

8/8/2021 - Psalm 43 - "Hope When God Seems Silent"

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[0 : 00] So I thank you for being here and for listening to me. And today we're going to look at Psalm 43. So if you have your Bibles, you can turn there. There are Bibles in front of you as well.

And it will also be up on the screen too. I'll give you a second to turn there. Listen to the Word of God.

This is Psalm 43. Let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.

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. 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. Where is God?

[1 : 33] We ask this question a lot. We live in a world that's full of sin. And we often feel hopeless.

We can become upset and downcast because God seems silent. We often feel like he's not there. One very sobering example of this happened on February 12, 2015, when 21 Christian men were led down to a beach by members of the terrorist group ISIS.

They had done nothing wrong. They were wearing orange jumpsuits.

And because of their faith, they were killed. Where is God? Why didn't he intervene?

[2 : 42] Does he even care about his people? Why doesn't God always defend us, protect us? Why doesn't he always reward us for our faithfulness to him?

Why is it that Christians sometimes face persecution? Why is it that Christians sometimes face persecution? Where is the hope for these 21 martyrs? You know, I know if I were in the shoes of these martyrs, that it would be very easy for me to feel hopeless.

To feel abandoned by God. And to ask where he is. And these are the feelings that the psalmist is wrestling with here.

These same sorts of questions. So this psalm is broken up into three parts. We're going to look at that today. In verses 1 and 2, we're going to see the persecution of God's servant.

And then in verses 3 and 4, we're going to see desire for God. And then finally in verse 5, we're going to see hope in God. So let's start with verses 1 and 2, the persecution of God's servant.

[3 : 56] Let's look. He says, Here the psalmist is asking for justice to be done.

The first thing we've got to ask ourselves is, What does vindicate mean? It's the first word here.

Vindicate. And vindicate means to show or to prove that someone is in the right.

That they're justified. And so he's asking God to show the world that he's pursuing the one true God. He's facing some sort of persecution or slander because of his pursuit of God.

And he's asking God to come and defend him. And then he starts to question why God isn't intervening. Why aren't you defending me?

Have you abandoned me? Where are you? The psalmist is upset. He's downcast. You know, he makes this argument.

[5 : 20] He says, You're the God in whom I take refuge. You know, why am I going through all these things if I'm pursuing you? We sometimes have trouble understanding how God could be on our side.

Why are we left to struggle? We understand that feeling of being abandoned by God. We all have times when it feels like God is silent.

Times when we ask, God, where are you? When have you experienced that feeling of abandonment? Because we all have.

One time or another. Maybe you're in a season now where you're feeling that. And you ask, You know, do you even care about me? Do you care about your people?

And that's what the psalmist is wrestling with. Lord, are you there? It's a cry to God. Why are you putting me through this instead of rescuing me from it?

[6 : 27] Why won't you come into this situation and fix it? Now, some might try to give an intellectual answer to these questions and lay out all the reasons why bad things happen.

But the psalmist goes in a different direction. So let's look at that. So we just talked about the persecution of God's servant, this feeling of being abandoned by God.

Let's look at verses 3 and 4, what he says. He says, Send out your light and your truth. Let them lead me. Let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.

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. So here we see the psalmist seeking God's presence.

The holy hill here that he mentions in verse 3, it's a little bit unclear what exactly he means, because we don't know when this psalm was written.

[7 : 35] But it is likely where the Ark of the Covenant was. And that may have been the tabernacle or the temple, depending on when it was written. But in any case, this is a representation of God's dwelling place.

And so the psalmist is asking to be brought into the presence of God. Because this is before God dwelt in believers. Now we have the Holy Spirit within us.

But he here is asking to be brought to the tabernacle, to the temple, to the dwelling place of God. And notice, he's passionate here.

He's passionate and he's desirous of God. His one desire is to be in his presence. And he finds joy in God.

He says, exceeding joy. And he praises God as well. You know, this isn't just an, okay, you know, I love you, so I guess everything is going to be okay.

[8 : 38] Yeah. No, that's not what's going on here. It's far deeper than that. He's singing about God. About his love for him.

About his joy in him. He's reminding himself of the joy he has in God. Now you may be wondering, what does this have to do with persecution?

What does this have to do with feeling abandoned by God? It's kind of an abrupt shift, it seems like. You know, he's just asking God where he is, and then all of a sudden he switches to an expression of his desire for God and to be with him.

He doesn't reason with himself. He doesn't explain to himself why he's going through this difficulty. Instead, he reminds himself.

He reminds himself of the joy he has in God. He's reminding himself of his truest desire, which is not to be brought out of this persecution.

[9 : 49] It's to dwell with God. And he brings his difficulties, his things that he's dealing with, into perspective. More than wanting deliverance from his accusers, he wants to dwell with God.

He's intensely desirous of being in his presence. Sometimes we become so focused on our situation that we become bitter when we're not brought out of that situation.

But the psalmist here is reminding himself of his truest joy, which is to be with God. And this provides a context to understand his difficulties.

He's bringing his persecution and his difficulties into perspective. Are you desirous of God?

Are you desirous of God like the psalmist? Not just of what he can do for you, not just in his ability to bring you out of trials and difficulties, but do you desire him?

[11 : 02] Do you yearn for him? I'll be the first to admit that I am not always desirous of him. I'm, in many ways, an intellectual.

And in reality, I'm kind of a nerd, partly because I find theology to be cool. You know, I find it interesting. But I don't always translate that love for theology, that love for knowledge about God into true desire for him.

Some of you may struggle with that as well. And some of you may struggle with loving what he gives you more than loving him. You know, would you be able to express your desire for him if you were struggling like the psalmist or like those 21 martyrs?

Would you still long for God even when he feels like he's not there, even when it feels like he's not working? Maybe you're already in a dark place.

Maybe you're already struggling. Do you desire him? Because we can be especially lacking in this desire when we are in a difficult place, when we're feeling abandoned by God.

[12:31] It's often difficult to remember our true desire. But that's not right. It's not how it should be.

We should always love and desire God far more than anything. You might ask why, and there are several reasons why.

First of all, we're commanded to in Deuteronomy 6, 5. He says, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. It's also our main purpose in life to love God, to enjoy him, to bring glory to him.

But it also provides a context for us to better understand difficulty. And I want you to look now at the logic that James presents in chapter 1, verses 2 to 4.

He says this. He says, count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

[13:37] And let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. So he's saying, even though things are tough, those difficulties are molding you into the likeness of God.

Now, that's not comforting. That's not really comforting. Unless you come to God with desire for him. If you're truly desirous of him, then that's immensely comforting. Because these things that you're going through, they're helping you to achieve your truest desire, which is to be with God.

But if you don't start with desire for God, then you're like, you know, okay, yeah, you know, this is helping me grow and stuff, these difficulties, yeah, but when are you gonna come and get me out of this situation?

You know, that's what you're focused on. But if you remember your true desire and your true purpose in life, then things have a better context.

[14:54] Arguments like the ones we find in James are comforting. And that doesn't mean that we don't struggle. You know, the psalmist here is struggling, but he's reminding himself of his desire for God.

And this provides a context to his struggle that is very important. Are you desirous of God? If you were to lose everything in this world, if you were to suffer, would you still be desirous of him?

Do you have that same desire for God that the psalmist does, that he wishes to dwell with God more than he wants deliverance from his persecution? Do you really love God?

You know, we desire the things that we love. So do you love the fact that he's forgiven your sin? Do you love that he's just?

You know, that one can be particularly hard because we don't always value justice in our culture.

That's something that was talked about a few weeks ago in the sermon is that we should love God for his justice.

[16:10] Do you love his creativity? The beauty we see in nature? Do you get excited about him? Do you love how God has perfect unity and harmony within himself in the Trinity?

Do you find yourself unable to keep silent about your great God? Do you love to spend time in the word and in prayer?

You know, our answers to these questions should be a resounding yes, yes, Lord, I love you and I fully desire you above all else. But if we're being honest, sometimes our answers to those questions is no.

No, I don't really love him. What is it that stands in the way of your desire for God? Is it daily hardships?

You know, maybe you just have a hard time desiring God when you're stuck behind a truck that's going real slow. Is it just that TV is more entertaining than spending time with God and cultivating that desire?

[17:31] Is it just something you don't really think about through the day? You know, maybe you have your 15 minutes of time with God in the morning and then you go about, you're busy working, doing this and that.

But you don't remember God's hand in bringing you safely to work that day. You don't remember to enjoy God throughout the day. What stands in the way of your desire for God?

Let me challenge you to cultivate your relationship with God. Cultivate that desire. And where you lack in desire for God, repent and then work to cultivate it.

Cultivate that desire. desire. Because when you truly desire God, it's in that place that you can have a context for understanding even the most difficult of circumstances.

Even when it feels like God isn't there. But the psalm doesn't end there. We've looked at persecution of God's servant. We've looked at that feeling of abandonment.

[18 : 39] And we moved into this expression of desire for God. And now he moves into something else. Hope. Hope in God.

Let's look at what he says in verse 5. He says, 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 here starts to challenge himself.

He says, Why are you upset? You know, it's at this point that he starts to reason with himself. You know, even though I'm being accused, even though I'm struggling over here, that doesn't matter.

Because my hope is in God. My hope is in God. Now, why should the psalmist hope in God here?

[19 : 45] You know, he's feeling abandoned by God. God doesn't appear to be doing anything for him. Why should he hope in God? I think the key word here that we see is that God is his salvation.

Now, I don't think he's only referring here to salvation from his accusers. Now, it could be part of it, because this is the Old Testament, and God often worked in very tangible ways like that.

So, he often saved the nation of Israel in a physical way. So, it could be partly about that. But I don't think it's just about that. Because if it were, that would leave no hope for those 21 martyrs.

Because they didn't get salvation from their accusers. So, if all the psalmist is hoping in here is to be delivered from his persecution, then there's no hope for those 21 martyrs.

So, what is he talking about here? There's another kind of salvation that he's talking about. The psalmist wouldn't have known Jesus personally, because Jesus hadn't come yet.

[21 : 04] But he would have known about the coming Messiah and the coming redemption of God's people. So, his hope is also in this future Messiah and in his salvation from his sin.

We can hope in the same things that the psalmist finds hope in here. Because that Messiah that he looked forward to, that Messiah has come.

So, we have hope. we have hope for our personal salvation. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, we can dwell with the Lord.

We will be able to dwell with him in the fullest way. And again, you know, that's only kind of comforting if you really want to dwell with him.

If you really want to be with him. Otherwise, you know, maybe you're happy to be saved from your persecution. Maybe you're happy you don't have to go to hell.

[22 : 17] But you don't fully appreciate the hope that you have. If you're truly desirous of him, though, then this hope brings exceeding joy.

God will be with you. And it should lead us to rejoicing and to praising him as the psalmist does. Because God will look at us and he will say, well done, good and faithful servant.

Not because of what we've done, but because he will look at us and he will see Jesus' sacrifice and he will declare us righteous. He'll vindicate us.

That's what the psalmist is asking for here, to be vindicated. He's asking for God to come and to show that he's righteous. And that will happen for him.

And that will happen for all of us. We will be declared righteous. We will be vindicated. Even though we've sinned. Even though we're not righteous in and of ourselves.

[23 : 26] Christ has paid the penalty for us. He has paved a way for us to be vindicated. And because of that vindication, we will dwell with the Lord forever.

So we have hope that we will fully dwell with the Lord. But we also hope for when he comes again. For when he will make all things right.

These difficulties that the psalmist is dealing with, these persecutions that we hear about, this feeling of abandonment that we sometimes have, all of that will cease.

It will be no more. He will end all of that. And then we will dwell with the Lord forever.

And it's in these things that even those 21 martyrs can hope in. Because they knew that they would be able to dwell with the Lord.

[24 : 38] And that when the Lord comes again, all of those injustices will cease. you ask, where is God? Let me tell you.

He's here. He's your joy and your hope. Things may seem bleak now because he doesn't always work on this earth in the way we'd like.

But your hope is not on this earth. Where is God? He's here. no matter what you're going through right now or what you have gone through, he has not abandoned you.

abandoned you. And he may require patience, but he has provided a way for you to have your greatest joy and desire, which is to be with him.

And one day, God will fix all of the problems that we see on this earth. we will dwell with the Lord forever. Why are you cast down?

[25 : 46] Why are you depressed? You shouldn't be. Are you upset because you're going through difficulty? Worldly difficulties shouldn't make you downcast because your hope is in God.

Rejoice and praise him. Now, before we wrap up, I want to say one final thing.

And that's that reminding ourself of this hope is not always easy. Sometimes it's difficult. We have to remind ourself of this hope a lot because it's difficult to remember.

And we can often become downcast when we're feeling abandoned by God. And I want you to notice that even the psalmist here needs reminders. If we look at Psalm 42, which is actually the beginning of this psalm, it's originally one psalm.

And if we look at Psalm 42, verse 5, he says, 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.

[27 : 05] That should be familiar. He's expressing his hope. He's reminding himself of that hope. And then he goes right back into it. Still in verse 5, it says, my soul is cast down within me.

And in verse 11, he says it again. Why are you cast down? Hope in God. And that leads right into chapter 43 where he says, vindicate me and defend my cause.

And then he ends the psalm, 43 verse 5, he says, why are you cast down? Hope in God. God. So sometimes we need reminders and that's okay because sometimes it's difficult.

We're forgetful people. but remind yourself, continually remind yourself of the hope that you have in God, especially when you're struggling or you feel like he's not there.

Remind yourself of truth because we do have hope. We have great hope. So as we close, I want to remind you all of what we've talked about today.

[28 : 20] We can often become discouraged with this world. We sometimes feel like God isn't there. And when that's the case, I think it's appropriate to bring those questions to God as the psalmist does.

But come to him with desire for him. In fact, let everything you do be out of love for him and for who he is.

Continually cultivate your desire for him. And when you're feeling abandoned by God, remember that you have hope.

You have hope for your personal salvation for when you will be vindicated and for when you will be able to fully dwell with the Lord. And you also have hope for when he comes again and fixes all of the problems that we see in this world.

Why are you cast down? Your joy and your hope is in God. when you feel like God isn't there or that he's not working, remember that hope.

[29 : 41] And if you truly desire to dwell with God, then this is great hope indeed. I want to say one last thing.

And that's that if you do not know this joy, if you don't know this hope, if you haven't put your trust in Jesus, please come talk to me or an elder because we would love to have a conversation with you. Because you too can know this hope. And you can know this joy. Let's pray.