

"When? Why? Where? Put Your Hope in God"

Psalms 42-43

While the title of the message may sound like a message about how to handle the Coronavirus – as in when will it come, why is it here and where shall we go – I assure you it is not. And yet, it does apply since in a very short period of time we see how a virus can turn the whole world upside down in a matter of weeks. But anytime disappointment, discouragement or even depression and oppression come into our lives, it throws our world upside down. And that's what we have here in Psalms 42-43.

Psalms 42-43 were probably one psalm originally. Many Hebrew manuscripts actually list them as one psalm. Either way they were intended to go together because we have a refrain repeated in 42:5, 11 and 43:5.

*42:5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*

Very quickly we see the psalm deals with disappointment, discouragement, depression and oppression. In between the refrains the author cries out to God about the pain he is going through but in each refrains he asks himself 'why is he downcast' and then encourages himself with the truth and reality of God's presence in his life by telling himself 'Put your hope in God because He's My Saviour and My God and I will yet praise Him.'

Because the psalm is cyclical, it's better to approach it by making overall observations that we can find helpful when we're discouraged to direct us to keep our hope in God. But towards the end I will show you there is progression in the psalm and we see how his hope in God is penetrating into his life even if he's still in his dark place.

This Psalm is a lament psalm where the author cries out to God about difficulties or pain in his life. Lament psalms make up one third of the Psalter. This should make us aware that lament is a natural part of our human experience even as believers in God and as a result should encourage us that ...

God Gives us Permission to Share our Disappointments **(Ps. 42-43)**

Eight times the author cries out 'Why?', two 'Where is your God' and numerous references to being downcast and disturbed. He uses other phrases like 'I pour out my soul', 'Your breakers roll over me' and 'Why have you forgotten me?' Because that's what it feels like at the time. So often we wrongly equate negative circumstances with God's absence. We doubt His power when we ask 'Where?', 'When?' and 'Why?' Mostly because we don't have His perspective, something we can have partially but not completely.

We always know that God causes all things to work together for His glory and our spiritual conformity to Jesus Christ (Rom. 8) but we don't know how exactly He's doing that through the things He allows to come into our life. That's where we must trust Him and put our hope in Him who knows all things.

The lament psalms are designed for us at difficult times in our life to echo along with the psalmists, 'Why, Lord?' 'How long Lord?' 'Where are you God?' as the writer does here. Most of the time we don't have specific information about what the writer was going through. Which enables us to put our feet in their sandals so to speak. What do we know here?

This psalm and the next seven are all from the 'Sons of Korah'. Who were they? The sons of Korah were descendants of Levi, so these served in the temple. Korah himself was a great-grandson of Levi. Korah's grandfather was Kohath. Levi had three sons: Gershom, Kohath and Merari. Turn with me to Num. 3:21-37. Here God told Moses to divide up the responsibilities surrounding the care and transport of the Tabernacle among the three families of Levites.

Num. 3:25 At the tent of meeting the Gershonites were responsible for the care of the tabernacle and tent, its coverings, the curtain at the entrance to the tent of meeting, ²⁶ the curtains of the courtyard, the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle and altar, and the ropes—and everything related to their use.

Remember, the Tabernacle was an enclosed tent that housed the smaller tent of the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. The Gershonites carried the tent curtains. Now look at 3:36

³⁶ The Merarites were appointed to take care of the frames of the tabernacle, its crossbars, posts, bases, all its equipment, and everything related to their use, ³⁷ as well as the posts of the surrounding courtyard with their bases, tent pegs and ropes.

So what was left for the sons of Kohath?

³¹ They were responsible for the care of the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the articles of the sanctuary used in ministering, the curtain, and everything related to their use. ³² The chief leader of the Levites was Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest. He was appointed over those who were responsible for the care of the sanctuary.

So the Kohathites got to carry the best stuff: the ark, table of showbread, Menorah! Very cool!! The only drawback however is found in Num. 4

¹⁵ "After Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy furnishings and all the holy articles, and when the camp is ready to move, only then are the Kohathites to come and do the carrying. But they must not touch the holy things or they will die. The Kohathites are to carry those things that are in the tent of meeting. ²⁶ "Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, is to have charge of the oil for the light, the fragrant incense, the regular grain offering and the anointing oil. He is to be in charge of the entire tabernacle and everything in it, including its holy furnishings and articles." ¹⁷ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ¹⁸ "See that the Kohathite tribal clans are not destroyed from among the Levites. ¹⁹ So that they may live and not die when they come near the most holy things, do this for them: Aaron and his sons are to go into the sanctuary and assign to each man his work and what he is to carry. ²⁰ But the Kohathites must not go in to look at the holy things, even for a moment, or they will die."

So they were not allowed to look at or touch the things they were carrying. And they had to carry these things on poles on their shoulders while the others had carts to move tent curtains, poles, etc. How'd they like that? Well, Korah himself didn't like it. In Num. 16 Korah staged a rebellion.

Korah son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and certain Reubenites—Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth—became insolent ² and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men,

well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council. ³ They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD’s assembly?”

Korah felt that they were just as worthy as Moses and Aaron to be in a leadership position. Moses fell to his knees in fear of what was going to happen. Then God spoke thru Moses,

¹⁶ Moses said to Korah, “You and all your followers are to appear before the LORD tomorrow—you and they and Aaron. ¹⁷ Each man is to take his censer and put incense in it—250 censers in all—and present it before the LORD. You and Aaron are to present your censers also.” ¹⁸ So each of them took his censer, put burning coals and incense in it, and stood with Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ¹⁹ When Korah had gathered all his followers in opposition to them at the entrance to the tent of meeting, the glory of the LORD appeared to the entire assembly. ²⁰ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ²¹ “Separate yourselves from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once.”

At this point Moses intercedes for the people to God, so God tells the people to move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Then we read in v.31 “the ground under them split apart ³² and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all those associated with Korah, together with their possessions. ³³ They went down alive into the realm of the dead, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community.

However, God in his grace spared Korah’s sons according to Num. 26:11. God in His grace allowed the Korahites to survive and remain in the service of the temple. David continued to use the three divisions of Levi’s sons in various responsibilities for the service in the temple. Here in the psalm we see a reference to his involvement in worship in Jerusalem at the temple:

⁴ *These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.*

Why isn’t he there now? We don’t know exactly but in vv.9-10 he says he was being oppressed by his enemies who don’t know God. And in v.6 he says,

My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.

Perhaps he was on his way to exile. The north eastern most part of Israel was on route towards the way to Babylon. Or maybe part of the civil wars between the north and south, we are unsure. But it gives us a little more depth to the psalm. Now we’re listening to the discouragement of someone involved in ministry, who because of unknown circumstances was not able to worship with god’s people or even be with God’s people. So if someone like this shares their frustrations and disappointments with God that certainly gives us permission as well. God knows our pain and wants to act. He will and in His time. That’s what the psalmist desires and ultimately prays for in this psalm. So if you are ever in a place where you need to complain to God that life is really hard right now, God can handle it. What He doesn’t want you to do though is give up on Him.

We Must Continue to Trust God Who Will Answer Our Prayers **(42:5, 11; 43:5)**

Three times he comes back to center on God. He asks himself why am I downcast? Why is my soul disturbed? The word disturbed means ‘out of order, raging, loud’. He knows better. He knows

God. He knows he should put his hope in God. He calls God his Savior. God is the only one who can get him out of his trouble, who can lift him up, changing his spirit as well as his circumstances. He has the knowledge of these things. Look at v.9

⁸ *By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me— a prayer to the God of my life.*

He knows God's presence is with Him, that His hewed love and promises won't fail. He even calls God his Rock in v.9 but then says 'Why have you forgotten me?' Thankfully he does keep coming back to God which is helpful when we struggle in our own discouragement. It helps if we

Keep thirsting after God (42:1-3)

¹ *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.*

² *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

Don't let discouragement drive you away from God but closer to Him. He has a great analogy. Like a hunted deer frantically searching for water. It's tired, it needs a drink but it can't find water. And so he likens his desire for God that way. 'My soul thirsts for God, the living God.' The deer prefers a stream of water, moving water. They actually called it 'living water' (Jesus refers to Himself as living water in John 4 and the women at the well mistakes that for a spring). So he calls God the "living God". Like a moving stream God is continually active, unlike the gods of the world. God is living so He's always moving always seeing, always active, always listening. He's the only One who can truly meet our needs so keep thirsting after Him. Ps. 63 begins,

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.*

The psalmists knew that only God truly satisfies the needs of our hearts. And only He gives us the peace that surpasses all understanding when we pray to Him and release our anxieties to Him (Phil. 4:6-7; Is. 26:3-4)

The other thing to keep doing when we're 'disappointed' in God's inactivity in our life is to

Remember God's Work in our Past (42:4; 43:3-4)

In 42:4 he reminds himself,

⁴ *These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.*

He recalls ministering with God's people in the temple. He remembers the joy, the worship and the thankfulness of God's people. Remembering God's activity in our life in the past encourages us to look forward to His continued and future activity also. He won't abandon us. Over in 43:4 he says,

³ *Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.*

⁴ *Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.*

He prays for God's Word (light and truth) to guide him now because they've successfully guided him in the past. He wants God to bring him back to the temple in Jerusalem because he

remembers the great ministry and times of worship he had experienced. He wants things to return to normal!

Here's something else that I hope encourages you when you've been discouraged and cried out to God.

During Difficulties it's not Unusual to Go Through Periods of Conviction and Confusion **(42:1-4/5, 6-10/11 43:1-4/5)**

In vv.1-4 he cries out in pain to God. In v.5 he says, 'Why am I downcast? Where is my faith?' Then in vv.6-10 he's struggling again and then in v.11 he repeats 'Why am I downcast? Why is my soul disturbed? Put your hope in God!!' Like he's saying to himself, 'I know better!! Why am I not trusting God?'

So don't berate yourself from lacking faith when you lack faith! It's not unusual in our disappointments to have pendulum swings and reality checks along the way. Here we have an example of it in the psalms. And there are other psalms like this as well. But here's the encouraging part as we go through this and keep voicing our concerns to God, praying them through (even talking to ourselves as he does here!). Because in Ps. 42 he is primarily talking to himself. But in his wrestling with despair and hope, in Ps. 43 he talks to God not himself:

- ¹ Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men.*
- ² You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?*
- ³ Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.*
- ⁴ Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.*
- ⁵ Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*

He's wrestled through and his focus is less on self and more on God. But he has to repeat truth three times (maybe more!) to get him through this. And one of the things he says three times is; 'for I will yet praise Him'

Reality of Seeing God's Presence in the Future enables us to Endure the Present **(42:5, 11; 43:5)**

How will we get through the Corona virus or any other calamity? Because we know that the God who holds our future in His hands holds the present. The psalmist knew he would be praising God in the future which enabled him to hang in there in the present. One day this calamity will soon disappear and another one will come (not too soon I hope!). But it too will disappear.

However, there is a day coming prior to Jesus' return that Jesus Himself said in Luke 21

¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness.

All difficulties in life (now or in the end times) are an opportunity for believers to bear witness to the reality and need for God in peoples' lives. People are panicking now. We can't be. We must trust God that in this difficulty and all other difficulties God is our hope. He is our Rock, our Saviour, and the living God. Sometimes we need to encourage ourselves with the light and truth of God's Word, telling ourselves to 'put our hope in God' because we have it. But also, that even if we're still struggling in our own difficulties our faith and assurance in God can bear witness to the joy and peace He brings through His Son Jesus Christ.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net