

Prayer Is Our Sat Nav

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Date: 25 July 2021

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[0 : 00] Now, for those of you that are under 30, you might not recognise what one of these things are. It's a road atlas, okay? So my dad's mantra when we went on holiday was, don't leave home without a map.

And indeed, he used to spend hours and hours pouring over the map before we left. Often, we left about an hour late because he was pouring over the map so much to find out the quickest route to get there.

And my mum used to be just shouting at him, let's just get in the car! Anyway, so don't leave home without a map. Also, I had to have map reading skills as well.

I remember an infamous geography field trip to Scarborough when I was about 14. It wouldn't be allowed now, I don't think, but obviously one day the teachers fancied an afternoon off. So they thought it would be a really good idea to take a load of 14-year-olds and drop us off 15 miles away from Scarborough.

With a map and a compass. And then just say, right, see you later guys, see you back at the hotel. So I remember spending hours and hours arguing, going round in circles.

[1 : 08] And I think it took us five hours to get back and it wasn't great. So anyway. However, so that's map reading. If you guys are younger than that though, you've had to learn how to use and interpret a sat-nav.

Sometimes it goes really well and sometimes it doesn't. However, annoying and bewildering as sat-navs are to use and maps can be to use as well.

If we're travelling through unfamiliar areas, we need something that's going to show us our route. And it's the same for rock climbers too.

I've got a picture of a rock climber here. Somerset, Cheddar Gorge are very popular for rock climbers. And often we've been there and I'm never going to be one because it terrifies me.

But I'm very interested to see them hanging off the rocks. And I'm reading a book at the moment and it basically says, if you're standing at the bottom of the gorge. I'm reading a murder mystery set in Cheddar Gorge.

[2 : 11] If you're standing at the bottom of the gorge and you're looking up and you're trying to work out how you're going to trace your route through. The best way is if you've got somebody going in front of you to guide you and to show you the way.

And so it is with the book of Psalms. The book of Psalms takes us through unfamiliar and very confusing territory and it shows us the way through.

They're full of authentic prayers that are written by people who are in often very confusing, disorientating and traumatic circumstances. And they're finding a way, one handhold and one step after another.

And they're God inspired prayers that show us a path of faith to follow when we're also in confusing and disorientated circumstances too. So over the next few weeks, we're going to be looking at different Psalms that speak into a whole range of circumstances and emotions.

But we begin today with Psalms 42 and 43, which we've just heard. And we're going to be looking at different times.

[3 : 42] So the two Psalms are listed in the Bible separately, but 43 isn't titled and so we think that they kind of go together really well. So, two things to look at this morning.

The first thing is, in these Psalms, they teach us how to pray with two hands. We think about the rock climber there. He's using his right hand and his left hand to get where he needs to get.

And we see a similar thing in this Psalm. We see the Psalmist taking hold of God with one hand and hanging on to him and moving from one thing to the next. We see him with his hand, honest, open

prayer directed to God with one hand.

And the left hand, he's telling himself truths to encourage himself about God. So prayer to God with the right hand and speaking to himself with the left. In 42 verses 1 to 4, he speaks an honest and open prayer to God.

And then in verse 5, he then speaks to himself. He says, So he turns from speaking to God to speaking to himself.

[4 : 58] But he doesn't stop there. He then again speaks honestly to God in prayer in verses 6 to 10. And verse 11, he then is speaking those names and words to himself.

And then we go a bit further on to Psalm 43 and look at the very beginning of it. He speaks back to God again. Before then closing by speaking to himself those same words about God.

So he's moving through right and left, back and forth, one hand to the other. When you and I pray, we probably tend to pray with either one hand or the other.

We either pray to God, pouring everything out in our times of stress and just giving it all to him. Or we just don't really speak to him.

And we speak to ourselves, kind of telling ourselves, you know, we're Christians. We shouldn't feel like this. We should feel joyful. We should remember the promises of God. And this is not, it's not great. We're not going to move very far with it.

[5 : 59] We can become fixed on telling ourselves that we should just trust God. Because he is trustworthy.

But this can actually turn into self-accusation. And we feel like we shouldn't feel like this. So the psalm tells us to pray with two hands. A climber that uses his two hands gets much quicker up the rock.

And it helps him to make an upward progress. So the second point is that as well as praying with two hands, we also need to pray honestly and authentically to God to help us progress further.

So he makes upward progress through honest prayer. So as we look at the very end of Psalm 43, we see that the writer is much more bold and confident in his prayer.

But he's only been able to get to this position because he's been really real, honest and authentic when he's been speaking to God. He's been real about his situation, how he feels.

[7 : 04] And actually he's been quite blunt. So he starts in verses 42, 1 to 4, by speaking his longing. His longing to go and meet with God. With God's people in the temple in Jerusalem.

And at the very beginning of 42 is a really famous passage. As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.

My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can one go and meet with God? So he longs to meet with God with an almost physical thirst. He's longing to go and worship him in the temple of Jerusalem.

Now this psalm, I don't know if you know, is written by one of the sons of Korah. And basically their jobs were a bit of a mixture of being a bouncer and a worship leader at the temple.

So they guarded the temple, but they were also some of the musicians that sort of brought people to worship God. And he's remembering back to that time. So in verse 4, when he was joining in with God's people and praising God together, but now he's somewhere far away.

[8 : 09] And more than that, he's surrounded by those who are mocking him, who are taking the mickey out and saying, where is your God? Not only where he's been meeting God seems physically far away, but it also seems to him that God's not listening to his prayers.

And our time, I'm sure, over the past year or so, when we've been really, really struggling because we've been not gathering together to worship God in our church buildings, I think that gives us a sense of what this psalm's talking about.

Now, just to be clear, our church buildings are not really like the temple. The temple was the place that God promised the people that he would live there. And that's where they went to hear him and to pray to him.

But for us, God's equally close to us, whether we're inside or outside of the building. And yet, I'm sure that I'm not the only one over this past year that's really felt a longing to gather together with each other to praise God and meet God together.

And it's been so wonderful this morning, gathering together and singing and praising God, just to hear your voices and my voice together. Even with masks on, it's been wonderful to celebrate how God is.

[9 : 21] So this psalm teaches us to voice that longing to God and then to speak to ourselves and to put our hope in God. That the end of our story will not be one of isolation, but it's going to be one of praise.

But before we can really fully get there, this psalm teaches us not just to pray to God about our longing, but also about our confusion. The verse 7, when it says, Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls, all your waves and breakers have swept over me.

Again, that's another famous verse. I've seen it on many fridge magnets. And in my head, I imagine that it's a lovely, beautiful waterfall with a cool, you know, still pool at the bottom. But I don't think it actually is.

I think the psalmist is talking about his experience there. And he's saying, you know what, God? This is your waterfall and these are your waves and they're crashing over me. He feels like he's being overwhelmed.

And the waves are battering him. This is your waterfall. He's being really honest. He doesn't try and separate his experience from God. In some sense, these waves are God's waterfall.

[10 : 30] And in the very next verse, he speaks of God's love. A love that seems to be expressed and the fact that he's able to cry out to God even in the midst of all this. And yet that love makes his experience all the more confusing.

Why have you forgotten me, he says in verses 42, verse 9. And he doesn't hear a voice back to give him an explanation. And yet it is through him speaking of his confusion before the face of God that he's enabled to then begin to pray and cry out with boldness.

And you get a sense of that in Psalm 43. In verse 3, he says with boldness, send me your light and your faithful care. Let them lead me. Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.

And then I will go to the altar of God. Oh God, my joy of my delight. I will praise you with a lyre. Oh God, my God. So I think he's imagining there that the Lord's going to be sending out him a rescue party, leading him by his light up the mountain.

Together with his people in worship, where he'll be able to sing his praises to God once again. So for him, like us, only through speaking to God about our longing and our confusion, do we discover the boldness that begins to help us to imagine that future joy.

[11 : 48] That future joy that he looked forward to, praising God, was just a faint shadow of what we look forward to. For us, we're gathering today properly in this building. It's just a faint shadow of the hope that we've got in heaven when we gather together with people from every tribe and tongue.

But that upward journey to a place of confidence and anticipation of the future and crying out to God for that future comes only through this two-handed, honest prayer.

So as I finish, some people here this morning think, well, that's okay for you to say. But you don't know my darkness or my desperation and what I've been going through and the path that I've come to from this place this morning.

Well, that's right. I don't know your specific situation and all that's going on for you at the moment. And I've not experienced some of the darkness that people may be in. But I have to say over the past two years, I've gone through my own stuff, my own anxiety and, you know, the situation that's been going on.

But this psalm helps point us to the one who has experienced it. It points us to the one that night before he died said, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow.

[13 : 00] He was mocked and taunted with questions by his opponents. He was crucified out on a rubbish tip outside the city. And he cried out in agony to a God and heard no audible voice to answer back.

And yet it points us to the one who held on to God, even though all of that, even through all of that. And he is the one who wants to draw near to you and to me this morning.

The one that actually his prayers did not go finally unanswered. In his resurrection, he receives the answers to those prayers. His resurrection, God vindicated him. The Lord overturned his enemies and silenced their accusations and mockery.

And more than that, Jesus was exalted to his Father's presence to a place of unending joy. And he completed the path of faith that this psalm traces out.

Now this morning, after the service, if you're feeling a bit rubbish at the moment or you want prayer for anything, we're going to have a little prayer team to do some prayer ministry.

[14 : 00] So Clive will explain a little bit later how that's going to work. But as we finish, we just need to remember that in him our hope is secure because he completed this path for us.

And because he comes to me and you this morning, wherever we are on that cliff face, whether we're struggling to hold on by our fingernails, he wants to come to us to guide us and to lead us on this path of faith, one handhold at a time, right and left, slowly upwards.

So let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you know the depths of darkness and yet you persevered in faith along this path.

And so we ask that you draw near to us and move our hands in faith to cry out to you, Father, and to hold on to your goodness. Help us to follow in that path that you have gone before us.

Amen. Amen.