

Psalm 42, 43 PM

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 00] Friends, while you're standing, let me pray for us. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening, in Christ's name. Amen. Please be seated.

It's nice to see you all. Well done on getting to church on this incredibly hot day. Well done. And if you are really hot, it could be worse.

You could be wearing tight black jeans. So, my name is Aaron Roberts. I'm the minister for this service. If you're brand new, would love to meet you.

Come and say hi afterwards. We are week three in a series, a sermon series, looking at the question, what does it mean to be human? What does it mean to be human? And we've been answering that question from the Psalms.

And week one was Psalm 8. And the big idea was that we're created by God with innate dignity and worth. We're not worthless because we're useful or talented or young, but because we're made in God's image.

[0 : 58] Week two, Psalm 139. We learned that we're wonderfully made and God knows everything about us. God knows us and loves us. So far, so good.

A pretty, pretty rosy picture. Now we get to Psalm 42 and 43. And this adds another dimension to the conversation about what it means to be human. To be human is to be somebody who seeks God.

To be fully human means that you are seeking God even when life is really, really hard and you don't know what's going on. To be human is to be a God seeker.

And just so you know, we're looking at two Psalms, Psalm 42 and 43. And we're looking at both of these Psalms because at some point they were almost certainly one Psalm.

If you open your Bibles and have a look, you can see 43 has no title. That's a bit of a clue. But the biggest clue is that these two Psalms share this kind of refrain.

[1 : 57] If you look at verse 5 there, So three times, twice in Psalm 42, once in Psalm 43, there's that refrain.

It's like this really long song and this is the chorus of the song. All right, here we go. Let's jump into it. Really big picture, big picture. What's the vibe of it?

What's like the vibe? What's the vibe? It's a very theological question. What's the vibe of this?

What's a bit sad, isn't it? It's written by a guy that's really despondent pretty clearly here.

It's everywhere in the passage. He talks about his tears have been his only food. He's in turmoil.

He's in mourning. And I think it's important to say that this is not a passage about somebody who's clinically depressed.

Although I think it's helpful. If you are clinically depressed, this could be helpful. But you need more than what this can, more than this Psalm to help you in life.

[3 : 08] This is just about a guy, I think, who's just going through stuff. He's just going through the ups and downs of life and he's feeling pretty beaten up by things. Also important to note that you might notice it's not presented as a guy who's failing at life.

It's not presented as somebody who's weak. He doesn't lack faith. It's just having a really tough time. I love the Bible's honesty about such things.

The Bible's full of folks who have really tough times. Who feel really overwhelmed. Elijah's a great example. If you want some homework, read 1 Kings 19.

Elijah. We know Jesus wept. He was troubled. He's called a man of sorrows. The guy in the passage, he didn't, sin didn't cause his trauma.

He didn't do anything stupid, it seems. I think his situation in these Psalms is he's just a dude who's just getting beaten up by life. I think we can relate to that.

[4 : 12] For me, I can tell you what it looks like. For me, it looks like waking up in the middle of the night. Or waking up really early in the morning. And thinking about people I know who are having a tough time and feeling a bit useless.

Or work staff or home drama or whatever. Are they feeling really overwhelmed? I just reckon that a lot of us know this feeling.

So that's the situation. The big question is, how does the writer of Psalm 42 and 43 respond to this? I think it's really beautiful and really practical. First, though, let's have a crack at trying to work out specifically why he's despondent.

We'll get into a few details here. Why does he say three times, Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me?

The title of the Psalm says that he is the son of Korah. So these were the worship leaders back in the days in the temple. Really important job. Verse 4, it talks about, you know, he would lead people in a procession of praise and singing.

[5 : 22] So he had this pretty killer role in the community. He was fulfilled. He had people around him who shared his beliefs. But that's clearly not what's going on in his life right now.

Verse 3 said he's surrounded by people who say, Where is your God now? So he's in a place where people make fun of what he thinks.

I heard a story recently the other day about a young adult, Christian home, Christian school, went to just a normal university and had this one professor that clearly hated the Christian faith and would mock it at every chance they get.

Sort of a bit like that. But that's their whole life. The writer in verse 6 says that, It's him talking about the old country.

I remember the old country. He's naming some places. So it doesn't sound like he's got his worship gig anymore. Doesn't sound like he's with his people anymore.

[6 : 24] Doesn't sound like he's in the place he grew up anymore. Likely he was forced to leave his home and his job. Maybe an invading force came through. And this kind of happened back in the days.

That sort of steal all the talented people away in exile. So maybe that's going on. So why is he downcast? We're separated from his people.

He's not doing what he loves to do. What he wants to be doing in his life. He's in a culture that doesn't share his beliefs. That doesn't share his values. In fact, they taunt him. Verse 10 says.

And not only that. The other reason he's downcast is that his relationship with God is really struggling with God. His relationship with God feels, it's a bit yo-yo.

He feels separated from God. Other times he feels close to God. But a lot of times it seems like he feels quite separated. And that's really hard to feel separated from God.

[7 : 22] Because we were made to be in a relationship with God. This famous opening line here. Verse 1. As a deer pants for flowing streams.

So my soul pants feel. It's like we kind of romanticize that a bit. It sounds really lovely. Like it's like a lovey-dovey love songy thing. It's not. He's not experiencing a lovely thing here.

It's a picture of him being really, really thirsty in part. It's not fun. It's disorientating when you're thirsty. He's not functioning well. He's spiritually dehydrated. He's spiritually dry.

The rhythms of his, his typical rhythms of worship have been disrupted. He's had to move. He's lost his peeps. And all of a sudden God doesn't feel real to him anymore. Like he used to.

And the writer of, says in verse 9, he says, God, have you just, have you just forgotten about me?

Verse 8 says, you know, I can hear God's sort of song at night time.

[8 : 25] But it feels a bit yo-yo-ist, doesn't it? You know? God is close. God is far away. God is close. God is far away. I think it sounds a bit like life, doesn't it, for us sometimes? Filling in with God and then feeling like he's very far away.

So it's a poor guy. Life's got him down at a very deep, human-defining level. So now we're on to the sort of the money question. The money question is this.

What does he do about it? Well, he does two big things. Firstly, he keeps seeking God. Secondly, he preaches to himself.

Let me say this differently. First, the things he doesn't understand in his life, why things are going so bad. The things he doesn't understand, he brings to God.

He brings these hard things to God, these questions to God. I feel like you've forgotten me, Lord. I don't understand why these things are happening to me. The things he does not understand, he brings to God. That's the first thing he does.

[9 : 30] Secondly, the things he does understand, the things that he's still got a handle on, he preaches those things to himself. Does that make sense? What he does know for sure, he tells himself.

It's like he's written it down on a post-it note and stuck it on his bathroom mirror. So let's get into these really quickly.

The first of these two things is, he keeps coming back to God. He comes to God with his questions. Remember, one of the questions for God is, why do you feel so far away?

Like, why have you forgotten me? Why have you forgotten me? Really tempting at that point to go, well, I'm just going to forget about you, God. You don't seem to be coming through for me.

Look at verses 3 and 4 there. My tears have been my flood day and night. While they say to me all day long, where is your God?

[10 : 31] It's a terrible situation. But these things I remember as I pour out my soul. See what's going on there? Even though he's having a tough time, he is still pouring out his soul.

He is still praying. He is still coming to God, even when he doesn't feel like it. Even though God feels far. Even though God doesn't feel real to him. He is still praying. He is still seeking. This series in the Psalms is about what it means to be human.

This is the guts of it. What does it mean to be human? It means being thirsty for God. Being perpetually, consistently seeking him. To be human is to be somebody who wants to see the face of God.

Because that's what we're made for. Especially, especially when God feels distant. It's a bit like waking up at night when it's still dark and you can't see a thing.

So what do you do? You keep your eyes open. And your eyes start to adjust, don't they? And you start to see some shapes. And things start to make a bit more sense.

[11 : 45] That's what the Spirit will do in you. If you're in the darkness, if you feel like God is distant, far away. Has completely forgotten about you. Feel completely separated. If you're feeling that, look into the darkness.

And you pray and you keep coming back. And you're like, I feel completely prayerless. Pray about your prayerlessness. The darkness will start to subside. And you'll start to see things a bit more clearly.

Very important to note, this may take a long time. This psalm is not a magic potion. You can't just read this a couple of times and then you're like, you know, kick back into gear. We're talking about consistent, the consistent discipline of prayer, which will yield a result.

It will yield closeness, but it might take a really long time. So the writer brings his pain to God. Even the pain of feeling distant. Second thing.

What's the second thing he does? He preaches to himself. He preaches to himself. Three times there is this refrain. Again, why you cast down, oh my soul, and why you're in turmoil within me.

[12 : 52] Hope in God. Next thing he says, hope in God, for I shall praise again. My salvation and my God. He preaches to himself in the midst of the drama. He reminds himself of the things he does know is true.

He doesn't know why this stuff's going on. But there's things he does know is true. And what does he know is true? He knows that there is a God. He knows this God has saved him. So he reminds himself of the things he knows for sure in the middle of a sea of uncertainty.

Look at verse 7 there. Deep calls to deep. At the roar of your waterfalls. At all your breakers. And your waves have gone over me. It's like swimming in an ocean.

I swam in an ocean a few months back. And it was a beach break. Big waves. It was a surf beach. It was not fun. Because you just kept getting pounded by these waves.

You couldn't really get a breath. It wasn't fun at all. This is what he's experiencing. He's just getting hit, hit, hit. But look at how he frames and talks about these waves.

[13 : 54] He says, your breakers. They're your breakers. They're your waves. He is reminding himself of God's sovereignty over everything. Life is hard. But he knows God's in control.

That everything that's going on, it's under God's sovereignty. He might not know why it's happening. But he for sure knows that God's in charge. He preaches that to himself.

Martin Lloyd-Jones was an English preacher. Famous guy. Middle of the last century. He wrote a book called Spiritual Depression. Back in 1965.

Let me read a quote from him. Just a short little paragraph. It's brilliant on this. He says this. Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you were listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?

I'll read some more, but I'll repeat that line because it's killer. Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you were listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?

[15:02] And he goes, carries on. Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they are there talking to you.

They bring back the problem of yesterday. Somebody's talking, but who's? Who's talking? Your self is talking to you. Now, the man's treatment in Psalm 42 was this.

Instead of allowing the self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. Why are you cast down, O my soul? He asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him.

So he stands up and he says, self, listen for a moment. I will speak to you. Isn't that great? And he speaks to himself about the stuff he does know.

This week, actually this last two weeks, I have been waking up in the middle of the night, feeling the weight of life on me. And I've started doing this. I've seen a little change.

[16:06] I've seen a little change. And that's wonderful. And it will get better. And I would encourage you to do that same if you're feeling weighed down right now. So what things do you know?

What things could you tell yourself when things aren't going great? It could be very simple. I know there is a God. And from previous Psalms in the last weeks, I know I'm wonderfully made.

It could be that I know God sees me. I know God knows what's going on. I know. God loves me so much he would rather die than be without me. It could be this is the big one for me.

Whatever pain I'm in, I know it will not last. It might last my whole life. This life. But not into eternity. Because God will make all things new.

You preach to yourself the grand truths of the Bible. Okay. We're going to wrap up here.

[17:11] So this guy in the Psalm is having a tough time. God feels far away. He is not where he wants to be in life.

Things have not worked out the way he wanted them to. He's weary. He's downcast. He's in turmoil. But his knowledge of God has not changed.

He might not understand why this other stuff's going on. But his knowledge of God hasn't changed. So he chooses to remember God. He chooses to keep coming back to God.

That's what humans are supposed to do. He chooses to preach to his own soul. Doesn't that sound like a brilliant idea? Folks. I'm going to pray for us now.

And then we're going to sing. Heavenly Father. When we are overwhelmed by life. And it feels like you are far from us.

[18:16] I pray we do not give up on Jesus. I pray that he would continue to be our great treasure. Teach us, Father.

To listen to. The truth of who you are. And how much you love us. And how you have made us. So that we would be sustained.

When the waves keep crashing, Father. I pray this in Christ's name. Amen.