

Psalm 42 “Hope in God”

Psalm 42

To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah.

1As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. **2**My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? **3**My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?” **4**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. **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 **6** 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. **7** Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. **8** By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. **9** I say to God, my rock: “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” **10** 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?” **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.

When I was 14 years old, my uncle committed suicide. Okay Joel, is this another dark message? Well, part of it is, but part is also bright. What makes it bright is our hope in God.

My uncle was lonely, and so he would often come over to our place in the evening when we were finishing eating. He needed someone to talk to. He was looking for community. I wish that we could have encouraged him more.

Right after he committed suicide, my father's sister came to our house. I remember that she and my mother hugged each other and cried. I had not seen them do that before. Till then, my mother had often spoken negative and critical words about her. But at that moment they were suffering together and wishing they had encouraged and included Uncle David more.

My uncle believed in Jesus as his Savior and had been baptized. However, because of failure in work and marriage and life, he became discouraged and just couldn't get over it. There may have been other factors involved too.

In Psalm 42, we see in verse 5, that the writer is downcast and in turmoil. Why is that?

Look at verse 3. "My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'" He is in a difficult situation. On top of that, he is being taunted and made fun of. For example, if your marriage had just failed and then on top of that, someone says to you, "Why doesn't your God help you?"

We also see this in verse 10. "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?'" It scars us. It hurts us. Jesus experienced this as he hung on the cross. People taunted him and said, "You saved others. Why can't you save yourself?"

It's not just the voices of people that taunt us. It's our own hearts that accuse us and taunt us. Often our own hearts attack us more than other people do. "You're a bad person." "It would be better if you weren't here." Nobody has actually said that to us, but we say it to ourselves. It's called negative self-talk.

In your Community Groups this week, ask each other this question: "What is your default reaction when someone's words attack you or your heart accuses you? How do you react?"

Since there are several of you that are not in community groups, let's take a minute to do it right now. Ask the person next to you this question: "When you are accused or your heart is negatively influencing you, what is your default reaction?" Overeating? Shouting? Keeping it in? What is your reaction? I tend to be passive-aggressive and then eventually explode. Let's try and share with each other for about a minute.

This week in your Community Groups, please try and continue this discussion. But don't finish with this. Help each other find ways to fight against these attacks and accusations. The writer of this psalm is doing this. How does he do it?

First of all, he asks "Why?" Verse 9: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"

His feeling is that God has forgotten him. At the same time though, he knows in his head that God has not forgotten him. We see this in verse 8. "By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life."

His feelings don't match what he knows to be true. Have you ever experienced this? You know that God loves you, but you don't feel that. What should you do?

Well, we've already said that it is okay to ask "why?" The next thing he does is to affirm God's steadfast love. Verse 7 says, "Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me."

Eleven years ago, when the great disaster occurred in East Japan, we were also experiencing a huge tsunami in the church we were serving. The result of it was that the pastor and his wife left the church. I was one of the elders at the time. In the process of the conflict, I spent time with each of the other leaders. It didn't seem to help much. I talked with the pastor. But that didn't go well. My immaturity and not having a deep relationship with the pastor probably influenced it. I guess maybe I thought I could fix the problem. But, in my clumsiness and foolishness, I was not able to.

But there was one sort of good thing that happened. The pastor and his wife had already left the church, but we had a church meeting where anyone could ask any question and share their feelings about what had happened. It was not pretty. It was not a lovely worship service. It didn't necessarily end well. During that meeting, I saw that one of the leaders was crying. I had never seen him cry. I asked him later, "Why were you crying?" He said, "Because today I saw the true church." Wow! "Is this really what the church is?" I thought. But the more you think about it, you realize that it's true. The true church is scarred and full of sin. It's not beautiful and nice-looking. But Jesus came for that reason to die on the cross and to rise from the dead, so that we could be healed. We didn't solve the problem well, but through clumsiness we were able to pour out our feelings, confess our sin, forgive each other and commit ourselves to hope in the Lord. Without hope in Jesus, we cannot be the true church.

I thought later, "I wish the pastor and his wife could have been right in the middle of that, and could have experienced forgiveness and love and grace." If they could have experienced that, how would it have turned out? As the family of God, can we not solve our problems together as the church? In the process of solving it, we ask "Why Lord?" We feel as if we are drowning under the waves. But then we realize that God is allowing these waves for a reason. He loves and he wants to transform us. He wants to make us a better church.

Well, back to Psalm 42. The author is downcast and in turmoil because he is being taunted. Within that, he asks the Lord "why?" He affirms the Lord's love for him. This is within God's purposes for him. God is allowing even this.

But then verse 8, "By day the Lord commands his steadfast love."

He knows that God has allowed these waves, these circumstances, and in the midst of it, he affirms God's steadfast love for him.

After that, he sings during the night. Verse 8, "At night his song is with me." This psalm was sung. We see it in the chapter heading: "To the choirmaster, a Maskil of the Sons of Korah." They were the

worship leaders. 2 Chron. 20:19, "And the Levites, of the Kohathites and the Korahites, stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice."

We probably can't sing in a loud voice during the night, but we can come here and sing. And we take that joy with us and remember it during the night when our heart torments us.

Also, when we are tormented, we must preach to ourselves. If we just listen to our hearts and feelings, we will remain in turmoil. When we wake up what is our first thought? Yesterday's regret? Today's problem? Tomorrow's worry? A difficult person? That is when we need to fight against those feelings with the word of God. The words that we hear on Sunday or the words of God that we read in our devotions. We need to share the words of God in our Community Groups.

The writer of this psalm also remembers how it used to be when they would gather as the people of God. Verse 4: "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."

This is our worship. We gather and sing and pray and share Holy Communion and we hear the words of God. We are raised from death to life here. People considering suicide are saved. Why? Because God is here. Why? Because we can hope in God. It isn't that God isn't with those who are worshipping online, but we are experiencing God here and in churches everywhere that cannot be experienced alone. Let's recall our worship experiences as a family. We gather. We cry out to God. We confess. We affirm God's love. We sing. We receive his words.

Finally, the writer of this psalm thirsts for God the way a deer pants for streams of water. His soul thirsts for the living God. He wants to appear before God. He wants to see the face of God.

My brothers and sisters, notice that he doesn't ask to be taken out of the situation. He doesn't say, "I want to get out of here." He might have felt that way. He is cast down and in turmoil. In that, he desperately desires to see the face of God.

I have a friend in America who said, "I don't want to read the whole book of Job. I just want to read chapter 42. Why? Because most of Job is lament and loneliness. But in chapter 42, there is a happy ending. Till then it's only sickness and suffering and fighting and anger and attacking and conflict. But this too is in the Bible. Why? Because God wants to show Satan that even when God does not appear to help Job, he still obeys God and defeats Satan.

This reminds us that our enemy is not sickness or people. It is Satan. "O my soul, what are you cast down?" This is loneliness. "Hope in God, for we will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God." "My soul thirsts for the living God." I am thirsty. I am lonely. I want to come before God. Really? Don't you just want to escape? Hope in God for we shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

Job's wife says to him, "Curse God and die." That's my version. Job answers, "You are a fool." That's my strong language again. But it does say in Job 2:9,10, "You speak as one of the foolish men would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this Job did not sin with his lips." And then in chapter 42:5, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see you." This is the saving face of God. Let's pray.

"Father God, many people are losing hope. They are downcast. They are lonely. They are fighting within themselves. They are asking "why?" They are in turmoil. In that, help them to see you. Help them to see that this too is your love. You are embracing us. In your arms, in your lap, help us to reaffirm your love. Help us to be able to praise, to speak God's Word to our hearts and believe it. Help to remember our times of worship, to love those people we can't seem to love by confessing and repenting and making reconciliation. Thank you Jesus, for your cross and your resurrection. Only by that are we saved. Only by that do we become the true church. Come Lord Jesus, come. Break us Lord.