

Sixth Sunday after Trinity

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Date: 16 July 2023

Preacher: Rev. Daniel Avitan

- [0:00] We enter into the summer series this morning. We wrapped up a short series from Easter till last Sunday on Ezra and Nehemiah.
- Now in the Bible there are two separate books, but in the original Hebrew text there would be one specific book and we wrapped that up last week. Now we're in a summer series on the Psalms, specifically the second book of the Psalter.
- So this morning I'll open up the second book, Psalms 42 and 43. Again, separated in our Bibles, but very, very likely to be one solid Psalm.
- So why don't I pray and ask the Lord's blessing and we will jump right into it. Lord, thank you that we have your word and specifically that we have the Psalter. Lord, it is a wonderful collection of prayers for your people.
- Prayers by your people. And Lord, some of the prayers are bold prayers. Some of the prayers are spicy prayers and aggressive prayers and prayers of woe.
- [1:05] And Lord, it teaches us that you desire us to talk to you exactly where we're at. Lord, you want us to be authentic and honest and real and raw to you.
- So Lord, this morning as we open up your word and take a look at Psalm 42 and 43. Lord, help us this morning to see the great benefit and blessing that it is that we can pray such prayers.
- And Lord, even more than that, remind us afresh that your hope is steadfast. And it is the only true, eternal, long-lasting hope that we could have. We pray this in Christ's name.
- Amen. Amen. I'll be dabbing my brow and drinking a whole bunch of water this morning. It's hot in here. So if you do that too, that's great.
- We'll do it together. In preparation for today's message, I spent some time listening to a talk given by Dr. Chen Hellman.
- [2:05] He's a professor at the University of Oklahoma and a founder of the Hope Research Center. Now, I hadn't heard of that before, but I wanted to see kind of the best of the best in terms of what academics and psychologists would say about hope.
- And it was a great video. It was a 20-minute video. And in it, he shared his own story about hopelessness as a teen. And he was homeless at a certain point.
- He was a very broken young man. And he desired to escape his trauma and stressors so much so that it led him to a plan for suicide.
- This was until a trusted educator and mentor came up to him. And the way he described it as, this man sat beside him and leaned into him and said nothing for two or three minutes.
- Now, try saying nothing for two minutes beside somebody. Kind of uncomfortable. But two to three minutes, he sat beside this guy, leaned into him, and then got up and said to him, Chen, it's going to be all right.
- [3:16] And for whatever reason, this was the beginning of this transformational hope in his life away from suicide and towards meaning. It's a really interesting story.

Hope saved this man's life from suicide and sparked in him a desire to explore and to research hope and the nature of it.

And it seems like they've done some great work at this Hope Research Center in Oklahoma. In the same talk, Dr. Hellman would go on to say that our connectedness to others and to something greater than ourselves, outside of ourselves, is one of the single greatest predictors of hope.

The longer one lives, the more one realizes that life can be difficult to navigate. Disappointments, pain, trauma, loss, betrayal, sickness, death, all can be terribly crippling to our outlook and prospects for the future because they rob us of hope that things will improve or that our future will be better than our present.

The longer we live, generally speaking, the more we see that life is tough. This is how depression can move in and make a home in our lives when hope begins to disappear.

[4 : 42] So Psalm 42 and 43 are incredibly honest about depression and incredibly honest about hope. It's honest about depression because it talks about its causes and what it may look like and how to acknowledge our depression.

But more importantly, how to combat it. And it will be with hope. So these two psalms, like I mentioned, are likely one psalm originally.

And in it, there's three fairly distinct sections. So we're going to treat the psalm as, in a sense, one poem with three distinct sections.

And we're going to see what hopelessness and depression looks like. And specifically, we'll see that it looks like spiritual dryness sometimes. Other times, it'll be spiritual oppression.

And other times, spiritual injustice. And I tack spiritual in front of those three descriptors of depression because ultimately everything is a spiritual reality.

[5 : 49] We are not just human beings that dabble in some spirituality here and then. We are deeply spiritual. We are a body. We are a mind.

We are a soul. So, in a sense, depression is a spiritual reality. So, spiritual dryness, spiritual oppression, spiritual injustice.

But more importantly, this psalm will teach us how God can combat that. How? With reminders of the past that testify to what he will do in the future. Also, with his strength and stability.

And then finally, with his truth and his light. So, why don't we jump right into it? We'll look at chapter 42, verses 1 to 4 to begin. If you have a Bible, please follow along.

There should be some Bibles in the back that you can grab at any point in the service. Let's look at verses 1 and 2. As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.

[6 : 54] My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? The parched spirit is the human desire to find eternal meaning and belonging.

Mankind desires meaning above all else. We don't simply work to get food, to eat it, to go on our way. We want something that we can engage in, that is bigger than us.

Something that we're working towards. The feeling that we are complete and whole. That we have a purpose in our day-to-day and worthwhile goals that are achievable in the future.

This is our search for meaning. But more than that, we have a desire. And it looks different from different people and different cultures. But I would put forward to you that across human history and across human culture, that we have a desire to be fully known, accepted, and loved.

And not for a moment, not for a couple days or for a season, but forever, for eternity. St. Augustine's famous opening, and we've mentioned this throughout this opening season in our church plant, but St. Augustine's famous opening to his confessions articulates this perfectly.

- [8:15] It says, You have made us for yourself. We are restless until we find our rest in you. The human heart longs for fellowship and communion with the living God, and it is restless until it finds God.

Or better, until God finds the human heart. Whether we can articulate that or not, that is the heart that is the motivation of humanity.

So coming to faith in Jesus Christ is the achievement of our greatest desire, the satisfaction of our most deeply held desires. We get to know God and be known by Him.

The perfect peace that comes to our restless hearts. But here's the thing about Psalm 42. It is not a psalm that is prayed by an unbeliever or a spiritual seeker, but by one of God's own children.

And yet, there's still this kind of parched spirit, this brokenness, this longing after God. I thought I was supposed to be corrected when somebody comes to faith. This is the choir master.

- [9:27] He is not some person who has been a Christian for maybe, you know, a couple months or even a couple years. This is the person that leads the worship of God by the people of God.

A leader in the faith community. He is calling out to God with a longing heart as if God was actually completely absent. Is this a fall from grace?

Has this man lost his salvation? Is he a terrible spiritual seeker? Is he just some big hypocrite who's finally come to his wits end and said, God, okay, it's a big charade.

Now I want to get right with you. I'm not sure. But I would put forward to you that it is, it's not the case at all. I mean, listen, this is the reality.

We come to faith in Christ. We know his forgiveness. We enjoy the fellowship with the Father. We trust that by the Holy Spirit's power. We grow in holiness and righteousness, desiring the things that God desires.

- [10:29] We might even have a spiritual experience or a season of spiritual experiences that excites our very being and then a disappointment rattles us to the core.

Jars our faith. We become jaded with church and religion because miracles and faith, they seem to become increasingly implausible to our minds.

Maybe a scandal or an incident of abuse in the church pushes us away. All of a sudden, we find ourselves feeling as though God is not close or maybe even He does not exist.

And this is on the other side of coming to faith. This is the faithful person praying here. Listen, the psalmist continues. Look with me in verse 3 and continue on. My tears have been my food day and night.

That's, he's essentially saying, I am so distraught, I can't even bring myself to eat. While they say to me all the day long, where is your God? These things I remember as I pour out my soul, how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts, songs of praise, a multitude, keeping, festival.

- [11:45] Notice that the psalmist feels spiritually depleted. The accusations of those around him are what he is feeling himself to a degree.

Where are you, God? Like, where are you? You're supposed to come through. Where are you? It's a very honest response. And I'll put forward to you that it is not a sign of a lost faith, but of a restless heart that desires to rest in God.

Notice that the psalmist is pouring out his heart. It says it in verse 4. These things I remember as I pour out my soul.

This is an honest man here. There's an authenticity and rawness being displayed. He's not numbing the restlessness with distractions. I'll tell you, that is a growing problem amongst us, amongst me.

Nor is he accusing God of being anything other than he claims to be. God, you said you'd come through and you're not keeping up your end of the bargain to hell with you.

[12:53] He's not saying that. He's not cursing God, nor is he pretending that God doesn't exist. Instead, what is he doing? He's being honest and pouring out his heart, his very guts, to God.

And this is what he does in the midst of this. He remembers the past. And this is the key to this next portion. He remembers the past of what the Lord has done and is remembering that God, if he is faithful in the past and he is unchanging, then surely he's going to be faithful in the present.

But I'll just say one of these things. And this is one of the examples that I didn't give that might rattle your faith. Maybe there's embarrassment about a past spiritual experience you've had.

You come from a charismatic background or you had a zeal in your 20s that might be rather embarrassing in your 30s, 40s, or 50s. That maybe you used to clap in church.

You'd encourage people in maybe overly sentimental ways. Whatever it may be, you're a bit embarrassed of it now. Maybe it's some of the things you believed that you held to that clearly after some time in God's Word and years studying and sitting under Bible teaching, you realize maybe that wasn't the right thing to believe.

[14:20] But you're embarrassed of it now. You know, I'll just say this. The zeal of a young person should not be an embarrassment to that same person when they're older.

Because the heart was there. And I don't want to get overly sentimental with talking about the heart. He had the right heart. I mean, that's a terrible excuse for a lot of things, okay? But for the young person that is moved to worship God in such a way that you look back and it's kind of cringy, don't look back and cringe.

Look back and see the Lord's faithfulness as a youth. See that zeal and say, Lord, thank you for that wonderful season. Could you do something similar?

But for me today, not 20 years back me. Trust that the experience of the past is not so embarrassing that you forget God in the present.

Having a season where God feels distant is something that all Christians feel. But like in verses 1-4, God is not so absent that He doesn't hear the prayers.

[15:31] This man is praying to God. God clearly isn't absent. He is there. He just is not there in the way that is giving this man rest.

So let's pause here quickly. You'll notice I'm skipping over verse 5. I will skip over three verses and then we'll get to them at the end. We'll skip verse 5. So we see that there is a spiritual dryness that comes.

It's a reality for God's people and it comes from all sorts of different avenues. But let's look at this next section, verses 6-11, where it's not a spiritual dryness, but rather a spiritual oppression.

Before we read, you'll notice that the imagery of verses 1-5 was that of a desert. Here the imagery is this oppression, these feelings of being overwhelmed.

It's an image of being by a waterfall, a fast-moving current, water that is both, I'm sure, beautiful to watch, but destructive to enter into.

[16 : 39] Read with me verses 6-10. And my God, my soul is cast down within me. Therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mitzar.

Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls. All your breakers and your waves have gone over me. By day the Lord commands His steadfast love and at night His song is with me.

A prayer to the God of my life. I say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning? Because of the oppression of the enemy.

Verse 10, As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me while they say to me all the day long, where is your God? The second time that question comes up, where is your God?

Now He is being oppressed and taunted. Here we have a picture of a person who is completely overwhelmed by opposing forces. Again, like in the previous section, we are not told what the specifics are.

[17 : 42] In some way that's a beauty of the Bible in sections like this because it helps us to then apply it to any situation in our own lives. We see in verse 9 and 10 that these enemies are causing great anguish, they're mocking, they're taunting.

He is caught in a torment. Sorry, He is caught in a torrent. He is slammed by untamable waves and waterfalls. This deep calls out to deep.

On one hand, it's this beautiful kind of lyric and songs and a prayer that we could pray, and it might be that symbolically. We might read it in such a way, but in the original language here in Psalm 42, deep calls to deep is, it's like massive body of water slamming onto me.

Calls to another one, come over here, slam onto him. It's this picture of these destructive forces crashing non-stop onto this person.

Complete overwhelmed feeling. It's like being underneath Niagara Falls. Where is your hope? How can you possibly fight against a waterfall?

[18 : 54] You can't. You are completely overwhelmed. And this is what is happening to this person. He is being overwhelmed by opposing forces. He is in great anguish.

The mocking and the taunting is something that he just, he can't stand up. He has lost his footing. He is thrashing around. Has God forgotten him?

Again, verse 10. Where is your God? Where are you, God? Sometimes we are overwhelmed by situations and ideas that either run counter to or distract us from the call of faith in Christ.

It feels like an unending barrage that causes us to be disoriented and causing our footing to slip. That we can't seem, we can't seem to stand upright.

And it might cause us to doubt and it might sap our courage. So, in our culture, in our day in Ottawa, in Canada, 2024, the most obvious barrage that is against people that want to take their faith seriously in the triune God is around gender identity ideology and it runs counter to and rejects the unchanging tradition of male and female created in God's image.

[20 : 09] And it is hard, it is very hard to stand firm when it is a constant feature from media and from friends and co-workers and family. It's like a torrent.

How do you stand for what the scriptures say of a biblical anthropology when it seems like deep is calling out to deep and barraging us in such a way that we don't have footing and we can't stand?

If we do stand, what do we do? I mean, we risk being labeled as intolerant or hateful or fear the loss of promotion or income or opportunities. It's very difficult.

Wave after wave comes crashing down on our heads. We may even feel hopeless. Friends, in a sense, this only proves that we can't manufacture our own hope.

Remember, I have no idea, by the way, if Dr. Chen from the University of Oklahoma is Christian or not, but remember what he said about hope. That it must, in a sense, come from outside of us.

[21:12] From some external source. We can't manufacture hope. That kind of strength within us. Notice in verse 9, this is exactly what the psalmist recognizes as well.

He says, I say to God, my rock. Now, he goes on to say, why have you forgotten me? Now, God hasn't forgotten him, but God is the rock.

He is the firm foundation. Not ourselves. Not our own resolve. Not our own ability to grit our teeth and push back in an endless war against the culture. That will run you into the ground.

Now, there are times to stand for truth, of course, but that, by your own strength, will run you into the ground. God is the rock. He is our only hope.

So, for those that do not subscribe to a biblical worldview or struggle to believe it within our congregation, consider this. The ideas that so deeply are cherished today quickly become ridiculed tomorrow.

[22:14] It seems like it's, we have a failure to remember this. Okay, 400 years ago, the transatlantic slave trade wasn't opposed by every corner of the world, by everybody who lives and breathes.

People of different ethnicity, namely, black West Africans, were seen as inferior, non-humans. who holds that today, by and large?

And the fringe groups that do, we rightfully reject. How about 150 years ago, King Leopold of Belgium, he justified one of the most brutal colonizations of Congo, of the Congo.

Now, that was, that was mainstream thought. Nobody would agree with that today. How about Margaret Sanger, who championed eugenics in some of the poorest neighborhoods in America, among some of the poorest communities of color in America.

Eugenics was, friends, it was the science 100, 120 years ago. That's what you held on to. Now, well, maybe it's still, in a sense, held on to it, but by and large, eugenics is seen as a terrible thing.

[23:29] 50 years ago, Henry Morgenthauer, a Holocaust survivor, normalized genocide among unborn children in the sterile rooms of clinics across Canada.

And today, healthy people are having irreversible surgeries to affirm mental instability. Why do I say all this? Because what is held today as rock-solid truth will tomorrow, God willing, be seen as broken and outdated and, by and large, embarrassing.

as a culture. We will lament about it. That's why our hope is not in our own ability to navigate this, but in the solid rock who is God.

He talks about here that God, His love, is steadfast. Now, if the rock of God who is steadfast that is unchanging will go on through eternity and be able to give us footing in a very tumultuous time, should we not trust in that?

God, it's not easy. I'm not suggesting it's easy and I'm not suggesting we look down our nose at those that are outside of the church or those inside of the church that struggle with a Christian worldview.

[24:44] It is hard. That's why we look to the Lord and we trust that He is compassionate and merciful, that His steadfast love will endure. Let's pause there.

We'll jump to verse 43. So, if this psalm teaches us about a spiritual dryness and a spiritual oppression and how God combats both with His strength and His reminder of what He has done in the past with His faithfulness, then the third aspect, and we'll see this in chapter 43 is spiritual injustice.

So, read with me. Only five verses here. We'll read one to four. Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people from the deceitful and unjust man.

Deliver me. For You are the God in whom I take refuge. Why have You rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

Send out Your light and Your truth. Let them lead me. Let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise You with the lyre.

[25:57] O God, my God. Another such example here, deception and injustice. Think of how people aren't given an honest shake.

They're not steel man, they're straw man. They're slandered, they're rejected, oppressed, canceled. They are, sound bites are taken and used as fodder to eliminate them from the public scene altogether.

This feeling of rejection and oppression boils down to lies. And lies are awfully powerful. So the cry is for God to send out His light and His truth to it, expose the lies for what they are, to expose the darkness for what it is, and to lead this person, this man, back to intimacy and joy.

To remember that God is a God who keeps His promises, that wants to have us know that He knows us, and that it will result in joy.

This man, looking with me again, excuse me, in verse 4, then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy. I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.

[27:18] Listen, this is what God can do. He exposes lies. He leads us into all truth. And the fear for us is that if we embrace God's truth and light, we will be miserable.

But the reality is we will have joy. And this is where we must take God's word by faith. Here's the conclusion.

Now I skipped over verses 5 of chapter 42, verse 11 of chapter 42, and verse 5 of chapter 43.

And I'll read them all right now. Why are you downcast, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him.

My salvation in my God. Verse 11 Why are you downcast, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him.

[28:13] My salvation and my God. And then chapter 43, verse 5 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him.

My salvation and my God. Friends, hope in a God that has experienced spiritual dryness. Jesus Himself upon the cross, fully man, fully God, what does He cry out?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Except that unlike in here, God forsook Jesus so that we would be accepted by Him, brought into His fold. Hope in the God that has experienced spiritual oppression and feelings of being completely overwhelmed.

Jesus, as He's headed to the cross, He says this in Luke 22, 42. He says, Father, if You're willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done.

And it goes on in verse 44. And being in agony, Jesus prayed more earnestly, and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Jesus knows what it's like to feel oppressed.

[29 : 23] He does. Which means that we can put our trust in Him. Hope in that God. And finally, friends, hope in the God that has experienced complete spiritual injustice, the kind that none of us can relate to.

For Christ hung upon a tree, the Creator dying for His creation, the most unjust punishment for the most innocent and perfect person, completely rejected for you, so that you will be accepted by God the Father.

God hears you. If you're going through a spiritually dry time, or you're feeling oppressed and overwhelmed, if you're feeling that there's just lies upon lies, and people are misjudging you and mishearing you, and there's just a sense of injustice that you are experiencing, know that He hears you, that He is not distant.

He is not distant, because He has come down in the person of Jesus Christ. He hears you. You're not crazy if you continue to talk, and it feels like you're just talking to the walls.

He hears you. And He will speak, primarily through His Word, is God's Word written. He will speak to you through the Scriptures. He will remind you of His truth and His faithfulness in the past.

[30 : 43] He will remind you that as you look to Him, as you hear His voice, that He will not leave you or forsake you. And you can only, in a sense, experience that if you put your hope in Him.

If you look outside of yourself, to Him, to the rock that will never be moved, then that will never be changed. And friends, maybe not today, maybe not this week, but if you put your hope in Christ, you will have joy.

And the type of joy that will bleed into eternity. It will be wonderful. Let's pray. Lord, thank You for Psalm 42 and 43. Thank You that the Psalms help us to pray honest prayers.

Thank You that they also give us hope, not in ourselves, not in things, or people, or in money, or in prestige, or reputation, but in the unchanging God that always leads to life and light.

Lord, we, and to truth. Lord, we thank You for this. Lord, for those of us, myself included, that struggle with courage, that feel like we are overwhelmed with what it means to follow You and to be Your people in this day.

[32 : 06] Lord, help us to be people of prayer, to encourage one another, to pray for one another. And Lord, we ask and expect that You will come to meet us.

We thank You, Lord. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.