

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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Restoring Your Soul...in Spiritual Turmoil
Psalms 42-43

This morning's passage of study is Psalms 42-43. Most scholars agree these two psalms are meant to be taken together. We don't know for sure the human author the Lord used to write them, and we don't know the exact circumstances that they are describing. What we do know, however, is that they provide a vivid description of deep spiritual turmoil in the life of a believer.

Some of you are in that place today. Sickness is in your life or your loved one's. Conflict is in your relationships. Your nation is gripped by darkness and decay. You are weak and tired. You are confused and overwhelmed. Your soul is in turmoil. If any of that sounds familiar, I believe the Lord has a word for you.

So, let's continue our series on Restoring our Souls in the Psalms by looking to God's word in Psalms 42 and 43.

Psalm 42-43

To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah. As many of you know, the Psalms are a book of songs used in worship to God at the temple and in individuals' lives – including our own. Many scholars believe the word "maskil" is an ancient musical term that encouraged worshipers to contemplate the words of the song rather than mindlessly singing them. The Sons of Korah were a group of men designated to lead the worship songs at the temple.

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 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.

43:1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! 2 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? 3 Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! 4 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. 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.

Clearly, this is a psalm about spiritual turmoil. That's what the psalmist explicitly says in the refrain that is repeated 3 times (including the final verse of Psalm 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.***

His soul is cast down and in turmoil. I think most of us can get the gist of what he means, but he doesn't leave it there. He gives us multiple descriptions of what qualifies as or contributes to spiritual turmoil. Let's walk through several of them and see if you can relate.

1. Dry

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.

On one hand, these verses describe something that is a very good thing. It's good to have an appetite for the real and living God.

On the other hand, few things are more dangerous or debilitating than being unable to get a drink of water. Just work outside for an hour this week and you'll get it. The debilitating weakness that comes from needing a drink of water. And that's how this psalmist describes this season of spiritual turmoil. He's parched and unable to be refreshed. He wants a kind of experience with God that just isn't happening.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever felt withered and dry inside, wanting an experience with God that just doesn't seem to happen? That's spiritual turmoil.

2. Distant

42:2 When shall I come and appear before God?

Most scholars agree this song describes a time when the psalmist was exiled from Jerusalem (v 6, remembering from the Land of Jordan/Hermon) and couldn't come to the Temple of God, the one place on earth where God most powerfully manifested His presence at that time. Again, we don't know the exact circumstance, but it seems pretty clear that there is an overwhelming sense of distance between the psalmist and the experience of God's presence.

In verses 3 and 10, he mentions that his enemies are taunting him by asking where his God is now. Those taunts are especially hurtful because they coincide with a similar question that he himself is asking: "God, will I ever experience your presence again?"

Have you ever been there? I have. It's a desperate place to be. In his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis describes a believer who..."no longer desiring, but still intending, to do [God's] will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken...". That's a perfect description of some of us today.

You attempt to pray, and God feels a million miles away. You try to worship, but there's no sense of His nearness or presence. You want to discern His direction for your life, but all you get is silence. You read the Bible, but it feels as if the words don't speak to you. It isn't that you no longer believe in God. It's that you no longer see evidence of God's presence in your life. It's spiritual turmoil.

3. Depressed

42:3 My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?”

He wakes up with sadness. He goes to bed with sadness. It’s like a dark cloud has descended on his life. He can’t shake it. It’s a kind of depression that lingers in the background throughout the day.

42:9 I say to God, my rock: “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?”

43:2 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?

He feels forgotten. Abandoned. Alone. He goes around mourning.

Have you ever been there? Things that should bring you joy no longer bring you joy, affecting everything you do. You feel abandoned by God. You feel grieved. You dread when people ask you how you are doing because you don’t want to say it out loud. “I feel terrible. I feel forgotten. I feel sad.” You say you’re fine but you haven’t been fine for a long time. It’s spiritual turmoil.

4. Despondent

42:4 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.

42:6 My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.

He looks back at good times, but it’s like he can’t see any hope of them in the future.

To be despondent is to have a sense of hopelessness. It’s what happens when you have plenty of memories but no dreams.

Look at 42:7 **Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.**

He returns to the metaphor of water, but instead of receiving a refreshing stream of God’s goodness, it feels like God has unleashed an ocean of difficulty...and he’s drowning. Wave after wave comes crashing over him.

Have you ever been there? It’s the place that makes your depression all the more depressing because you don’t see the light at the end of the tunnel. Your only good thoughts are of things that are in your past that make your present circumstances that much darker. It’s everything you can do to keep your head above water and just about the time you come up for breath, here comes another wave...and you feel yourself sinking. It’s spiritual turmoil.

5. Disoriented

42:5 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?

42:11 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?

43:5 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?

He's asking himself why he feels the way he feels. The reason I say that's disorientation is because it seems clear why he would feel the way he feels. He's surrounded by enemies who are taunting him. He's been removed from the safety and security and familiarity of his homeland. He's confused and life seems like it's been flipped upside-down. Those things are clearly disorienting enough.

But that's not the only way he is disoriented.

What I mean is that he knows the truth. He knows he has a God. In verse 2, he knows he has a living God. In verse 3, he knows he has a God who is worthy of praise. In verse 8, he knows he has a God who is a loving God. In 43:2, he knows he has a God who is a refuge.

He knows amazing truth about God. And it's disorienting to know amazing truth about God and feel the way he feels. I believe that's the primary reason he is asking himself why he is so cast down and in turmoil. He knows the truth about God, but He doesn't feel it.

Have you ever been there? You think to yourself, "If I really believe what I think I believe then why do I feel the way I feel?"

- You know your loved one is in heaven, but you feel like you've lost them forever.
- You know this world is not your home, but you feel destroyed to see your nation falling apart.
- You know your job isn't your source of joy, but you feel ripped apart when you get laid off.

You know what the bible says is true, but you don't feel the way you think you should about that truth. And you find yourself asking, "If I really believe what I think I believe, then why do you feel the way that I feel?" It's spiritual turmoil.

Listen, friend, you aren't alone. You aren't the first and you aren't the only believer to struggle with spiritual dryness, distance, depression, despondency, and disorientation. And I'm not just talking about the author of these psalms. The Bible is filled with faithful men and women who did what was right and believed what was true and still walked through seasons of spiritual turmoil.

- Moses and Joshua and Elijah and Hannah and Jeremiah were faithful, God-centered people who lived in seasons of spiritual turmoil.
- The apostle Paul was used by God to write half the New Testament and spread the gospel to the known world, yet he said he was so utterly burdened by trials that he despaired of life itself.

Friend, if you feel the darkness of depression and the dryness of spirit that are described in this Psalm, I want you to know you are not the only one and it doesn't mean that God has cast you off or left you alone, even if you feel that way.

But what do you do in times of spiritual turmoil? How do you fight for joy and spiritual renewal? What do you do to restore your soul?

That brings us to our big idea for this morning.

Big Idea: In seasons of spiritual turmoil...Pray with honesty to the Lord; Place your trust in the Lord; and Preach to your soul the truth of the Lord.

That's what we find happening in this psalm through the inspiration of God's Spirit. Let me show you what I mean.

1. Pray with honesty to the Lord.

42: 1-2 *As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.*

The opening words of this psalm are an honest confession. The psalmist is honestly pouring his heart out before God. He's saying, "God, I'm thirsty. God, I'm downcast. God, I'm in turmoil."

He's praying with honesty to the Lord. It sounds so simple, but many of us have never learned to be honest with God. Friend, if you are in turmoil, bring it honestly before the Lord. Don't fake it. Don't hide it. Don't deny it. Bring it to your Father.

Do you remember what happened when Adam descended into the despair and shame of His own sin? He hid from God. And what did God do? He came to Adam with a question: Adam, where are you?

It wasn't because God didn't know. It was because Adam had to acknowledge where he was so that he could know and experience God's grace in the place of His brokenness. And, that same principle applies here. We have to get real with God to knowingly experience His grace in the place of our brokenness. Let me say it this way

If you don't stop faking your spirituality, you'll never experience the real thing.

Let me encourage you to incorporate something into your prayer life. Whether it's first thing in the morning or as many times as you need to throughout the day, stop, take a deep breath and let it out, and tell God where you are.

- Jesus, I'm afraid.
- Jesus, I'm confused.
- Jesus, I'm angry.
- Jesus, I'm sad.
- Jesus, I feel alone.
- Jesus, I feel abandoned.
- Jesus, I don't feel anything anymore.

Where are you today? Stop hiding it from God because the only one you're actually fooling is yourself. Pray with honesty to the Lord. But don't stop there...

2. Place your trust in the Lord.

43:1-2 *Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! For you are the God in whom I take refuge;*

He doesn't take things into his own hands; he places them into God's. He trusts God enough to entrust His life to God.

What would it look like if you took the circumstances of your life that are stirring up spiritual turmoil and brought them to Jesus and said, "Jesus, do what only you can do and do what you please. I trust you."

So, when you pray, “Jesus, I’m afraid,” don’t stop there. Keep going to the place of entrusting the circumstances to the Lord. “Jesus, I’m not just afraid. I’m afraid my loved one isn’t going to make it...I’m afraid my marriage won’t ever be better...I’m afraid we won’t make ends meet. So, Jesus, I give those things to you and trust you with them. Do what only you can do in them and do as you please.”

What would it look like in this season of spiritual turmoil if you prayed honestly to the Lord and placed your trust in Him to do what only He can do in that place in your heart?

3. Preach to your soul the truth about the Lord.

That’s the refrain of this Psalm.

***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.***

The psalmist doesn’t just pour out his heart to God, he pours God’s truth into his heart. While it’s important to tell God what is going on in your heart, you can’t let your heart have the final word. Our hearts can be wrong, but God’s word never is.

Look at 43:3-4

3 Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! 4 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.

He calls on God to illuminate his life with His truth, the truth of the Lord. He says that’s the way to return to God’s presence and have exceeding joy restored to your soul. It’s through the light and truth of God. So, he preaches to himself over and over again.

“Hope in God. Confidently expect that God will come through and keep His promises.”

Why? Why do we have reason to hope in God? He says it’s because God is his salvation. The Lord will save. He won’t forsake His people. He won’t leave us in despair and darkness. He will save us in every way we need to be saved. It’s who He is. It’s what He does.

And we need to preach that truth to ourselves in seasons of spiritual turmoil. It may be true that your circumstances are dark and difficult. It may be true that your heart and soul are in turmoil. But those things don’t negate the bedrock truths of all that God is for us in Jesus. So, in times of spiritual turmoil, preach to your soul the truth about the Lord.

And that brings us to the Lord’s Supper. 1 Corinthians 11:26 says, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

This table is a proclamation, that’s just another word for preaching. We are preaching to ourselves and one another every time we take the Lord’s Supper. And what are we preaching? What are we proclaiming? That we have a God who has so loved us that He gave His Son to die in our place. In His death we have forgiveness for all our sin and restoration to God as our Father. In receiving the gift of Jesus through faith, we have Christ living in us, enabling and empowering us to live in victory over sin and despair. And, just as Jesus fulfilled His promise to save in His first coming, He will finish what He started when He comes again.

If you want reason to hope, look to the cross where God poured out His love for us by pouring out His punishment for our sin on Jesus. Look to the cross where Jesus suffered and died so that He could redeem and restore your life from every place of brokenness and pain.

This table is a declaration of the gospel, the same gospel we need to preach to our own souls each and every day.