

Psalm 42 “As The Deer”

Introduction

- There are quite a few places in scripture that use animals to metaphorically describe our relationship with God. Last week we looked at Psalm 23, sheep and the shepherd. In Psalm 42 that we'll be looking at today, we are compared to a deer, panting and longing for the flowing stream. Next week we'll be looking at Psalm 84 – what in the world does it liken us to? These passages sing of God's unchanging, sure protection.
 - In recent reports from the World Wildlife Fund and others, we hear that during the call to stay at home this year, there has been a sudden boom of pet ownership. There is a higher demand for pets because of the kind of “nesting” people are doing as they spend more time at home. Pet shops have reported twice the sales of their average year.
 - On the other hand, around the time the call to stay at home was lifted, they say puppies and kittens are being dropped off at animal shelters in the city nearly every day. In other words, people are abandoning their new pets. They didn't understand what doing life with a pet, what pet ownership, was like. The animal rescue shelters are experiencing a rapid increase in animals because people are abandoning their pets.
- However, God does not do temporary pet booms or pet abandonment like people do. In Psalm 42 today, let's look at our relationship with God as we are compared to deer. Especially, how can we desire God, depend on, and hope in Him?

[Psalm 42]

¹ As 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 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.

- Do you ever have times when you think God is not with you? What should we do when we don't feel God present with us? Let's look at 3 points from our Psalm today. First, the absence of God; it is good to grieve, to lament the reality of the feeling that God is not doing anything. Let's honestly express our trials and suffering. Doing so does not mean we lack faith!
- Second, let's remember God's grace, remember how God has been good to us. It is especially important to reflect on God's salvation fulfilled through Christ. Lastly, let's focus on faith that hopes in the Lord. Because no matter what our current circumstances are, we can wait and have hope for the future. 1) Lament to God, 2) Remember His grace, 3) Hope in God.

1. Lamenting to God

- The book of Psalms includes what are known as Psalms of Lament. Psalms written in the midst of suffering or trials, lamenting and grieving that God hasn't answered prayer, hasn't rescued; Psalms of despair and anger. Psalm 42 paints a picture of anguish and disappointment that even though the psalmist is seeking and longing for God, God hasn't answered.

"¹ As 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?"
- The psalmist speaks of himself as a deer. A deer burning up with the sun shining right on it, panting with thirst. Wandering in the middle of a desert longing for a flowing stream. But it can't find one. Like the word "pant" repeats in this verse, the deer keeps looking for the stream, but finds nothing to wet its thirst.

- Maybe in this part some imagine a romantic scene of the deer finding water, drinking, thirst healed, taking a rest. But what the deer comes to is a dried up river. A "wadi", a completely dried up ravine that is only a stream when the rains come. The deer comes to the dry river bed and desperately sticks out its neck, searching in vain for water. It is a truly pitiful, pitiable picture.
- Because the psalmist is exposed to judgment and attack from the enemy. What he is lamenting here is not just the pain of the lack of resolution and help from God in the midst of his trial. In verse 3 and 10 it says

3 My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" 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?"
- The psalmist is suffering with no resolution, but on top of that he has the words of all those around him, "Where is your God?". The lament of the psalmist is not just the pain of the trial. It's the lack of an answer from God, and on top of that, he is deeply grieved all the more by judgment and insults from his adversaries.
- Maybe like the insults, back-biting, and gossip we too hear in our modern time. "So you believe in God. What good is that going to do?" "Your God isn't going to help you?" "You're free to believe in God if you want to, but I have absolutely no interest in a God who doesn't help when I'm suffering." These are phrases people use to negate or oppose faith.
- Or, "You must be being punished. You must have done something bad, sinned. There must be something you need to repent of." That's what righteous Job's friends said to him when he was in the midst of suffering. Which means the "adversaries" Psalm 42 refers to does not necessarily only mean people who don't believe in God. It may even include the psalmist's friends who believed in God.
- This Psalm is speaking for all of us, our complaint to God, the cry of our hearts. We are comforted or encouraged when we read the Psalms, first of all because the psalmist honestly lays out his heart to God without concealing anything. The Psalms aren't writings recommending we be good, reasonable believers. Of course it *strongly* recommends believing in God and obeying the Lord. But at the same time, honestly express your present reality, the secrets of your heart, the panting and longing cries of your soul, to God.

9 I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"
- When God feels absent, appeal to him! "Why must I suffer like this?" Be honest and wrestle with God. Bono from U2 says,

"I find a lot of dishonesty in Christian art,... [Christians] are vulnerable to God – porous, open – and I would love if the people who write Christian songs would write about their bad marriage,... because that's what God wants from you. Honesty. Why I'm suspicious of Christians is the lack of realism.... The Psalter may be a font of gospel music, but for me it's despair that the psalmist really reveals and the nature of his special relationship with God. Honesty, even to the point of anger."
- In fact, Psalm 42 never says God resolved the problem. There's no happy ending in these verses. However, we do see the psalmist waiting for the Lord, trusting in the Lord. Why is that?

2. Remember His Grace

- Let's continue on to point 2. As we've just seen, the writer of Psalm 42 was extremely down and discouraged. And expresses that honestly to God. He rejects a purely sensible attitude that at a glance may seem spiritual. Because God can see right through everyone and everything anyway. Even if you gloss over something, God sees to the depths of our hearts. Your true feelings are projected onto God's 360 degree screen.
Psalm 139:1 "O Lord, you have searched me and known me! ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar."
- And when we are in a place of sorrow or suffering, or even deeply depressed, there are times when we suddenly remember a joyful time, something that happened a long time ago, and we remember it fondly. It's in that same way that the psalmist, in the midst of suffering, remembers His wonderful relationship with God and the joy he had. It is not only your current struggle that is projected onto God's screen. God reminds us of the wonderful things as well.
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."
- The psalmist remembers going to God's house, the temple. For special times of worship like Passover or Sukkot (Feast of Booths), he remembers going with his friends to the temple, praising the Lord, the great joy he had. God's house, the temple, symbolically displays God's reality. This memory is a reminder that God truly IS, and He listens to our prayers.
- But of course, remembering those joyful days and fond memories, and comparing them to your current suffering or grief, may make you even sadder and pierce your heart with even more pain.
⁶ 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."
- Mount Hermon is the mountain at the source of the Jordan river, far from the temple in Jerusalem. We don't know exactly where Mount Mizar was, but most likely it was quite far from the temple as well. It's like the psalmist is using physical distance to symbolize the spiritual distance he feels from God. The waterfalls and large waves symbolize the suffering and confusion of his despairing heart.
- However, even if we feel a great distance, God truly exists; He is present. Please remember. Remember the joy of worship, the good things God has done. Remember the wonderful things God has done in your heart, your life, your community. Especially remember that Jesus came for you, his work of salvation, how he even gave his life on the cross.
 - Today two people will be baptized! Etch this day into your heart and mind and don't forget it. Even during this time when the coronavirus is spreading and we can't physically meet together for worship, God is living and working! In trials and suffering, there are times when we feel God is far away even though we're seeking Him; that we're sinking lower and lower and He isn't answering. But baptism is a testimony of God's eternal promise to us, to be *with* us.

3. Hope in God

- If that is the case, what we need is to hope in the Lord. First to clearly tell God our lament, our disappointment. Second to remember the wonderful things of God. And thirdly, in the very midst of trials and suffering, to wait for and hope in the Lord. The most famous phrase of this Psalm is repeated in verses 5 and 11:

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... 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."
- For some reason, the psalmist is seeing the state of his soul, his heart, in the third person. It's a bit strange, almost as if he's seeing himself from God's perspective. Perhaps because if he doesn't, he feels he might drown in an ocean of despair? Sometimes we need to look at ourselves from God's perspective. Because in times of trial and suffering, it's easy for us to fall into self-pity, to think there's just nothing that can be done, it's over, and give up.
- We need to see ourselves through God's eyes, to encourage ourselves through His word. If we can't do it ourselves, let's allow our friends to play that role and remind us of that perspective. Listen to God's words of promise through your friends. And say to ourselves, too, "Hope in God; for I shall again praise him." That is a confession of faith and hope. Dare to declare that.

It is also the meaning behind what we do in worship together. We only understand a sliver of who God is. Our faith is not perfect, and our lives are full of problems. We often are down and discouraged. In the midst of that, isn't it all the more reason we confess, "I believe in God. I admit my sin. I trust in Jesus. I commit to walk guided by the Spirit." U2 sings in their song "40" (from Psalm 40),

"I waited patiently for the Lord. He inclined and heard my cry.

He brought me up out of the pit

Out of the miry clay.

I will sing, sing a new song. How long to sing this song?

You set my feet upon a rock And made my footsteps firm.

Many will see, many will see and hear.

I will sing, sing a new song. How long to sing this song?"

- The Lord will not forsake you. We see the psalmist remembers the firmness of God's promise in verse 8. This covenant is already fulfilled in Jesus.

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.
- No matter how long you have to wait, waiting on and placing our hope in God is a privilege we have in Christ. We get discouraged. Disappointed. Worried. We despair. But even if we lose hope in ourselves, hoping in the Lord is our strength. Isaiah 40:28-31 says,

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. 29 He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. 30 Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; 31 but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall

mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

- Please experience the power of the grace of God working in your weakness.

(Prayer)

Father God, We praise your name, holy and full of grace. But we often lose sight of you. We even lose faith, fall into despair and worry as if you weren't there. We ask you honestly. When will you answer my prayer? How long do we have to wait? We remember that you are rich in mercy, we remember worshiping all together and fellowshiping with joy like it was just yesterday. We thank you that through the Lord Jesus you saved us out of sin, and gave us eternal life. We wait and hope in your salvation, and in You yourself. Please give us a peaceful society, city. May all people hear of the Gospel of Jesus. And we pray especially that you would guide those being baptized today by the Holy Spirit. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.