Martin Luther King wrote from the Birmingham city jails and what these letters appeal to was not a new nation. They appealed to being consistent to the founding documents and those founding documents came out of a Judeo-Christian world view. That is what has given us unity. Our point is not the manipulation and management of diversity, it is a unity built around a common commitment to an idea, a culture of values that are embraced by everyone. That's what had blessed America and the source of propagating those values whereas the discipleship ministry of churches were concerned were alive, they were salty and light in the community.

Bruce: The next question is about Israel. Recently Michelle Obama discussed the proposed plan of the Trump Administration regarding the land in Israel. She warned that the plan proposed in January 2020 includes dividing the covenant land of Israel and dividing Jerusalem which God clearly gave to Israel. The question is this document still legally binding under international law as Michelle Obama states?

Harry: The answer is 'yes' and 'no.' It's a great question. This could take up five conversations with Harry and Bruce but let me try and get to it. I will just do bullet points. The Balfour Declaration was put under the guidance and implementation of Britain. With all due respect to our British allies of America, I don't think they did a good job. In fact, I believe they were a little selfish in how they did it. They were supposed to establish the Israeli state and those living there were given place and room to put them, but instead of doing that England made another state called The State of Jordan that didn't exist. The State of Jordan at that time was pretty much functioning as a client state of England. Where were all these displaced people to go? They ended up becoming refugees. All of what today is Jordan was supposed to be a new state of what we might call Palestine but that didn't happen. It was another state which by the way had a lot of oil available and became a client state of England thus you have all of these people who had property who no longer had property – who were owners and now they are not owning. So what do you do with them? There came the division and the Palestinian Jewish problem then began to move forward. I'm not covering all the Islamic issues that were involved in this because we don't have time to do it. But that is what we have struggled with ever since.

The second thing is, when you look at this America does not exist to be an instrument of foreign policy for Israel. Our foreign policy has to deal with equality. Should we pray for and promote the peace of Israel? Yes, but that does not mean our policies have to become cyanism. Why? It is because there are other people that are there and I've been there and preached in their churches. As a Christian you are concerned for the Jewish people because it was through the Jewish people that came our Savior and we're supposed to take the Gospel back to the Jew first. Our calling is not to reinstitute the Old Testament boundaries. Our calling is to bring the Gospel to the Jewish people and then to Gentile, but our foreign policy ought to acknowledge the Balfour Declaration and what has been in place. Now the Balfour Declaration has since been

modified by the United Nations which first affirmed it and sent it into implementation and has legally modified it at various times.

I think President Trump's current two state approach is both appropriate for Israel in its present existence and shows the right concern for the Palestinian. I want to remind all my brothers and sisters that you have brothers and sisters that are Palestinians. I have fellowshipped with Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem, Jericho and various other places. You will spend eternity with those brothers and sisters. So we want fairness, justice and equality to be put into place and that's what we should encourage our foreign policy. In my personal opinion I do not speak for the President, the Republican Party or their platform, but I do believe the last proposal given by Trump and the way he approached the two state solution was probably the best that I have seen yet. These Palestinians need to be taken care of for they are made in the image of God but we ought to do so without furthering Marxist ideology and showing a true sense of civility and dignity. We also have a growing number of brothers and sisters in the Jewish population and I want them to be properly treated as well for they have a land as well.

This land of Israel is important for another reason. Whenever in dispersions they have been in other nations that has become the occasion for antisemitism and antisemitism must be confronted. It is now growing in America and it must be confronted by the fact that we understand the crucial nature of the Gospel to every ethnicity and we understand the Gospel came to us through the Jewish people. For that reason, we want to bring Christ in word and deed back to them.

Bruce: This may give insight to the follow up question. The person thinks the proposal could be a reason that we're now suffering this unparalleled, historical distress in America and that it's possibly a warning or judgment from God.

Harry: I appreciate this being passed on and with all due respect to the congressman I think that is dead wrong. I am not saying that our foreign policy for Israel is not important and appropriately for Palestine. I mean this with all respect, I believe we are now under a hand of judgment from God – now is to the destruction of America or to the discipline of America and the opening up to another Great Awakening? The latter is what I'm praying for. I have no doubt that the hand of God is upon us – the fires, hurricanes, the unrest, the chaos, the promotion of Marxist ideology right within the bowels of our largest cities, this and that. All kinds of things are happening but I believe the issue is our policy and legal embracing of the denial of God's creation mandates. We are destroying the family, undermining the sanctity of marriage, the sanctity of sexuality, the sanctity of gender, the sanctity of men and women made in the image of God and at the bottom of it was the fabricated right of abortion and the destruction of the sanctity of life. I'm all for looking appropriate foreign policy but the hand of God's judgment is upon us because right in the book of Genesis is the sanctity of life, sanctity of gender, the sanctity of marriage, the sanctity of family and the sanctity of sexuality within the context of marriage between a man and a woman to initiate, procreate and bless the marriage. We have by policy and legal affirmation we have assaulted every single one of those and it all began with the assault of the sanctity of life. I could go back in history and show where all of this started in the 19th century and this is exactly where I'd point you to when it comes to God's hand of disciplinary judgment.

I am going to be shameless on this by encouraging you to go back to a series that I preached on Nahum. Nahum is the book in the Bible chronicling God's judgment upon a non-

covenantal people whom He had blessed with an awakening and that was Nineveh and Assyria. After blessing them with revival and they turned this is how He dealt with them. I believed I did about four sermons on the book of Nahum on this.

Bruce: This will be the last question for this session and it comes from your sermon from last week. You made a reference to Exodus 28 that said Aaron had a bell on his robe, so can you give further explanation for the bell on the robe?

Harry: I think the context gives the explanation where there was a certain attire God had designed for the high priests. It was a blue robe worn by the high priest. The high priest was to bring the Urim and the Thummim underneath it, close to his heart which is the testimony of God's presence, judgment, mercy, grace and the promise that God would give His people wisdom. Secondly, there were the 12 stones and then through the process on the Day of Atonement the priest was to bear the sins of the people.

Think of the tabernacle like the pop-up picture book. As you opened the book these things would pop up. That's what the tabernacle was for God's people. There was the court of the Gentiles, the court of the women, the court of Israel, then into the Holy of Holies and how you would make progress there. Your great desire was the presence of God and God's justice being satisfied in a substitutionary sacrifice for their sins, yet they did it every single year and that's another pop up. It's God's way of teaching them what they need but the blood of bulls and goats don't do it. This high priest can't do it. They need a true High Priest that doesn't need His own forgiveness and you need a Lamb of God, not an unblemished lamb out of someone's flock. So God continues to teach them with the tabernacle.

In the context of the tabernacle there is both the lamb and the high priest. So the priest comes into the presence of God in bearing the sins of His people and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). God says 'no man shall see Me and live' so as you see him and hear him with the golden bell as the priest moves out of the sight of the people, you have hope that the sacrifice is going to be blessed of God. But if you don't hear the bell that's why Exodus 28 says 'lest he die' for this was him being clothed as God designed him to be and in that is a witness of God's blessing upon obedience to what He has designed which has been designed to teach us of the need of a greater High Priest, according to the order of Melchizedek and that would be Jesus. And a greater sacrifice where we don't need another Sacrifice which is where that High Priest would become the sacrifice Himself – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Exodus 28 gives us the reason for the bell, the two items at the hem of the garment, to let us know God was honoring the obedience to what He had designed, yet it was going to have to be repeated which means it was not efficient for we needed another High Priest and Sacrifice, that is Jesus.

Bruce: That is a beautiful picture – that beautiful contradictory term – a Living Sacrifice that points us to Christ.

Harry: Here is Jesus the fulfillment of that High Priest as He said 'Father into Thy hands I commend My presence' and Jesus is the Sacrifice, now Jesus dies, buried – body in the tomb, soul goes to the place of the departed souls in paradise – but now the question is, will He live? This is the affirmation of the efficiency, efficacy, and the propitiation of His sacrifice. Will he live? For three days they could hear no bell for He was gone and they could not see Him but

then on the third day the bell rung for He was risen and we have everlasting life. That is what I want every single one of you to have and those of you who have it I want you to share it with other people and grow in this relationship with Christ. Even in a present distress like this we can keep growing by doing everything we can to be the church of Jesus Christ on mission, on message and in ministry. Praise God the bell rung! Jesus was delivered up because of our transgressions and was raised because of our justification and we are saved by His grace through Him and His sacrifice for us. He lives and because He lives we live.

Bruce: That is all we have time for in this Q & A session but I want to encourage you to continue to send your questions to askthepastor@briarwood.org and we'll look forward to answering them, Lord willing, in our future Q & A time with Harry and Bruce. God bless you.