

Spiritual Dryness

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Date: 26 June 2016

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[0 : 00] The slogan, you've got to crack a solo, the thirst crusher. You see, we all know what it's like to be thirsty. So much so that ad campaigns are built around that idea of thirst.

But it's not just liquid drinks that we humans thirst for. We thirst for things in life as well, like relationships or money or a better house, a better health, a job, security.

Those are the sorts of things that people thirst for as well. And underlying all of them really is the thirst for joy or happiness, fulfillment, that kind of security in life, so that we are not downcast or depressed.

But as we'll see today, what we really need, what we really should be thirsting for is God himself in Christ. For it's in him we find lasting hope and happiness.

But before we get to that, let me give you some brief background. Today we begin a three-week mini-series in the Psalms, and the Psalms I've chosen are all ascribed to the Sons of Korah.

[1 : 07] Not the modern-day band, though they would have been good to get here, but the original Sons of Korah. And we see it in the title, if you've got your Bibles there, under the title Psalm 42, you've got this sentence in italics, a mascal of the Sons of Korah.

Now that is actually in the original Hebrew text. And the word Sons here means descendants of Korah, who were all Levites, and along with their cousins, like Asaph, were involved in music at the temple in Jerusalem.

Now it's not clear whether they wrote these Psalms, or whether they just wrote the music that went with the Psalms. Either way, these Psalms were meant to be sung, like we saw with Habakkuk chapter 3 last week, to help the Israelites remember what to do when they face downcast days.

And what I think is clear, though, is that Psalms 42 and 43 go together, which is why we're looking at them together today. You can actually see that. So in your Bibles there, next to Psalm 42, there's a little footnote C, and down the bottom it says that in many Hebrew manuscripts, Psalms 42 and 43 constitute one psalm.

And you can actually see it by just looking at this common chorus or refrain that is repeated through both Psalms. So have a look at Psalm 42, verse 5. He says, And that's repeated at the end of Psalm 42, but it's also repeated word for word at the end of Psalm 43.

[2 : 44] Do you see that? And so these two Psalms are meant to go together. And much like our songs today, there's a verse and then a chorus, a verse and a chorus.

In other words, this repeated refrain kind of divides these two Psalms into three sections and ends each of those sections. And so with that background in mind, let's look firstly at the first section, the writer's thirst, point one, verse one.

He says, As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Where can I go and meet?

With God. The writer is thirsty for God, he says. To be with God, to meet with God, to be with him perhaps in the temple. And this is a desperate kind of thirst.

Verse one is a pretty well-known verse. In fact, it's even been turned into a song. And usually it has a picture of a deer like Bambi. So, you know, slipping water on the side.

[3 : 50] But that's not quite the picture that we're given by the Psalmist. It's a much more desperate need. It's more like the next slide where, you know, tongue sticking out. I need a drink or I'm going to die kind of thirst.

You see, the Psalmist knows he needs God. He's desperate to be near God, with God, to drink in God's presence. Why?

Well, because he seems to be suffering in some way. So see verse three. He says, See, instead of being able to drink in God's presence to find comfort, he only has tears to drink.

He's suffering in some way, such that people can tease him and say, Where is your God? He must have left you for you to be suffering like this. Now, it's hard to know exactly what sort of suffering this is.

It could be persecution because he mentions a couple of times about being oppressed by the enemy, in verse nine, for example. Or it could be physical illness, which also gives people a chance to tease him and say, Where is your God?

[5 : 03] Isn't he looking after you? Or most likely, it's both. And like when Israel was conquered by an enemy nation and carried off to exile, away from God.

But the psalm itself is a little bit vague on the type of suffering. And I think it's deliberately vague so that we might be able to relate to it with whatever suffering we face, whether it be ongoing sickness of winter colds or sleepless nights caused by crying kids or more serious illnesses that threaten our lives, or perhaps the persecution that has even taken lives like those of our brothers and sisters in the Middle East.

What we do know, though, is that this suffering is made worse by the fact that he cannot be with God to find comfort, which is why he's thirsting for God. It's why he remembers being with God in the good old days where he could go to the temple.

Do you see verse four? He says, Now he is suffering and far from God.

And so he is downcast. And so much so that he even seems to struggle to keep trusting in God. We see it with the refrain where he talks to himself and tells him to keep trusting God.

[6 : 40] But we also see his struggle in the following verses. Point two, verse six. He says, And then he kind of gets depressed again.

And then deep, cause the deep in the roar of your waterfalls. All your waves and breakers have swept over me. And then it's kind of positive again. But by day, the Lord directs his love. At night, his song is with me.

A prayer to the God of my life. And then he kind of gets back down. You can see this waxing and waning kind of thing. I say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?

My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, where is your God? Do you notice how he kind of goes positive, then negative, then positive, up, down, up, down? You kind of get the sense of this struggle that he has to keep trusting God. And it's struggle because he's far from God.

[7 : 46] We've already seen this, but we see it again in verse six. He says he will remember God from the land of the Jordan, from Hermon, Mount Mazar. Now, these places are a long way away from the temple in Jerusalem where God dwelt.

So on the next slide is a map, I think. And at the top, with a black dot, that's where Mount Hermon was. And that's where the Jordan River began as it rushed down Mount Hermon and then down the south.

And the temple in Jerusalem is where the yellow dot is. You can see that he's physically far from God. And so we're not sure exactly what the situation is.

It could be around that time when the kingdom of Israel was divided into two. And so the northern kingdom, the green, kept the name Israel. And the southern kingdom was called Judah after its biggest tribe there.

And there was a bit of civil war, really. And so maybe he's trapped up the north. Or perhaps it could be the time when Assyria came across and took out the whole green part, took out the northern kingdom.

[8 : 53] And he's actually in exile in part of Syria. Or it could even be the time when the Babylonians came, like we heard from Habakkuk, and actually wiped out everything, you know, the beige, the green and the purple.

And so he's still trapped up north a long way from God. Whatever the situation, the psalmist is far from God. But not only is he far away from God, secondly, he struggles to keep going because he feels forgotten by God.

Do you see verse 7? He acknowledges that the waves and breakers, this suffering that he is going through, are under God's control. Yes, it says your waves and breakers.

He acknowledges that God is, you know, in control of this. But at the same time, he feels like God has let this suffering go on too long. To the point where he feels God has forgotten him.

So verse 9, he says, why have you forgotten me? And verse 10, his enemies taunt him and tease him, saying, where is your God? And we can sometimes feel like that, can't we?

[9 : 57] I mean, when we suffer and feel like God has forgotten us. Or even if we suffer and people have said, where is your God? How can he let you go through this? I remember talking with a person from our church whose adult children are not Christians.

She cannot make church on a Sunday. It's too difficult. In fact, she lives in constant pain. She's always on painkillers. And she's confined to a wheelchair in a nursing home about five metres by three metres big.

So it's a very small room. And one day the pain was particularly bad and her children came around to help. And they said to her, if God is really real, then why doesn't he help you?

And at that point she admitted she wished her children were less helpful. But you see, they were effectively saying, has God forgotten you? Where is he? And even she admitted that someday she finds it hard to keep trusting God because of her suffering.

She, like the psalmist, struggles to keep trusting God. It's up and down. But here's the thing to also notice about the psalmist here. He's not given up on God, has he?

[11 : 06] In fact, his very struggle shows that he's trying to persevere in trusting God. And so verse six, he says, my soul is downcast within me.

And so what does he do in the rest of verse six? He says, therefore, I will bar you, God. I will walk away from you, God. No, he says, therefore, I will remember you, God.

Or take verse seven, the waves of suffering have swept over him. He's drowning in it. And yet verse eight, he remembers God's love or literally his steadfast love, his loving kindness that has made him one of God's people and continues to direct him by day and sing to him by night.

You see, he perseveres and struggles to keep going. And the way he does it is by reminding himself of God and what he has in God. In fact, he even talks to himself, doesn't he?

They say talking to yourself is the first sign of madness, but it's not so here. He speaks to how he feels with what he knows. And so he says, verse 11, why my soul are you downcast?

[12 : 16] Why so disturbed with me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my savior and my God. See, he not only remembers who God is and God's steadfast love, he also talks to himself and encourages himself, tells what he's feeling and tells what he's feeling with what he knows, speaks with what he knows.

And it seems that this is now what he does. For he does put his hope in God, he prays to God. And he has some confidence, I think, that God will answer.

So we're up to point three and Psalm 43. He prays, vindicate me, my God, and plead my cause against an unfaithful nation, whether it's the northern kingdom or Assyria or Babylon, we don't know.

Rescue me from those who are deceitful and wicked. You are God, my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?

Send me your light and your faithful care. Let them lead me. Let them bring me to your holy mountain in Jerusalem, to the place where you dwell, he says.

[13 : 26] Here the psalmist prays for two things, really. First, that God would vindicate him.

Remember, his enemies have seen his suffering, whatever it is, and they tease and taunt him, saying, Where is your God?

He must have left you for you to be going through all this. And so he prays that God would rescue him from his enemies, perhaps from exile, and in so doing, prove to his enemies that God has not forgotten him.

Show his enemies that he was right to keep trusting God. In other words, vindicate his faith in God. That's the first thing he prays. The second thing he prays is that God would also lead him back into his presence, back to his holy mountain, back to the temple.

You see, whatever has brought on this depression and downcast spirit, the psalmist knows that God is the solution. That's why the psalmist thirsts for God.

That's why he repeats that phrase, to put your hope in God. That's why he now prays to be back with God. And there is a bit of confidence that God will answer his prayer, because he starts planning what he will do once he's back in the temple.

[14 : 32] Do you see verse 4? He says, Then I will go to the altar of God at the temple, to God my joy and my delight, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.

You see, there's a bit of confidence here that God will answer his prayer. You see, you don't usually plan to do something unless you're sure you're going to be there to do it. Do you?

And so by planning what he will do back in the temple, it shows he has some confidence that God will answer his prayer to be brought back to the temple. And so the last chorus of the psalm is, I think, meant to be more confident.

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God. The question, I guess, for us this morning is, what does it teach us?

Well, first, we are the thirst for God to find true hope and happiness. You see, the world teaches us to thirst for more stuff or better jobs or more relationships.

[15:41] And the problem is those things never last all that long and they don't always make us happy. I mean, our jobs are not secure. Some of you here today know firsthand what that's like. Our wealth goes up and down, as does our health.

Again, people here know what that's like. Holidays are good times. I mean, I'm going on holidays next week. Looking forward to it. But have you ever noticed that when you get back, it only takes about a week to forget what the holiday was like?

It doesn't last all that long. Well, have you ever noticed how people get the latest iPhone or whatever it is, only to want the next one that comes out? And relationships are often spoiled by sin and certainly by death, such that they don't always bring joy.

Now, don't get me wrong. These are all good things. It's just that we cannot rely on them to always bring hope and happiness, true joy, because they don't always last or are spoiled by sin.

But God is not spoiled by sin. And he does last forever. And so he can continue. So he can continue to give hope and joy. So he is the one we're to thirst for.

[16:50] That's why the psalmist thirsts for God throughout both psalms and longs to be near God, because he knows God is the one who gives lasting hope and happiness. That's why he says, put your hope in God.

That's why he calls God his joy, his delight. There was a Christian writer in the fourth century called Augustine, who wrote this on the next slide, I think it is.

This is what he said. He says, of God, you, God, have formed us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

See, whether we realize it or not, we've been made for God. And so whether you realize it or not, we need God. In him, we add a thirst for and find lasting hope and happiness.

I don't know if you've ever seen the movie Night at the Museum. Night at the Museum is one, two, a few people anyway. On the next slide, Mickey Rooney is the short guy in the middle there, one of the grumpy security guards.

[17:55] Last I heard, he was in the Guinness Book of Records for the longest acting career in Hollywood. Earned mega bucks, long career, lots of accolades and awards, and lots of wives.

He was married eight times. And I remember hearing on an interview, the interviewer say, oh, you've had this great career. You've got all this money. You've won all these prizes.

You've even had lots of relationships. And he was saying it like a good thing. And Mickey Rooney, who had not long become a Christian, said it was terrible. None of it ever satisfied.

You see, he realized the hard way that what he really needed to be satisfied was God in Christ. Because that's how we're built. That's who we're made for.

In fact, even last Sunday, there was a guy who gave his testimony at 5 o'clock church who has an auntie in Singapore who owns lots of property and cars. And if you know anything about Singapore property, you know that means she's mega rich, right?

[18:54] And yet this guy said, my auntie has everything she could possibly want and is one of the most unhappy and grumpy people I know. I don't like going there.

See, we had a thirst for God, not for stuff. Because God is the one who gives lasting hope and happiness. And so have you realized, as the psalmist did, that we need God?

And secondly, have you realized not only that if you need God, that Jesus is the one we are to come to to find satisfaction, to find quenching for our thirst.

Our thirst for things is only met in Christ and Christ alone. He is the true solo, the thirst crusher, if you like. Oh, let's go with what Jesus said.

On the next slide, Jesus himself said from our second reading, anyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water, welling up to eternal life.

[19 : 59] Jesus is saying that when we come to him and believe in him, he will give us living water, which he makes clear later on in John's gospel that he's referring to the spirit. And the spirit will live in us, which means God is really near us and ready to help us when we pray to him.

We don't have to go to the temple like the psalmist did. No, no, we have God with us by his spirit, working in our minds and our conscience, directing us. You can't get much closer to God than that. And what's more, Jesus says that this living water wells up into eternal life. Elsewhere, this eternal life is described as a living hope, a secure heavenly inheritance. And so on the next slide, from 1 Peter, it leads to these words.

He says, In God's great mercy has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

It's certain, it's secure, kept in heaven for you. And if that's not enough, who through faith, you are also shielded by God's power and to the coming of that salvation that is ready to be revealed in that last time.

[21 : 09] In this, then, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to have suffered grief in all kinds of trials. You see, in Christ and Him alone, we receive living or secure hope.

By His death and resurrection, we have a heavenly inheritance that will never perish, spoil or fade. And that God will shield us and ensure that we make it to that inheritance.

And because this inheritance is secure, then we can rejoice. We have some pretty serious Essendon fans amongst us here at the 1030 congregation.

I won't mention any names, Paul. Simon's away today. And as you know, the Bombers are at the bottom of the ladder. Now imagine if Paul and Simon knew that the Bombers would win every single premiership from next year onwards.

Guaranteed. Not by cheating either. Imagine if they knew that was certain. Now wouldn't that, knowing that certain future, help them to still rejoice in the present misery?

[22 : 21] It would, wouldn't it? Knowing what's to come. You see, in Christ, our future inheritance is certain so it helps us to rejoice in the present, even though we face tough times and downcast days.

So not only are we to thirst for God instead of the things of this world, we also to come to Christ to have our thirst met, to receive that hope and happiness, that certain heavenly inheritance in the future, which means we can still rejoice in the present.

So have you done that? Have you come to Christ? Have you put your trust in him? Do you believe in Jesus? Third and finally, for us who do believe, then we must remember what we have in Christ. You see, we will still face tough times and even downcast days. I should add that when the psalm speaks of being downcast, he's not talking about clinical depression, which is a real mental health issue that might need medical help.

Rather, he's talking about when life is hard and the days are cold, like below seven degrees, when things go wrong or when we're just down in the dumps for whatever reason.

[23 : 29] What are we to do then? Well, we're to do what the psalmist did. We're to talk to ourselves. Maybe not out loud in public, but we're to talk to ourselves. We're to remind how we feel with what we know.

We're to remind ourselves of who our living God is and what we have in Christ. A God whose steadfast love gave his only son to die for us and adopt us as his children. A God who is near us by his spirit and ready to help us to keep trusting in him.

A God who has given us a hope and inheritance that is living and secure in Christ. So we have reason to rejoice, to be truly joyful, happy, just like we saw with Habakkuk last week.

When I was at college, there was a guy in our year who found out his wife was pregnant, which was very exciting for them because they'd been trying to have children for a while. But then they found out that their child had Down syndrome which brought them down.

And it wasn't so much the prospect of having to look after this child for the rest of their lives, as hard work as that would be. The thing that really made them downcast was knowing that he would not get to enjoy the things that others would in life.

[24 : 37] That he would not reach his potential. And while they rightly mourned over the effects of sin in the world, some days it just led to a kind of depressed state, I remember.

Yet I still remember they did what the psalmist did. They reminded each other of what they have in Christ. The hope that their child now has because he has some sort of faith in Christ.

That one day his body would be transformed to be like Christ's glorious body. That he would receive an inheritance that would never perish, spoil or fade. And that he would reach his potential in the life to come.

See, that's what we need to keep doing. Keep speaking to ourselves. Reminding ourselves of what we have in Christ. Talking to how we feel with what we know. Like the lady who I mentioned confined to the wheelchair in her small five by three meter room pain every day.

She has three Bibles scattered around her small room because she's confined to a wheelchair.

That way she knows she has access to God's word at any point in the room so she can read it and remember who her God is.

[25 : 46] His steadfast love for her. Her secure hope in heaven. Such that when her children who sometimes say where is your God? She can say he's with me and he gave his son for me so I can go to him in heaven and there there'll be no more pain.

She can still smile and laugh with people like me who visit her. We've got to keep talking to ourselves. Remembering what we have in Christ. Why my soul are you downcast?

Why so disturbed within me? Remember your hope is secure in Christ so I will still praise him my saviour and my God.

Let's pray. Our heavenly father we do thank you for your word which speaks into real life.

Father we thank you for this psalm today that points us to you to thirst for you and ultimately points us to Christ in whom our thirst is met in whom we find lasting hope and joy.

[26 : 55] And so father when times are tough or days are downcast help us to keep talking to ourselves with what we know about you and what we have in Christ for we ask it in his name.

Amen. Amen.