

Scripture: Psalms 1:1-6

Sermon Title: A Forest of People who are Righteous / Translated by Melody Lee

1.

I once climbed Mt. Jiri in August 2005. The plan was to hike Jirisan for three days and two nights with a friend and his younger brother. We were going to start from Nogodan and head to Cheonwangbong. However, on the second day of hiking, our group got lost. After wandering around for a while, it took us over 2 hours to get back on the correct trail. There are often signposts on mountain trails, but I got lost while following a ribbon that read 'OOO Mountaineering Club' rather than a signpost. I should have followed the signposts installed by the National Parks Office instead of the signs of the mountaineering club. It was then that I came to the realization that 'to live life properly, I must choose the right path and follow the right signposts. We often liken life to a road. Is your life path a path with clear directions and clear signposts? What resources will give you wisdom and inspiration when your life is messed up and chaotic? What is the signpost that sets the direction of your life and gives you meaning and direction? I'm sorry to say the conclusion in advance, there is no signpost in life like the Bible. When life is difficult, I open Psalms. This is because the Psalms are written by seniors of faith who have gone through the same troubles and anguish as me. Since most of the psalms are songs of people with religious concerns, it is a very comforting word for those who are struggling.

First, let's take a quick look at the place Psalms occupy in the Old Testament and then go into today's scripture. The Hebrew Bible is divided into three main parts. These are the Torah, called the 5 Books of Moses, the Neviim, the books of the prophets, and Ketuvim, the Holy Writings. In addition to Psalms, Job, and Proverbs, books such as Ruth, Song of Songs, and Chronicles are found in the Ketuvim. However, the Jews considered the Torah written by Moses to be the most holy book, followed by Neviim, the books of the prophets, and regard the Ketuvim as the lowest grade book. In today's terms, Ketuvim is like a testimony. It is not like the other books where Moses or the prophets prophesied the Word of God. The Psalms are the sighs and supplications uttered in the midst of the problems that they are struggling with in their lives. In today's terms, you can think of it as similar to a testimony broadcast like "Let it be Renewed." It is a bit different from "Bible Essence" and "Bible School," which directly lecture on the Word of God. If you just watch "Let it be Renewed" when your heart is tired, you can feel that God is alive. You will find new hope. The Psalms are just like this. If the sermon in Christian worship is a direct way to hear the word of God, the representative prayer is the word of God heard through the inspiration of the saints. So, if the Torah is a sermon, the Psalms are a representative prayer. Through Ketuvim, such as the Psalms, we can learn how to live wisely in a life full of hardships and chaos.

2.

The theme in Psalm 1 is the same theme as all 150 psalms. Psalm 1 is a six-line summary of the 150 psalms. Psalm 1 wants to tell us how to live a blessed life. It tells us which path to choose among the many paths in life and with what attitude we should live to have a blessed and happy life. Among the many signposts, which signposts will you live by? It's like giving you a choice. Like most of the 150 psalms, Psalm 1 presents the choice with black and white logic. There are many signposts to live like this or live like that, but there are only two types. It is either the path of the righteous or the path of the wicked. There is no middle ground. Most people then have an identity confusion. I don't think I'm a righteous person, and I don't think I'm a wicked person either. Then what is it? I'm sure there are some of you who have this kind of confusion. Black and white logic is either black or white. You may say that there is gray, but in Psalm 1, all gray is classified as black.

In verse 1, the Hebrew words used to classify the wicked into three classes are different. It is interesting to look at the verbs used for each of the wicked ones in this classification. Walk, stand, sit, are in a specific order. Which movement seems the most stable? At a loss, one wonders whether to follow the tricks of the wicked, but in the end they end up on that path. They progress step by step from standing up to sitting down. Arrogant people are quite confident compared to the wicked and sinners. It can be seen as the greatest villain with confidence and stability in the evil path he is taking. Even in Hebrew, the meaning of arrogant has the meaning of 'one who mocks'. It means that you are laughing at God. In contrast, 'losh' or the plural form 'lesheim' translates as sinner and means a weak person, a wrong person, and a bad person. Hebrew word 'Azat', translated as 'the cunning of the wicked', is translated into words such as 'advise, counsel, and prudence'. These people are tempted, but confused, with ears open to evil schemes. It can be seen as an innocent sinner. These are people who have an open ear to bad advice and are ready to receive it. They are people who read the newspaper and curse those who commit evil deeds, but in their hearts they think that it would not be bad for them to live like that when the opportunity comes. There is a book called 'The Screwtape Letters' by C. S. Lewis. This is a letter in the form of a letter from Uncle, a senior in the demon world, to his nephew, the demon Wormwood. The Uncle Devil sends his nephew, a new salesman, a letter full of tender instructions and advice on how to seduce and destroy Christians. There, the biggest strategy of the devils is introduced. "Don't make the people of the world typical evil people. Then the righteous will see it and rise up. Which villain is best to create? Make a lot of bad guys who look like good people and plant them all over society," kindly explains to Wormwood. It means to create wicked people who worry about being righteous as if they were righteous but actually keep their ears open to the advice of the wicked. No matter how progressive media you read, such as the New York Times or news factories, all those who do not actively enjoy the life of the righteous are classified as this first person.

The second stage of sinners are those who have gone one step further and entered the sinner's way. These sinners are one step ahead of the wicked who follow their cunning. Standing on the road means no more wandering. They are sinners who have orientated themselves on the path of their own choosing. For such people, the narrow road, the thorny road, is just disgusting. Even if their own path is not the path of life but the path to hell, many people are on it, so they are the ones who are determined to follow it. It is much more difficult to bring these people back than to devious wicked people.

The sinners who go one step further than these sinners are the arrogant ones. They are sinners who have been sitting in their seats. If you compare it to a gang, this type of sinner would be the boss. Bosses do not stand and work, but sit and rule the organization. He is the leader who sits on the throne and rules like a king. The destructive power of the arrogant is huge. When President Putin sits in the seat of the arrogant, he fires missiles at good citizens. That's so demonic. People like Hideyoshi Toyotomi in the Joseon Dynasty and Hirobumi Ito in the Japanese colonial era are such people. They have no qualms about slaughtering peaceful people. They are arrogant people who don't have a twinge of conscience even though they rob an entire country. The world of evil consists of a complete hierarchy. There are principalities, powers, and heavenly rulers who rule over sinners and wicked people and exercise royal rule. If we do not keep our minds upright and lead a life of faith, it is easy for us to live in sympathy with the forces of evil. Fighting and colliding with the hierarchy of evil in the Bible is called spiritual warfare. This is Ephesians 6:12. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms". The apostle Paul tells us how fierce the war against evil is and requires a high degree of spiritual energy. The reason this fight is so fierce is that the forces of evil are organized in a thoroughly hierarchical order.

3.

In the words of Ephesians 6, in order to win the spiritual war, it advises us to fight against the forces of evil after equipping ourselves with armed tools. Helmets, armor, boots, belts, and shields are all defensive tools. However, the only offensive weapon given to Christians is the Word, the double-edged sword of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God is an offensive weapon that inflicts great damage on the forces of evil. The hierarchy of evil can be weakened so easily by a small voice of truth. Because the hierarchy is a false hierarchy. We must know how great a blow the voice of truth is to the forces of evil when it is delivered to them. So, the author of Psalm 1 tells us to meditate on Yahweh's Torah, the word of truth, night and day.

No matter how strong the advice of the wicked is, it is of no power to those who meditate on the Word of God day and night. The words rejoice and meditate form a poetic couplet. The word to meditate is

'Hagah' in Hebrew. There are three types of examples of Hagah. First, it means to meditate. The second meaning is translated as recite read aloud in Psalm 63:6, Hagah is the act of reading aloud and reciting over and over again. It is a word that expresses the will to stay in the Word. The third meaning is an example from Isaiah 31:4. In the words "the young lion roaring on his prey," the word 'roaring' is Hagah. Like lions, cats bite their prey and make a noise when approached. That's how they express the joy that can't be missed because they enjoy feeding. Hagah is a word that expresses the meaning of enjoying and rejoicing in the Word.

To meditate refers to the act of trying to remember God while grunting and groaning. Like the prophet Habakkuk, many prophets of the Old Testament lamented the reality of a world that did not return to God's truth. Abraham also received God's promise, but he said that he needed to wait for a very long time for it to be fulfilled. In the midst of the gap between promises and answers and ideals and reality, many people have suffered. Similar to us. There are many times when we doubt whether God's truth is working in this world. What we need at such times is the Word of God. Meditating on God's Word and God's Torah can be said to be an active action to seek God's will and wrestle with questions about the reality that does not turn out according to the truth.

To enjoy the Torah of God is to say the attitude of responding with "Amen" in front of the reality that comes true according to the Word. In that sense, rejoicing and meditating form a poetic dialogue. To those who meditate on the Word to discover God's will in a reality full of questions, God gives great joy by giving answers and fulfilling the Word.

Why should Christians not only rejoice in the Word of God but also meditate on it day and night? Because the moment we doubt the truth of God's Word, we become potential allies of evil. In other words, the moment you don't meditate on the word of God, you begin to doubt whether the word of God is the truth. That is why Christians must keep close to the Word of God. When I read the Bible, I begin to feel the reign of God within me. If you want to feel that God is alive, you must read and meditate on the Bible. In the Bible, the book of God's story, we can read and internalize the principles by which God governs the world. Internalizing God's rule also means that I choose not to be God myself.

For example, we read the story of Joseph being imprisoned after fleeing from Potiphar's wife. In his story, we see how God drives his life. To him who struggles to live a righteous life to the point of stupidity, the reality is still dark, but we see how God makes his life prosperous. Through such stories, we can regain our lost imagination of a righteous life. As we read the stories of people who have tasted the care of Almighty God and live, we apply them to our lives. A person who refuses to read the word of God is the same as saying that he wants to become God himself.

4.

Verse 3 compares a person who rejoices in Yahweh's Torah to a tree planted by streams of water. The righteous are like trees planted by streams, but the wicked are like chaff blown away by the wind. See which images are being used. The righteous are rooted and unshakable, but the wicked are chaff that blows away as the wind blows. The righteous bear fruit abundantly and are full of fruit, but the life of the wicked has no grain and is nothing more than chaff.

The 'stream' used here is not the 'nahar' used in the meaning of a river in Hebrew. The word 'Peleg' refers to a waterway that flows through a desert or wilderness. It is not a river flowing through forests or grasslands, but a stream running through a desert or wilderness. It means that the word of God enriches us in our life, which is as rough and dry as the wilderness. Life is still chaotic and full of problems, but the river of God penetrates the middle and enriches my life. I went on a trip to Xinjiang Uyghur in China alone in 2007. At that time, I took a train from Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, to Kashkar, a border city in the far west. A train runs through the Taklamakan desert, and a stream flows in the middle of the desert. It was a stream that melted and flowed from the mountains. All other places are desolate, but trees are growing green only at the waterside where the stream flows. This is Peleg. Like Joseph, everything he does seems to be twisted, but in the end, don't you see God who makes it prosperous? This is the life of those who meditate on Yahweh's law day and night.

We must believe the words of verse 6 with our hearts. "For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction." If we do not believe this word, our faith is fake. We must believe that the lives of those who live righteously will win in the end. Many forefathers of faith looked at the depressing reality and struggled with whether the Word is working. Even so, they believed that the Word of God was the truth and did not lose their faith until the end. Sometimes it seems that it is not the righteous but the wicked who are planted by the stream. They were disappointed when it seemed only the wicked prosper. However, they meditated on God's Word and overcame the difficulty. Because we have doubts as to whether God's law is working, we meditate on the Word of God.

5.

There is one interesting fact in Psalm 1, which is that the number of 'blessed people' used in the first verse is singular. The wicked, the sinners, and the arrogant all stand in contrast to being expressed in the plural. However, in the last verse 6, the plural is used as righteous. At first, the righteous path is narrow and narrow, so few people walk it, and it seems like the righteous are alone. However, the lonely tree planted by the stream is now forming an evergreen forest that does not lose its leaves. The trees of the forest are

fruit-bearing trees that bear fruit according to the season. Don't complain that I'm left alone in this barren land. If God acknowledges your righteous path, he will surely attach and add co-workers to you.

Meditate deeply on what today's words mean for our lives. It seems that there are many roads in the world, but there are only two kinds of roads. It is either the righteous way or the evil way. If you look righteous but listen to the tricks and advice of the wicked, that person is a potential wicked person. He's just a potential sympathizer for evil. The middle ground, the gray area, doesn't exist. A really radical decision is required here. You must decide whether to live according to the Word of God or to live a life in which you are the owner, following the way the people of the world follow. Living according to the Word is a life of acknowledging that my master is not me but God. It is a life that gives up on me in front of Jesus Christ. I die on the cross with Jesus and live a new life resurrected with Jesus' life. Psalm 1 speaks so confidently. The life of surrendering to Jesus, the life of surrendering my life to Jesus, is a very happy life. This determination and commitment is the first gateway to entering the path of the righteous. If you have not yet passed this gateway, you are unfortunately still on the path of the wicked.

The hierarchy of evil will continue to deceive you. There is nothing wrong with living moderately righteously and moderately selfishly. I have already said that it is the most powerful strategy the devil has ever used. Living a life of faith is not moderate. Planted trees cannot move around. The wind does not wander from one road to another like chaff. Become a life planted in Jesus Christ. Be rooted in the Word without wavering. Grow now by sucking in the nourishment of the Word. The church, the forest of the righteous, is more than an appropriate social space. This is where the comrades in spiritual warfare gather. The church is a fellowship of spiritual comrades who live fiercely in this world in order to return this world, which has been taken away by the forces of evil, to God. We must be confirmed every time we gather in church that living by the truth is never a life of loss.

And when you return to your daily life, you will still struggle with many problems, but call out and find answers in the Word of God. If you don't know how to meditate on God's Word, just read it. If you watch 'The Chronicles of Narnia', you open the closet and then you see another world open, don't you? Reading and meditating on the Word is connecting with the world of God. When we meditate on the Word, we are included in God's story. I ask you all. Be an offensive righteous person and an aggressively blessed person. Become spiritual warriors to bring down the cartel created by the wicked - the sinners - the arrogant. Those who live like that are bound to bear fruit. In this way, the lives of those who risk their entire lives for God and stand up against the forces of evil are destined to prosper. Go beyond the stage of avoiding the tricks of the wicked, and rather live the life of an aggressive righteous man who destroys the powerful camp of evil. I hope for the day when a dense evergreen forest of righteous people will be created in the midst of the righteous path you are walking.