

PSALM 42

THIRSTING FOR GOD

This song is the cry of a person who is far removed from the outward ordinances and worship of the Lord, and who is sighing for the beloved house of their God; and at the same time, it is also the voice of a spiritual believer who is experiencing a time of depression – longing for the renewal of the Lord’s presence, and struggling with terrible doubts and fears, but yet holding his or her ground by faith in the living God. Most of the Lord’s children have sailed on the sea which is here so vividly described.

Under the similitude of a thirsty deer, the Psalmist begins by describing his feelings in the hour of temptation, when he was absorbed in tears and entirely immersed in the extremities of distress. Alas! In such hours of darkness, the God of life, peace, light, and consolation is not seen; the Sun of all comfort is hidden, as it were, behind a cloud. At times like these, the hearts of the tempted ones feel nothing except an angry God and a cruel avenger; and Satan increases these dismal views of misery to a fearful extent. To these things, moreover, are often added the blasphemies of those who make derision of the afflicted ones; they assail them with the taunt, “Where is now thy God?” The world and the ungodly cannot contain themselves when they see the saints in calamities. They cannot refrain from taunting and deriding them; from aggravating the distresses of these Godly ones; and from exclaiming, in their bitterly-cutting triumph, “They hoped that God would deliver them, but where is He now? Where is their Christ Whom they talk so much about? Why doesn’t He help them out of their predicaments?” These wicked wretches make their judgments according to their own blind reasoning; they imagine that affliction is a certain sign of Divine anger against the saints.

Overview of the Psalm, adapted from Charles Spurgeon:

This Psalm is eminently calculated to instruct those pilgrims whose road to heaven is of the same trying kind as David’s was. It is always edifying to listen to the experience of a thoroughly gracious and much afflicted saint. That choice band of singers – “the sons of Korah” – are bidden to make this delightful Psalm one of their peculiarars. They had been spared when their father and all his associates and their children had been swallowed up alive in their sin (Num. 27:11). They were the spared ones of sovereign grace. Being preserved for a reason unknown to us, by the distinguishing favor of God; it may be surmised that after their remarkable experience of the Lord’s mercy, they became so filled with gratitude that they addicted themselves to sacred music in order that their spared lives might be consecrated to God’s glory. At any rate, we who have been rescued (as they were) from going down into the pit – out of God’s mere good pleasure – can heartily join in this Psalm, as well as in all the others which show forth the praises of our God and the longings of our hearts after Him.

The structure of the song directs us to consider it in two parts, which end with the same refrain – namely, verses 1-5 and then verses 6-11.

But when the Psalmist found himself in such circumstances as these, he comforted himself by looking to the Lord as his chief good; and he set his heart upon Him accordingly. By thus casting out his anchor, he rode out the storm. When the soul rests on itself, it sinks; but if it catches hold on the power and promises of the Lord, the head is kept above the billows. Believing souls can never take up their rest anywhere short of their living God. Without Him, even the joys of His house cannot give them any satisfaction. It was not the remembrance of the pleasures of the Tabernacle itself that afflicted David during his forced absence from that holy place; but rather, it was the remembrance of the free access which he formerly had to God's presence in that house of worship. He desired, with the greatest fervency of heart, to come unto the house of the Lord, and into the congregation of those who sing and rejoice. He longed to observe the Sabbath, to celebrate the name of the Lord, and to see His face. He had an ardent desire to hear the Word of the Lord, so that he might thereby be lifted up and refreshed – being very nearly consumed in the fiery heat of his temptations and distresses. The house of the Lord is where His Word and His promises of grace are preached; and the face of God means His presence, where He reveals Himself and His will in His Word.



The best way to forget our miseries is to remember the God of our mercies. David saw troubles coming from God's wrath (verses 6-11), and that discouraged him. But if one trouble follows close after another, and if all seem to unite to ruin us, let us remember that they are all appointed and overruled by the Lord. Just as David regarded the Lord's favor as the fountain of all the good that he looked for, let us also hope and pray in our Savior's name. One word from Him will calm every storm; it will turn the midnight-darkness into the light of noon, and the bitterest complaints into joyful praises! At length, the Psalmist's faith came off as the conqueror by encouraging him to trust in the name of the Lord and to rest himself upon Jehovah. "My God," he says – and that thought enabled him to triumph over all his griefs and fears. Let us never think that the God of our life and the Rock of our salvation has forgotten us, for we have made His mercy, truth, and power our refuge. It was in this manner that the Psalmist strove against his despondency; and in the end, his faith and hope obtained the victory! Let us learn to imitate his example; for we also may put to death all unbelieving doubts and fears by applying the Lord's promises to ourselves, and then pleading them in prayer to Him!

Lord Jesus, we praise You as the ever-flowing, refreshing source of water to revive the thirsty souls of Your redeemed ones during all their pilgrimage on earth! Amen.