

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park and Faith Family

Title: The Way to Happiness

Lesson: Psalm 1:1-6 NRSV

- ¹ *Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;*
- ² *but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night.*
- ³ *They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.*
- 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 watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.*

(Slide 1) A few days ago, my wife and I bought some baby clothes for one of her friends who lives in Boston and will deliver a child soon. We mailed her the clothes to celebrate. Then, suddenly, I was curious about the current Boston weather, so I looked it up. When the temperature in Northern Wisconsin was around 5 degrees, the daytime temperature there was around 40 degrees. While I was proud of the Wisconsin cold, I was jealous of the warm winter there.

On the same day, while watching YouTube, I saw a video about the weather in Oymyakon, Russia. The average winter temperature there is -40 degrees below zero. There, it is said that schools are closed only when it is - 62 degrees. There was a time when it was 3 degrees below zero due to global warming, and it is said that the people there were wearing short sleeves and eating ice cream outside. In an interview with a person who lives there, he said that he would be happy if the weather there is -4 degrees. After watching it, I felt very blessed to live in Wisconsin.

Psalm 1 we read today clearly indicates who is blessed and who is wicked. Do you know how many psalms there are? There are 150 psalms. By the way, Psalm 1 is important because it is the prologue of all Psalms. Psalm 1 describes the theme and purpose of the entire Psalm. It is a milestone and guide to 150 poems.

(Slide 2) The truth teaching in the Psalms is “a life that walks with God.” Let’s read together verses 1-3: “¹Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; ²but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. ³They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.”

Verses 1-3 tell us who is a blessed person. It speaks of a happy person and at the same time tells us to live with him. Psalm 1 tells in advance the conclusion of the entire Psalm. The happiest are those who live by God's law. The happiness of a blessed person does not mean a reward for something. Like a green tree bearing fruit in the Word of God, it means a happy life itself.

The Psalms are the thickest of the 66 books of the Bible. So, it is divided into 5 volumes like Torah to increase the authority of the book of Psalm. At the conclusion of Deuteronomy, the last book of Torah, Moses blesses his people and says: “Happy are you, O Israel” (Deuteronomy 33:29).

Here Israel is the name of the nation, but according to theologian Gerhard von Rad, he interpreted Israel as people under God's rule. Therefore, the meaning of ‘Happy are you, O Israel’ is that those who live in the reign of God are happy.

(Slide 3) People seek happiness. There is no one in this world who does not want to be happy. So, people often ask: "How can we be happy?" Perhaps, each person has their own standard of happiness. Some might say that health is happiness, some might say that family is happiness, some might say that being successful in whatever they do is happiness, and some might say that making a lot of money is happiness. However, what does Psalm 1 say about happiness? It says that happy are those, who do not follow the advice of the wicked or take the path that sinners tread. In other words, those who follow the law of God and meditate on it day and night are happy. (2)

(Slide 4) When people today think of meditation, they often think of closing their eyes and doing it in a quiet space. However, the meaning of meditate here is slightly different from that. Some of you might know this by raising cattle. It is

known as cattle have four stomachs and chew the cud. That's why the cow's mouth is always busy. In this way, when we read the Bible, we should read and read and re-read day and night what we have read, not stop reading once. Therefore, lives following God's law and meditating on it day and night are the lives captured by the word of God.

(Slide 5) In Psalm 1, we see the righteous and the wicked. The life of the righteous brings happiness, but the life of the wicked brings destruction. The righteous are those who do not compromise with evil. According to the Bible, the righteous do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers. To be honest, the path of the righteous is not an easy one. As you walk on the path of the righteous, people around you may gradually disappear and you may have to be alone. In addition, the righteous are sometimes threatened. It is easier to walk the path of the wicked than to walk the path of the righteous. That is why the author of Psalms urges us to meditate on the Word of God unceasingly, because the Word of God establishes the center of our lives and keeps us from falling into any temptation.

The result of a blessed life is like a tree planted by a stream. The tree bears fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither, and in all that they do, they prosper. But it is said that the results of the wicked are like chaff to be blown away by the wind. Even a small wind uproots the life of the wicked and flies away.

(Slide 6) The righteous and the wicked are two kinds of life that are incompatible with each other. They are people with different destinations. According to verse 6, it says "for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." The Lord not only knows the way of the righteous, but also the hard work of trying to live a righteous life, but the wicked reject God and do not walk with God. The way of the wicked is destined to perish.

(Slide 7) You may have heard 'Alpha and Omega.' There are many letters such as beta, gamma, and delta between alpha and omega. However, alpha and omega are words meaning the beginning and the end. The expression A to Z is also synonymous with alpha and omega. Psalm 1 speaks of the righteous and the wicked. This does not simply refer to two people; there are all human beings between the righteous and the wicked. Psalms teach us what the life of the righteous is and how we can live under the reign of the Lord. As I've been preparing for today's message, a poem by an American poet came to mind. You

may know it. The poem is “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost. I want to finish today’s message by sharing it.

(Slide 8) The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves, no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Beloved: the righteous do not walk in the path of the wicked. The righteous do not compromise with the wicked. The path of the righteous is difficult and narrow. There are not many people who follow the path of the righteous. However, the Bible guarantees that the way of the righteous is blessed and happy. The result of the life of the righteous is salvation. And the life of the righteous will always be filled with happiness on their journey along that road. There are two paths in our life. The way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. Which road are you walking or which road do you want to take? Amen.