

Hope in God

October 10, 2010

Psalm 42 and 43

**** Seat folks and read Psalms 42 and 43 ****

Weather Extremes

- III: Vacationing in Utah in April 1996 / Omaha snowstorm of Feb
 - SE Utah - Drove all day and saw next to no one
 - Best vacation for me ~ Worst vacation for Tabitha
 - We got to a hotel about dusk
 - While eating dinner at restaurant next to hotel – overheard waiter
 - Bus broke down on Sunday in Feb near Lincoln NE / -23 degrees
 - Caught new bus west on Wednesday / 65 degrees
- When walking in -23 degree weather it's hard to imagine 65 and sunny
 - But that's what psalms 42 and 43 are all about
 - The psalmist shares with us the painful -23 degree experience
 - Yet retains unwavering hope that 65 and sunny would come
 - But God only knows whether that will take 2 days, 2 weeks or 2 months

Background on Text

- Psalms 42 and 43 go together ~ they were separated @ 200 BC
- They contain some very memorable portions of Scripture
- They are described as a lament ~ but they are more . . .
 - They instruct the reader how to escape the pit of despair
- There are 3 sections that I labeled on your handout
 1. **42.1-5** ~ "In the pit of despair"
 2. **42.6-11** ~ "Forming a plan of escape"
 3. **43.1-5** ~ "Escaping the pit of despair"
- Each section begins with the psalmist directly addressing God
- Each section ends with the same self-directed sermon of encouragement
 - **Read 42.5** ~ "**Why are you cast down . . .**"
- In between he addresses others with either + or - thoughts

Xition: Let's enter into the "pit of despair . . ."

The psalmist begins by describing his longing for God

- Obviously he is not experiencing God's presence
 - The picture c/the deer is one of running from an enemy
 - The deer is seeking water as a means of salvation
 - It is hunted, perhaps wounded and near death
- This man knows what he lacks ~ he used to have it / enjoy it
 - This is a godly man who once knew God intimately
 - He longs to again experience that intimacy with God

Sadness and despair

- What does he mean by, "**My tears have been my food**"?
- "*Have you ever cried so intensely that tears coursed into your mouth?*"
 - You push them away but they come back down the same tracks
 - What he's describing is inconsolable weeping . . .
 - This doesn't come from physical pain ~ but spiritual anguish . . .
 - You're eating tears and nothing else because you have no appetite
- And if the internal anguish wasn't enough, outwardly he's being taunted
 - Enemies ask, "**Where is your God?**"
 - This argues strongly for occurring during the Babylonian captivity
 - Not only is the writer in exile, but his God has been vanquished

This type of anguish longs for release – for an escape

- So he is prone to taking little mental vacations from the pain
- His mind naturally takes him back to better days, ~ to the "*good old days*"
 - with the multitude (belonging) – joy – praise – feast
- Such escapes from the harsh reality of the present are so tempting
 - III: Strictly Ballroom – "*I've got my happy face on*"

Suddenly the sermon to self (v5) intrudes

- While in one of these melancholy funks the self-directed sermon intrudes
- It seems to spring from nowhere . . .
- The writer is rebuking himself for the mood he is in
 - He judges dwelling on past joys as unhelpful
 - He suddenly recognizes that he's allowed his mind to wander – AGAIN
 - He's in the pit of despair and his thoughts aren't helping him get out

Xition: Let's examine the sermon he preaches to himself . . .

“Why are you cast down, O my soul?”

- Two observations
 1. He acknowledges the despair he’s feeling
 2. He questions the despair he’s feeling ~ “why”
 - He is not questioning his circumstances
 - But he is questioning his emotional response to them

“Hope in God”

- Two responses
 1. He’s taking responsibility for his thoughts and his emotions
 - He assesses his behavior and finds it wanting . . .
 - This reflects a very mature believer
 2. He commands himself to do what he knows to be true
 - **John 6.67** ~ Many stopped following Christ because of his hard sayings. Jesus asked the twelve, “**Do you also want to go away?**”
 - Peter answered (v68), “**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.**”
 - God alone can address our emotional / spiritual state
 - Anything else you might try will likely do more damage than good

“I shall yet praise Him”

- This means he will continue to praise Him
- And this praise is the cause of hope

Matthew Henry quotes

- Q: “ *Casting anchor thus at first, he rides out the storm*”
 - This mini-sermon is him casting out an anchor – and praying it holds
- Q: “*When the soul rests on itself, it sinks, if it catches hold on the power and promise of God, the head is kept above the billows*”
 - Ill: Remember the deer ~ in the river with only muzzle above water
- Q: “*Being cast down springs from unbelief and a rebellious will, we should therefore strive and pray against it*”
 - The psalmist recognizes that he must combat the despair
 - He tells himself he has no reason for such dark thoughts

Xition: Let’s go on to the next section at verse 6 . . .

The 2nd section

- He begins by again speaking to God as he did in **verse 1**
- He speaks to God more this time (**vss 6 and 7**)
- Note why he chooses to remember God – **“Therefore I will remember”**
 - He chooses to remember God because his soul is cast down . . .
 - This is **terribly important** to catch . . .
 - Remembering God is the key to escaping the pit . . .
 - *Q: “The way to forget our miserias, is to remember the God of our mercies” ~ Matthew Henry*
 - **v8** - He starts thinking positively – **“The Lord will”**
 - In the handout note this is underlined in red (+ thoughts)

Verse 9 details the “Escape Plan”

- **“I will say”** ~ **“Why have You”** ~ **“Why do I”**
 - Underlined in black because he’s not acting on it yet . . .
- Again he is attacked by enemies ~ **“Where is your God?”**
- But notice that this time something different happens
 - Before he’d lapsed into morbid reflection on former joy and glory
 - But this time he immediately preaches the mini-sermon to himself
 - The ship is being buffeted by the storm - he throws out another anchor

The Psalmist carries out the escape in chapter 43

- He again begins by talking to God
- Let me explain the handout at this point
 - The blue sections are where he is directly addressing God
 - G = God | O = Others | H = Himself
 - Note that in each section the blue portion grows larger
 - In the 1st it was **25%** ~ 2nd it was **40%** ~ by the 3rd it was **88%**
 - In last section he speaks to God nearly the entire time
- Note also that after he speaks with God he addresses others
 - In sections 1 and 2 they start **positive(+)** and turn **negative(-)**
 - But there is nothing negative by the 3rd section

Xition: Let’s look at the text of the 3rd section . . .

Before he was whiny and introspective - stuck in past glories . . .

- Now he's heavily engaged in a conversation with God
- **v1** - Note the passion in his voice
 - He says, "**Vindicate me**", "**plead my cause**", "**deliver me**"
- **v2** - Note the confidence in God
 - "**You are the God of my strength**"
- **v3** - Note the conviction he has in God's Word
 - "**Send out Your light and Your truth**"
 - "**Let them lead me**" ~ "**Let them bring me**"
- **v4** – He now speaks to the others
 - He tells them he's heading to God's altar – to God his exceeding joy
- **v5** – And he goes right back to talking to God
 - He can't stand being away from him

He ends by again preaching his mini self-directed sermon

- Note that the sermon (preached 3 times) had a profound effect
- But note also that it never changed
 - "**Why are you downcast?**" ~ you shouldn't be . . .
 - "**Hope in God**" ~ God alone holds the key to your joy
 - "**Praise Him**" ~ For who He is and for His gifts to men . . .
- The psalmist knew the answer ~ hope in God
- He just needed to remind himself to do it with all his strength . . .

Depression / Joylessness / Spiritual Drought

- I've experienced periods of mild depression in recent years
- But some of you have gone through "*dark nights of the soul*"
- I encourage you to meditate on **psalms 42 and 43** next time . . .
- Q: "*The psalmist strove against his despondency, and at last his faith and hope obtained the victory*" ~ Matthew Henry
- "**Hope in God**"