

Depression and Despair

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[0:00] Psalm 42 and Psalm 43 today. So the Psalms, it's divided into five sections, five books they call them.

So that's kind of modeled after the five books of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. And then first book is Psalms 1 to 41. So we just finished the first book, which means we're about 20% of the way there, which is exciting.

And we usually cover one Psalm on Friday, as you know, but we're going to cover two because Psalms, just like Psalms 9 and 10, Psalms 42 and 43 are widely believed to have been a single composition originally.

That's why a lot of the Hebrew manuscripts have them actually as one Psalm. And then they have the same theme and there's a trajectory and same refrain in both of those Psalms.

So those are all clues that tell us that they were originally a single composition. And like the other songs in the Psalter, this one is also rich theologically and spiritually, but it's very raw emotionally and experientially.

[1:17] And it's kind of, this one in particular deals with depression and despair, that very common human experience, although that doesn't make it any less difficult experience.

And as we read through it, kind of we see the psalmist's thought process, how God brings him through his depression and despair.

And it teaches that we can hope in God in the seeming absence of God by remembering him and praying to him. So that's really the main point of this Psalm. So first we're going to talk about the absence of God in verses 1 to 5 of chapter 42.

And then we'll talk about the remembrance of God in verse 6 to 11. And then we'll talk about prayer to God in chapter 43. So verses 1 to 3 express how the psalmist feels spiritually parched and longs for communion with God.

It says, 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?

[2:27] My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, Where is your God? If you're like me, you have experienced this seeming absence of God at some point in your life, a dry season.

And I say seeming because God's of course not really absent, but it sure feels that way, right? It feels dry, weary, and you're stressed and harassed by the circumstances of your life.

And then you feel like, you know, just that relationship with God seems to be waning, and you don't feel his presence.

And the contrast in the images of water in verse 1 and verse 3 is very revealing. The first in verse 1, it says, He longs for, pants for, he thirsts for flowing streams of God, like a deer in a dry country.

But then instead, in verse 3, it says, His tears have been his food day and night. So the contrast of the water imagery, right? So drinking, instead of drinking of the vigorous life-giving stream of God, he has to be satisfied with the dripping tears from his own eyes.

[3:32] That's his food. It's a really sad picture. And so he, you know, kind of wistfully reminisces about the good old times in verse 4. He says, 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.

And the psalmist apparently used to lead God's people in the worship, in the celebration of the Jewish feasts, the festivals. But now he is alone in his depressive thoughts.

And we don't know exactly what kind of state he is in, what he is experiencing. But he is definitely dealing with some kind of loss and sorrow. And he feels deserted by God and is lamenting the fact

that he can no longer worship God in the temple in Jerusalem.

And so he says in verse 5, Why are you cast down on my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

And the psalmist is kind of here giving himself a pep talk, right? He's trying to exhort himself. He's examining himself. And exhorting his own soul. And why are you cast down on my soul?

[4 : 46] He says, And why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. So this is the refrain that occurs again and again three times in these two psalms.

And even though there is an expression of hope at the end, really the dominant note at this point of the psalm is one of being downcast. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And then he continues his conversation with God in verse 6.

He says, My soul is cast down within me. Therefore, I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon from Mount Mizar. So he admits that his soul is still cast down.

Therefore, he says, I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon from Mount Mizar. So land of Jordan and of Hermon are distant from Jerusalem. They're far away. So it shows where the psalmist is.

And because of that, he's choosing to remember God because he can't be in the temple, in the presence of God to worship him now. He chooses to remember him. And so this is, though he doesn't feel God at the moment, he thinks about him and remembers him.

[5 : 47] And this is using his spiritual memory to aid his fight against the depression and despair. And as he remembers God, he acknowledges that even his difficulties are from God's sovereign hand.

And so he says in verse 7, Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls. All your breakers and your waves have gone over me. And then it's God's waterfalls that fall thunderously upon the waters.

It's his ocean waves that are raging around him and foaming all around him. Instead of the refreshing waters of the flowing streams of God, now he's feeling overwhelmed by waterfalls and waves of God.

Yet the psalmist, even in the light of this, remembers an important truth about God in verse 8. He says, By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.

So he doesn't feel God's steadfast love toward him, but he knows God's steadfast love, and he's encouraging, he's rehearsing that truth at this point. And it's this remembrance of God's character that spurs him to pray more boldly and honestly in verses 9 to 11.

[6 : 58] It says, I say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? 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?

And notice how the psalmist never impugns God's character. Even in his desperation, he says, God is my rock. And he cries out to him. And it's this belief in him, that the belief that God loves him and cares for him, even in the midst of this, that helps him to pray to God and respond to the enemy's taunt, where is your God?

Accusing him of God's absence. And as he's trying to remember God and rehearse the truth about God, he goes back to the refrain in verse 11.

Why are you cast down on my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. And this recurring self-exhortation is really insightful, if you think about it, because speaking to yourself in the midst of depression and despair is really one of the most important things and helpful things we can do, is speaking to ourselves, speaking the truth of God to ourselves.

And in his book on the issue of spiritual depression, Martin Lloyd-Jones writes this, asks this incisive question. He says, have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?

[8 : 29] So don't just listen to your doubts and fears, but exercise faith and tell yourself of God's sovereignty and care and goodness. So then don't wallow in your guilt and self-condemnation.

Don't listen to that, but then speak to yourself instead about God's grace and his justifying work through Jesus on the cross, right? So by remembering God and rehearsing the truths about God,

we can overcome much of the depression and despair that beset us.

And this is not, I just want to address this because it's a common misunderstanding, but it's not just a fringe, you know, regressive opinion of a scientifically ignorant pastor, right?

I mean, this is a, because often I hear people say things like, well, but isn't depression caused by a chemical imbalance, right? And so, I mean, what good does it do to a person if you tell them to speak to themselves and adjust their attitudes, right?

And, but that's actually an erroneous idea from the last century that to think that depression is caused by a chemical imbalance. It's in a widely acclaimed book entitled *The Depths*.

[9 : 32] Psychologist Jonathan Rottenberg, who is an expert on major depressive disorders, writes that that suggestion that depression is caused by a chemical imbalance is wrong and naive and misleading. Rather, he suggests that depression is a result of a confluence of factors, including our own choices, relationships, our thought patterns, and how we regulate our emotions, right?

And there are, of course, instances where there is a biological reason, right? So, for example, thyroid problems or, you know, intolerance for certain foods and certain illnesses can cause feelings of depression, but those account for 10% or less of all the observed cases of depression. And so, chemical imbalance really has become, that theory has become widely popular because of the pharmaceutical companies who, on the first case, want you to believe that you're depressed and then secondly, want you to believe that their pill will solve that problem, right?

So, I mean, that's in large part why that view became so popular without scientific backing. And so, this is corroborated by findings of Harvard Health Publications and *Scientific American*.

They all published articles dealing with this. And it turns out that the Bible, which has been saying the same thing for millennia, has been right all along, right? That these things can be dealt with through rehearsing the truths of God.

[10 : 53] And so, we can maintain our hope in God by remembering Him and rehearsing the truths about God. So then, when we feel neglected and alone, we remember and rehearse the fact that God's omnipresent and with us, imminent.

And then, when we feel afraid and anxious, we remember God's sovereignty and love for us and that helps us to deal with our repression and despair. And as the psalmist continues to remember God and rehearse His truths, His tone grows ever more hopeful and that's when we turn to chapter 43 and then His lament turns to prayer, to a petition.

And so, this is a really important transition because so far, this was just the internal dialogue with Himself, but now He's adding a third party to the dialogue. God comes into the picture and then that decisively changes the whole tone of His introspection.

So, 1 to 4 of chapter 43, it says, vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people from the 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 about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? Send out Your light and Your truth. Let them lead me. Let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling.

[12 : 10] 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. Sometimes when we see other people struggling or suffering or when we are ourselves suffering and struggling, we pray that God will help us cope with the situation, but we don't pray that God will deliver us from the situation, that God would intervene to change the situation.

And this tendency often betrays people's kind of functional deism where they think of God as, oh, God's there, but He's not really going to intervene in our lives. He's not going to do anything about it.

Or rather, just a lack of faith and resignation. So I'm willing to pray for small things but not for these big things because I don't want to be disappointed and lose my faith.

It could be a lot of those things. But then as Christians, we can't resolve that tension. We need to pray for both. And that's exactly what Jesus does in Gethsemane when He prays to God.

Mark 14, 36, Abba Father, all things are possible for You. Remove this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what You will. So we see in the first part the request to just in faith remove this from me because that's what I want.

[13 : 24] But then at the same time that trust in God saying, but not my will, but Your will be done. And the Father, it turns out, was not willing to remove the cup, right?

So Jesus' prayer to remove my cup from me is not answered. And because that prayer is not answered, as believers who have been saved by Jesus, we can be, God's answer to us, His presence with us is guaranteed because Jesus' prayer was unanswered.

And that's why we can pray the prayer of the psalmist. Send out Your light and Your truth. Let them lead me. Let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling and have complete confidence that God will answer that prayer.

And because now Jesus has died for us, He's the new temple through whom we have access to God. And then through Him we have been sanctified so that even the very Spirit of God dwells in us as temples of God.

Right? So because of that, now we, this prayer that psalmist prays is one full of hope and faith for us.

[14 : 31] And then the final refrain comes again in verse 5. And at this point, because of the context of the prayer and the hopefulness of it, what used to sound like a forlorn cry in the previous chapter now soars with hope and it almost sounds like He's rebuking His own soul for its faithlessness.

It says, 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 by salvation and my God. So then in the midst of depression and despair, let us find hope in God by remembering Him and praying to Him.

Amen. Amen.