

Hope in God

A Sermon on Psalm 42

by

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1. Introduction

2. In the midst of a spiritual wasteland, hope in God's presence (42:1-5).

a. The psalmist longs for spiritual sustenance amidst unquenchable drought (42:1-3).

i. The psalmist begins with a word of lament and the reason for this is that he is removed from the presence of the Lord.

1. We must remember that for the Israelite, the center of worship was the temple.

a. In the Old Testament, the Spirit of the Lord dwelled within the tabernacle on the Ark of the Covenant, so for one to be removed from the presence of God's Spirit was to be cursed.

b. In every meaningful way, the psalmist is cut off from the means that God has given Israel for worship.

2. Yet as a son of Korah, he was even further removed because his duty would have been to lead the people in worship and to guard the tabernacle.

a. One of their chief duties was to guard and preserve the tabernacle, and so he is about as close as one can get to the presence of the Lord besides the High Priest.

b. His duties, however, were even greater than this; he led the people of God in worship—yet all of this was taken from him.

ii. "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants 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 day long, ‘Where is your God?’”

1. Here was a man suffering what he knew to be the fullest extent of a spiritual drought.
 - a. Like a deer, desperately seeking a source of water, the very source of life, so his soul pants for the living God.
 - b. Notice his question: *when* shall I come and appear before God? The only way he would be satisfied would be for God to nourish his soul, yet in a cruel twist of fate, the only source of water to him is an endless stream of tears.
2. If this were not enough, during the driest conditions of his life, he must endure those who taunt him as he weeps. They ask him, “Where is your God?”
 - a. Continually, they add insult to injury by mocking his faith.
 - b. This is not an earnest question; it is designed to rub it in all the more, and even mock his God.

b. The psalmist remembers the good old days amidst proud mockers (42:4).

- i. “These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God, with the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.”

1. The way this phrase is expressed is that he is pouring out all of his being to God—and in the midst of that, he remembers.
 - a. It’s this strange mix of continual sorrow, and yet an incredible time of hope and joy.

- b. As he weeps for what he used to have, he fondly thinks of those joyous times where he led the people up the mountain to the house of God.
 2. What he has in mind here is likely the various times that the Israelites would gather together and make their pilgrimage to the sanctuary. There were three main feasts:
 - a. The greatest of these would be the Passover, where the people of God would remember God's redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt.
 - b. The second would be the Feast of Weeks, where they would celebrate the Lord's gracious provision to them in the harvest.
 - c. Then finally, there was the Feast of Tabernacles, where they would remember their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, where God preserved them through the wilderness and had them live in tents.
- ii. All of them were a continual reminder of God's gracious protection and provision for His people in every aspect of life.
 1. As the men of Israel would make their way to these celebrations, the Sons of Korah would lead them in Psalms of Ascent.
 - a. As they traveled to Jerusalem and climbed the uphill road to the city, they would sing these songs at designated points, which were designed to turn their minds, hearts, and affections on God Himself.
 - b. These various songs of ascent are filled with rich, theological truths of all that God has done and all that He is.
 2. He remembers, and as his eyes fill with tears of sadness because he longs for this once again, there are tears of joy intermingled as he is reminded of all the truth of who God is and what He has done.

c. *The psalmist preaches hope to himself amidst great despair, for he will praise God once again (42:5).*

i. “Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence.”

1. As the psalmist draws from his memories of this great procession of God’s people—he is not merely thinking about what he *felt* those days.
2. The two words for “despair” and “disturbed” pale in comparison to what he’s actually feeling at the moment.
 - a. The word for “despair” literally speaks to the fact that he feels like his soul is dissolving away within him; the word “disturbed” here would be like a loud churning of his bowels.
 - b. The word is often used to describe a surprise attack on a city, and the citizens respond in a loud uproar.

ii. In other words, he is a man who is experiencing very real and raw emotions—yet he is looking to bring his emotions under submission to the objective truth of who God is.

1. He recognizes his feelings, are in fact, what’s currently betraying him.
 - a. In essence, he is preaching the truth to himself and he directs himself back to the objective truth of God’s Word.
 - b. He’s remembering the songs he led where he and countless others sang of God’s faithfulness to Israel in the midst of whatever opposition they faced.
2. Yet he does not merely remember, nor even rebuke himself. He commands himself to hope in God.

- a. The idea is that this is an active hope. It relinquishes all of the dread and anxiety of what is and what may be, and confidently waits upon the Lord.
- b. “For I *shall* again praise Him for the help of His presence.” He actually anticipates that salvation from the Lord shall come and he will be restored to praise once again.

3. In the midst of a physical wasteland, hope in God’s lovingkindness (42:6-11).

a. The psalmist longs for God’s nearness amidst unsurpassable separation (42:6-7).

- i. “O my God, my soul is in despair within me; therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan and the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.”
 1. He places himself geographically in the land of the Jordan river, near Mount Hermon and Mount Mizar.
 2. From the distant peaks of the lonely mountain, separated from the presence of the Lord, he remembers once more.
 - a. He picks back up on the refrain of the psalm given to us in v. 5. Once more, he directs his attention to his God.
 - b. As he remembers God, he pours forth another prayer of lament.
- ii. “Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; all Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me.”
 1. The language he uses here to describe his depression is incredibly vivid.
 - a. Picture the scene as a never-ending barrage of water on rock from the falls as an endless supply of water spills over the side.
 - b. Deep calls to deep. This word is the same one used in Genesis 6, where the floodwaters rose from the great deluge stored under the surface of the earth—and destroyed *everything*.

2. “All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me.” What a terrifying and yet simultaneously beautiful understanding of the sovereignty of God.
 - a. His miseries, his trials, have completely overwhelmed him. He is drowning in the great deluge.
 - b. Yet the psalmist recognizes his circumstances were brought upon him by God.
- b. *The psalmist preaches hope to himself amidst great despair, for he will praise God once again (42:8-11).*
 - i. “The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime; and His song will be with me in the night, a prayer to the God of my life.”
 1. Though his circumstances give him every reason to despair—he once again draws his sights on God; he fixes his hopes on two great realities given to the people of God.
 - a. The first thing of hope he focuses on is that God will command His lovingkindness to him in the daytime.
 - b. The second thing of hope he focuses on is that God’s song will be with him during the night.
 - c. All day long, in other words, the psalmist knows that God will be with him.
 - d. Out of this flows a prayer of lament, which is recorded for us in the next two verses.
 2. In each of the previous sections, he has begun with despair, but here, he immediately begins with hope in God.

- a. “I will say to God my rock, ‘Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?’ As a shattering of my bones, my adversaries revile me, while they say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’”
 - b. He knows the truth about who God is. He knows every fiber of his being should trust in him, and yet by every appearance, it looks as if God has forgotten about him.
- ii. “Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.”
- 1. This refrain is the same as the first in v. 5, except for the very last few words.
 - a. He has every confidence the Lord will rescue him and bring him once more into His presence to praise Him.
 - b. The word “help” here is truly a weak translation of the word “salvation.” It is the same word Moses used when the Israelites are standing before the Red Sea as the Egyptians were closing in on them to kill them.
 - 2. He looks with eyes filled with faith—that his God will not merely save him from his current distress, but save his face.
 - a. What he means is this: there is yet a day coming for the psalmist where he sees that his endless crying will be turned to joy once more as he comes into the presence of the living God.
 - b. In other words: there is hope, but it is in God, and God alone.

4. Conclusion

Small Group Questions:

1. What can we learn about the psalmist's practice of correcting himself, and commanding himself once more to hope in God?
2. What does this Psalm teach us regarding the nature of suffering in the life of the Christian?
3. How do you see God's faithfulness to you in the midst of life right now? Look beyond the mere material aspects (though these are good to recognize) and explore how God sustains you in the hope of His Word, His promises, and Himself.