

God My Exceeding Joy

A Sermon on Psalm 43

by

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1. Introduction

- a. Psalm 42-43 can be taken together as some older Hebrew manuscripts combine them as one.
 - i. But even if we ignore the historical evidence, there are internal clues that suggest they may have originally been one psalm.
 - ii. In fact, if you look at vv. 5 and 11 in Psalm 42, you will find that they are nearly identical to v. 5 in psalm 43.
 - iii. Regardless of taking them as one psalm or two, they arise from the same psalmist under the same circumstances.
- b. My hope then was that in taking Psalm 43 on its own, I could develop this idea of hope in God further for you, because this is literally the wellspring from which everything else flows.
 - i. If your consistent hope is in God and God alone—you will stand through the various trials this life has to throw at you.
 - ii. But in order to do that, you must know what it means to find God as your supreme delight because this is how the psalmist portrays genuine hope in the lord.
 1. Thus, the question you and I must ask is: what is the well you draw from?
 2. The reason I ask this is simple: whatever truly captures your heart will be the well you draw from when suffering comes—not *if* suffering comes, but *when*.

3. Whatever preoccupies the majority of your thoughts, guides your decisions, and even informs how you spend your money and time, will be the contents of your well.
- iii. Perhaps it is better to ask as the Puritans did: are we a people of piety? Do we have reverence for God—or as Scripture simply puts it: do we fear the Lord?
 1. The most basic aspects of the Christian faith are informed by our devotion and reverence to God and His Word and so we must ask if this is true for us, or we are merely one of many consumers.
 - a. If we are merely a consumer, we ought not be surprised when we are often shown to think trite thoughts of God and His Word.
 - b. Yet we must also not be shocked to find a lack of faithfulness to His Word.
 2. In one sense, this is Christian piety; it is the recognition that all of our life belongs to the Lord—and all of life is worship.
 - a. And yet the idea of piety is so much more than simply reverence and respect for God and His Word in the form of obedience.
 - b. That is the foundation for the pious life, but what gets produced from a life of piety is delight in God Himself.
 - c. It is this pious life, or more simply stated, the life of one who fears the Lord, that will endure through trials and sufferings because God is the source of joy to us rather than the fleeting feeling of happiness.
 - d. This is the psalmist's life in every meaning way currently and we can see how his reverence for the Lord produced joy and hope. In other words:

what came out of his “well” in the midst of trying circumstances, was a rich understanding of who God actually is: the psalmist’s delight.

2. A Prayer for Vindication to the God of His Strength (v. 1-2).

a. The psalmist asks the Lord to stand as his character witness and defend him against an ungodly people.

i. “Vindicate me, O God, and plead my case against an ungodly nation; O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man!” (v. 1).

1. At the crux of the psalmist’s dilemma is the idea of true, biblical justice.

a. The language here is reminiscent of a courtroom scene, where he stands on trial before his accusers and in every single way, he has no hope for a fair trial.

b. Whether or not he actually stands in a court, they are acting as judge, jury, and executioner.

2. Notice how he describes these men: they are ungodly, deceitful, and unjust.

a. The ungodly man is one who simply has no thought of God and His ways.

b. The deceitful man is one who is given over to lies rather than the truth.

c. The unjust man is one who is given over to what the New Testament calls “malice.”

ii. Yet in spite of his circumstances, he still begs God to intervene and deliver him from his enemies.

1. He recognizes he is ultimately powerless in the face of his accusers.

a. The courtroom imagery continues here as he asks God to vindicate him, to plead his case, and ultimately, to deliver him from his accusers.

- b. He uses what is called an imperative of entreaty in all three instances where he asks God to intervene.
 - 2. If God rises to his defense, he knows that he will be declared an innocent man and set free from his unjust punishment.
 - a. Yet if God fails to act, he knows things will only go from bad to worse. In other words, God *must* act on his behalf and rescue him.
 - b. The foundation of his request rests upon his knowledge of who God is.
- b. The psalmist laments that God has seemingly rejected him and left him to his enemies.*
- i. “For You are the God of my strength; why have You rejected me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” (v. 2).
 - 1. Pay attention to how he grounds his prayer in the objective reality of who God is. Yahweh is the God of his strength.
 - a. The term in the Hebrew here is better translated as “stronghold.”
 - b. If you’re not familiar with what a stronghold is, it is best described as a tower you could run to for safety in the midst of invasion.
 - 2. For the Psalmist, God is his stronghold. God is his place of refuge and safety from his enemies.
 - a. If a stronghold built by human hands is difficult to destroy, how much more so is it to try and destroy the undestroyable God of the psalmist?
 - b. For him, God is the one sure refuge he can run to in the midst of any impending doom
 - ii. The dilemma he faces is that by every measurable criterion, this God, who is his stronghold, seems to have rejected the psalmist.
 - 1. He still mourns as a captive among an ungodly people who only wish him further

harm.

- a. You can sense perhaps there is confusion within him as he sees that his circumstances do not match what he knows to be true of God.
 - b. He knows that God is just; he knows that God intervenes for His people; he knows that God is a saving God—and yet here he sits among the scoffers.
2. The incredible thing is that he still affirms that God is currently his stronghold and in fact, this is what moves him to ask God why He has not yet come to the rescue.
- a. There is no point in which the psalmist denies that God is his place of refuge and safety, he is merely asking that God act in a way that is consistent with who He is.
 - b. In spite of how he sees things and in spite of how he feels, he places his trust and hope in the God he actually knows.

3. A Petition for Restoration from the God of His Guidance (v. 3).

a. *The psalmist asks that the Lord set free His light and truth to lead him out of captivity.*

- i. “O send out Your light and Your truth, let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling places” (v. 3).
 1. In every instance, the psalmist’s position is shrouded in the darkness of false accusation and imprisonment, yet he asks that the very light and truth of God would be set loose.
 2. The psalmist gives an almost human-like description of God’s light and truth.
 - a. The very light and truth of God is seen as something that emanates from Him, meaning they are born out of His very character and nature.

midst of affliction.

4. A Promise of Praise to the God of His Exceeding Joy (v. 4).

a. *The psalmist promises praise for God's deliverance.*

- i. "Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and upon the lyre I shall praise You, O God, my God" (v. 4).
- ii. This verse requires very little explanation; if God sends forth his light and truth to guide the psalmist, he will go back to the sanctuary and praise Him.

b. *The psalmist's joy, however, is God Himself, regardless of being delivered.*

- i. What I want you to pay close attention to is that the psalmist's joy is not dependent on God delivering him out of his affliction.
 1. He of course desires that God would rescue him and lead him back to the tabernacle, yet notice how he uses the present tense here to describe what God is to him in the midst of his affliction.
 2. Notice that his promise of praise is future tense, but when he speaks of God, he proclaims that God is his *current* exceeding joy. God is *currently* his God.
- ii. This concept of God being your exceeding joy is much the same as the idea of piety I spoke of in the introduction.
 1. It is not that this life has nothing to offer us in which we can find delight, but that God Himself is our ultimate joy and delight.
 2. This is the reason I ask: what is the well you draw from? What it is that you truly love? Is it God? Or is it God plus something else?

a. If you want to know if this is actually true of you, all you must do is look at what takes priority in your life right now.

b. Beloved, we are masters at self-deception. We are experts at carving out

little places within our hearts where we believe we can tuck away are idols.

- c. The only reason why the genuine Christian finds joy in the midst of affliction is because God Himself is the never-ending wellspring of joy you draw from.

5. A Posture of Hope in the God of His Salvation (v. 5).

a. *The psalmist rebukes himself and commands himself once more to hope in God.*

- i. “Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God” (v. 5).
- ii. There is a reason why the psalmist, between Psalms 42 and 43, repeats this verse three times.
 - 1. He is at a place of incredible weakness and helplessness—yet rather than wallow in his despair, he directs his attention continually back to God.
 - 2. He draws from what he knows to be true. He draws from the well that he knows will never run dry or disappoint him.

b. *He is a man of incredible trust and confidence in God and God alone.*

6. Conclusion

Small Group Questions

1. What is the “well” you draw from currently that is lulling you into a place of false hope?
2. How do you cultivate godly spiritual disciplines so that when trials and hardships come, you will have a “deep well” to draw from? If you have children and/or a spouse—how are you cultivating these disciplines in them?
3. What is your true delight in this life? Does how you spend your time, energy, resources, and more, show this to be true?