

Hope for the Discouraged

Pillar of Truth Conference

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Bible Verse: Psalm 42
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I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 42 for the text of our message this morning. Psalm 42, what is in the inscription called, "A Maskil of the Sons of Korah." I'm going to read the Psalm and then we'll spend most of our time there this morning.

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 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. 6 Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. 7 By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. 8 I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" 9 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?" 10 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.

After the privilege of preaching the word of God and being able to give your life to the study of it, one of the great privileges of pastoral ministry, in my opinion, is to stand alongside of people as they go through the deep waters that life inevitably brings. Not too long ago in another state, I was standing alongside two grieving parents at the grave of their teenage son who had died unexpectedly in inexplicable circumstances and we just talked about their son, grieved with them. They showed me pictures of him, of his artwork and different aspects and we just had an incredibly sweet time, the three of us, standing there and reminiscing and talking about the providence of God, the faithfulness of God, and the comfort of God, and eternal matters of consequence that are so intimate

and so precious, I wouldn't dare to repeat them in a public setting. But it's a joy for me to be able to stand alongside people in their sorrows, Christians especially in their sorrows, and hear what's on their heart and do whatever I can to bring a measure of comfort from the word of God to them in those times. That's what I want to do with you here today, beloved. You know, in a room of this size, it obviously can't be immediately personal like that but many of you, if not most of you, come with things that are heavy on your heart, matters of discouragement, even matters of despair, matters of grief, some longstanding for years, some more immediate, maybe it's just the pressure of daily life or longer term things where your heart has been broken. I'm here this morning to stand alongside you through the word of God and to bring the comfort that the word of God would have for you here today and so we turn naturally to the Psalms because Christians find their own experience reflected in the Psalms. The Psalms are amazing in their description of the human condition and the motions of the human heart and though written some 3,000 years ago or more in some instances, that they speak to us and in joy or in sorrow we find a reflection and we find that which gives voice to the matters of our heart before a holy God and in the Scriptures we have a reliable guide in these Psalms to help us. And so that's what we're looking to do this morning, is to find the encouragement from the word of God. I've titled today's message, "Hope for the Discouraged," And in Psalm 42, without doubt, the writer is discouraged and what he does in the course of this Psalm, in his discouraged state, he calls himself to hope by remembering his unchanging God and not letting the discouragement of the day define his perspective on God, and yet at the same time, and what I find so helpful and so contrary to those that have an easy answer for everything, you see that in this Psalm it's a struggle, that he's laboring, that he's fighting a fight of faith, even against himself in some ways, and yet at the end, he calls his soul to hope in God, and that's what I'm here to do for you here today. We find a pattern to respond to our own discouragement, our own despair, our own grief in the words of this most blessed Psalm.

Now Psalm 42 and Psalm 43, just by way of a little bit of background here, they're closely related. They have a common refrain. If you look at Psalm 42:5, you see this pretty well-known refrain where the Psalmist 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." Then in verse 11 we read, "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." And while I didn't read Psalm 43, look over at verse 5 of Psalm 43, and you see this refrain echoed again. "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." A common refrain across those two Psalms, and yet that's not the only parallel that you find in them. There's a common reflection in the Psalms as well. In Psalm 42:9, we read this, "I say to God, my rock: 'Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?'" And then in Psalm 43:2, we read, "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?" And because of those common themes and those echoes across the two Psalms, and the fact that Psalm 43 does not have a separate title of its own, many people think that perhaps those two were originally one Psalm, and indeed some of the early manuscripts put Psalm 42 and 43 together as a single

Psalm. And it's reasonable to view them as a single Psalm but for today's purposes, they are separated in the English text as we've received it today and so we're going to treat it separately and look only at Psalm 42. I just want you to see the close link of those two Psalms together. And as an aside, as you study through the Psalms and you read them closely, you find that that's often the case in the Psalter, that Psalms are grouped together with common themes and common wording and things like that, and as you look at the Psalms in an overview manner, it's obvious that they were arranged in a deliberate fashion, that they're not haphazard individual texts with no relation to one another as you go through consecutively in the Psalms. But that's for another time.

Here in Psalm 42, we read that in the inscription that it's called "A Maskil of the sons of Korah," and the sense of that inscription is that this is to be understood as an artistic song that expresses wisdom. Here we find what would have been used in a musical way in the Old Testament times, a Psalm that is used to express wisdom and in the theme of the Psalm, how we find wisdom as we walk through times of discouragement. How is it that we, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, when our hearts are downcast, when our minds are confused and the things that we've known clearly in the past now seem to be covered by a cloud, how do we respond in times like that and how can we move from discouragement to joy, from fear to faith, and from tears to triumph? How do we move in the right direction and that's what we're going to see here this morning.

Scripture tells us that the sons of Korah served in the temple, and that's going to be important later on. They served in the temple. They sang. They played instruments. They were centrally involved in the worship of the temple in the Old Testament times and so this is coming from that community that contributed to the worship of God in the temple. Just as we as Christians serve in the worship of God and we serve him with our worship in corporate ways in the New Testament era, these were worshiping people that produced the Psalm that we have here and yet as worshiping people, we find the individual who wrote this Psalm cast down and letting us know in no uncertain terms that his heart is broken and discouraged. And what we want to do here today is I just want to break this Psalm into two major points. We're going to look at the reality of discouragement and then the remedy for discouragement. The reality of discouragement and then the remedy for discouragement.

Part of one of the ongoing themes and goals and aims of my ministry over the course of a few decades now, has been to help Christians overcome the false teaching that creates a wrong sense of what the Christian life is supposed to be like. You know, there are those teachers who create the impression that God wants you to be healthy and wealthy and always happy and God's going to quickly solve all of your problems for you if you just have enough faith, and I know by direct personal experience, as most of you do also, that the reality of life contradicts that false theology. Sooner or later you come to realize that that's not the way life works, even as a believer. Scripture doesn't teach that. Scripture wouldn't point us in that direction. It's a false hope and a false promise that we can go through this fallen world on a bed of roses and not suffer and never have any difficulties and then just waltz our way into heaven because we belong to Jesus. That's not the way it

works. That's not what Scripture teaches us to expect from our salvation. And so in this Psalm, we see an immediate rebuke of that false view of things.

The Psalm opens with a deep desire for God's presence in the midst of intolerable sorrow. A deep desire for God's presence in the midst of utterly intolerable sorrow and I just want to bounce across some of the highlights of the Psalm so that you see this theme very clearly because it's central to understanding this Psalm, central to drinking the milk that God would give to us to refresh our hearts from his word here this morning. Look at verse 1 where the Psalmist says, "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God." I have unfulfilled desires for you and for your presence. I am longing for you. I am thirsty for you, and there's nothing to slake my thirst and to help me as I open this Psalm. In verse 3, we read, "My tears have been my food day and night while they say to me all the day long, 'Where is your God?'" His heart is discouraged. He describes a time of weeping that informs this Psalm. Look at verse 6, "My soul is cast down within me." And in verse 9, he says, "I say to God, my rock: 'Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?'" And with that opening picture of a dehydrated deer, we see a picture of someone who is thirsty and panting for the presence of God. He's discouraged, his heart is dried out, and as we're going to see, there are enemies and opponents and those that dislike him who are agitating and provoking him in the midst of it and he's isolated in this time of spiritual distress. And so he's a man with unfulfilled, unsatisfied spiritual thirst. He needs the God of power to act and help him. He needs the God of love to comfort him. And it seems like God is tarrying. He's waiting. He's delaying while the situation goes from bad to worse. And if you are in a situation like that, and you're praying urgently, "God, help me," and no help comes, and the next day comes, and you're still waiting, and you wonder, "How long is this going to go on?" Well, you have a friend in the writer of Scripture who's walked that path before you and has expressed his experience under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and God intends this text to bring comfort to you right now in this situation, to not only guide how you respond to it, but to comfort your heart and give you a sense that he has not abandoned you, that all will be well in the end, even though there may not be a quick solution to what you need.

And as you read this Psalm, as you study this Psalm, what you find is this, there's a certain spiritual brilliance to what we have in front of us here in God's word. As you trace the Psalm through its argument, you find that the Psalmist has identified and he recognizes that there are discernible human causes for his discouragement, there are reasons for his melancholy spirit, and to recognize those reasons is the first step in winning the battle and dealing with the reality of discouragement. I just want to highlight three of those aspects of the reality of discouragement for you here today.

First of all, he is spiritually isolated. He is alone. Somehow his circumstances are keeping him separated and apart from the people of God for reasons that are not explained in the text. But look at verse 2 where he says, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" I long to be in worship. How long will it be that my inability to be with the people of God will continue? When will I be able to appear before him? Now, beloved, this is where understanding the sons of Korah and

their role in the temple worship is helpful. In the Old Testament economy, God had uniquely set apart the temple as the place for worship. It was at the temple where God had uniquely manifested his presence to his people and so for the Psalmist to say, "When shall I come and appear before God," it's an indication that he misses being in the temple to worship in the presence of God by the means of worship that he had appointed for that time. He valued gathering together with the people of God. He valued the worship of God. He's not in this place of discouragement because he's a godless man who has rebelled against God and is looking to turn his back further on him. We see the godliness of his heart by what he emphasizes at the start of his unfulfilled desires. "I want to be in worship. I want to be in the presence of God and yet I can't be." He's spiritually isolated, obviously for reasons that are beyond his control and so he pours out his heart before God.

Now, let me hit the pause button for a moment and just go on a very brief minor tangent here. There are those who would, perhaps looking at a situation apart from Scripture, would be critical of someone expressing these kinds of sentiments that you find in Psalm 42 to God. There are those that would rebuke you, you know, how could you say, ask God if he's forgotten you? Don't you know that he's omniscient? You shouldn't even say anything like that. Well, John Calvin, in his commentary on Habakkuk, has a really helpful observation here. He says, the purpose of prayer is that we pour out our hearts before God. Here the Psalmist is agitated, he's discouraged, he's weighed down. What he needs is the opportunity to express those sentiments freely before his God. He's seeking God. He's longing for God. He's not in rebellion against God in the things that he's saying here. He's expressing the desires of a godly soul that are going unmet and he's feeling the consequences of that. So where else, this is always where I come out to, where else, where else is a discouraged Christian supposed to go? Where else is a downcast believer to go if he can't go and express his heart freely and honestly before God? What does it mean that in Christ, in Hebrews 4 that we have, or chapter 2, this text escapes me and I'm not going to have you turn there, what does it mean that we have a sympathetic high priest and the call to go to him so that we may find grace and mercy to help in time of need if we can't go and express the need? What good is that? How can we sing about a sympathetic Savior if we're forbidden to express our discouragement to him? What good would it be to have a human friend who is supposed to be your close bosom buddy and you can't bear your heart before him? It's nonsense. It's not the pattern of Scripture. The Lord sympathizes with his people. The Lord himself knows what it's like to weep at the graveside of a friend. He knows what it's like to groan in the midst of opposition. He went through his humanity in part, in part to be able to sympathize and identify with his people in our sorrows and we see here in Psalm 42 an early Old Testament shadow, foreshadowing of that comfort that would be abundantly available to the people of God as they go to Christ with their sorrows. And so in our spiritual isolation, can we pour out our hearts honestly before God? Yes, absolutely. Yes, absolutely. We have a sympathetic Savior who bids us to come, who says, "Come to me, all you who are weak and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." And so just knowing, for some, the initial crack of light coming through what's previously seemed to be a closed door is just opening the door to recognizing that the door is available to walk through. and to pour forth your heart before God and know that he receives you sympathetically. Here, that's what the Psalmist is

doing in the midst of his spiritual isolation. He's isolated, of course he's discouraged, of course he's downcast and so that's one of the reasons that he's panting after God.

Now secondly, there's a second reason for his discouragement. He's surrounded by enemies. He is surrounded by enemies. There are men taunting him in the midst of his sorrow and this is one of the most wicked ways that the devil tries to discourage Christians. It's one of the most wicked things that unbelieving people can do to the people of God in the midst of their discouragement is to come and try to aggravate it and make it worse and the Psalmist feels that. Look at verse 3 with me again. Psalm 42:3, he says, "My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, 'Where is your God?'" Answer me. Show me by the circumstances, you Christian, where your God is. Show me by your circumstances this God that you say is loving and faithful. Look at you, look at the mess that your life is in. Look at how your friends have abandoned you and sometimes look at how your family has abandoned you and turned against you. You say you have a God on your side, where's the evidence of that? You've been with us in the conference, arguing from the theology of what? Of glory, as opposed to the theology of the cross.

Go down to verse 9 in Psalm 42. He says, "I say to God, my rock: 'Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?' 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?'" They're not content to say it once and then walk away and get back to their own business. They've got to provoke and aggravate him repeatedly. These reprobates made sport of his discouragement. They reveled, they enjoyed watching this man of God in his sorrow. Sometimes, Sometimes it's just an imaginary voice inside, standing in front of personal catastrophe, standing in front of a coffin, unexpected death, imaginary voices insinuate to you, "Where's your God?" And the devil takes opportunity to provoke and discourage and all of that in our time of weakness. It's one of the ways that our adversary tries to devour like a roaring lion. It's one of the ways that his diabolical, despicable character is exposed, that in our greatest weakness he takes opportunity to try to discourage us even worse. But human voices, "Where is your God when you need him? What good is it doing you to follow him? This is your reward?" And the Psalmist here was alone with no friends to support him. He's alone and separated from the temple and his heart is broken and he doesn't have anything to point to to refute these vile taunts that are being made against him.

So he's spiritually isolated, he's surrounded by enemies and there's no one there to help him, and God seems to be standing by, letting it all happen, seemingly being the key word, seemingly disinterested in his sorrow. Have you ever felt that way? Am I the only one in the room that's ever felt that in a crushing way? "Where is my God in this?" The Psalmist understands. There's a third aspect that contributes and provokes his sense of discouragement. We've seen that he's spiritually isolated. He's surrounded by enemies. And thirdly, he misses his prior role of leadership. He misses his prior role of leadership, of spiritual leadership, and the discouraging reality of now for the Psalmist is in contrast with what he used to enjoy with his prior prominence. We don't get many details, but we get enough to see that he had a role in leading worship in the past. Verse 4, look at it with

me. He says, "These things I remember, as I pour out my soul." What is it that you remember? What's he reflecting on? He's remembering something from his past. He says, "I remember," verse 4, "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." Somehow he had a front line responsibility and a privilege and a responsibility and he's leading the people of God, multitudes he says, he's leading them in worship. He would go before and it was an occasion of joy, glad shouts, songs of praise, a multitude joining in, all united around the praise of the God that he loves. Now the circumstances have been reversed. Now the memories are reminding him and he longs for what has passed. "God, I remember the privilege that you once gave me. I was leading this worship and so many people were joyfully praising you and that's what I wanted to do and that's what I did and now God, it's all gone. It's all gone. I delighted in that, God, because I delighted in you." And now here he is. He had that past history, that past resume, that past experience that he found so much joy in and somehow in the purpose of God, the providence of God, it's been removed and there's a vacuum. There's an emptiness in his heart not having that any longer and this present isolation surrounded by enemies instead of the worshiping throng of God, it's a complete reversal of that earlier joy. He was not leading worship. He was not at the temple. Instead of being with the people of God, he was with the enemies of God instead and they delighted in his sorrow.

Now listen, beloved, whatever your perspective is on how people should respond to trials, whatever strengths you have or think that you have or whatever that may be, understand this, understand that we're commanded in Scripture in Romans 12 to weep with those who weep, that one of the aspects of true Christian character and developing Christian sanctification is an ability to sympathize with people in their sorrows, to not stand apart and criticize them, to not stand apart and blame it on them, you know, if they're not suffering as a direct result of their own personal sin, What I want you to do to really benefit from this text that we're looking at, what I want you to do this morning is to at least sympathize with the Psalmist in what he's going through. To say, "You know what? That would be hard to be alone, to be on a spiritual island, and the only natives on the island are the people that hate you and mock your God while you're simultaneously remembering what you used to have and it's somehow been taken away from you. I can sympathize with him on that. My heart goes out to him." And you see, to enter into the benefit of the Psalm is to enter into the sorrow of the Psalmist and to identify and sympathize with him and for those of you that are sorrowing, which I'm guessing is a greater majority of you than the people I was just addressing, is to realize not so much that you identify with the Psalm, but here in Psalm 42, the word of God identifies with you, that there is a sympathy that the word of God finds for you and has for you in the sorrow that is pricking your heart here today. We look at the Psalmist in his spiritual isolation, he's surrounded by enemies, he's lost a position that he once enjoyed in worship, there's only one thing that we can say as we look on that and as we look on this dear man, and all we can say is, of course it's hard. Of course it's hard for someone in circumstances like that." His tender, godly, spiritual desires are being denied, and in their place, he is being attacked, and he is alone, and no one is there to sympathize with him, and it seems as even God himself has withdrawn his hand. That's hard. That's hard.

Now, having seen this reality of his discouragement, let's ask a question here that begins to let us and help us to apply this to our own lives and get the benefit that God would have for us here. How is it, how do you initially deal with what we could call spiritual depression? Spiritual Depression. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has a book by that title. If you do not own it, you should buy it. If you own it and have not read it, you should read it because it is a profound classic to help in exactly situations like this. How do you deal initially with spiritual depression? Well, another writer, Sinclair Ferguson, says this. He says, "This Psalmist experienced discouragement. He traces it to particular causes. There are specific reasons for his condition and realizing that is half of the remedy that he needs." You find yourself in spiritual discouragement, spiritual despair, I'm not bashful about using that word. No one's going to fire me for my position at this point so I can speak a little more honestly and plainly than perhaps I felt the freedom to do as a younger preacher. Just knowing and looking at your circumstance and say, "Why am I in this fog? Oh, you know what, there are reasons for this." And understanding that there's an explanation for why I would be in this spiritual condition, if you can identify it, that's part of the step toward the solution.

And so my Christian friend, I ask you whether you find yourself discouraged today? Let me ask you and suggest just a few things for you to maybe trace some causes in it and the starting point, it's not in this text, it's elsewhere in Scripture, and probably going to surprise a number of you for not being sufficiently spiritual in what I'm about to say, but how is your nutrition? How's your rest, physical rest? Are you worn out? Is your body lacking what it needs? That's what happened to Elijah in 1 Kings 19. He was greatly discouraged and he was alone at the time. The wicked woman Jezebel was out to kill him. He's under the juniper tree and he's crying out to God. He's all alone after a great spiritual victory as he defeated the prophets of Baal. What does God do for Elijah? What's the first thing he does? He starts to bring him food. The ravens bring it to him. Elijah gets some sleep. God then begins to address him on other matters. Starting point there. You know, maybe there's a physical cause that you know, appropriate medical help could help you with. Don't neglect that aspect of it as one possibility. You know, and those of you that are under grinding, grinding physical pain again and again and again, you know, I can understand if that brings you down and you wrestle with keeping your spirits up under that kind of extended affliction.

Let me ask you some other questions. Have circumstances maybe kept you from fellowship with God's people, maybe job issues, maybe your own laziness and neglect has drawn you away from the people of God and you look and say, "You know what? I have not been faithful in worship for about two years now." No wonder you're discouraged. You've separated yourself from the spiritual nutrition that the Lord has for his people.

Let me ask you another sympathetic question. Has a major life change come upon you? Has there been the death of a loved one? That doesn't have to be in the past three weeks. You know, these difficult deaths, the effects of that go on for years and we can look at that and say, "That's why my heart is downcast. I'm under a cloud of grief here." Maybe a job change. Maybe you're trying to live in the midst of constant hostility from family,

friends, or coworkers. Maybe you're a caregiver for an ailing parent and that's been going on for a very long time. You know, there's reasons why these things come upon us and affect us. What we're saying here at this point is to not simply give in and surrender to the weight of the feelings of all of that, just take the opportunity to understand, to see that Scripture acknowledges that these things have the ability to bring us down.

I find that helpful. I find that helpful. I remember going through a time of discouragement in my early Christian life and having the sense that people were critical, they were judgmental, they told me you're not doing this, you need to be doing that and never stopping to say, "What's the context here? Oh, that's the context. No wonder you're so down. No wonder you're so discouraged." And I'll tell you this, having gone through that, one of the things that I do, one of the things that motivates me when I preach these days and has for a very long time, is one of the things that I do when I preach is I preach like I wish someone would have preached to me in those days of dark discouragement. I needed someone to sympathize with me from a pulpit, didn't always happen. I also needed someone to speak clearly to me, someone who wasn't simply just trying to sympathize with me without giving me a vision of God that would elevate my soul and actually help me and to call me to higher ground. That's part of what I'm doing here with you this morning.

We see that there are reasons that we go through discouragement and, beloved, I sympathize with you and the word of God and the more importantly, far more importantly, the Lord Jesus Christ sympathizes with you in your discouragement. But we can't stop there. You see, we're not meant to just sink under the weight of it and just stay there. We need to go further and look for the remedy for discouragement. The remedy for discouragement. Point number two here in Psalm 42, the remedy for discouragement. Now beloved, here's where some spiritual responsibility kicks in, that you have a duty in the midst of your discouragement. You have a spiritual job to do when you are discouraged and I realize sometimes you don't want to hear that but if you're a Christian, that doesn't matter if you don't want to hear it. You have a duty to fulfill in those things, and Psalm 42 leads the way. You see, circumstances may explain the feelings of discouragement, but you can go further than that. If you are in Christ, you can go further than that. You must go further than that, and you can go further than that. There may be legitimate reasons for your sorrow, but beloved, here's the pivot point, we're turning a corner in the sermon now, there may be legitimate reasons for your sorrow, but you have, as a Christian, you have better and bigger reasons for hope. You have better reasons for encouragement than for discouragement and you see that, and the Psalmist recognizes that as he speaks to himself and reasons with his own heart as the Psalm goes along.

Look at verse 5 with me. In Psalm 42:5, 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." What's he doing here? He's taking himself in hand and he's preaching to himself. His heart is agitated, his emotions have been controlling him. Now his mind steps in, takes over and he speaks to his own heart and he says, "Why are you so discouraged? Why are you downcast?" And he's calling himself in a sense, he's calling his own self to account. He says, "Remember what you believe. You think that God has

forgotten you, part of the problem is that you've forgotten who your God is." And so he's speaking to his own heart and he's preaching to himself and he says, "Why are you downcast?" Why are you downcast if you belong to the great God of the universe, my Christian friend? Let's put it in New Testament terms. Why are you downcast if you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, if you are justified, if your sins are pardoned and God has accepted you as righteous, why are you downcast? Why are you downcast, my Christian friend, if the Holy Spirit indwells you? Why are you downcast, my friend, if the promises of God belong to you? Why are you downcast, my Christian friend, if the outcome of your sorrows is that you are in Christ at the end with him at home in heaven with all the saints of all the ages around the throne worshiping Christ and that's the outcome and the sorrows of this world are forgotten and you're going to be with him. If that's the outcome, why are you so downcast as if there were no hope in the situation whatsoever?

What the Psalmist is doing here in verse 5 is he's preaching to himself. He's talking to himself. It's an interesting dynamic, but every one of us needs to know how to do this. We need to know how to speak truth to our own hearts and here he's speaking to his own heart and asking his heart to justify itself. "Why are you so downcast when you have this God?" And so he commands his own heart and says, "You hope in God, for I shall again praise him. It may not be possible right now, it may be difficult right now, but I will again praise God and so I'm going to live in hope despite of the surrounding difficulties that I have right now." Now this verse is premised on a theological doctrine: God never changes, and he never can, and he never will. Jesus Christ, Hebrews 13, the same, yesterday, today, and forever. God never changes and what that means is, you've got to stay with me here, this is the key that unlocks the dungeon for you if you're a Christian, God always acts consistently with his wisdom, his holiness, and his love. He always does. His providence is always an outworking of his eternal wisdom, his eternal holiness, and his eternal love, achieving his decreed purpose for the goal of uniting a bride with his Son in eternity. Always. There are no exceptions to that.

Now, I'm going to speak to your heart. Let's do it this way, I'll speak to your mind so that you can speak to your own heart, okay, and remind you of truth that you need to hear. The eternal God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who chose you, I'm speaking to Christians here. I'm speaking to Christians here. The God who chose you before the foundation of the world, the God who took on human flesh, lived a perfect life, went to the cross and offered himself up as a sacrifice for your sins, shed his blood in an atoning death, bore the wrath of God on your behalf, was buried and according to the Scriptures was raised on the third day, now ascended on high, reigning in heaven, interceding for you at the throne at the right hand of God, the God who's done all of that, the Spirit of God who drew you to Christ, who opened your mind to truth, who applied the gospel, who formed repentance and faith in your heart and made you a new creation in Christ, who indwells you, who is keeping you until the end with an outcome of eternal glory, beloved, that God, that Christ who saved you and blessed you in that way, hear me, the God who has done that in your spiritual past has not changed one bit. He is the same today in your discouragement that he was in the early days of the joy of your conversion. He is the same God and his purpose is completely unaltered. What's changed is your human

circumstances but you do not, you do not, you do not view God through the lens of your changing human circumstances. That's where everybody goes wrong. What you do is you view your changing human circumstances through the lens of your unchanging God, your unchanging Christ, your secure salvation, and you come to this conclusion, hard as it may be, this is where we walk by faith, not by sight. This is what you affirm at the gravesite when there is nothing to provoke hope around you, "He will help me again in the future, even if I have to wait for it. He hasn't abandoned me." Beloved, he has not abandoned you. He could never do that. He would never do that. Ever, ever, ever. He is the God who keeps lovingkindness for a hundred generations. He hasn't somehow forgotten you. He hasn't changed in your circumstance.

What the Psalmist is doing here in verse 5 is something so important, he is preaching to himself. His mind is speaking truth to his emotions rather than letting his emotions run away from him. He says, "Hope in God, for I shall again praise him." And this hope, as I'm sure if you've been at Grace Church for any length of time, you've heard at one point or another, this isn't the vague kind of vaporous hope that we use the word hope for, like, you know, "I hope things get better, but I have no reason to think they will." That's not biblical hope. Biblical hope, what the Psalmist is expressing here, is an assured confidence, an assured confidence that is based on the character and promises of God. "I have hope," meaning I have confidence, "because God is who he is, because he has promised what he has promised to me, that it will be good in the end." It's an assurance that God will bless us in the end, no matter how difficult it may seem, no matter how sorrowful it may be, today, today is not the way it's going to turn out if you're broken in sorrow. You see, hope is rooted in the revelation of Scripture and it is certified to us, it is confirmed to us by the shed blood of Jesus Christ for our souls. If he loved us enough to go to Calvary for us and did the greater thing, beloved, he's going to do all of the lesser things that are necessary to secure your soul and your well-being in the end. No exceptions.

What the Psalmist does is he calls that God to mind. Look at verse 6. He says, "My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar." Hermon is a mountain range in northern Israel. Mizar may be a smaller peak in the range. What he's saying is, he's geographically removed from the temple. He's far away from the temple and the source of his comfort and as a result, he's saying, "My troubles come upon me repeatedly like one wave upon the shore right after another," and it's like one of his deep trials calls out to another deep trial and says, "Hey, come join me, join the party!" Trials are calling out to other trials to surround and discourage him. It's in the midst of that kind of isolation and desperation that he calls upon the Lord.

One time in this Psalm, and it's in verse 8, he uses the covenant name of God, covenant name LORD, Yahweh, which is an expression of God's eternal character and his covenant-keeping nature. He is always faithful to his people. And that's the name that he calls on. That's the name that he remembers here in verse 8. He says, "By day [Yahweh] the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life." This is the beam of hope in the Psalm. He recognizes that the Lord is

still sovereign in his sorrow. The Lord who loved him, the Lord who keeps him, is still there, and the Psalmist is confessing the faithfulness of God even though he doesn't see the external evidence to support it.

Beloved, beloved, beloved, beloved, it's almost time for me to go. This is the last time I get to talk to you this time and so it's a particularly urgent moment right now for me to say this to you. God's loyal love for his people means absolutely and without contradiction that for you in your discouragement, there is a time of praise that is certainly coming that will reverse the present sorrow that you feel. You may have it in this life as I have, maybe not. But this world, here we have Scripture says, here we have no lasting city. Our hope is in the final fulfillment, the ultimate fulfillment of God in heaven, in the world yet to come, and in that world yet to come, there will be no doubt that your faith was not squandered on Jesus Christ. He will fulfill and the one who believes Scripture says will not be disappointed. And so, whatever the sorrow is now, however deep and dark it may seem to be, if you are in Christ, there is a coming time where that sorrow will certainly be reversed and that gives you hope, that gives you motivation, that gives you encouragement to continue on and to have an inner sense of confidence, a growing sense of joy, even if nothing changes about the circumstances, and even if nothing can. God is who he is, that's enough.

Now, Travis and I didn't plan it this way, but turn to Romans 8. I was delighted when he started reading from Romans 8 knowing I was going to go here for just a moment. Romans 8, and let your mind anchor in some of these truths, beloved. Roman 8:18, after Paul's described the glories of salvation in the first seven and a half chapters, Paul says, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Look at verse 28 through 32, "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." No one gets lost. Not one of the elect gets lost from the time God predestined them before the foundation of the world. He calls them in Christ. He justifies them. He will glorify them. Not one of us gets lost in that process, no matter what happens to us on earth in the short meantime. And so the rhetorical question Paul asks is in verse 31. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" "God, I call you against all these enemies that taunt me in my isolation. Who are they compared to you? You are with me, that's enough." Verse 32, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" If God loved you while you were an enemy, if Christ died for you while you were an enemy, and God has saved you and going to be, the outcome, having saved you, the outcome is going to be consistent with all of that eternal, glorious, cross-bearing, wrath-bearing, sin-bearing, interceding love. It can't come out any other way. It can't. It can't. And that's why we can have confidence. That's why we can have joy. So that in verse 37 we read, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth,

nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now going back to Psalm 42 as we need to wrap this up, the present extended hardship that the Psalmist is going through seems inconsistent with that faithfulness and love and so there's a going back and forth, you know, and if you fight this battle with discouragement, you fight it more than once. Sometimes you're fighting the same battle again and again. Sometimes you're fighting it within the same day. You're fighting it, but you're fighting it all in the same way and on the same ground. The Psalmist goes back and looks at his circumstances and he says, "I say to God, my rock," verse 9 here, 'Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?' 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?'" It's side by side, the faithfulness of God, the goodness of God, his covenant-keeping nature, and this oppressive moment in the present, this season of life in the present and he says, "How can I question God like that? How can I ask seriously whether God has forgotten me? Of course God hasn't forgotten me," the Psalmist says. And beloved, of course God has not forgotten you. The God who numbers your hairs, the hairs on your head, Matthew 10, he hasn't missed what you're going through. He knows where you dwell. You read that in one of the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3, God says, "I know where you dwell." God knows where you dwell not just physically, God knows that you're dwelling in hardship and difficulty and discouragement and he looks on you with sympathy and he calls you in light of that to remember him and to place your hope in him even if your circumstances don't change.

Now beloved, as we wrap this up, let me say this and I hope that at the end of this hour, you'll see what I've said and what I haven't said. The remedy for depression does not start with just renewing a commitment to the outward form of your quiet time. Now maybe you've neglected Scripture and you need to get back to that, that would be good, yes, that's good but it's not just finding some kind of greater commitment in your will that you're going to try harder. Many of you have found that you can't get out of this by trying harder and sometimes that's all that people have to say, "Well, you just need to try harder, have more faith." That's what someone told me one time. That's not helpful. Might be true, but it's not helpful. The remedy for depression is more than renewing the outward form of your quiet time, you need to take the truth that you know and preach it to yourself. In the seat of your heart, in the deepest affections of your life, you must affirm what you know to be true about God's loyal love and turn your trust to his ultimate faithfulness.

You must remember, beloved, the love of Christ. You must remember the one who loved you and gave himself up for your soul. You must remember the one who in some infinite way that I can't begin to explain, thought of you on the cross, thought of you in his sufferings, because he died for your sins. Christ died for you because he loved you, because he had an eternal plan for you, and thus gladly gave himself up on behalf of you. And so beloved, those kinds of unshakable truths and unshakable convictions about your God, about your Lord, about your Savior, those are the things that tell your emotions how to respond. The manifest and loyal love of Christ determines the outcome of everything

else. No matter how hard it is, no matter how great the loss, my dear friends, the ultimate love of Christ guarantees that he will make it well and right with you in the end. That's why we sing, "It is well with my soul."

And so I close with this: do you believe in Christ, my brother, my sister? I know that you do. I'm on your side. We share in the weakness of human flesh. If you don't believe, I invite you to come to Christ. But if you believe, beloved, hope in Christ. You will again praise him. He himself would have it no other way and he will not let it come out in any other way than joy and peace and confidence in him in the end. Persevere until he gives you what he's promised.

Let's pray together.

Father, look on these dear friends and bless them. Look on these dear friends and keep them. Look on your beloved, Lord, and make your face to shine upon them. Look on them, O God, and be gracious to them. Lift up your countenance upon them, O God, and give them peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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