

Psalm 42—Where is Your God?

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I. Introduction

- A. If this Psalm is about David, like most scholars think, the question is legitimate: Where is your God?
 - 1. If David is hiding in a cave or nearby city, it gives the appearance that God is not with him in that same sense he was the day he fought Goliath.
 - 2. With countless victories in his past that were obvious signs of God's protection and help, why is David and his mighty men cowering in a cave?
 - 3. There are obvious reasons—David will not lift his hand against God's anointed—King Saul. But you might ask—why didn't God do something about Saul? Why did it continue on so long?
 - 4. I think we all have those questions and we may not know how to ask or fight for hope when our soul is anxious or afraid or cast down or in turmoil within us.
 - 5. I hope this helps us know how to fight or help others fight for hope when the darkness seems to linger.
 - a) Job knew where the suffering came from but he didn't know why it came. He pleaded for a mediator to help him make sense of the pain.
 - b) Jesus asked, "Why have you forsaken me?"
 - c) If you have asked similar questions then you are in good company because this is a reality we all face and the fact that you would be longing for him when he seems distant says a lot about your faith and love for the Lord.
 - (1) If you are impatient, would it be right for someone to ask you, "Where is the Holy Spirit?"
 - (2) Or you notice that you haven't prayed and given thanks to God in a while, you should ask yourself, "Why am I not seeing my need for you and why am I not noticing your good gifts?"
 - d) The fight to remain hopeful will give way to thanksgiving!

II. Main Point

- A. How to fight for hope in God knowing you will give thanks to God again.

III. Outline

- A. Where Is your God?
- B. Remembering and Hoping
- C. Pain leads to Gain

IV. Exposition

- A. This first section begs the question and the enemy asks the question—where is your God?
 - 1. It seems to ask this question because God is not helping. There's an obvious need that's not being met.
 - a) This psalm opens with the panting of a deer for flowing streams.
 - (1) We are meant to picture a scene in which a deer is in search for water but has not found it.
 - (a) But the basic idea the psalmist wants us to see is the longing for water.
 - (b) The Psalms often give us these pictures without giving us the exact reason.
 - i) For example, are we to understand the deer panting because of a drought or famine or maybe a wide spread forest fire? Maybe the deer is being hunted by a predator and the only means of escape for the deer is speed. But the escape has the deer thirsting for flowing streams.
 - ii) The reason for the panting is not the point. The longing is.
 - iii) The reason is also left out because this psalm should not be limited to one specific situation.
 - b) This scene of the deer standing there panting for water...tongue hanging out...breathing hard... looking and listening for the flowing stream was given to describe how the psalmist feels too.
 - (1) The second part of verse one—so pants my soul for you, O God.
 - (a) The idea of longing for water is to help us see what longing for God looks like.
 - (b) Again, like the deer not finding the flowing streams, nor can God's help be found.
 - (c) The onlookers ask, "Where is your God?"
 - 2. In verse 2 the psalmist describes this panting as—My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

- a) The very idea of thirst means he is lacking the refreshing drink of water.
 - (1) Our bodies create these impulses like thirst to keep us alive.
 - (2) If we did not thirst, I suppose we would dehydrate and die.
 - b) If my soul doesn't thirst for the living God what will happen to it?
 - (1) The flowing stream is an image in Psalm 1 that gives life to the tree.
 - (2) That tree is the man who meditates on God's word day and night.
 - (3) It cannot get enough of the living water.
 - (4) Its roots drink deeply from the flowing stream of God's goodness in his word.
 - c) The one thirsting for God asks a lot of questions in this psalm.
 - (1) There in verse 2 he asks—when shall I come and appear before God?
 - (a) We do not know where he is but he is not BEFORE God.
 - (b) The place to come before God was where God dwelled—in the temple.
 - (c) Therefore, he longs for God's presence not just his help.
 - (d) The burning question is—when?
 - i) For some reason he cannot get to God at the temple.
 - ii) But he is longing to do so.
 - iii) The wait is hard. Days turn into weeks and weeks into months.
3. The image is intensified in verse 3 with tears.
- a) We all know what tears communicate. Most people do not cry without reason.
 - (1) We are all different in this regard of what brings on those tears.
 - (2) But when they come, they make it clear that we are deeply moved.
 - (3) The title of this psalm is ascribed to the sons of Korah. Almost every person I read speaks of this psalm being about David.
 - (a) They think it describes when he is banished from Saul's presence and pursued by him in the mountains.
 - (b) But whether it's the sons of Korah or they are writing about David, this one who is longing for God has tears as his bread day and night.
 - i) "In his affliction, man weeps before God (Dt. 1:45; 2 K. 20:3 = Isa. 38:3; 2 K. 22:19 = 2 Ch. 34:27) as a means of intensifying his prayer and of arousing God's compassion (Isa. 30:19; Ps. 6:7–9[6–8]; 39:13[12]; 56:9[8]). Man knows that he is dependent on God, acknowledges his own [poverty], and hopes for grace from the strong and yet compassionate judge. Thus the [comfort] of God follows the weeping of those returning home from exile (Jer. 31:9). There is homesickness and trust in God in the tears of the lonely: Ps. 42:4(3); Job 16:20." (TDOT)
 - ii) The tears come as the enemy taunts him there at the end verse 3—where is your God?
 - (1) In other words—Where is the God with whom your help comes?
 - (2) "This question hints scornfully that God is not fulfilling his function as God of the person addressed: "What a useless God you have!" (TDOT)
 - (a) You must know God is very willing to be mocked by the enemy to keep you thirsty for him.
 - (b) Just like a wife may drop obvious clues that something is wrong just to see if the husband notices, God may be testing you to see if you notice.

4. This idea of "where is your God" is used in Jonah when the storm is raging.

 - a) There's more to say about Jonah later but Jonah knew why the waves were threatening to sink the ship.
 - (1) In fact, Jonah was not longing for God but hiding from him.
 - (a) He should have been asking the question, "Why do I want to hide from God?"
 - (2) The storm was a wake up call to Jonah and praise God for sending the storm.
 - (a) He made Jonah thirsty and God is the only satisfying water.
 - b) Where was Jonah's God?
 - (1) In the storm.

- B. The question of where is your God looms over into the next section, too. In fact, the mocking seems to have prompted the actions in verses 4-6. The pressure of the enemies causes the psalmist to find God by remembering which is the means of his hope to wait.
1. A new image is given to use here in verse 4 which is—as I pour out my soul.
 - a) This image of pouring out usually describes the pouring out of blood for sacrifices.
 - (1) As we already know, the one in anguish is no where near the altar of God to offer sacrifice.
 - (2) Therefore, since he cannot do that, he pours out his soul.
 - (a) This image describes the intensity of his prayers.
 2. So, as he is praying, here are the things he remembers.
 - a) There in verse 4—(Psalm 42:4 NAS95) “For I used to go along with the throng *and* lead them in procession to the house of God, With the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.”
 - (1) If worshipping God by yourself was the same as with God’s people this man would not have been in such anguish and tears.
 - (a) Worshipping God through a virtual screen is not the same as with the people of God.
 - i) In fact, you cannot claim to be a church in any fundamental sense if you do not assemble together for worship.
 - ii) Church means assembly of the called out ones.
 - (b) But the separation has caused his heart to grow fonder of God!
 - i) That only happens if the LORD is to one you have thrown in with and attached your very being to.
 - ii) You are not looking for another. He’s it!
 - iii) And when he is taken from you, you will not be satisfied until he is restored.
 - iv) It’s been rightly said that we do not know what we truly love until it is taken from us.
 - (1) When we sing Blessed Be the Tie do you mean this verse when you say it?
 - (a) —4 When we are called to part, it gives us inward pain; but we shall still be joined in heart, and hope to meet again.
 - (b) The next verse goes like this in the Psalter Hymnal—5 This glorious hope revives our courage by the way; while each in expectation lives and waits to see the day.
 - (2) What is taken from you that makes you feel like this?
 - (a) It’s also been rightly said that we don’t know our idols until someone puts their hands on them.
 - (b) I hope you long for the Lord, not idols.
 - (c) Idols are temporary pleasures that cannot save your soul.
 - (2) So, the psalmist remembers going to worship God with the throng to the house of God. But he also remembers going with shouts of joy and thanksgiving.
 - (a) You might have been wondering what this Psalm had to do with Thanksgiving.
 - i) Some of your translations will say praise instead of thanksgiving.
 - ii) The fundamental idea of the words used in the OT for thanksgiving is confession.
 - (1) Thanksgiving can be expressed through confession, offering or praise.
 - (2) Behind the idea of giving thanks is indebtedness.
 - (a) God is rightly praised because we owe him and cannot repay.
 - (b) God doesn’t want you to repay him but he wants you to trust him and recognize his gifts to you.
 - (c) Since he has loved them and us by paying for our sins through the cross of Christ and giving us hope of eternal life in the resurrection of Christ, we have much to be thankful for.
 - (d) All the many blessings he has given us are evidence of his ongoing love for us. Let us give thanks to God!

3. More questions come. There in verse 5 we have a new one—one that will be repeated at the end. He asks his soul (he talks to himself)—Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?
 - a) The question arises out of his separation from God in worship.
 - (1) I think there are times when I feel down and discouraged and if asked why I have sometimes said—I don't know.
 - (2) However, in some cases I think it's simply this—we are longing for God's presence and for whatever reason he is distant.
 - (a) It could be sin. I could have quenched the Spirit.
 - (b) It could be that God pulls back to see if you notice that he isn't there.
 - i) When joy in the Lord isn't there, do you ask—what is wrong? Where is the Holy Spirit?
 - b) The problem with this idea of distance from God in worship does not have to be merely a separation from the acts of worship.
 - (1) You can be gathered here for worship and your heart be somewhere else.
 - (2) You are not where your feet are. You are planning something or struggling with a decision. Whatever the case is, your heart is not thirsting for God.
 - (3) Can you sing every word and not hear or mean those words? Of course!
 - (4) We must fight to focus our attention on the Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - (a) There's much that could be unpacked about the indwelling Spirit but let it suffice to say, the Spirit can be in us and yet grieved. Our hearts can be dull and calloused to his promptings.
 - c) Upon asking this question, the psalmist fights with hope!
 - (1) Notice how he does that in verse 5 where he commands his soul to hope in God!
 - (a) Why does he have hope?
 - i) What is hope? Hoping is waiting with expectation.
 - ii) He says—FOR (or because) I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.
 - iii) You might say—well why doesn't he just do that right there?
 - iv) God can hear him just as well from there, right?
 - v) Well, because he knows God's presence dwells in the temple.
 - vi) He wants to offer his thanksgiving before him!
 - (1) If it were our anniversary and I decided to fly to Florida for a round of golf and I paused for a moment during my game to send my wife a text saying "happy anniversary" what does that say about my love for my wife?
 - (2) I think you know the answer to that .
 4. We do find out where the psalmist is in verse 6.
 - a) What does hope look like? "My soul is down cast; therefore, I remember you!"
 - (1) Specifically he is doing that FROM the land of Jordan and of Hermon, FROM Mount Mizar.
 - (2) Behind this remembering is this—"Yahweh is the only true God, and no one [is] like him, who declared the end from the beginning—in other words, governs history from beginning to end. These statements are introduced by the imperative: "Remember this and be strong!" This structure expresses the importance of this fundamental faith, but also the necessity of the remembrance that gives assurance. It is therefore not surprising that "memory" can be accompanied by strong emotions. Even at night the psalmist remembers Yahweh (Ps. 119:55), and the worshipper in Ps. 42:6 remembers with yearning God's presence in the temple." (TDOT)
- C. The taunt of the enemy—where is your God—has pushed the psalmist to find him by remembering and remembering has produced assurance! Only if the pain were over. Life keeps pounding away and we are forced to decide whether to stay or abandon the Lord. What will the pain bring? Gain in God?
1. As we move on to the last section—7-11, we see a waterfall crashing down on an already troubled soul.

- a) The image is striking—Deep calls to deep at the roar of YOUR waterfalls; all YOUR breakers and YOUR waves have gone over me.
 - (1) I would suggest that Jonah probably helps us understand the meaning of this.
 - (a) Indeed, he quotes these words verbatim while in the belly of the fish in Jonah 2:3.
 - i) It wasn't enough that God had sent a storm. It wasn't enough that he was thrown into the sea. He had acknowledged God but his thirst for God had not returned.
 - (1) In other words, he believed in God but he didn't long for him. In fact, as you know he attempted to hide from him.
 - (2) While in the sea, the fish swallows him up and takes him to the bottom of the ocean.
 - (3) There he cries out to God and he hears. But it wasn't until these breakers and waves of God had gone over him.
 - (4) Those waves were God's merciful gift to Jonah and the psalmist.
- 2. The pain does bring gain for Jonah and the psalmist.
 - a) Notice there in verse 8 where he finds assurance of God presence.
 - (1) How is God's presence with him? Look at the middle of the verse—his song is with me!
 - (a) Job 35:10 describes God as the One who gives songs in the night!
 - (2) This is one of the reasons why we sing.
 - (a) Not only do we praise God in the assembly but also we carry those truths with us to hold on to God until dawn comes and we can meet again!
 - b) I take this to mean that he has assurance of God's steadfast love but song is not enough for him. Assurance is necessary but we should not be satisfied with it. For we shall see his face!
 - (1) Verse 9 finds him also HURT by God's absence.
 - (a) Earlier we heard the enemy say to the psalmist, "Where is your God?"
 - i) He doesn't seem to answer them. He doesn't start an argument with the enemy.
 - (b) No. There in verse 9—I say to God, my rock.
 - i) Don't answer a fool in his folly.
 - ii) Pray! Believe!
 - iii) Some of you may not know how to pray and fight like this.
 - (1) "Why have you forgotten me?" More questions.
 - (2) This question is directed at God.
 - (3) Do not hesitate to be honest with the Lord.
 - (4) This question bursts with faith!
 - (5) He is hurt by God's absence.
 - (a) You will be hurt by the absence of some of your loved ones this Thanksgiving.
 - (b) Do you know when God's presence is near or far?
 - (2) Notice how he describes how bad it hurts
 - (a) Again another image is given—As with a deadly wound in my bones.
 - i) The wound comes from the repeated strikes of the enemy.
 - ii) He says there in verse 10—my adversaries (plural) taunt me, while they say to me all the day long—"Where is your God?"
 - iii) The psalmist repeats his same question as earlier—Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?
 - (1) He repeats it because his circumstances haven't changed.
 - (2) But he is not letting go of the Lord. Like Jacob wrestling with God and Moses saying in Exodus that he is not going anywhere without the LORD, so too the psalmist. He desires God!
 - (a) For I shall again praise him!
 - 3. There is no doubt in my mind that you feel this way sometimes and you need to know how to fight.
 - a) Hope does not give up. Hope in God. Do not let him go!
 - b) Worship the Lord in the assembly.
 - c) Serve the Lord any way you can.

- d) Share the gospel with others. If you are feeling dead you may be like the Dead Sea. It's dead because water comes in but nothing goes out. Be a living, flowing stream!
 - e) When God seems distant, search your soul of any unrepentant sins.
 - (1) There are things that hinder your relationship with God.
 - (a) For example—Psalm 66:18 ESV) “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”
 - (b) Of husbands in—(1 Peter 3:7 ESV) “husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”
 - f) Be thankful in all things—even in the difficult things. Go read Corrie Ten Boom’s story about the fleas.
 - g) When you notice that you are not thirsting for God you need to start asking why.
 - h) Do not believe for a second that God doesn’t have steadfast love. Remember and be strong.
 - i) But also know, he may bring relentless things into your life to make you thirst for him.
 - (1) And in doing so, he is saving you.
 - (2) This is God’s gracious work.
4. I’ll simply end by asking you, “Where in your God?”
- a) Do you know and long for him as the deer pants for flowing streams?
 - b) You can know him today. Respond to God’s call to repent and believe in Christ and he will save you.