

## Summer Sermon Series: Sing to the LORD

# “Sing through the Raging Storm”

(Psalm 42 and 43)

### Introduction

- For this year’s Summer Sermon Series – “Sing to the LORD” – we are utilizing biblical themes/lyrics from great worship songs as the basis for our sermons. To this point, we have used the song “How Great Thou Art” (1885) to preach from Psalm 139 on the greatness of God; the song “Rock of Ages” (1776) to preach from 2 Corinthians 5:21 on the substitutionary atonement of Christ; the song “A Mighty Fortress is our God” (c. 1529) to preach from Psalm 46 on the sovereignty of God; the song “Before the Throne of God Above (1865) to preach from 1 John 2:1 to preach on Jesus as our Advocate; the song “Our Great God” (2002) to preach from various Scriptures on the character and activity of the devil; and the song “Come Thou Fount” (1758) to preach from 1 Samuel 7 on God’s salvific mercy.
- Our song for this morning brings us to Psalm 42 and 43. The book of Psalms, known as the Psalter, is a book of songs. It has been appropriately referred to as the hymnal of Scripture. But these Psalms also function as prayers to God (petitions, confessions, thanksgiving, and praises). In fact, one of the major distinctions concerning the book of Psalms, is that the Psalms are man’s words directed toward God, where much of the Bible (certainly the books of the Law; the Pentateuch) are God’s words directed toward man. Consequently, the book of Psalms is often used as a source and guide for our prayers and praises to God.

Chronically, the book of Psalms spans about 1,000 years. The first Psalm to be written was probably Psalm 90, written by Moses some 1400 years before the coming of Christ, and the latest Psalm is thought to be either Psalm 126 or 137 (late sixth or early fifth century B.C.). What is for sure is that the book of Psalms is a collection of 150 Psalms written by many different authors over a period of about a thousand years – all serving as part of the inerrant and inspired Word of God.

- Most scholars (both Jewish and Christian) agree that Psalms 42 and 43 were originally one Psalm (also likely of Psalms 1 & 2, and 9 & 10), as they share the same “chorus” (at the end of each five-verse stanza). They function as a song, sung to the by the believer to God, with three verses and the repeated chorus after every verse:

**Ps 42:5-6** ~ “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 <sup>6</sup>and my God. ...”

**Ps 42:11** ~ “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.”

**Ps 43:5** ~ “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.”

- In these Psalms, the psalmist cries out to God because he is being attacked by his enemies and as he is feeling far from God. These Psalms are a comfort and benefit to many Christians as they have experienced doubt, discouragement, and despair. Sometimes, when we are feeling lonely and/or being persecuted, we can struggle with how we are feeling and how to express those feelings to God.

**Psalm 42** ~ “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. <sup>2</sup>My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? <sup>3</sup>My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, ‘Where is your God?’ <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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 <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. <sup>8</sup>By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. <sup>9</sup>I say to God, my rock: ‘Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?’ <sup>10</sup>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?’ <sup>11</sup>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** ~ “Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! <sup>2</sup>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? <sup>3</sup>Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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.”

➤ Psalms 42 and 43 give us an outline to follow. That is, words to express, and how to respond, when we are struggling in the midst of a spiritual battle.

### 1. The DESPERATION for God (Psalm 42:1-4)

➤ At the outset, it is blatantly obvious that the Psalmist longs to be with the God – perhaps in the presence of God or in right fellowship with God. Whatever the reason, and to whatever degree, he feels that he is separated from God: *“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. <sup>2</sup>My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?”* (vs.1-2).

At first glance, it is easy to see that the Psalmist is comparing his desire for God with the desire a deer has for water. But that understanding only scratches the surface of what the Psalmist is intending to communicate. The Hebrew word for *“pants”* (עָרַג; vs.1<sup>2x</sup>) describes more than a simple thirst for water. Rather, it expresses an intense longing, earnest desire, and desperate need for something (only here and in Joel 1:20).

**Joel 1:18-20** ~ “How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle are perplexed because there is no pasture for them; even the flocks of sheep suffer. <sup>19</sup>To you, O Lord, I call. For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flame has burned all the trees of the field. <sup>20</sup>Even the beasts of the field pant [עָרַג] for you because the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.”

➤ The Psalmist is not comparing his desire for God to that of a tranquil scene with mildly-thirsty deer before a brook (as is so often depicted). Rather, this is a picture of a dehydrated deer that is in desperate need of a drink of water – in the midst of a drought! The picture is not serene, but severe. The deer is not just wanting water but panting for it – desperately in need of it!

This is a perfect illustration of the Christian life. For as Christians, we ought to have an intense longing for God! We must recognize our desperate need for God, and our utter hopelessness apart from God. This is an oft-repeated refrain in the Psalms:

**Psalm 63:1** ~ “O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”

**Psalm 84:2** ~ “My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.”

**Psalm 143:6** ~ “I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.”

➤ This desperation for God is neither shallow nor superficial. *“My tears have been my food day and night”* (vs.3). It is not sinful, or even wrong, to grieve (see Jn.11:35; Rom.12:15; 1Thess.4:13). Christians are not impervious to mourning or feelings of sadness. Sorrow is not the opposite of joy, and sadness is not ungodly.

**Ps 6:6-7** ~ “I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. <sup>7</sup>My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows weak because of all my foes.”

**Ps 69:2-3** ~ “I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. <sup>3</sup>I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.”

➤ The Psalmist is honestly crying out to God in honest pain and sorrow: *“I cannot eat, I weep day and night”* (vs.3; NET). This is not manufactured grief, or artificial sadness. He is coming before the Lord, in prayer, without guile or duplicity. He is raw and real.

Since God is omniscient, and cannot be deceived, it does us no good to fake our prayers. God is not fooled by flowery but insincere prayers. He is not impressed by religious sounding prayers that are phony or contrived.

Some people, perhaps thinking that they cannot really express their true thoughts and feelings to God, do not cry out to God in prayer. But as the book of Psalms shows, it is acceptable and beneficial to express to God our pain and our sorrows.

➤ In our sorrow, however, we need to avoid the temptation to doubt (or test) God or to fall into despair (or depression). The Psalmist is not crying out to God in self-pity or with selfish ambitions. He is not whining about not getting his way, complaining about life being unfair, or crying because someone hurt his feelings. He is under attack, as enemies of God are taunting and persecuting him: *“My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, ‘Where is your God?’”* (vs.3; cf. vs.10).

The Psalmist is obviously suffering some sorrow or affliction, and ungodly people are using the opportunity to taunt him. They decide to “kick him while he is down”, to “pour salt” on his wounds.

✓ **Illust:** “Cruel taunts come naturally from cowardly minds. Surely they might have left the mourner alone; he could weep no more than he did ... Note how incessant was the jeer; and how artfully they framed it! It cut the good man to the bone to have the faithfulness of his God impugned. The wicked know that our worst misfortune would be to lose God’s favor; hence their diabolical malice leads them to declare that such is the case” (Charles Spurgeon; *Psalms volume 1* (The Crossway Classic Commentary); Ps.42:3).

✓ **Illust:** “In ancient times almost no one was a true atheist. The first real atheism came with Greek philosophy. So the taunt did not mean that God did not exist but that God had abandoned the psalmist. It meant, ‘Where is your God when you need him? Where is your God now?’” (James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 42–106: An Expository Commentary*; 42:3).

➤ But in the midst of his trial, the Psalmist resolutely recalls his time spent worshiping God in church: *“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”* (vs.4). He reminisces on his past time spent in leading people to the temple to worship God, and worshipping God in the midst of the congregation. He remembers that, in the past, he has joyfully praised God for His blessings and rejoiced in the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Sometimes, in the darkness of loneliness and sorrow, we can forget the times spent in the light of God’s glory and sovereignty. If we are not vigilant, we can lose perspective and fail to remember God’s amazing love, His unmerited grace, and His immeasurable goodness. If we are not biblically discerning, we can drift into thoughts that we deserve better (or more) from God. If we are not careful, Satan can deceive us into thinking that God is unkind, unjust, and that He has forsaken us (see Gen.3:1-5). If we are not resolute, the dark night of the soul can eclipse the brilliant light of God’s glory.

➤ We need to regularly ask ourselves questions such as these: Is my Christian life captured by an all-consuming desire to know and follow after Christ? Could I accurately describe myself as a person who is passionately obsessed with Jesus? Would others testify that I am intensely and faithfully seeking after God in my life? I think all these introspective questions could be answered in response to this one question: Does my life reveal that my soul longs for God as a deer – dying of thirst – pants for streams of water, or have I become too content with the wastelands of this world? May we daily be reminded of our desperate need for God, and His all-satisfying goodness and grace.

## 2. The LAMENTATION to God (Psalm 42:6-10)

➤ The Psalmist's desperation for God turns into a lamentation to God. He is discouraged if not outright depressed: *"My soul is cast down within me"* (vs.6). This is an expression of despondency (*"I am depressed"* [NET]; *"I am deeply depressed"* [HCSB]; *"my soul is in despair"* [NAS]). His sorrow was not quickly or completely alleviated. He has tasted the salt of his tears (vs.3), experienced the sharp pain of mockery (vs.3), and suffered the emptiness of feeling forsaken by God.

➤ But rather than wallow in misery or self-pity, he again forces himself to remember God's goodness and grace. What does he remember? The question is not 'what' as much as it is 'who'? *"... therefore I remember you"* (vs.6; see vs.4).

In times of doubt and despair, we need to remember the nature and character of God. This is yet another reason why we must faithfully read and study the Bible, and faithfully attend a Bible-preaching church. For God's Word serves as *"a lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path"* (Ps.119:105). It is also an anchor for the soul, to keep us from drifting into sin or crashing upon the rocks of despondency.

➤ Specifically, the psalmist remembers God *"... from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar"* (vs.6). Mount *"Hermon"* is a geographical location north of Galilee and east of the Jordan river [the location of Mount Mizar is unknown]. It is possible that the psalmist is remembering that even though he is geographically far from Jerusalem (and feels far from God spiritually), God is still with him. It is also possible that he is struggling to remember this truth, in the midst of his trouble and despair.

The poetic imagery is powerful: *"Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me"* (vs.7). It seems as though the psalmist is describing himself as drowning in the deepest depths of the sea, where the waves are endlessly crashing over him. The Hebrew word (תְּהוֹמוֹת) translated *"deep"* (vs.7<sup>2x</sup>), refers to the deepest of depths (*"the great deep"*, Ps.39:6; see Gen.1:2; 8:2). The psalmist is seemingly all alone, nothing but deep waters and crashing waves as far as the eye can see, surrounded by perilous threats and chaos on every side. Emotionally and spiritually (perhaps mentally and physically as well), he is really in a bad way with no apparent help in sight. Struggling to keep his head above water, the psalmist sees himself as drowning, and he acknowledges God's sovereignty through it all (*"your waterfalls ... your breakers ... your waves"*; see Ps.119:75).

**Jonah 2:3** ~ "For you cast me into the deep [תְּהוֹמוֹת], into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. ... <sup>5</sup>The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep [תְּהוֹמוֹת] surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head"

**Ps 69:14-15** ~ "Deliver me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep [מַעַמְקוֹת] waters. <sup>15</sup>Let not the flood sweep over me, or the deep [תְּהוֹמוֹת] swallow me up, or the pit close its mouth over me."

**Ps 88:7** ~ "Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. ... <sup>15</sup>Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer your terrors; I am helpless. <sup>16</sup>Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me. <sup>17</sup>They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together."

➤ The only help for the psalmist is the LORD. Deep need calls for a great God! Quite literally, only God can rescue him from the drowning, only God can save his life. It is at this moment, like a drowning person gasping for air, that he affirms the faithfulness and omnipresence of God: *“By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life”* (vs.8). That is, even amid his trials and tormentors, he knows he can call upon the LORD. God is God in the night as well as in the day – in life’s valleys and mountaintops – in bad times as well as in good times.

And yet, his prayer is perhaps surprising: *“I say to God, my rock: ‘Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?’<sup>10</sup> 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?’”* (vs.9-10; see vs.3). While he knows that God is his *“rock”* (vs.9) – that which he desperately needs – the psalmist is struggling with feelings that God has forsaken him. His circumstances scream that God has left him, as his oppressors (vs.9) and taunters (vs.10) ruthlessly insist (vs.10), but he knows that God is sovereign, faithful, and good.

Can you relate? You believe that God is sovereign, that God is all knowing and all powerful, but you seemingly cannot escape the feeling that He has failed, forgotten, or forsaken you. If so, you are not alone.

**Ps 22:1-2** ~ “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? <sup>2</sup>O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.” (see Matt.27:46; Mk.15:34)

Matt 28:20 ~ “... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Heb 13:5 ~ “... he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” (see Josh.1:5)

➤ This is the collision between our feelings, and right biblical doctrine. This is evident in the fact that the psalmist is praying to the God who he feels has *“forgotten”* him (vs.9; Ps.43:2). His enemies are so vicious, so relentless, that they are *“a deadly wound in my bones”* (vs.10; “shattering my bones” [NAS] or “crushing my bones” [HCSB]). Yet, he knows that God cannot forget and that God will never forsake those who belong to Him (see Jn.6:37; 10:27-30; 11:11-12; Rom.8:1, 37-39). While suffering, he vacillates between faith and doubt; doctrine and feelings; what he knows to be true and what he feels in the moment.

✓ Illust: “Feelings are always real, but they are not always right.”

**Jer 17:9** ~ “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (see Eccl.9:3; Matt.15:19-20)

**Prov 28:26** ~ “The one who trusts in his own heart [“mind”; ESV] is a fool, but the one who walks in wisdom will escape.” (NET; see Prov.3:5)

### 3. The PETITION to God (Psalm 43:1-4)

➤ In Psalm 43 we find the two-fold petition the psalmist made to God. The first, is a request to be exonerated: *“Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! <sup>2</sup>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?”* (vs.1-2). The psalmist is not claiming to be sinless, but asking God to reveal that his sufferings are not the (direct) result of his sin. He is not sinless, but he is innocent. His reputation has been sullied by his enemies (*“an ungodly people ... the deceitful and unjust man”*; vs.1), and he wants God to clear his name. He is innocent of the charges brought before him. He longs to have God, he’s pleading with God to, *“vindicate”* and *“defend”* him (vs.1).

**Job 13:15** ~ “Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face.”

Job 13:15 ~ “Even if he slays me, I will hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face!”  
(NET)

**1 Cor 4:3-4** ~ “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup>For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.”

➤ The second request is to be restored: *“Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling!”* (vs.3). God’s “light” will dispel the darkness he is in, and God’s “truth” will rectify all the lies that are told about him. In addition, it is God’s light and truth that will “lead” him in life, and ultimately “bring” him to be the dwelling place of God (*“your holy hill and to your dwelling”*). Only God’s light and God’s truth can bring us into God’s presence.

Even though he is feeling forsaken/forgotten by God, the psalmist’s greatest desire is (still) to be in right fellowship with God, and to rightly worship God: *“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”* (vs.4). This is joy overflowing, and praise unending. Through all the trials, persecutions, losses, and sorrows, the psalmist’s ultimate desire in life is to worship God – the one and only true God – as his one and only God. He longs not for worldly comforts, physical wellbeing, or temporal pleasures, but the deep and everlasting communion with God. He longs to offer sacrifices to God, and to sing praises to God – to be in the glorious, sanctifying, and awesome presence of God – his “rock” (vs.9), his “exceeding joy” (43:4), his “salvation” (42:5, 11; 43:5), and His “God” (42:6, 11; 43:5).

#### 4. The (RE)DEDICATION to God (Psalm 42:5, 11; 43:5)

➤ Sometimes it is good for a person to talk to him/herself (but not always). We need to talk ourselves out of bad moods, restless anxieties, or brooding discouragements. We simply cannot wait for someone else to cheer us up, or to set our minds right. We cannot waste (anymore) time struggling or sulking. Jerry Bridges has stated that we need to preach the Gospel to ourselves every day.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981), the renowned Welsh preacher (the senior minister at Westminster Chapel in London from 1943-1968), wrote a book (published in 1965) titled “Spiritual Depression: It’s Causes and Cure” (one of his most popular books). In it, he wrote: “I suggest that the main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression in a sense is this, that we allow our self to talk to us instead of talking to our self” (p.20). This book is essentially an exposition of Psalm 42, and he specifically addressed the repeated “chorus” in Psalms 42 and 43: *“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”* (42:5-6, 11; 43:5). This “self-talk” (self-rebuke, self-exhorting) occurs frequently in the Psalms (Ps.62:5; 103:1-2; 116:7; 146:1).

➤ There is certainly no shortage today of things that can make us anxious or fearful. Especially with the internet and social media, crises can seem to be pervasive and invasive. Consequently – if our minds are not set on things above (Col.3:2); if the peace of Christ does not rule in our hearts (Col.3:15); if our eyes are not fixed on Jesus (Heb.12:2); if our souls are not anchored to the truth of God (Heb.6:19) – we can fall into all kinds of uncertainty and despair.

✓ Illust: “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? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them but they are talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now [the psalmist’s] treatment [in Psalm 42] was this: instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. ‘Why art thou cast down, O my soul?’ he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, ‘Self, listen for a moment, I will speak to you.’”

... 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 your soul: ‘Why art thou cast down’ – what business have you to be disquieted? You must turn on yourself, upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself: ‘Hope thou 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 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 for the help of His countenance, who is also the health of my countenance and my God’” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, p.20-21).

➤ At the end of each section (stanza) of this Psalm (song), the psalmist rededicates his life to the Lord – after in his desperation (42:5-6), after his lamentation (42:11), and after his petition (43:5). It is so important, often especially in times of intense pain or grief, that we remember who God is (His character, nature, attributes, promises, etc.) and who we are in Him (His beloved children; those He has chosen, redeemed, sanctified, and will one day glorify, etc.). God will not fail, He cannot forget, and He will never forsake those who belong to Him!

In Christ, we have been justified (freed from the penalty of sin, sanctified (freed from the power of sin), and one day glorified (freed from the presence of sin). When is the last time you preached God’s Word to yourself? We need to do this daily, if not all throughout the day (perhaps especially when in the midst of trials, sufferings, and sorrows).

## Conclusion

➤ In 2018, Matt Papa and Matt Boswell published a song inspired by the 42<sup>nd</sup> Psalm. It is titled, “Lord From Sorrows Deep I Call”:

### Verse 1

Lord from sorrows deep I call / When my hope is shaken  
Torn and ruined from the fall / Hear my desperation  
For so long I’ve pled and prayed / God come to my rescue  
Even so the thorn remains / Still my heart will praise You

### Verse 2

Storms within my troubled soul / Questions without answers  
On my faith these billows roll / God be now my shelter  
Why are you cast down my soul / Hope in Him who saves you  
When the fires have all grown cold / Cause this heart to praise You

### Verse 3

Should my life be torn from me / Every worldly pleasure  
When all I possess is grief / God be then my treasure  
Be my vision in the night / Be my hope and refuge  
’Til my faith is turned to sight / Lord my heart will praise You

### Chorus

Oh my soul put your hope in God / My help my rock I will praise Him  
Sing oh sing through the raging storm / You’re still my God my salvation

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