

Text: Psalm 42:1-11

Title: Do You Have a Refrain For Your Life? / translated by Han Yeaen

## **1. Song of the Sons of Korah**

Lately, there have been significantly more cloudy days. When I lived on the West Coast, I resented that there were a series of sunny days with no rain in sight, but coming to the Midwest where there are many cloudy days, I am grateful to see the sun. Still, the Midwest feels a bit more human, with cloudy days and rainy days, cold days and snowy days repeating according to the seasons. It resembles our lives. Because in our lives, too, cloudy days, bad days, and windy days repeat ceaselessly at any time. For the first time in a while, we hear God's word through the Psalms. The Psalms are composed of a total of 5 books, and Book 2 ranges from Psalm 42 to Psalm 72. Today's text is the first psalm of the second book of Psalms. Most of the poems in Book 2 of Psalms have subtitles attached. Psalm 42 has the subtitle <A Maskil of the Sons of Korah, for the director of music>. Maskil refers to a form of song. The Sons of Korah were a clan of the descendants of Levi, a group that led temple worship. In today's terms, they were clergy. However, looking at today's poem, this poet's life does not seem easy. It seems he is spending the cold winter of his life. Through today's Psalm, we will try to get a hint about how he navigates the tribulation that has suddenly befallen him.

## **2. Thirsty Deer**

Looking at verse 1, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God." These days, it seems deer are running wild because it is both deer mating season and hunting season. However, there is a reason why deer leave their habitats and encroach into human territory. It is because they are hungry or thirsty. A thirsty deer is blind to everything else. That must be why they jump towards cars so suddenly. The moment they jump is so sudden that it is bewildering. As someone who has hit a deer, I wondered what was so urgent and desperate for them. They are thirsty. When I went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in Israel, I visited a place called En Gedi near the Dead Sea. That is the very wilderness where David fled to avoid King Saul. Just when I visited there, I saw a deer wandering in the wilderness, which looked like it didn't have a single blade of grass, searching for either grass or water. In En Gedi, 'En' means spring and 'Gedi' means young goat. There was an oasis near the Dead Sea named En Gedi, and deer used to wander searching for the source of that spring. What was the poet trying to express through the image of a deer panting and searching for a spring? He is using the deer as a metaphor to show that his soul is earnestly seeking God. When he wanted to express how thirsty his soul was, people at the time could understand what it felt like just by the image of a thirsty deer.

### **3. God, the Source of Living Water**

The never-drying spring that the poet seeks so desperately is God, the source of living water. In Jeremiah 2:13, the word of God that Jeremiah delivered to the people of Israel is this: "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." It says the people of Israel committed two sins. Their first sin is the sin of forsaking God, the source of living water. The second sin was digging another spring after forsaking the source of living water, but it was a broken cistern. So, it means they abandoned God and followed other idols. Because God is the source of living water that does not dry up even in drought, he is desperate to find God. In what circumstances were the Sons of Korah, introduced as the authors of this poem, to make such a confession? Looking at verse 6, it seems he is in exile near Mount Hermon on the northern border of Israel. A person who used to lead temple worship wrote this poem in a place of exile far from the temple, missing the temple. The mention in verse 2 of meeting the living God and seeing Him refers to the presence of God experienced in temple worship. Like verse 4 says, he remembered the time when people visited the Jerusalem Temple to worship during Israel's great feasts, the three major feasts I mentioned last week. His heart is breaking as he thinks about leading the pilgrims who visited the temple to the house of God and entering that tabernacle. Because he cannot do that now. When he could always go, it probably didn't seem precious. But in the reality where he cannot go, he misses it so much. Among people in Seoul, there are many who haven't ridden the Han River cruise ship. Because they see it all the time and think they can go anytime. People who come up from the countryside actually enjoy more parts of Seoul. When I was in China, I also thought I would be there for a very long time, so I put off traveling to places I wanted to visit, like Zhangjiajie, Guilin, and the birthplace of poet Yun Dong-ju. But suddenly being deported and unable to go, the feeling of regret was immense. Perhaps that's why, as soon as I came to the U.S., I tried to visit various places whenever I had the chance. The poet also realized, after leaving the Jerusalem Temple, how precious that temple was and that it was the place that became the water source for his life. We can guess and know that the living water that does not dry up even in drought is the presence of God experienced in the temple. Living water is God's presence. There was no water of life as sweet to his life as God's presence experienced in the temple. He was so thirsty for God's presence. Unable to attend public worship and deported, having not received grace for a long time, the Son of Korah is heartbroken in the place of exile. Because there were many people who criticized and mocked him.

### **4. Tears Becoming Food**

His adversaries mocked him, saying, "Where is your God?" There must be one or two such people around you as well. "Doesn't everything work out if you believe in God? You said God helps you, but why are you in that shape?" I mean those people who dig into our hearts with words like these. This is the strategy of Satan, the enemy of God. Satan's biggest strategy for ruling humans is 'Divide and rule.' It is making people's hearts divide. Conversely, as can be known from the name God (Hananim - The One), making things one is His strategy. The people mocking around the poet are saying "Where is your God?" to separate his heart from God. Because of such teasing and mockery, the poet confesses that he shed tears day and night, and those tears became his food. Food is the source of energy that gives us strength. But when the heart is too heavy, you don't even want to eat food. At such times, God gives us tears instead of food. Tears become food and give us energy. Tears not only have amazing healing power, but they also give the strength to stand up again. Among Christians, there are those who say not to be too sad when someone close passes away. I tell them not to do that. If you are sad, you must cry a lot. Because tears give us the strength to rise again. If you are sad, cry. You can rise again using tears as energy. These days, perhaps because of hormonal changes, tears keep flowing even when I just hear pop song lyrics. But after shedding tears, I feel like my soul becomes somewhat clearer. I also keep tearing up while reading novels or poems. I think I might have entered menopause (male menopause). It may be tears of a different meaning than the tears of the Sons of Korah in this poem, but I feel that tears become energy in our lives. I wonder if there is anyone among you who is shedding tears alone in great sorrow. I truly hope those tears are not in vain and become energy that raises your life anew.

## **5. Do You Have a Refrain in Life?**

In the middle of this song of sorrow, the poet inserts a refrain that has sustained his life. What is a refrain? It is a phrase repeated at the end of a song. In musical works, even while singing or playing sorrow, joy is sometimes expressed by repeating the main theme as a refrain. It expresses sorrow and joy, despair and hope alternately. The refrains of Psalm 42 are verses 5 and 11. Perhaps the theme of this poem is contained in this refrain. "Why, my soul," means the inner person deep within my heart. "My soul" is the word representing the essence of my existence hidden in the deepest, most secret place of my being. And the following words, if changed to a modern song, would be, "Why are you so down?" "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." The reality is a very depressing situation in a minor key, but he deliberately sings a refrain in a major key. Whenever our souls become discouraged and fall into despair, we need such a refrain in our lives. It could be a Bible verse you have memorized, or it could be a favorite hymn. When you are tired, discouraged, and anxious, just reading the Psalms aloud repeatedly is also a big help. Because most of the songs in Psalms were composed in situations of depression, hardship, and

discouragement. We all need these refrains that can change the atmosphere of our lives. I mean spiritual habits or attempts that will reconnect me to God's presence that had become distant. Sunday worship, daily morning meditation on the Word, evening reflection prayer, good deeds, praying while writing a diary, etc., the refrains we can practice are truly diverse. However, even if you encourage yourself with a refrain like this, reality may still remain unchanged. After the refrain in verse 5, the poet confesses the desperate reality again. Like the words in verse 9, he appeals, "I say to God my Rock, 'Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?'" It means reality hasn't changed. But what he confesses toward God is "God my Rock." His life shakes very much like the Disco Pang Pang ride at the amusement park in front of Wolmido, but it is a confession that God is the One who does not shake. I might shake, but God is absolutely the One who does not shake. It is a confession that God does not shake and becomes his firm ground to stand on. Therefore, he encourages himself once more through the refrain. "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." Don't you feel his will to remember God the Rock and live his life toward God once again?

## **6. Everyday is a Gift from God**

The author of the text, the Sons of Korah, was expelled from Jerusalem and is living in exile near Mount Hermon in the north. It is not revealed for what reason he is living there. However, looking at the atmosphere of the poem, we can see that he is living in a place he does not want, among people he does not want. He misses his ordinary daily life. He feels how precious the temple that was always nearby and the presence of God he tasted therein were. In that sense, how blessed is a life that realizes nothing in our lives should be taken for granted? A person who realizes that everything I currently enjoy is God's gift is a happy person. A person who realizes that our lives are full of wonder is a happy person. The taste of the living water he experienced offers a sip of hope in the midst of his dry life. He wants to feel again the presence of God he tasted in the temple. He looks back on his life of wandering in search of springs other than God. Reflecting on his life of trying to find comfort through other idols, he searches again and again for God, the source of living water. He praises God through the refrain of his life, which is like a spell, to reconnect to God the Rock. The refrain made him stick tight to God whenever his life shook. Through the refrain, he steadied his heart again, knowing that while he might shake, God is absolutely, absolutely the One who does not shake.

## **7. Becoming a Seed**

The poet records specific place names in verse 6. They are all places located on the outskirts of Israel. He intended to show through these place names that he is living as a

wanderer scattered in the borderlands. In 1 Peter 1:1, Peter opens the preface of his letter with this greeting: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia," Peter also mentions specific place names, clarifying that he is sending this letter to the scattered exiles. The Greek word for 'scattered' is 'Diaspora.' The meaning of scattering seeds is contained in this word. It means wanderers sown all over the world like scattering seeds. Our lives as immigrants are exactly that. We are God's seeds scattered here because God has a plan. God thought of us specially and chose us. And we were scattered here. Around 1994, there was the Zapatista movement in Mexico. It was a non-violent resistance movement launched by indigenous people of Mexico demanding the guarantee of their right to live. They resisted with the slogan, "The land belongs to those who work it." It is said that they sang this song while being persecuted. "They tried to bury us. They didn't know we were seeds." "They tried to bury us in the ground, but they didn't know we were seeds." When a seed is buried in the ground, it is bound to sprout and grow somehow. God placed us here as diaspora and wanderers to make us live as seeds. Those who leave their hometown are bound to become vulnerable. In the poem <Hometown> by poet Kim Jun-tae, he sings like this: "In my hometown/ even if I run with my eyes closed/ when I fall or trip/ the soil and grass embrace me." In our hometown, there are many things we can lean on and rub against. But the life of a wanderer is not like that. Everything is vulnerable. Seeds fallen in a place like the U.S., where competition is fierce and you have to solve everything alone, are bound to be even more harsh. Having lived in both G2 countries, China and the U.S., I think life in the U.S. is much harder and dryer. Because we are seeds sown in a barren place, we are bound to be thirsty. We need a source of water. Without God's presence, it is difficult for us to endure the life of a wanderer. We must stay firmly attached to God, the source of living water. It is a life that cannot be lived without God. Therefore, when life keeps shaking and becomes anxious, there must be a refrain to sing repeatedly. Mothers in the old days used to carry newborn babies on their backs in a blanket (podaegi). What do they do when the blanket carrying the baby keeps sagging below the waist? They repeat the motion of bouncing their waist once to hoist the baby up above the waist. I see this as the role of the refrain. Our lives cannot always be smooth. People who make things hard for me do not disappear but always exist. Work basically drains my strength. When we are anxious and down like that, we absolutely need a refrain to hoist us up. Because of that refrain, we gain the strength to live again in response to God's call that placed us here as God's seeds. Even if you shake, do not be discouraged. Because through the process of overcoming that shaking, the muscles of our soul will be strengthened. Though we shake, if the Lord holds us, we will finally bloom as God's seeds and bear fruit. I pray that you will stand firm because of God, the source of living water, and become a fruitful life.

**<Sharing the Word>**

1. Share how you felt after putting your to-do list from the previous meeting to action.
2. Is there anything making you anxious or discouraged lately? Share it with your small group members.
3. What kind of refrain do you have that will pull you up again? If there is a phrase, habit, or action that serves as a refrain you are repeating periodically or should repeat, share it together and practice it until the next meeting.