

An Aching Soul

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 2nd of July 2000.

The preacher is Leroy Coote. The sermon is entitled An Aching Soul and is from Psalm 42. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can gather here to be your people. Please give us listening hearts as we're challenged by your word.

Please give me clear words to say, clear words to preach. And we ask that your Holy Spirit be working in all of us today.

We pray this in your Son's name. Amen. Please be seated. For those of you who aren't. Imagine you're in the middle of nowhere and there's absolutely zilcho in sight.

[1 : 08] Not even news about the GST. Not even news about St Kilda's latest victory. Not even news about other events that are happening worldwide.

The Fiji crisis. The Solomon Islands. Not even a drink stand in sight. Just desert.

All you have with you are the clothes on your back. It's dry. It's dusty.

And lonely. The other thing you have with you are memories of the past. That past involves being with people.

Living in a fertile land. And tons of time with God's people. Praising him. Celebrating his greatness.

[2 : 18] In effect you're in exile. I wonder if your relationship with God has felt like this before. Has it been dry?

Have you felt separated from God? And thus in complete despair about life? Have you ever felt completely lonely without God before?

For some of you this could be a recent experience. But for others it could be rare. For those in despair there's a simple solution.

Which we'll get to during our time together. This picture of desolation and isolation is what we have here in Psalm 42. Which if you would keep open at page 447 of the Bibles would be very helpful because I'll be referring to it from time to time.

The psalm gives you an idea of what it would be like to be distant from God. It is a psalm that belongs to Psalm 43. Even though I'm only going to look at 42.

[3 : 35] The two psalms are linked by the refrain of verses 5 and 11 of verse 42. Which is exactly the same as verse 5 of Psalm 43. Which reads, Why are you cast down, O my soul?

And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God. For I shall again praise him. My help and my God. Psalm 42 is commonly referred to as an individual lament.

A lament is an urgent prayer uttered in situations of need. Perhaps the military defeat and humiliation of the nation. Or in this case, the affliction, illness or persecution of the individual.

Laments are dominated by a detailed description of the psalmist's need. And boy, if we get a really detailed one in here. The actual request of the psalmist is usually expressed only in general terms. And the psalmist looks forward to returning. To thank God when God's delivered. Indeed, he often begins praising God.

[4 : 53] He begins praising God now for the deliverance that he's going to expect in the future. The psalm also is the start of book 2 of the psalms.

And he's set in dry, desolate Israel. This particular psalm itself has two parts to it. Verses 1 to 5, which I've called the drought.

And verses 6 to 11, which I've called the depths. In each part, the psalmist lets himself go by expressing his feelings.

He makes himself think by turning away from his present despair. And then he pulls himself together. So firstly, the drought.

The psalm starts by creating for us an image of drought in verse 1, where we see a deer longing or panting for flowing streams.

[5 : 53] Please note that in verses 1 to 3, they're in present tense. And that becomes significant later as we go through the psalm. As mentioned earlier, Israel was a dry and desolate place, without much water.

If any. Animals need water to ensure that they live. Therefore, the deer is looking for its stream of life in order to survive.

The yearning and crying deer, in verse 1, is an effective picture of the torment and the consuming desire with which the psalmist stretches out for Yahweh.

Just as the deer is longing for his next drink in the dry land, the psalmist longs for God himself.

There's an intense, deep, deep desire in both the deer and the psalmist in what they're after.

But there's an implicit waiting here for their particular desire. The deer for the water. And it could be waiting a while because rain in the desert does not happen that often.

[7 : 11] As for the psalmist for God, waiting for God, we don't know the time when he's going to meet God. But his desire to do so is deep.

It's a deep, inner desire. As his soul thirsts for God in verse 2, he's aching to meet with God because he's dry without him.

In other words, the psalmist is like a thirsty deer waiting for a drink in a desert. Similarly in Africa, where famine conditions are rife, people are yearning, aching for their next meal.

They're in despair. They're hurting. There's a sign of, who's going to help us? They're lonely.

They're sad. They're crying.

Just like our psalmist. Our psalmist is crying in verse 3. And we're told that he's been crying day and night.

[8 : 24] Unless something is really, really hurting inside of you, there's no need for you to be crying day and night. When you cry, tears flow down from your eyes, which you already know.

But what they do, is they actually diminish your vision of people. If I was to cry now, people around here would be a blur.

I would not be able to see you as clearly while crying as I would normally. And the similar thing is happening here for the psalmist.

His view of God is diminished. And nothing else seems to matter to him because he's been crying day and night. It's overtaken his whole life.

It's in fact diminished his view of God. And to make matters worse, others around him have noticed that he's not the same person he once was. But do they comfort him?

[9 : 37] Do they go, there, there, it'll be alright? No. They say to him, cutting comments such as, where is your God?

And they say it continually in the end of verse 3. Where is your God? These guys cry. And people are going, where is your God?

In a taunting fashion. We don't know exactly what's stopping the psalmist from meeting God. But what's very clear from these three verses is that for the psalmist, distance from God is despairing.

Generally speaking, distance from loved ones is despairing. Distance from friends is very despairing. Distance from the one who provides is despairing as well.

And for us, distance from God is despairing. But, despite his despair, our despairing psalmist remembers some positive things.

[10 : 46] So much so, that he appears to almost turn his back on the despairing things. Excuse me. And completely ignore them.

Have a look at verse 4. These things as I remember. These things I remember as I pour out my soul. Now, note the change here from present to past tense.

How I went with the throng and led them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving. A multitude keeping festival.

This guy was partying with the people of God. He was really happy. He was really excited at this point. Boy, that would have wiped away a flood of tears.

It would have got him really excited. He remembers those good things. He remembers the joy that he felt and the enjoyment that he had. He remembers these great times despite the obvious despair that he's in.

[11 : 51] So, what we've got in verses 1-4 is on one hand a man in great despair because of his distance from God and distance from God's people.

But, on the other hand, we've got pleasant memories of the times that he has with his people. So, how does he resolve this despair that is within him and coincidentally has him remembering positive experiences at the same time?

Both positive and negative striking him at the same time. How does he get some balance in his life?

We'll take a look at verse 5. Why are you cast down, O my soul?

And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

His solution to his disquiet? Hope in God. In other words, he puts his future with him. The most excellent option that anyone who wants to believe in God can do.

[13 : 01] Anyone who wants to trust in God can do that. But why trust him? Well, let's look at the psalmist.

For someone in Old Testament Israel times, God has created the earth that he's lived in. God has rescued him out of slavery from the land of Egypt.

God has given him the promised land in the book of Joshua. Three things that just stand out very clearly.

But, what about us here on earth in the 21st century? We too can put our hope in God.

Why? Because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. In other words, we can hope in God not because of what he can do for us, but for what he has already done for us.

[14 : 15] These first five verses introduce the psalmist's thirst to meet with God. What's your thirst to meet with God like? Has it reached drought proportions?

How deep, how deep does your thirst go? Is it down here, right into your throat? Or is it just at the tip of your lips?

And it's the depth of the psalmist's thirst that's the subject of the rest of this passage. Verses 6-11 give us an indication that this yearning to be close to God was very deep.

The first part of verse 6 tells us that the righteous soul was cast down deep within him. In verses 6-7 we have our friend expressing the depths of his soul.

He's gone to the depths of his memory here. The height and depths of his closeness to God, his desire to be close to God, are reflected in verse 6 with reference to the place names.

[15 : 21] Let me explain this. Let me read the part I'm referring to from the land of Jordan and of Hermon from Mount Mesa. Mount Mesa is the place where this psalm was written but I'll get to that in a second.

Let me talk about Mount Hermon. Mount Hermon is referred to in Joshua 12. In the book of Joshua God's chosen people entered God's chosen land for them.

Mount Hermon was the highest peak in that land. It was the highest mountain in that land. Now, keep that in mind.

Mount Mesa. The word Mesa in Hebrew means hill.

So initially we've got this comparison between mountain on one side and little piddly hill on the other. Now, so what?

[16 : 32] It gets greater. Mount Mesa is located outside the promised land. So what we've got is the peak mountain Mount Hermon which he can see but he's a it looks like a minuscule dot in comparison to where he is which is Mount Mesa which is outside the promised land doesn't matter how far but the fact that he is outside God's chosen land for him is a significant part.

So he's looking from this piddly little hill up onto the peak of this giant mountain which he was once at with God's people.

So that's the place where these pleasant memories that he referred to in verse 4 are and he's miles away from it. He's exiled from it.

He's by himself. He's in dry desert arid Israel full of sand getting sand blown into his face etc. And it's swamping him.

It's despairing him. The despair is so much it's overwhelming him. Have a look at verse 7 which reads, deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts and that's waterfalls not bits on your eye and your billows which are great waves or surges of the sea which have gone over him.

[18 : 09] In the time that this psalm was written the crashing of water whether it be waterfalls or waves was a symbol of chaos and creation. The psalmist's mind as we've already seen is chaotic from the combination of despairing feelings and great memories rolled into one and just causing chaos in his mind.

He's so swamped by these feelings that it reminds him of the thunderous sounds of waterfalls and waves crashing over him. Reminds me of once going body surfing in Sydney.

Now the thought of me body surfing may conjure up some pretty ugly thoughts in your heads and it does in mine let me tell you. But I remember once going out at Avalon Beach which is known for some rather hefty waves and going body surfing.

And a wave just picked me up and it would have to have been a decent wave and slammed me face first into the sand.

The wave washed over. My pride was dented. I got up and not only did I spit a lot of sand out of my mouth, my back was rather heavily contorted.

[19 : 37] I felt really, really sore. But the pain I've experienced is tiddly wings compared to the pain this guy is actually going through in this psalm.

He's felt really, really wiped out. He's in real, real despair. It's deep. It's deeper than the muscles in my back.

It's right into his heart. So what we've seen in verses 6 to 7 are an overwhelmed psalmist, overwhelmed by despair and distance from God.

But again he comes up with something even more extraordinary. Again he blots out this extreme despair from his mind and comes up with verse 8 which reads by day the Lord commands his steadfast love and at night his soul is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.

He somehow again turns his back on the despair and looks back into his moth and remembers God's character. He goes really deep into the character of God.

[21 : 05] But despite this memory of the character of God in verse 8, in verse 9 he feels forgotten.

Now when you read this psalm you might be thinking not again, unfortunately yes, again. But the repetitiveness there is repurposed.

It actually shows the depth, the extreme depth of this guy's despair. And yes, whatever the cause, our relationships with God can in our mind appear distant despite those pleasant memories of who God is and our times with his people.

There can be times of repeated despair. I can remember back to a time in my life, about six years ago now, where I felt and really wondered where God was in a lot of things.

There was a time I was searching to work out what God wanted me to do next in life. And it wasn't an easy time. I'd moved out of home.

[22 : 21] Home wasn't fun at the best of times, at that time in particular. I had very little peer fellowship at the church I was at.

I felt isolated. I felt quite lonely. Lonely. And it was, I was living in a place where everybody else seemed to know each other.

But I knew nobody. It was lonely. My life seemed to consume of work, go home, sit in front of a box, go to sleep.

It was pretty desolate, pretty boring. It reminded me a lot of this psalm. I felt like saying what the psalmist said in verse 9, to God my rock, why have you forgotten me?

Why must I walk around mournfully, because the enemy oppresses me? I felt pounded down by Satan at that time. I did know that God was stable, as shown by the mention of the rock.

[23 : 43] And we know the rock is a symbol of stability. Through the parable where the house was built on the rock as being more stable than the one built on sand.

But the psalmist was also mournful under persecution. I wasn't persecuted, but the psalmist was. And who wouldn't be mournful under persecution?

He appeared to be without help. And because of these persecutory thoughts or taunts, he felt like death in verse 10, where it reads, as with a deadly wound in my body.

my adversaries taunt me while they say to me continually, where is your God? In apparent times of near death in his mind, the psalmist is asked, where is your God?

Is he the one that's going to rescue you from this death feeling? This feeling of death is the deepest feeling of despair one can have. There seems to be no rest from this.

[25 : 00] Or is there? Let's see what the psalmist does in verse 11. Why you cast down, O my soul, and why you disquiet within me?

Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God. God, he's got to the depths and he's put his hope in God.

By hoping in God, he is free from the deadly depths of despair that he is in, as well as his well-documented disquiet of present despair and pleasant memories.

It is God who frees us from death. It is God who breathes life into us. It is God who breathes life into the bones of Ezekiel. For us here in the new millennium, we can put our hope in God because of the life Jesus breathed upon us.

Now response to putting our hope in God? End of verse 11. For I shall again praise him, praise him as what?

[26 : 22] My help and my God. There are times in our lives when we feel real distant from God. It is a distance that makes us feel dry, deep in our hearts.

We feel forgotten by God. But the psalmist here says, hope in God, praise him, give thanks for who he is.

Dig back into those memories that are good about God that you have. A song I remember vividly has it as its first line, my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

righteousness. As Christians in the new millennium, that point is vital in society today.

For in society today, hope is what's going to happen tomorrow or what is going to happen tomorrow. tomorrow. I think I'd rather my hope in God than the next day's happenings.

[27 : 39] But if you're despairing in your relationship with God, there are some points from this psalm that help you get out of your despair. One, voice your feelings.

Cry out to God like the psalmist and don't be afraid to do it. God's there to hear them. He'll listen to you. Two, remember the good times, the times with his people, the times when your relationship with God was strong.

Remember the things that were happening at that time, usually things like your prayer life was going well, Bible study was going well and you were meeting with God's people on a regular basis at an irregular fruitful time.

All these things need to be worked on. I know, that's something I need to work on. So let's all work on it together and meet regularly. The third thing, put your hope in God and praise him.

How you do that can vary. But it can include singing deep meaning hymns or choruses with a good biblical bass. Colossians 3 tells us with gratitude in our hearts to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God.

[29 : 01] So since you praise him through song, it can be through other things. And fourthly, and I think probably most importantly, knowledge, God is yours.

In verses 5 and 11 of this song, we see the line, my help and my God. Is God your help? Is he your God?

Well, from isolation from God to fellowship with God, that's what God wants. And we've seen that's what the psalmist's journey's been.

Where are you? Are you in despair? Are you in hope? Either way, all that's needed for each of us to do is to put our hope in God.

Amen. Amen. morning, and we're in waiting.

[30 : 35] Thank you.