

Where Is Thy God | Psalm 42 & 43

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- [0 : 00] I'd like for you to take the Word of God and turn with me to the 42nd Psalm. Psalm 42. That was my best Clarence Sexton impersonation. If you've been around Crown, you would know that.
- He opened, I don't know how many messages the same way. No niceties, no greetings. Just take the Word of God and turn with me to the 42nd Psalm.
- I heard him specifically say this on a very specific night that I'll never forget. It wasn't to open up a sermon. He was on a video screen.
- He was stuck in an airport, or around in Colorado. He was at the airport. It was September the 11th, 2001. All the student body was gathered into the main auditorium, and we watched him as he said, take the Word of God and open with me to Psalm 42.
- Earlier that day, I was playing NCAA football. I had a great dynasty going. At a friend's house off campus. My brother turned off my game and turned on the news.
- [1 : 04] We watched as the North Tower was burning. Paper was flying out of a massive cavity as if the building was hemorrhaging. None of us had any idea what was going on.
- News anchors were trying to speculate. Was it an explosion? Was it a bomb? There were reports that there was an aircraft involved. Maybe there was an accident of some kind. And as I watched live, a 767 plowed into the South Tower.
- There is now no doubt this was not an accident. My mind did not even know how to process what I had just watched. We continued to watch as fire and smoke and papers continued to flood out of the building, carried by the heat upward, filling the sky.
- Then we noticed that several objects plummeted downward. We realized that those were not objects, but people. They jumped hopelessly to their death, choosing not to burn. I almost threw up.
- I don't know that I'd ever watched a live death like that. It was like the world was moving in slow motion. Emergency crews raced to the area and began to storm up the towers.
- [2 : 16] I watched as one fell and then the next. I thought I was a grown man and prepared to take on the world. You know, 18 or something like that. Partway through a year of college.
- But in that moment, I wanted so badly just to be at home. I wanted to be comforted by my mom. I wanted my dad to bring reason and calm to the situation.
- As we gathered into the auditorium, there were tears. There was fear. I mean, we wanted to go home. We wanted to be somewhere we were familiar, somewhere we were comfortable.
- And on the screen, I'd like for you to take the Word of God and turn with me to the 42nd Psalm. Psalm 42. And he read.
- And then he took us to another passage and he read. And then to another and another and he read. No human explanations. No words of wisdom or political narrative. Just the Word of God.
- [3 : 17] And for the first time that day, I felt some peace. I learned a great lesson about the sufficiency of Scripture that I will never forget. And honestly, I will never ever read this passage the same.

That moment will always be etched in my mind. A few days or maybe weeks or months. I don't even know how long later it was. Larry King was interviewing several leaders from different various religions.

And I think MacArthur was one of them. And he asked, as he often does, a loaded question. Where was your God when the towers fell? I remember it so well.

By the way, MacArthur knocked it out of the park. He said the same place he was on 9-10. This question was not original to Larry King.

We find it twice in this passage. The psalmist was in a bad place. Maybe falsely accused and exiled. Maybe discouraged, hurting. Maybe physical, maybe emotional, maybe spiritual.

[4 : 16] We don't know. But he's in a bad place. He's surrounded by his enemies. And they're asking him, where is thy God? Where is your God now? I had you mark that in the passage.

But I also had you mark, yet I shall praise him. When we stand and praise God in the midst of the worst of times, we say he's right where he belongs. He's on his throne.

In this passage, we find a great internal conflict in what he sees and hears and feels, his circumstances, and what he knows to be true about his God.

I think we've all faced those moments in our life. If not, you will. I can almost promise you that. Psalm 42 and verse 1, the Bible says, As the heart panteth after the water brook, so panteth my soul after thee, O my God.

My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night. While they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me, for I had gone with the multitude.

[5 : 15] I went with them to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day. In the first part of this passage of Scripture, we see his circumstances. We see what he sees and what he hears.

We see what he feels. We see the problems that he's facing. Maybe he is exiled. Maybe he is cut off from the house of worship, and he can no longer bring sacrifice to God.

We don't know exactly, but we know he's hurting. We know he's discouraged. He said that he is thirsty and he is separated. So often in our modern worship songs, we take as the deer panteth for the water, and we make it like we're so close to God that we want him all the time.

And I'm not saying that's a bad way of viewing it, but in this passage, that's not the case. The deer is thirsty because it is separated from water. And he says, I am just as thirsty for God. Just as the water sustains and supports the life of that deer, God sustains and supports me, and I'm separated from Him.

I don't know where He is. I don't feel Him. I don't hear His voice. I can't worship Him like I used to worship Him. And this separation is painful.

[6 : 26] It's hurtful. He said, God, when can I come before You? I don't know if you've ever felt that way, but He said, when do I get to see You? When do I get to be close to You again?

He's longing for God. He's thirsty. He's separated. We have an unusual circumstance here where we're actually given very specifically the location of the psalmist.

We don't know who it is, but we know where he was. In verse number 6, it says, O my God, my soul cast down within me, therefore will I remember Thee from the land of Jordan and from the Hermonites and from the hill Mizar.

He said that he was cast out from the holy place. And he was separated from all that he knew that he could worship.

He was separated from the location of his relationship with God. Let me just say something very quickly. If your source of spiritual strength is a place, you're missing it.

[7 : 30] I think we know what it's like to be separated from a building. Now don't get me wrong, I've heard way too much about how the church is not a building. I agree. But it is a gathering.

It's like what the word means. But if this is your place, if you have to be around the congregation, you have to be around others in order to feel God or hear God or know God, I think you're missing it.

But boy, there is something about being at church. He remembered the singing. He remembered the praise. And the Bible says it poured out his soul. It broke his heart that he could not be in corporate worship with his brethren.

He was separated. He was thirsty. He was afraid and he was discouraged in verses 6-10. This psalm is an interesting one as well. I love the psalms.

They're so poetic and they're so descriptive. And all through this psalm, there's this emphasis on noise. On sound. He remembered the sound of the singing and the praising. He constantly heard the voice of his enemies all throughout the passage.

[8 : 37] But at this point in the passage, all he hears are the waters. He may have been in these hills of Mizar.

He may have been around a waterfall and it was so loud that he could hear nothing else. The Bible said that it was deep. Callesth unto deep. Just water against water. Just pounding and loud.

And it was threatening to him. At the noise of thy waterspouts. Verse 7. All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. He felt completely overwhelmed.

Again, in our modern worship, we have the waves and it's like this wonderful, overwhelming. That's not what he's saying here. He looks to God and he says, what you're doing to me is crushing me.

Thy waves, thy billows are crushing me. All he heard was fear and discouragement. The worshiping of God, the sound of the crowd was drowned out.

[9 : 40] By other noise. By the circumstance that was right in front of his face. Oh man, we've all been at the place where we get out of a service and it's just so good.

You've been there? The music was so good. Obviously. I make the order of service. The music was so good.

The preaching was so good. Just everybody there said something about my hair. It was just so good. But how long does it take before something hits you and you don't even remember it anymore?

The very thought of it is just pouring out your soul. And people say, well, just remember. You remember that? You say, I don't want to. Because all I see is pain.

And all I hear is doubt and discouragement. He said, thy ways and thy billows. Look at Psalm 43 and verse 2. Look at verse 2. For thou art the God of my strength.

[10 : 40] That's pretty good. Look what he follows it up with. Why dost thou cast me off? Have you ever felt that way?

I honestly don't think God's even mad at us when we look to heaven and say, why? Why are you letting this happen to me? Or why are you doing this to me? Why are you doing this to me? I remember my mother-in-law.

One of the sweetest, godliest ladies on this planet. And she began in her mind to speculate why God was allowing her husband to die. And I am a very respectful son-in-law, but I said, you need to shut your mouth.

I said, you just need to stop. Because none of that's true. None of that's true. God loves you. But the voices, the water spouts, the deep upon deep was all she could hear in that moment.

I don't think God was mad a minute for it. He was oppressed and needing to be vindicated. In Psalm 43, verses 1-4, he's crying out to God to vindicate him because the deceitful man and an evil nation had done him wrong.

[12 : 04] I think we can all say that we've been done wrong. Possibly exiled and false accused. He was surrounded by his enemies. Twice his enemies cried out to him, where is thy God?

Can I remind you that you're surrounded by your enemies? I know the first thing that comes to your mind is Satan. That roaring lion, be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, yeah, he is your enemy.

But honestly, I'll speak for myself, I don't know if he's that worried about me. He is my enemy, and he is powerful. He's the prince of the air. He's the father of lies. But I don't know how many head-to-head combats I have with the devil.

I don't know how high I am on his hit list. But another one of our enemies is the world, and I can't get out of it. It's all around me. It's on my phone. It's on my computer.

It's on my television. It's where I go to work. It's where I go to eat. It's all around me. And it has a system that is oppressive. It has a system that is broken.

[13 : 06] It has a system that is false. In John 17 and verse 14, we're warned about this. I have to go to John 17 at some point.

It's all we've been getting in Sunday school. I'm sorry. Adult Bible fellowship. But Jesus said that the world hates them. Why? Because they're not of the world, just like I'm not of the world. They're in the world, but they're not of the world.

If the world doesn't hate you, you should probably be worried. You might be of them. In 1 John 2, it says that all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life.

That's our enemy. Let me tell you, that's still not my greatest enemy, I don't believe. My greatest enemy looks at me in the mirror every day. James 1 says, Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.

But every man is tempted when he is drawn away, and you should circle it, of his own lust. And lust goes to sin and sin goes to death.

[14 : 16] I'm my own greatest enemy. There's a song I love that speaks about how we are prone to wonder, but Jesus is prone to mercy. It's so good. In the last verse, it speaks of heaven and it says that freedom from myself will be the greatest rest I've ever known.

Boy, I've felt that so many times. Just to get out of this flesh and not deal with it anymore. There were voices. The enemy was saying, where is thy God? Let me just be honest with you, too many times I've looked in the mirror, and the enemy was looking me in the face saying, where is your God?

You're hurting. Where's your God? You're down. Where's your God? You've done this and this and this and this for him.

Where's your God now? You wrote the check and put it in the plate. Where is your God? Y'all are more spiritual than I am. That's what this psalm is really about.

Let me just tell you that it doesn't matter if you're in it or not. This is for you because it's unavoidable. Ever since Adam's sin, this world has been broken with pain and hurt and sickness and death.

[15 : 29] And there's going to be a moment in your life, either now or sometime, when the voices begin to tell you where is your God. So the first thing we saw was his circumstances.

The second thing we see is his God. So we saw what he sees and hears and feels, but now we get to see what he knows about his God. Listen, this is a struggle. And I feel this struggle.

But there are moments when he's like, you are crushing me. But in the same breath, he's saying, you're my rock. And he's saying, you're my strength, but why are you casting me off? But all through the passage, he just declares it.

Even though maybe he doesn't even feel it. Even though maybe he doesn't even really believe it at times. He cries it out. There are times when I think he just screams it at the top of his lungs. God, my God.

And yeah, I'm hurting, but I still believe in you. He says that he is God. He says that he is the living God. He says that he is my God. He says that he is the Lord. He says that he is God of my life.

[16 : 28] He says he is God my rock. He says he is God of my strength. He says he is God my exceeding joy. He remembered who God was. I'll never forget this.

This is one of those times when Brother Gary was so sick. He was so sick. And I was preaching for him. And I came in to check on him after I preached the service. And I came in and he said, hey, I want you to show you this.

He says, I was reading in my Bible. And look what I marked. He said, this helped me. And he didn't mark that that day when he was so sick. He marked that years.

Maybe decades before. He had dug a deep well of the knowledge and the love and the relationship with God so that when he was in a thirsty place, he had something to draw from.

Let me just tell you something. Dig a well and dig it deep. If you're looking for water, when the drought comes, you're in trouble. Isaiah 40, 28. Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary.

[17 : 31] There is no searching of his understanding. Remind yourself of who God is. He talks to God. In this passage, he prays, and I'm going to have to fly. He is honest with God.

He says, my soul is cast down. He says, I feel forgotten. He says, I am oppressed. He says, why are you doing this to me? He really accuses God at times. He says, you're crushing me. You're casting me off.

But then he asks for help. Verse 1, he says, in chapter 43, he says, you judge me. All those liars are judging me, but I want you to judge me. He says, then you plead my cause.

You see what's really real in my life, and then you plead my cause. He says, then you deliver me. Yeah, we have an adversary, but we also have an advocate.

And we can go to him, and we can beg him to help us in our deepest need. We can say, well, people are lying about me. God knows the truth about you. Go to him with it. He says, lead me with your light and your truth.

[18 : 26] All the voices I hear are leading me down into depression and discouragement, into doubt. Facebook is killing me. TV and the news is killing me. My friends, my face in the mirror is nothing but discouragement and fear.

But you lead me with your truth and your light. I love how confident he is that he is going to get back. He says, then I'm going to get back to the house of God.

He says, I'm separated right now, and I'm thirsty, and it's dry, but then I will go back to the altar. I will go back to thy tabernacles. Worship will be right again, because you are going to plead my cause.

The third thing, his big conversation with himself. In that refrain, he says it over and over again. Why are you cast down? He's talking to himself.

Why are you so low? Why are you defeated? Why are you discouraged? What is your problem, Stephen? What's your stinking problem? Why are you cast down? He has a conversation with himself.

[19 : 29] He asks the big question, why are you doubting? And then he gets a real big answer from a bigger God. He yells at himself.

I mean, it's one of those slap yourself in the face situations. He says, you hope in God. You silence the voices, and you hope in God. And then he says, yet will I praise Him.

I saw Zach walk in. I think he walked out. I know there was joy when he went into a hospital room, and he saw Hamilton born. And I'm sure he was thinking, God, I'm so glad you are here with us.

Healthy mom, healthy boy, this is awesome. But he went into a hospital room later, and he got news that that boy had cancer. But I can tell you, the same God was in the same room.

Hey, and later when they rang the bell, he was there too, by the way. Yet to praise Him. There are lots of things in life we have no control over, no choice about.

[20 : 32] There are circumstances that you would never choose. But you do have a choice about who you're going to listen to. You can listen to the enemy. Maybe even your own voice.

Cry out, where is your God? Or you can just say, I'm yet going to praise Him. I remember when I was sick.

The sickest I've ever been in my life. And I was curled up on my bed. I think it was Sunday morning. And I was just so miserable. I mean, I was just miserable. And I was praying.

And I was saying, God, if you don't fix this, I'm going to die. It wasn't real. I was dramatic. But I felt it. I was like, why don't you just help me?

And Ed and the group sang. I was watching service on my phone. And Ed curled up in fetal position. Sick as a dog. And they sang the song, Sovereign Over Us.

[21 : 32] I mean, I just bawled and bawled and bawled. I mean, I was just crying my eyes out. And it was like God wrapped His arms around me and said, I've been here the whole time. What took you so long to talk to me?

Stephen, I promised you I would never leave you. I promised you I'd never forsake you. I told you I would be with you. Even to the end of the world. In the valley of the shadow of death, I am with you.

You got a voice about who you're going to listen to. I know I'm over my time, but the missionaries took it, so. I want to tell you that you do have to learn to silence the voices.

The news is the news. I mean, it's there to make you watch and panic and whatever. Facebook is Facebook. And it's drama.

Friends, family, even yourself, you got to just silence it sometimes. And you got to remember what you know. You got to remember what you know to be true about God.

[22 : 40] He is good. He is the Creator God. He does love you. He's not mad at you. The wrath of God was poured out on Christ. He's not punishing you right now. He loves you.

He's promised to never leave you and never forsake you. And He doesn't lie. And you tell yourself that. And you tell it again and again and again and again until you start believing it.

And then you praise Him. And you put your hands up. You cry. You do whatever you've got to do. And you just praise Him. Even still. Yet praise Him.

The waters are still loud. The noise is still there. The pain is still there. COVID is still around. But you still praise Him. You got to learn to talk to yourself.

I was so close to doing this but my wife would have killed me. Trent sent me a picture one time. He was in the hospital and they had just gotten some bad news. It was like end of the road kind of news. No more treatment kind of news.

[23 : 43] And he sent me a picture of a mom. My mother-in-law. And her three boys. And her daughter. Her daughter. Huddled around like a football game.

Praying. That didn't happen in the storm. That well was dug before those kids were ever born.

And Brother Gary and Miss Linda prayed together. And read the Bible together. And then did family devotions together. And trusted God together from surgery to surgery to surgery.

That well was dug. And when he was in his dying day. There was no bitterness. There was no anger.

There was a daughter holding his hand. And singing a hymn to him that he had sang to her before she even knew how to speak. A hymn that he had taught her how to play on the piano.

[24 : 41] And she sang it to him. She yet praised him. The moment he took his last breath. And then I think he finished the song in the presence of God.

And yet praised him. That's the choice that we have. Circumstances are going to come. But you've got to learn who you're going to listen to. And you better dig a deep well now. You say everything's good right now.

Pastor's off the ventilator. Everything's good right now. Start digging. You never know when you're going to need that water. Let's pray together. God, I love you. I thank you for your word. In the times when we have no answers, we've just got to read it.

When our world is falling apart, just trust your word. And trust who you are. I pray that you'll help us. That's in your name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.