

A Song for Difficult Days – Psalm 42-43

It's almost conclusive that these two Psalms were originally one, I'm preaching from that assumption. The fact that Psalm 43 has no introduction while the following Psalms do seems to confirm this... It is composed by the Sons of Korah as the intro at the beginning tells us, yet it depicts an individual's experience. Many assume the individual to be King David. If this Psalm is based in David's experience then it is worth noting he that is not found longing for the comforts of home, the riches of his palace or the position of his throne but for the presence of God. Either way it is a personal Psalm which opens & closes with hungering after God. Yet it is by no means written from an easy place, it is a Psalm of lament.

Its words express a desperate desire for God in the midst of struggling through sorrow (42:3), mockery (42:3), exile (42:6), depression (42:5, 11, 43:5), trial (42:7), oppression (42:9; 43:2), pain (10), betrayal (43:1), mourning (43:2) & turmoil (42:5, 11, 43:5). The writer also feels forgotten & rejected by God (42:9; 43:2). So he has extremely tough things to face within & without!

Yet we will see how none of these inward & outward struggles are given the central or final word. And none of the negative things rob the author of his hunger for God. His negative emotions & experiences do not decrease his desire for God but increase his desire for God & we will learn why this is so... We find that people either go one way or the other when faced with such things. Understanding this Psalm will help keep our relationship & desire for God alive in the hardest of times.

1. The Structure of this Psalm Contains a Powerful Truth

If we look closer at the structure of the Psalm we find that the author has crafted it in order to make one central & powerful point. To highlight that no matter what is going on around us or within us there is a powerful anchor for our souls which helps keep hope in God alive!

In the Psalm we find three stanzas of lament. The first stanza is 42:1-4, the second stanza is 42:6-10 & the third & final stanza is 43:1-4. After each of these stanzas there is the exact same refrain in 42:5, 11 & 43:5: **“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I will again praise him, my salvation and my God”** which again helps underline the understanding that this was originally one Psalm. So in our language we could say there are three verses & a chorus. Yet there is something different, something extra, something special about the middle stanza! It contains an extra verse (five instead of four) which helps to bring out that in the original there is an extra two lines in this middle stanza. These extra two lines are found right in the middle of the middle stanza (verse 8 in our Bibles), they break this middle stanza exactly in half & interrupt the lament right in the exact centre of the Psalm! This is no accident, this is a musical artist at work & he is crafting his Psalm to communicate

something very powerful. Something we can take hold of no matter what is happening around us or within us! Something to anchor our life in a powerful truth!

The idea of locating a poem's main point at its structural centre occurs many times in the Psalms. Yet I don't think any other Psalm does it quite as powerfully as this one. When we understand that Psalm 42 & 43 was originally one Psalm verse 8 stands at the exact structural centre of the Psalm! The whole Psalm hangs on this verse. This is the peak of the Psalm, this is the main point!

Listen to the truth that is firmly planted at the peak of this Psalm; V8 **"By day the LORD commands (or directs) his steadfast love, & at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life."** In the middle of all the crazy things that are happening, in the middle of all he is feeling, in the midst of the turmoil within his soul & in the very centre of his lamenting he basically takes a deep breath of glorious gracious truth & affirms that the LORD is still commanding & directing his steadfast love towards him every day, God's song is still with him in the night & he is praying to God who is still sovereign over & personally taking care of his life. In other words in spite of & in the midst of all he is feeling & all that is going on in his life God's love is right here in the midst of it, it has not been withdrawn, he has not lost favour with God & God has not let go of his life. He is expressing his confidence in the LORD's love, care & sovereignty. This is the only place outside the refrains where there is any break in his lamenting & this is the only place in the whole Psalm where God's personal name Yahweh occurs. He wants us to see that God's love & care is still present & active in the midst of all he is going through!

As well as this if we look carefully at the three stanzas we will notice that the first (42:1-4) looks to the past. In 42:4 he says **"These things I remember..."** Then if we jump to the last stanza we see he is looking to the future. In 43:4 he says **"Then I will go to the altar of God..."** Yet here in the middle stanza he is very much talking about his present. Which powerfully communicates God is still commanding & directing his steadfast love in his present – in the midst of the isolation, discouragement, rejection, mourning, oppression, pain & mockery he is currently experiencing. God is present in his present...

Why is this so important for us to see? Because when everything in life goes wrong, when people turn on us, or illness strikes us we are so prone to think we have lost favour with God & that he has forsaken or forgotten us. In fact there are false gospels out there that would program us to think this way. I think this is why some run from God when life gets hard.

Yet this powerfully crafted Psalm booms with NO to such thoughts & instead declares that even in the midst of tears, mockery, alienation, depression when life or even the Lord's discipline hits us hard. Even when we feel forgotten, mournful or oppressed, even when our bodies are in agony, our faith is undermined & unfaithfulness is all around us the truth is God is still commanding & directing his steadfast love in our lives because he is not only the God of our good moments, good days & good times but he is

the God of our life – that includes every season we go through! Including seasons like the Psalmist finds himself in right here.

For this reason even in the darkest night God's song of love is with us & on the worst day he is still commanding & directing his steadfast love in our lives & this gives us reason to sing a powerful refrain of hope in every season of life which leads me to the second thing I want to point out.

2. The Refrain of this Psalm Contains a Chorus of Hope

Not only do we find affirmation of God's love, care & favour in the very centre of this Psalm of lament we also find a chorus of hope at the end of each stanza!

The Psalmist is experiencing the worst time of his life. He is downcast & in absolute turmoil. So what does he do? He preaches hope to himself. I heard last week that when you look at all great preaching down through history the one common denominator is that all great preaching gave God's people hope... I've also heard it said that people can survive without almost anything apart from hope. The refrain which keeps being repeated in the midst of outward & inward turmoil here is one which looks to HOPE! **“Why are you cast down, Oh my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.”** Hope is what keeps him going & keeps desire for God alive when all sorts of stuff is going on in & around him.

Your life at the moment may be full of some of the things listed above... yet too can face it all with knowledge of God directing his steadfast love & a chorus of hope resounding in your heart! Sometimes we have to simply stop listening to our self & preach truth & hope to ourselves.

When I talk about preaching hope I'm not talking about giving yourself a little pep talk or motivational talk I'm talking about something much deeper & much more durable. I'm talking about preaching glorious truth to ourselves. Pep talks are like the cheap batteries you get in a Euro Store, one Duracell battery lasts longer than them all. The hope that flows from the gospel is even better & lasts even longer than Duracell; it never runs out of power & it has the power to bring us through anything!

If the Psalmist was able to preach hope to himself in the OT era then how much more can we who live on the other side of Christ's coming. Since Christ has come & will come again we have a greater view & foundation for hope. So the main thing we should preach & sing to ourselves is the gospel of Christ! We need not let our circumstances or emotions have the last word when we carry Christ in us the hope of glory. With Paul in 1 Tim 4:10 we can say; **“For to this end we toil & strive, because we have our hope in the living God, who is Saviour of all people, especially those who believe.”** Note that Psalmist's chorus of hope is also a chorus of salvation. We can also join with the proclamation of Peter in **1 Peter 1:3-9**. This is our hope in the midst of trial! Peter words are reiterating the same truth!

No threat to the church, no setbacks in ministry & no trials in life can ever put Christ, our living hope, back in the tomb. Our powerful Christian hope is the gospel rocket fuel that will keep us going no matter what. When you see Christ as the true source of hope you will not be found thirsting for anything else more than him. Because Christ is alive, hope is alive! Who cares about comfort, who cares about riches, who cares about position when he have Christ in us the hope of glory?! We Christians carry the hope of glory in our hearts. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:17; **“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”** We cannot survive the seasons of life without hope & there is no better or surer hope than our glorious Christian hope. There is no true hope without Christ yet there is unbreakable hope in him. Get a hold of Christian hope & let it get hold of you for it is a true hope that will not disappoint!

Yet even as we wait for the certain outcome of our faith the gospel also declares that Christ is presently with us now in our lamenting. We have a Jesus who is able to identify with the lamenting of this Psalmist. Who knows what it is to weep, to be cast down, to have a soul in turmoil, to be in exile from his holy place, to be rejected by men, to be oppressed by the enemy & even forsaken by his Father. He knows more than anyone what it is to have all the breakers & waves of the almighty crash over him & to suffer deadly wounds in his bones while adversaries taunt him & say “where is your God.”

No wonder 2 Peter 3:8 tells us to; **“Grow in the grace & knowledge of our Lord & Saviour Jesus Christ.”** There is so much in the Psalm that reflects what Christ endured for us. Yet he did so to give us hope in God, to become our Rock of stability through all the ups & downs of life, our cornerstone that holds us together when everything seems to be falling apart! Our reminder that God has not forgotten or forsaken us but is instead orchestrating his steadfast love towards us in the turmoil of life! And when we look to his cross we see how in the very centre of the story of salvation history, in the midst of pain, rejection, turmoil of soul & lamenting on the cross God was in fact directing & demonstrating his love for us **“in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”** God loved us when we were at our worst & because of this we can know for sure that he is still orchestrating his love for us on the worst day of our lives. This is why we can have chorus of hope ringing in our hearts in the midst of all inward & outward struggles of this life.