

Psalm 42-43

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[0 : 00] Thanks, Jad, for that. For those of you who don't know, Jad is moving on in just a few weeks to move to Buffalo to continue his career in medicine.

So if you get a chance to thank him, wish him farewell, this is that time of year in our church where transitions happen and friends who've been here for a while move on.

And so I was listening to you sing, I was thinking about songs. And why are we doing a series this summer in the Psalms?

I have to say that properly so you hear the difference. And it is because one of the things that God has given us the Psalms, the book of Psalms for, is because it's communicating truth about God in a different way than some of the other genres of scripture.

The Psalms communicate in poetry. And in fact, they were meant to be sung. If you look at the prescript on this, on the Psalm we'll look at today in Psalm 42, it'll say it's of the sons of Korah and the sons of Korah served in the temple and they wrote songs to be sung in worship to God.

[1 : 17] The Psalms give us poetry and they use the language of imagery, the language of metaphor, and the language of meter and rhyme to connect the truths in our head with the depths of our heart.

They give us words to talk about our experience, our experience of life, our experience of joys and sorrows.

The whole range of human experience can be found in the Psalms. And they give us words to talk about the whole range of our experience as we bring them to God.

John Calvin said this about the Psalms, I've been accustomed to calling the book of Psalms an anatomy of all the parts of the soul.

For there is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Rather, the Holy Spirit here has drawn a picture of all the griefs and sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, and perplexities with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated.

[2 : 40] So the Psalms give us words and psalms. There are psalms of praise and psalms of thanksgiving.

There are psalms of lament, psalms of grief, psalms of wisdom, and psalms of remembrance, psalms of trust and psalms of confidence. So we want to spend our summer enriching and deepening our language so that we can take the breadth of our experience to the Lord in meaningful and significant ways.

Nick mentioned it earlier, but we're going to look at a series of psalms that we've selected out of book two. If you look at the book of Psalms, if you go home, the book is split up into five different books.

There are little subscripts that tell you about this. And if you're interested in finding out more about how to read the Psalms, there is a handout on the back table. It's a chapter from a book called How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth, which is one of the best books we have in our bookstall.

And if you want to go down to the bookstall, there's great books down there for you to get. That's my little advertisement for today. But the book is called How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth.

[3 : 58] And there's a particular chapter on how to read the Psalms. And we made a couple of extra photocopies of just that chapter. So if you're interested in taking that home with you, just know it's back there and a resource for you.

And we're going to be looking at selected psalms from this book. And there are different authors.

There are different historical contexts. There are different experiences.

There are different tones that we will see throughout this summer. But I hope you will join us in this journey. This journey of thirsting for God together and enriching our language of how we do that in

the book of Psalms.

Our morning, this morning, our psalm is Psalm 42. And it's a lament song. And what is a lament song? Well, one scholar put it this way.

This is pretty practical for scholarship. He said, most of us have experienced trouble to one degree or another. Like a fire engine driving by when I'm preaching. Let's try that again.

[5 : 04] Most of us have experienced trouble to one degree or another. For longer or shorter stretches of time. The journey of life may take us over difficult terrain. Adversity replaces prosperity.

Turmoil swallows up tranquility. Chaos obliterates order. Doubt replaces faith. Though happy songs can hardly pass from our lips at such times.

God has nevertheless given us songs to sing even then. And these are the songs of lament. So we're going to start by looking at Psalm 42.

We're actually going to read Psalm 42 and 43 together. If you want to look in your Bible, it's page 469 in the Pew Bible. And you may be asking the question, why are you doing two instead of just one?

Well, if you look at it, there are a couple of things that make me think that originally this was written together. One is you will see it's structured. There are three verses with a chorus. And the chorus is repeated each time.

[6 : 07] Each time. Middle of chapter 42, at the end of chapter 42, and then at the end of chapter 43. And so it seems that there's a holism to it.

The second thing is that chapter 43 lacks any title or any indication that it's a new psalm. Now, not all the psalms have that, but a lot of them do, and particularly in this section.

So the lack of a title is outstanding. And the other thing is that at the end of it is you will see as I'm drawing, as we explore this together, the thematic lines about this communicate a unity of thought and of heart.

So we're going to look at Psalm 42 and 43 together. And look at how the psalmist bears his soul as he asks questions, excuse me, of the Lord.

So let's look at this together. Psalm 42. As the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.

[7 : 16] My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night while they say to me all 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 and songs of praise of multitude keeping festival. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God. For I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

My soul is cast down within me. Therefore, I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. 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.

[8 : 23] I say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why do I go on mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

As with the deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me. While they say to me all day long, where is your God? Why are you downcast, O my soul?

Why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God. For I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against ungodly people.

From 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 on mourning because of the oppression of my enemy?

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

[9 : 28] I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why are you in turmoil within me? I will praise you with the lyre, O God, for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

let's pray together Lord this morning I'm sure some here this morning are downcast in their soul and in turmoil within them Lord this psalm this psalm gives words to the reality of their hearts Lord there's some this morning who for whom this psalm seems far off at least in this season of life God for all of us I pray I pray that you would open our eyes open our hearts to see the glory of this

lament the hope to which it points us to

God that this psalm may be a song in our hearts as well we pray this in Jesus name Amen Amen well as I said this psalm is structured like a song there are three verses with a chorus but rather than looking at it sequentially because I don't think because it's poetry it's not meant necessarily to be read simply through what I want to do is instead look at three different I look want to look at the lens of three different things about the psalmist so I want to look at his situation I want to look at his strategy and I want to look at his solution and I'll explain those as we go along but his his situation his strategy and then his solution so first his situation did you notice as I read the questions that he asked did you feel them they're not rhetorical questions they're not questions for which the answer is an easy or obvious one look at me in verse 2 of chapter 42 the second half he says when shall I come and in the ESV it says appear before God literally means when shall I see the face of God again when will I get to him and you see as the psalm unpacks this in verses 1 and 2 it says my soul is like a deer panting for water and this is not a commendable pursuit of God this is a deer that is desperately thirsty he didn't choose to long for water he knows that he desperately needs it and without it he will die but he does not have it and so he is thirsting for it he's he's looking for it the psalmist is saying that's

God you were like that to me and I need you and you're not there he goes on and then it says in in uh you see that he not only is he thirsting for the Lord in this way but also he's been cut off from the corporate worship this is what verse 4 points to he remembers longingly to the time when he would go up for one of the festivals the three annual Jewish festivals when there would be a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and they'd join together in the temple and worship God with all the pilgrims with all the people and the psalmist says I remember that but it's not mine now I'm far away I'm up in the north near Mount Hebron I'm up near Mount Mizar and I can't get there I'm not allowed for whatever reason we don't know all the context we don't know why he but he can't get to go and be among that throng of praise and so God is far off geographically

God is far off personally and existentially to him and surrounding him there are these enemies these oppressors and again we don't know much about them but we do know what they say where's your God you look like your life is pretty terrible you're suffering aren't you where's your God I don't see any God why do you believe in that God verse 9 says like a sword or a dagger piercing to the depths of my bone and then twisting it the psalmist is longing for God and he is not nearby and it's not just these external realities it's not just these things that are going on but that question resonates with the question in his own soul do you see it in verse 9 chapter 2 look with me there I say to God my rock why have you forsaken me why have you forgotten me it was repeated again in 43 verse 2

[15:06] God you are my refuge why have you forgotten me why have you forsaken me and it's interesting to note this is not someone who has given up on God he is not saying God I don't think you're there I don't believe in you I'm wondering if you exist he's saying God you are my rock you are my refuge and that makes it all the harder isn't it because God you're supposed to be there and you say you were there and I can't get to you I don't feel you I am far off or you are far off and whatever it is I cry out to you in the midst of this where are you notice that even in the imagery of verse 7 that lovely imagery that resonates in our culture deep calls to deep but it is God's waterfalls and God's breakers and God's waves that have overwhelmed him he knows that God is sovereign he knows that God is real he's not questioning that but he's saying

God why have you forgotten me why is this so hard why are you so far off my attempts to you to find you have failed and I'm like the deer not by the streams of living water but panting through the arid middle east looking searching desperately for that thing that I know to be life giving God where are you God why have you forsaken me it's a picture of a spiritual desert of dryness of melancholy even of depression it is the dark night of the soul friends I want to know when I ask you this morning does this ring true to you

I know some of you well enough to know it does I know some of you have come and shared with me how far off God seems my guess is that there are times when it's obvious in our lives that we're feeling this way when we are just empty and broken and it all hangs out and everyone who knows us can see it but you know the culture we live in my guess is that most of us are actually really good at hiding it and that there are far more of you who have experienced these dark nights of the soul and perhaps today are experiencing a spiritual dryness that God feels far off but you're hiding it really well you've put on your happy go to church face and yet you know the depths of that dryness

why does it happen

I think there can be lots of things that might be triggers for how this comes about in our lives it might simply be the weight of expectations and pressure that you feel whether it be as a parent navigating everything from piles of diapers to piles of tuition bills the perplexing confusing overwhelming questions of the things that your children are facing or going through it may be in your professional life where you think I'm doing all the right things and nothing is happening and I can't quite keep up and I can't quite get ahead of the curve and I'm feeling like I'm going under the waves and the breakers are overwhelming you it may be that you're carrying around the weight of grief and loss and disappointment it might be the loss of a loved one who has died it might be the loss of a hope a dating relationship has ended a fellowship was turned down an application was refused and you're left with nothing you may be facing adversity this morning chronic illness where the pain just doesn't stop and there's no sign of relief in sight you might be facing the inexplicable antagonism of a family member or a co-worker or a boss the resistance of others to you whether to your faith or just to you just seems unmovable and so every day you face this and you know sometimes maybe more than sometimes it's just a season there's no trigger there's no cause there's nothing to fix there's nothing to go back and repent of it's remarkable the psalmist never repents of sin in this psalm there are other lament songs where he does but in this one he never does he just cries out sometimes it just happens

God feels far off for a season but you know you come to church and to confess that God feels far off it feels like you're a failure maybe it feels like blasphemy because you know God is everywhere he has to be that's in the in the definition so and yet you can't feel him you don't know that he's there and so you put on that face and you hide maybe you share with one or two close friends but you feel the pressure to keep it up and even with your closest friends if it keeps going for a while you feel like you're just becoming a drag to them and you stop sharing with it friends this psalm gives you a song to sing the psalmist knows what you are the psalmist has been maybe not the exact same road you've walked maybe not the exact but but do you see the resonance and these things all raise up in this question this cry of heart

[22 : 07] God where are you one of the things that I want you to see this morning is that God has given us the psalm to tell us that this is not a problem to be fixed in the Christian life this is a part of the picture of a Christian life as we see it in scripture it's fascinating if you like church history go read of some of the great saints go read of Charles Spurgeon go read of David Brainerd go read of William Cooper and of his friendship with John Newton go read of these men that God used remarkably and powerfully in the history of the church who suffered from repeated deep struggles with spiritual dryness and yay even depression where the darkness just did not lift for seasons in their lives friends this is if this is you you are not alone let me just stop for a minute

I want to I've mentioned this word a couple of times depression one of the things that struck me when I was working at Yale is that when we took overseas trips we would do these little really basic personality tests and 50% of our teams from Yale on any given year were melancholy by nature that's not statistically normal depression is a reality in our culture it's something that's talked about a lot at one level and yet in our church we struggle to know how to handle it I would love to give you a whole sermon on depression I'm not going to but I want to give you a few anchor points to how to think about it depression is a deep trial and it is real and it is painful biblically we have to see that it is a holistic reality it affects us relationally socially spiritually physically and psychologically it is a part of living in a fallen world it may have various causes including our own sin the sin of others against us environmental and situational factors and biological and chemical influences as well and friends in the face of depression we must see and embrace a holistic view of

God's redemptive work God's redemptive work may include all of these things medicine counsel friendship prayer prayer and worship we need to be particularly careful to not fall into simplistic diagnosis treatment schedule the two that are most prevalent in the church are the two extremes one is the depression is sin so repent of it and get on with being a joyful Christian come on buck up brothers and sisters that's one one end and the other end is that in reaction to this sometimes we just and in our culture which often medicalizes everything we think all we need is the right pill the right medication the right balance and what I want you to hear me say is that these are not sufficient to deal with the reality of depression for many people for most people and that often it will be a combination the redemptive work that

God will do in the face of depression will include a combination of all of these things there's way more to be said about that but I wanted to at least lay out a couple of things for us and we can talk about it more afterwards if you want but Charles Spurgeon suffered from depression partly because he was sick but his sickness led him into dark places where he was unable to function did you notice the psalmist he said tears have been my food day and night well that's interesting it means he's both sleepless and has lost his appetite in the midst of this dry season this season of spiritual melancholy this season of crying out and wondering God where are you and not getting a quick answer and not getting a quick fix so whether clinical or seasonal whether it's a spiritual season for us whether it's this full bodied fallen experience the psalmist invites us in what I want you to see is that it's not a problem to be fixed but it is a context in which

God invites you into deeper fellowship with him this is what the psalm is doing for us this is where we are going because we've explored the situation and what the psalmist is experiencing and how he's feeling and what he's thinking the question is what does he do with it well he has two responses and I want to distinguish he has a strategy but then he has a solution and part of the reason why I distinguish that is because he knows that his strategy is not the solution his strategy is the proper responsibility that he has to do things in response to his situation but he knows that he will not be able to solve this look with me in this this is exactly what the refrain of this psalm is all about right so you see this refrain in verse 5 and verse 11 and then again at the end of 43 in verse 5 why are you downcast oh my soul why are you in turmoil within me now it's important to ask this question why is he asking that question is it a rhetorical question like stop it why are you doing this just stop it

[28 : 45] I don't think so I think he's saying soul why is this going on he wants to understand more deeply the dynamics of his own heart and his own soul he wants to see this experience as an invitation to go deeper into who he is and then to connect that with God because that's where he goes doesn't he right he he says hope in God hope in God for I will yet praise him he is my salvation and my God the psalmist is saying I want to ask this question of my soul why is this going on so that in the depths of how I experience this dryness and this depression

I can connect with a hope and that hope can sometimes be pasted over in the Christian world as a placebo as an easy fake here just hope in God it'll all be better and sometimes that's not sufficient matter of fact often it's not sufficient in the throes of what the psalmist is going for but instead we know that God is doing something else in it the distance that we experience with God is an invitation to go deeper towards God one of my favorite poets Rich Mullins you might have heard of him he also writes music but said this in a song many years ago now but he said this he said and everything that could be shaken was shaken and all that remains is all

I ever really had what I would have settled for you've blown so far away what you've brought me to I thought I could not reach I came so close to giving up but you never gave up on me and friends this is what God is doing in the midst of these depressed times he is refining you he is taking away he is shaking from you he wants to take your hope and he wants to deepen it he wants to take it to deeper places than you've ever experienced so that it's not just a band-aid and it's not just a placebo and so he takes himself in hand soul don't be full of self pity don't make excuses yes tears are our food day and night yes you are cast down in your soul and he says hope in

God he doesn't just say fix your theology he doesn't just say work harder at your spiritual disciplines he doesn't condemn himself for the questions or for his experiences but he speaks words of hope and words of hope that have an object because he knows that the solution is not in himself and his whole strategy is to recognize that he can't solve this problem he can't fix it and that he needs to look for a solution that is outside of himself he knows that God is his only hope when you look at 43 3 and 4 this is what he's crying out for it's the it's one place where he actually asks he says God send me your light and your truth remind me of who you are and help me experience who you are more deeply because when you return then

I will be able to return to the temple and be filled with but he knows that he can't make that happen he can't say soul be more joyful and have it have the effect that he needs instead in the darkness he cries out God help me I can't do this I need you and he reminds himself that the only place that he can go is God and this is his solution one of the striking things I don't know if you noticed it as we read it but the solution has to do with God himself if you look through these verses right 16 verses or so over and over again

[33 : 59] God is referred to as God right you just say so my soul plants for you oh God my soul thirst for you for God for the living God this the Hebrew word is Elohim it's a generic word for God it's it's the sort of a it's what we would use for God in a broad sense and over and over again he says God God God look with me at verse eight suddenly singularly in the whole song it is not God but it is the Lord and hopefully you know this but if you don't when your Bible gives you the Lord in those little capital letters that means this is Yahweh this is the God who revealed himself this is the God who when Moses said who are you God what's your name so that I can tell your people who what your name is this is the name that God revealed he said

I am that I am this is my name I am your personal God I am the God of all the universe but I am the God of this people and not only does the psalmist say Lord like a sovereign king directing his armies to go here and there directs his love and he says I have set my love my covenant love my chesed love for those of you who have been here for a while this is the love that God said to his people in Deuteronomy when he said of all the nations in the world I have loved you this is the love that Hosea has for his homer this is the love of a king for his servants and of a father for his children it is characterized by steadfastness and faithfulness and loyalty and unbreakableness and in the very structural middle of this psalm the psalmist changes the word for God and points to this steadfast love he says this is my song in the night this is my prayer to the God of my life friends this is his solution this is for the psalm psalmist why he can say hope in God because it is not a generic hope and it is not a generic God but it is a hope in God who has acted in these ways in this way the psalmist can remember how this God had delivered his people from slavery in Egypt how this God had brought him through the Red Sea how this God had triumphed over the enemies and brought him into the promised land the psalmist the psalmist says this is the God in whom I placed my hope and his love is the song that I can sing I don't feel it I don't sense it but it is the only hope that

I have and friends we today have so much more to look on to know what God's covenant steadfast love looks like for we know that God who rightly condemns sin did not leave us in our condemnation but as we read in Romans 5 8 God demonstrates his love for us in this while we are still sinners Christ died for us we look to the cross we look to the cross because that is where we know how God has loved us because it happened in history because it's not just a vain imagination or a platitude or philosophy but it happened in history that Christ came and walked the earth with us and died for us and rose again for our salvation for our benefit so that we might be brought in to God's family so that we might be raised from the deadness of our souls into life with God we look to the cross and remember this God who has remembered us he has not forgotten us he has not forsaken us but he has purchased us with the blood of his very own son and he's given us that son for the satisfaction of our souls and he has promised us I will never leave you or forsake you and I know for some of you this morning you have wondered where is God where is God in the midst of my darkness where is God in the midst of my depression where is God in the midst of my reality today and friends the psalmist didn't say oh there he is look it'll all work out

[39 : 32] God works everything out for the good of those who love him can't you see how this is going to be great no the psalmist says I look to Yahweh the God of covenant love and we look to the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ the objective promise and standard by which we know that God has set his love on his people and this is why the psalmist can say hope in God for I will yet praise him he is my salvation and he is my God and so friends the strategy embraces the solution and puts it before us it is as we've talked about being a gospel centered church it is preaching the gospel to ourselves every day you're a sinner and God has loved you so much that he saved you in Christ and it's not just an individual practice that we're going to try and do on our own in the quietness of our own lives but it's also a corporate reality for this song was meant to be sung in the multitudes and so this is why we gather together this is why we're about to sing blessed be your name on the road marked with suffering blessed be your name when everything is going well blessed be your name when

I'm in a dry and desert place blessed be your name God because you have loved us at the cross that is how we know and that is how we endure and that is the song that the psalms have given us to sing in the darkness in the depression in the melancholy in the dryness of those seasons let's pray lord i pray that your spirit would help bring this home to us lord that even even when this truth does not strike a resounding chord in our heart and we don't experience it or feel it is true god this is true objectively truly eternally god it is true for your people so lord i pray that lord we might sing this

psalm with hope god i pray this morning for those who are here who maybe have given up fallen into despair that they will ever yet praise you again god i pray that you would help them this morning that you would send your light and your truth to them god i pray for those this morning who don't know you i pray lord that they would see that christianity isn't simply a quick fix to an easy and happy life but instead it is a deep deep well of reality and truth and hope that meets us in the greatest points of despair lord we pray these things in jesus name amen would you please stand with us as we sing our final song