

Psalm 42, 43 AM

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[0 : 0 0] Well, friends, while the kids do their artwork, I think I'm going to get you all to draw the same picture. That would be very interesting. That's not what I'm going to do. What I'm going to do is turn you back to Psalm 42 and 43. So if you take your Bibles out and turn back to Psalm 42 and 43, there were actually one Psalm, and I'm so glad that Jacob did what he did, and Peter got up and gave him the right passage. Micah was good, but Psalm 42 and 43 are even better. These two Psalms became my companions about 22 years ago, and I thought they were about depression, and I was moving into a depression, and so I preached them, and then in 2004, we went to England, and I took a friend's church for the summer in a village outside London called Harpenden. I preached a series on the Psalms, and I preached these two Psalms, and if the congregation was not depressed when they came to church that morning, they sure were when they finished. However, I've come to a much better mind, and I don't think they're about that. I think they are about what it means to be truly human, about who we are and whose we are, and they are both 42 and 43 are one Psalm, and they're built around this threefold repeated phrase. If you look at 42.5 and 42.11 and 43.8, three times the Psalmist says, 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. So there's nothing artificial or superficial about the Psalm. It's full of despondency and dejection and disappointment and darkness, but it's not about clinical depression, which many of us Christians struggle with.

It's not about the Monday blues. It's not because the writer has sinned gratefully and feels terribly guilty, nor is it because of some tragedy or suffering in their life or some great loss.

The two Psalms are about the central conundrum of human existence, the great contradiction in the Christian life or in life in general, and it is the absence of God.

And this is not, he's not writing as an immature or a weak believer. But here is something every mature Christian believer struggles with from time to time, the presence of the absence of God. And the thing that makes it much more difficult is that he knows God alone is the salvation and satisfaction for his soul. And yet he feels forgotten and rejected by God. So look down at verse 9 of 42.

I say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of my enemy? Or 43.2? You are the God in whom I take refuge. Why have you rejected me?

[3 : 46] As Will said, everyone believes there's something wrong with the world and even with us. It's why we have this desperate search for meaning and for identity and for hope. But all the different views of humanity and what it really means to be human that are on offer today cannot deal with this darkness and cannot satisfy our deepest longings if they leave God out of the picture. So I've got two points. The psalmist makes two points which I'll just move through quite briefly this morning. And the first point is this. To be human is to need God. Our souls are parched, panting, dehydrated without God. Do you see those first two verses? As the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before his presence? It's not a Disney film. This is the picture of a deer close to death, panting, thinking about the water that they need before they die. And the psalmist says, in just the same way, my soul pants for you. My soul thirsts for you for the living God because you're the only source of life and living water. And every human being, all of us, we need, our souls need God just as a dying deer needs water. We're dazed and confused and disoriented and distressed and spiritually dehydrated when we sense that disconnection from God. When God feels far away or unreal, when we feel cut off or alienated or that he's not there. And all humans need God. This is not just a Christian experience. There is a need for God in your soul, whether you believe in God or not.

And that is why the psalmist speaks more than seven times about his soul, his deepest self, soul. I think today most people think that the deepest part of us are our feelings, our emotions, that underneath my reason and underneath my will are my true feelings. And to be an authentic human being means to be true to my feelings because the answer lies in me. You know, that's not the Bible picture. The Bible picture is that we are embodied souls or ensouled bodies, if you like.

And here is the thing. Your soul does not exist on its own. It only exists in relation with God. It's the Godward part of us. It's the deepest part of the core of who we are, which means the answer doesn't lie within me. It lies in my relation and connection with God. And even the way the psalmist written shows us how this is true, the psalmist goes backwards and forwards, talking to God and then talking to his soul. And when he addresses himself, he uses a Hebrew word that is the intensive word for I. It's my soul of souls, my true me. It's my whole I-ness. It's my true identity.

So when he says three times, why are you cast down, O my soul? It's not that his soul is just feeling a bit low and bumping along and having a bad day. It actually means his soul is emptying out of himself. He senses and he feels that his soul is sinking in him and flowing out of himself because the very existence of his soul depends on God. And that the only thing that's going to satisfy and give him life is the presence of God and to see his face. And some of us have a strong sense of that even today. You might have come this morning feeling you're at the end of the rope. And you know this, that it's only when we see the face of God that will quench the thirst of your soul. And that's what he says in verse two when he says, when shall I come and appear before God? And literally it is, when shall I appear before the face of God? When shall I see the face of God? That's why there's nothing in this world, nothing in this life that can satisfy the soul. Our souls are made to see the face of God. And the fundamental longing that drives us as humans, that we attach to good things and to bad things. And after we've attached them to good things and bad things and we get those things and we wonder, is that all there is? They can only be satisfied in God. So this week we had Bible camp. And if you came any days or if you've seen the video, I just want to let you know that Susan Kennedy Carter, who played the white witch, was terrifyingly evil. And took to it just a little bit easily, too easily, I think. She was scary. It's based on C.S. Lewis's book, The Lion, the Witch and the

Wardrobe. And in that, the wicked witch tempts and manages to turn Edmund into a traitor by offering him Turkish delight. And he eats it and becomes enchanted. And in the end, he betrays his family.

[9 : 33] And the Turkish delight doesn't really satisfy him. What it does, it is it enslaves him. And C.S. Lewis, I've read this quote before and you'll be familiar with this. C.S. Lewis says this, most people, if they really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. And then he says, if I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. It's a great quote, isn't it? And this is where the psalmist brings us. It brings us to face that we're truly human. To be truly human is to need God and to need the face of God. Our souls thirst for God, point one. Point two, what's the cure for this soul thirst? Well, for Christians, there is something we can do about this. And for those who are not believers, although you will experience this, you may not recognize it for what it really is, but it doesn't really matter. Because whether we're unbelievers or believers, the cure is the same.

And what we do, what the psalmist says for us to do, is to pour out our souls in two directions. We're to pour out our souls to ourselves and to God. So firstly, the psalmist talks about self-talk.

This is something we as Christians need to learn how to do. We need to learn how to talk to ourselves, to take ourselves in hand. So those three choruses, when he stops, he actually stops praying and he turns to himself and his soul and he says, why are you cast down, O my soul? And why in turmoil within me?

Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. We've got to learn not just to listen to our souls. Our souls so easily believe a whole raft of nonsense about God. Our souls are so easily led astray to lesser things. But we need to take ourselves in hand and to speak strongly to our own souls and direct ourselves away from ourselves.

And where does he direct his soul? He doesn't say, feel better. He doesn't direct, he doesn't say, stop feeling bad. He doesn't even look at his feelings. He says, set your hope on what is solid.

[12 : 26] And there is no one else more solid than God. Set your hope on God, for I shall again praise him. Very helpful. You see, faith and doubt are not enemies. They coexist in all of us. They live together. But we need to learn how to speak to ourselves and direct ourselves back to God and to hope in him. That's what self-talk is all about. Secondly, we need to talk to God. And this is what the prayer of the psalm is about. It's not enough to talk to my soul. I need to talk to God about my soul.

And from beginning to end, this is an intense prayer. And I think this is helpful in itself, because when you don't feel like praying, what you should do is you should pray anyway.

That's what's one of the big points of the psalm. If you feel like God is absent, go to him and say, Lord, I feel you are absent. Please come to me. One of the great Puritan writers, John Owen, says, sometimes God withdraws his presence from us. And he does it for this reason, that we would seek after him more zealously and more keenly.

And John Newton says, if you feel the absence of God, don't get used to it. Seek him even harder. We can't force God's hand. We can't climb up into heaven and peek a look at God's face.

He must come to us, which he delights to do, particularly when we're praying to him. And I think the key prayer in this psalm is Psalm 43, verse 3. And I'll leave you with this text.

[14 : 12] He prays, send out your light and your truth. Let them lead me. Let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling, into the place of your presence and to see your face. And light, light is the favor of God.

It's the goodness of the blessing of God. It's the smile of his face. It's his love and his kindness. So when everything seems unreal and the heavens seem like they're blocked and closed, ask God to show you how you stand under his blessing.

And the truth is the fact that the light of God's face comes to us in the truth of the promises in his word. And when we hear his word preached to our hearts and our souls, we ought to be praying that Jesus Christ appears before our eyes and draws us into his presence and that we would see his face and experience that presence.

And I've got one more thing to say, but let me just turn around and say, it'll only take a minute and a half, Will. And of course, we see the face of God most clearly in Jesus Christ, don't we?

And the place we see it more clearly than anywhere else is in his death on the cross. And as we pour our souls out to God, we remember that he poured his soul out to death.

[15 : 41] And when we experience the absence of God, we remember that on the cross, he was truly abandoned. He was forsaken for us. He stood in our place.

And when he cried out, I thirst, that was the true experience of the absence of God. And it means that our experience is only partial and temporary if we look to the face of God in Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah, God says, I know the plans I have for you. Plans for welfare and not for evil. For a future and a hope.

Then God says, you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will hear you. You will seek me and you will find me. When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you.

Amen. Amen.