

Preaching to Your Soul Psalms 42-43

I'm going to read Psalm 42-43 (virtually every commentator sees these two Psalms as one, as many Heb manuscripts have them as such; Ps. 43 has no title [which is surprising in book II of the Psalter]; and most noticeably they have **a common refrain** (42:5; 11; 43:5). It may have been divided for liturgical purposes (like Ps 9-10) [**Read/Pray**]

Something for you kids... Do you all know Kai? His mother posted this video of him asking a question, "When is coronavirus going to stop?"

That's a good question buddy.

We have asked many questions during this pandemic: why, who, when?

We've asked questions related to shopping, sports, economy, employment, school, and public worship, just to name some categories.

Welcome to Psalm 42 – a Psalm, a lament, filled with questions: When, where, and why.

One of the main questions raised, is one we can relate to because it's about **attending public worship**: “

The writer is a musician (43:4) who has known the joy of worship in the “house of God” (42:4) but has been denied that privilege (42:2)

He is dry, dejected, overwhelmed, and disheartened due to his inability to participate in worship at the temple.

He seems to be far in the north (**v. 6**).

We don't know why he can't get to Jerusalem, but it could be:

- A Psalm written from **exile** (perhaps in Babylon, or it might speak of David running from Absalom, cf., Ps 3).
- Prisoner of war?
- He could simply **live far away** and not every Israelite could go to Jerusalem whenever one wanted.
- There could be some **kind of conflict**
- But most likely it's due **to sickness**.

It's possible that sickness has prevented the worshiper from participating in the worship in the temple.

Prevented from public worship.

He's not prevented from praying and communing with God – for that's what he's doing in the Psalm!

But there is a corporate aspect of our faith that is vitally important.

We don't have the temple like these OT saints, but we do have the need to never forsake assembling ourselves together (Heb 10).

Added to this struggle, is the presence of **enemies** who taunt him.

It's a Psalm filled with lament, plea, and **Hope**.

He has to **preach** this hope to himself, which is how he deals with his discouraged state.

And he has to remind himself of the **character of God and the past grace of God.**

Spiritual Depression

Now, even if we weren't in quarantine, we could still identify with this worshiper because regardless of the cause of his dejection, the fact is we will all have low points.

Many saints through the years have experienced what some call "spiritual depression" like *Martin Lloyd-Jones* (who has a book with that title), as well *Spurgeon* (eg, *Spurgeon's Sorrows; his mainly due to health problems*)

Elijah and Moses had significant moments of it.

You may be in the spiritual doldrums: lack joy, passion and enthusiasm.

The are not thirsting for God's presence; not desiring the Bible; not enjoying singing the great hymns of the faith. You're having a "broom tree moment."

There's a whole lot that could be said about the reasons for this but I want you to understand is **what this worshiper does** so that when you have those moments you can press on by faith:

He lets himself go ... speaking to God honestly.

He makes himself think – thinking of past grace; thinking of God's character

He pulls himself together – by preaching to his soul three times! (Goldingay)

The first two are common in the Psalms.

The third is less common and it really sticks out when you read it three times.

Structure

There are three stanzas with the same refrain

The stanzas contain the three elements above – prayer/lament, reflection, and preaching to his own soul.

Stanza #1: Longing for God and for Participation in Public Worship (Ps. 42:1-6a)

Sons of Korah – [Great band name!] a group of priests in charge of the ministry of singing (2 Chron 20:19); their ministry was based in Jerusalem.

The Sons of Korah were appointed by David for musical leadership.

The Korah Psalms are not as individual as the David Psalms. They have a corporate emphasis.

There are eleven total (42; 44–49; 84–85; 87–88)

Maskil. The meaning is not clear so most versions don't translate it. It comes from a verb that means to make one wise or to instruct (Piper). So it's a song that teaches us important lessons. I'll conclude with four lessons.

The worshiper's longing is expressed with intense and illustrative language, and the repeated references to *God* (throughout the Psalm).

1: Desiring God's presence like a **thirsty deer** expresses deep yearning.

The deer is looking for what until he finds it and quenches his thirst leading to joy.

So the worshiper's "soul" (his whole being) pants for Go's presence

The Spurge vividly comments:

Debarred from public worship, David was heartsick. Ease he did not seek, honor he did not covet, but the enjoyment of communion with God was an urgent need of his soul; he viewed it not merely as the sweetest of all luxuries, but as an absolute necessity, like water to a panting stag. Like the parched traveler in the wilderness, whose skin bottle is empty, and who finds the wells dry, he must drink or die—he must have his God or faint. His soul, his very self, his deepest life, was insatiable for a sense of the divine presence.... Do you know what this is, by personally having felt the same? It is a sweet bitterness. The next best thing to living in the light of the Lord's love, is to be unhappy until we have it, and to pant hourly after it. Hourly, did I say? thirst is a perpetual appetite, and not to be forgotten, and even thus continual is the heart's longing after God. When it is as natural for us to long for God as for an animal to thirst, it is well with our souls, however painful our feelings. We may learn from this verse that the eagerness of our desires may be pleaded with God, and the more so, because there are special promises for the persistent and fervent.

We must drink or die.

Stay thirsty, my friends.

And satisfy your thirst all day in the presence of the *living* God (2a).

Only he can satisfy our thirst. (cf, Ps 63; Ps 84; Ps 36:8)

2b: The temple is in view here. (cf., Ps 84:7).

God had always promised to be there, but he can't get there.

He's detached; isolated and consequently dejected.

He longs to worship God with the people of God in the house of God (v. 4)

Now remember, this is a song. Why would you sing this song? Good question.

It would foster anticipation for worship in the sanctuary

It would serve as a reminder that attendance was a great gift (not a burden!)

If you aren't looking forward to returning; and if you haven't realized what a gift it is to assemble together, then something is wrong.

Log College Press: "Between October 1, 1918 and February 1, 1919, over 33,000 residents of Washington, D.C. contracted what was known as the "Spanish Flu" — 2,895 citizens of the city passed away during that time period. It was a devastating time for the city as well as the rest of the world, leading officials to ban, among other things, all church services in Washington, D.C. for the month of October 1918. When the ban on such public gatherings was lifted, Francis J. Grimké pastor of the Fifteenth Presbyterian Church, delivered a [sermon] on November 3, 1918 in which he offered his thoughts about the situation." One of the things he said was this:

"The fact that for several weeks we have been shut out from the privileges of the sanctuary has brought home to us as never before what the church has really meant to us. We hadn't thought, perhaps, very much of the privilege while it lasted, but the moment it was taken away we saw at once how much it meant to us."

Yet is it is a privilege.

We long to return, and may we always recognize public worship as a gift.

3a: He expresses his grief.

He has been drinking his tears day and night.

That is, all he does is cry.

3b: The taunts of the enemy make things worse.

Lloyd-Jones reminds us of our enemy Satan who wants us to be cast down: “The devil’s one object is so to depress God’s people that he can go to the man of the world and say, There are God’s people. Do you want to be like that?” Obviously, the whole strategy of the adversary of our souls, and God’s adversary, is so to depress us and to make us look as this man looked when he was passing through this period of unhappiness.”

“Where is your God?” the enemy asks.

His enemies conclude that God has abandoned him, like Job’s friends said to Job. It seemed as if God had departed (cf., **Ps 22:1**)

4: Feeling deserted, he remembers better times: when he used to lead worship.

He goes back to the times when great crowds of worshipers had gone to Jerusalem to participate in the worship festivals. (Passover, Booths, Pentecost)

5: Even so, the weight is not lifted, and so here is the first of three “self-sermons.”

He preaches to his soul!

“**Hope** in God! For I shall again praise him”

“As though this were two men,” Spurgeon says, “the Psalmist talks to himself. His faith reasons with his fears; his hope argues with his sorrows.

The worshiper is seeking to preach his soul out of the dumps!

He is confident that the Lord will act.

He knows God is faithful. “I shall again” is a great statement of faith.

Piper in 2008: “I cannot tell you how many hundreds of times in the last twenty-eight years at Bethlehem I have fought back the heaviness of discouragement with these very words: “Hope in God, John. Hope in God. You will again praise him. This miserable emotion will pass. This season will pass. Don’t be downcast. Look to Jesus. The light will dawn.” It was so central to our way of thinking and talking in the early eighties that we put a huge “Hope in God” sign on the outside wall of the old sanctuary and became known around the neighborhood as the “Hope in God” church.”

“My **salvation**”

[Lit: “the deliverance that comes from his face”

It speaks of God’s presence in salvation.

If God would look with favor upon him and intervene in his kindness, everything would change.

“and my God” may go with the next verse

He preaches the gospel to himself.

We must remind ourselves of God’s great **salvation**.

Gospel-self talk is what we need when we’re down.

We must not listen to the enemy or ourselves, but we must speak the gospel to ourselves.

Lloyd Jones: “The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself.... You must say to yourself, “hope in God!” instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way. And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, who God is, and what God has done, and what God has pledged himself to do. Then having done that, end on this great note: defy yourself, and defy other people, and defy the devil and the whole world, and say with this man, “I shall yet praise him, my salvation and my God.”

Stanza #2: Feeling Overwhelmed and Forgotten (Ps. 42:6b-11)

The worshiper’s dejected spirit is further explained in this stanza.

6: He is at Mt Hermon in the northeastern. There are majestic mountains in this northern border, and the snow and dew feed the Jordan River. (I once did a devotion on a hiking trail in that region from Psalm 42!)

While majestic and beautiful, it’s a long way from Jerusalem.

Because he’s not near the temple, he determines to remember *God himself*.

He feels deserted but still cries out to God.

It’s important to see that he’s crying out to God during this time.

7: He returns to water imagery only this time it’s with him drowning.

He feels **overwhelmed**.

The waterfalls with its rocks, breakers, and waves, and it’s noise portray his condition.

The streams that form the Jordan pass through several waterfalls and cascades of rushing waters where “deep calls to deep” and breakers and waves pass over.

Jonah 2:3 uses the same image.

Deathly forces overwhelm him. It’s a picture of chaos.

But there’s a subtle statement of faith here as he says “your waterfalls” and “your waves”

Though he feels overwhelmed he knows God is sovereign over everything.

8: In his despair, he remembers God’s *hesed*.

He states that day and night he experiences God’s care, protection and blessing.

He sang praises to God and prayed to him morning and evening.

His relationship with God is real, “the God of my life.”

“Christ, who is your life” (Col 3).

9: More reflection on the character of God: “my rock”

That’s what you need in chaos, a rock to stand on.

He knows God is his rock and refuge, he’s perplexed by his situation, so he laments again asking “Why have you forgotten me?”

9b-10: He has been abandoned to godless men, who taunt him

He is like a dying man and God seems silent.

His whole being (“bones”) is distraught.

11: In the feeling of desertion; when overwhelmed he preaches to his soul again. One thing we can preach to ourselves in these times is the fact that we who are in Christ, **are never abandoned.**

Christ will never leave us nor forsake us.

Christ cried out, “my God my God, why have you forsaken me?” as he died on the cross for us, and then rose in the third day and as he commissioned his disciples says, I am with you always.”

He took the flood of judgment on himself so we don’t have to endure it.

He gave up his life so that we can say, “Christ is my life.”

Stanza #3: Deliver Me So That I Can Attend Public Worship (Ps. 43:1-5)

1-4: Lament with an intensified plea.

1: He knows God to be powerful and able to vindicate him; and that he alone can defend him and prosecute the enemy and deliver him.

2: He speaks more on the character of God calling him his “refuge”

But he’s perplexed because of his condition: “Why have you rejected me?”

He goes about in mourning because of his spiritual dissatisfaction and the presence of his enemies.

He’s gone from feeling “forgotten” (42:9) to feeling “rejected” (43:2)

3: In the darkness, the Psalmist asks God to send his “light” and “truth”

The light of God is the experience of redemption and rescue (Ps 36:9; Isa 58:8, 10; 60:1,3)

The truth of God speaks of God’s covenantal faithfulness to his people (Ps 40:10; 57:3).

If God will send these aspects of his love then he will be able to go back to God’s “holy hill” and worship.

He may be reflecting on the wilderness experience, as God led his people.

4: If God will come to his rescue then he it would lead to great “joy”

The altar of God speaks of the temple, and recalls the festivals.

God my exceeding joy.

He can already imagine himself playing the lyre to God!

5: He preaches to himself a final time.

His situation hasn’t changed but there’s hope.

Goldingay, “In Pss 42-43 there is no indication that Yhwh has answered the prayer. The whole is a statement of faith and hope.

Though perplexed, how present God turns out to be.

The personal relationship is seen in the titles for God throughout the Psalm: living God, the face of God, your God, my God, my living God, my rock, God in whom I take refuge, and God my exceeding joy.

We have to **preach to ourselves who God is and what God has done.**

Look what he has done for us – he has rescued us; he has brought us to himself.

Last week: A man said to me, “I wish God would just come down and show himself to us.” “He has.”

5 Lessons

1. He laments.

Honest prayer

- He voices his frustration.
- He voices his confusion.
- He asks questions.
- He laments.

Faith-filled prayer: But with all this, he expresses confidence in God.

- Because of God’s character and God’s past performance he goes on in faith and hope.
- Rom 8:32 – past grace empowers present and future hope.
- Speaking of Romans 8, right in the middle of that triumphant text he quotes a Psalm of lament from Psalm 44.
- Lament and hope; lament and faith in the same passage.

2. He thinks on the nature and work of God.

Sprinkled in throughout are truths about God.

- God’s *hesed* (v. 8);
- God’s salvation (3 times);
- God’s nature (rock, joy, refuge);
- God’s light and truth (faithfulness);
- God’s sovereignty (he rules the waves!)

God hasn’t changed; he reminds himself of that.

That’s important for us to do: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” and no virus is going to change that.

3. He remembers past experiences of public worship.

This is not nostalgia (v. 4), but reminders of the powerful presence of God that he experienced in the temple.

These experiences in corporate worship remind us that God is the living God.

These past experiences give us hope for today and tomorrow.

This song instructs us on the importance of the gathering, so that we will not take it for granted and long to have it.

We need it.

4. He sings

This is a song... and he says: “At night his song is with me”

This Psalm is a praying song. It’s a pleading song.

It’s not a jubilant song but it is a faith-filled song.

Luther, “Come Philip, let us sing a Psalm and drive away the devil.”

Luther: “Come Philip, let us sing the 46th Psalm”

5. He preaches to his soul.

Three times he preaches to himself.

He would not concede to his enemies nor to his emotions.

We too need a good gospel vocabulary.

On this side of the cross, we know the greatest source of hope: the risen Christ.

We say, “Self, If God is for you, who can be against you?... Nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ...”

We say, “I will see the face of my Savior!

We grieve and lament in this life, but we preach to our soul, “He will wipe away every tear from our eyes” and “death will be no more”

All viruses will stop on that day!

Verse 2 can be translated, as the footnote says, “When shall I come and see the face of God” – that question has been answered in the NT: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” (Jn 14) “glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4)

We will see him, the one who is greater than the temple.

May God give you a great thirst for Christ today (drink deeply from the river of his delights) and may he give you a great thirst for that day, when we see his face.