

“Calling Our Souls to Hope in God”

Psalms 42-43

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Psalm 42

To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah.

*¹ As a deer pants for flowing streams,
so pants my soul for you, O God.*

*² My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.*

When shall I come and appear before God?

*³ My tears have been my food
day and night,*

*while they say to me all the day long,
“Where is your God?”*

*⁴ 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,
a multitude keeping festival.*

*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 ⁶ 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.*

*⁷ Deep calls to deep
at the roar of your waterfalls;
all your breakers and your waves
have gone over me.*

*⁸ By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.*

*⁹ I say to God, my rock:
“Why have you forgotten me?”*

*Why do I go mourning
because of the oppression of the enemy?"*

*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?"*

*11 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.*

Psalm 43

*1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause
against an ungodly people,
from the deceitful and unjust man
deliver me!*

*2 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?*

*3 Send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling!*

*4 Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy,
and I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.*

*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.*

Intro: One Psalm or Two? The Sons of Korah: A Redemption Story –

I want to clarify one thing right up front: I am in the midst of preaching through the Psalms in the Summers, a project I began in 2016 and which has now reached its 6th summer. When I began, I set a rule for myself: one sermon per Psalm, one Psalm per sermon. So, a few summers ago, I preached Psalm 119 in one sermon, covering all 176 verses, in an overview sermon highlighting the major themes of the Psalm. Now,

here we are doing two psalms at once. Am I breaking the rules here? No, I don't think so.

In the original Hebrew Psalms, these two Psalms, 42 and 43, are one psalm. Once the Old Testament was translated into the Greek, a version we call the Septuagint, these two were split into two separate psalms. And while you can certainly read them as two psalms, they were originally one, and they work best together. If we take them separately, we're left without a stated author for Psalm 43, whereas all of Psalm 42-49 are the Psalms of the Sons of Korah. The same refrain found in verses 5 and 11 of Psalm 42 is repeated again in verse 5 of Psalm 43, and that refrain gives us the title of this sermon and our whole sermon series this summer: "Hope in God: The Psalms of the Sons of Korah" –

*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.*

As we will see in this series this summer, for us to anchor our hope in God, we have to know who God is and trust in His character more than in our circumstances. So, we will be taking time in each Psalm to focus on the attributes of God and how God's character anchors us in every season of life.

As for the Sons of Korah, theirs is a remarkable redemption story. Korah, their ancestor, was one of the members of the Tribe of Levi assigned to care for the Tabernacle. Three of these Levites – Korah, Dathan, and Abiram – were not content to just care for the Tabernacle and demanded to know why Moses and Aaron – who were also from the Tribe of Levi - were keeping the leadership positions for themselves, why they couldn't also be priests.

Moses confronted them in Numbers 16:4-11:

When Moses heard it, he fell on his face, ⁵ and he said to Korah and all his company, "In the morning the LORD will show who is his, ^[a] and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him. ⁶ Do this: take censers, Korah and all his company; ⁷ put fire in them and put incense on them before the LORD tomorrow, and the man whom the LORD chooses shall be the holy one. You have gone too far, sons of Levi!" ⁸ And Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: ⁹ is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the LORD and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, ¹⁰ and that he has brought you near him, and all your brothers the sons of Levi with you? And would you

seek the priesthood also? ¹¹ Therefore it is against the LORD that you and all your company have gathered together. What is Aaron that you grumble against him?"

God judged Korah for his rebellion by swallowing him and his household up. But some of the descendants of Jorah were spared, and later they were set aside by David and Solomon to be among the music leaders in the gathered worship of God's people. Just this past Thursday, I read 2 Chronicles 20 in my daily Bible reading, and there we read of King Jehoshaphat and Judah being attacked by an overwhelming horde of men from five surrounding nations. Then, word comes from the Lord that He will deliver His people, and we see the Korahites leading the people in praising the Lord for His good word.

So, the story of the Sons of Korah truly is a redemption story of those who learned to be content with the service God had given them and ended up being a tremendous blessing to God's people for generation after generation. Eleven of the Psalms bear their name, these psalms were either written by them or for them to use in leading God's people in praise. Today's psalm, Psalm 42-43, is a Maskil, meaning a psalm that is meant to impart wisdom.

In particular, Psalm 42-43 gives us the wisdom of how to deal with spiritual depression, how to stir our souls to hope in God when we're feeling far from God, far from home, surrounded by enemies, and overwhelmed by troubles. Three times the psalmist asks himself: *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?*

I. Feeling Far from God

The first answer for the cause of the psalmist's downcast and tumultuous soul is that he is feeling far from God. He expresses this in the opening lines by a desperate thirst and longing for God:

*As a 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 God?
My tears have been my food
day and night,
while they say to me all the day long,
"Where is your God?" – Psalm 42:1-3, ESV*

Hunger can be ignored, but deep thirst will not be put to the side. It must be satisfied, or it will kill us, and so it hits us with more desperation. The psalmist is like a deer panting for streams of living water, pursuing God and yet feeling far from Him.

He is so distressed at being far from God that he says his tears have been his food day and night. This is beyond just being a little teary-eyed or a bit homesick for Temple worship. He has been weeping day and night, desperately longing for God.

God is the bread and water of the believer's soul, and we can be satisfied with nothing less than Him. Notice how the Psalmist is specifically longing for the gathered worship of God's people:

*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,
a multitude keeping festival.*

Sometimes remembering wonderful times of worship can bring hope and encouragement to our souls, but at other times, the absence from gathered worship just makes our memories of sweet times of gathered worship more painful. It is unnatural for believers to be satisfied with not gathering together for worship. And one of the key blessings of the gathered worship of God's people are the songs of praise, the joyful singing of the redeemed people of God!

What makes you feel far from God? Sometimes unanswered prayer or cold and seemingly lifeless times of worship can make us feel spiritually numb, and then we exacerbate the problem by keeping ourselves out of the gathered worship of God's people and we neglect the means of grace God has given us.

II. Far From Home

Not only is the psalmist feeling far from God, but he is also far from home:

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

“*The land of Jordan and of Herman*” are in the far north of Israel, north of the Sea of Galilee, many miles from Jerusalem and the Temple. Some Bible scholars have speculated that this psalm was likely written by King David when he fled from Absalom, for this is the direction he went, to the far north of Israel. The language certainly seems to be in keeping with David’s style of psalm-writing, and this is as likely an explanation as any. David could have written it and then given it to the Sons of Korah to use in leading the people in singing, just as he may have also written some of the Psalms of Asaph, giving Asaph the words of a poem, which Asaph then set to music for congregational singing.

The truth is we do not know the circumstances or the author of this psalm. We do know he was far from home against his will and feeling overwhelmed. As long as we are in the world, believers sometimes feel far from our true, heavenly home where the pure and unveiled worship of God takes place around His heavenly home.

III. Surround by Enemies & Overwhelmed by Trouble

In addition to feeling far from God and being far from home, the psalmist is surrounded by enemies and overwhelmed by troubles:

In verse 3, his enemies are those who say to him all day long, “*Where is your God?*”

In verses 9-10, the taunts of his enemies resonate with the feelings of his own heart:

*⁹ I say to God, my rock:
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning
because of the oppression of the enemy?”
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?”*

Then, in verses 1-2 of Psalm 43, he comes back to his lament over the oppression of his enemies, asking God to deliver him from them:

*¹ Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause
against an ungodly people,
from the deceitful and unjust man
deliver me!
² 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?*

We are constantly harassed by our enemies, whether we realize it or not, and they world, our flesh, and the devil conspire together to make us feel utterly rejected by God and to give up faith in Him. The world wants to convince us that we don't need God to be successful or happy. Our flesh cries that God is depriving us of our deepest needs, our deepest desires. The devil taunts us with thoughts that God doesn't really love us or that He can't be trusted.

Not only is the psalmist constantly harassed by enemies, but his circumstances have him feeling overwhelmed by troubles, as he cries in 42:7:

*Deep calls to deep
at the roar of your waterfalls;
all your breakers and your waves
have gone over me.*

The picture here is drawn from the cascading rapids of the Upper Jordan River as it tumbles down toward the Sea of Galilee. He feels like he's caught up in this kind of overwhelming torrent and is drowning in troubles and sorrows.

Many circumstances in life can lead to us feeling this way: the death of a loved one, the loss of a job and sudden financial crisis, family conflict, wayward children, troubling national politics, division and conflict with loved ones, a sudden diagnosis of cancer, a crisis pregnancy, betrayal by a close friend, the moral collapse of a trusted spiritual leader. These can all threaten to overwhelm our souls with feelings of helplessness and drowning. And because the psalmist believes that God is sovereign and that His providence orders all of the events of his life, he is crying out to God, saying these are your waterfalls, your breakers, your waves.

IV. Calling My Soul to Hope in God

Where is our hope in such times as these? Where is our lifeline when our soul feels far from God, far from home, even forsaken by God, surrounded by troubles, taunted by enemies, and just completely overwhelmed, drowning in tears, in anxiety, in fear?

Well, if we look back over these lines, we can see several ways God reaches out to the psalmist in his distress and several ways the psalmist anchors his soul's hope in God:

First of all, in the refrain, we see the psalmist speaking to his soul and calling his soul to hope in God. Sometimes, when we're feeling so overwhelmed, we need to realize that part of the reason why we feel so overwhelmed is that we've been listening to ourselves too much and not talking to ourselves enough. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones expressed this truth in his classic book, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a successful medical doctor when the Lord called him into the Gospel ministry in the 1930s, and he went on to become one of the most influential ministers of the 20th Century. He said that too often we're listening to ourselves instead of talking to ourselves, and we've got to stop. In other words, instead of giving in to the grumbling and complaining of our hearts, we need to preach the Gospel to ourselves daily, calling our souls to hope in God.

We see several other things the psalmist does and that God does for him:

First, he is remembering God and the worship of God, and even though that is causing his heart some deep pain, it is still good that he is remembering.

Secondly, God has not truly abandoned him, for he says in 42:8: *By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.* God's steadfast love is His covenant loyal faithful love to His own people. It's one of the most powerful words in the Bible and a golden thread of hope that runs throughout the Psalms: *hesed*. *Hesed* is basically untranslatable into English, and early English Bible translators coined the word *lovingkindness*, and while that word captures the love and the kindness of God reflected in *hesed*, it missed the covenant steadfast committed nature of the love, so the ESV's *steadfast love* is pretty good.

How does God's steadfast love come to him? In part, through song, perhaps through some of the Psalms themselves. Music has a powerful effect on our psyche, for good or ill, and wonderfully rich and biblical worship music can certainly stir our souls to cry out to God and remember His steadfast love.

He also cries out for the Lord to **send out His light and truth to lead him**, in 43:3-4:

*³ Send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling!
⁴ Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy,*

*and I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.*

God's light is His truth and righteousness, His shining goodness and perfections. The psalmist knows he will not find his way back to God on his own, He needs God to send out His light and truth to lead him back to worshiping God rightly. We find God's light and truth in His Word, as the opening of His word gives light and His Word is truth. And ultimately, the written word of God leads us to the embodied, incarnate word of God, the Word made flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ. Ultimately, Jesus is the light and truth of God. He is the Light of God who stepped into the world, and He is the truth of God given to us. So, when the psalmist cries out "send out your light and your truth," he is asking God to send Jesus the Light and Truth of God who will lead him to worship God rightly. In our distress, what we need more than anything else is Jesus.

V. Hope Anchored in Who God Is: My Salvation & My God

Ultimately, the anchor of hope the psalmist seeks in God rests in who God is, and he needs to be reminded of this repeatedly, which is why the refrain is needed three times:

*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.*

Who is God for the psalmist? He is "my salvation and my God."

"My salvation" speaks of the loving and saving character of God. This word in Hebrew is yeshua, the same as the Hebrew name of Jesus. Remember, Gabriel told Mary and Joseph to name Him Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. The psalmist needs saving – from his enemies, from his downcast soul, from his circumstances, from his despair. And he knows that his only true salvation is in God – in God my salvation, God my rescuer, my Savior.

But God is also "my God." Over and over again, the psalmist refers to God as God, which may seem obvious, but there are three main Hebrew words used for God – Elohim, translated "God" is a reference to the mighty power of God. Adonai, translated Lord, is a reference to the rule of God. And YaHWeH, translated as the LORD (all caps) is God's covenant name, taken from "I am who I am" and it refers to God's unchanging self-sufficiency that makes Him absolutely trustworthy.

So, the focus in Psalms 42-43 is on God as my God, my mighty one, the strong and powerful. And this makes sense, for if God is going to be your Savior, He needs to be powerful.

Together, “my salvation and my God” reflect perfectly the goodness and greatness of God. We need God to be both very good – kind, loving, full of *hesed* that endures forever – and we need Him to be very great – strong, powerful, undefeated and undefeatable. Together, God’s goodness and greatness as our salvation and our God give us an unshakable anchor for our hope. And we need to call our souls to that anchor again and again!