

A Plea for Justice

Psalm 43:1-5

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Psalm 43, but allow your eyes to drift a few verses back to Psalm 42 and verse 6. We're working our way through the second book of the Psalms. That second book entails Psalms 42-72, and we're going through those Psalms on Sunday evenings. And over and over we're going to be asking several questions: 1) What does the Psalm teach me about Christ and 2) What does this Psalm teach me about Christian experience? And in particular we're going to consider several things. First, how the Psalmist's experience foreshadows Christ's experience. And how the Psalmist's experience foreshadows our experience. And then looking at it from the other direction, how Christ's experience informs our understanding of the Psalmist's experience and then even expands that Psalm's application to our own Christian experience today.

Last week we were looking at Psalm 42, a very famous Psalm but a haunting Psalm. Derek Kidner calls it "one of the most sadly beautiful in the Psalter." And we saw in it, for whatever reason, the Psalmist is literally unable to come to corporate worship, and the very thought of that is killing him. And we focused especially on the first five verses of that Psalm. You may want to look at them briefly. And we said that in that Psalm God is teaching us and teaching us through the Psalmist's experience of desire for God in absence from the sanctuary. God is teaching us about how the Christian ought to desire worship, to worship in the assembly of the believers. That is, we said in the first five verses of Psalm 42 especially, we learn the desire which is at the heart of true Christian worship. And we saw applications of this Psalm, which are both christological applications to the life and person and experience of Christ, and also experiential applications of the Psalm, experiential applications to our own lives.

Let's remember a couple of things that we saw about Christ. We commented about this Psalm that Christ Himself worshipped God with the whole of His life; He glorified and enjoyed Him in everything. We remember Christ repeating frequently--especially recorded for us in the gospel of John--statements like this: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me" (John 4:34 or John 5:30); "I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me"; or John 6:38: "I have come down from heaven not to do My own will but to do the will of Him who sent Me."

And Christ emphasizes--and John reminds us of this--that He delighted in doing His Heavenly Father's will, and so He worshipped God in all of life in the doing of God's will.

But Psalm 42 also anticipates Christ's leading of the heavenly worship. And we went back to Psalm 22, the Psalm that Jesus quotes on the cross when He begins, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" And we reminded ourselves that the Lord Jesus knew that whole Psalm, and so when He quoted those words, He also remembered that in Psalm 22:22 and following. That the very one who had started that Psalm by saying, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" can go on to say this: "I will tell of You, O God, to my brethren. In the midst of the assembly I will praise You, for from You comes my praise in the great assembly."

And that reminds us of something very strange that the Apostle Paul says, but which is cleared up in light of the truth of Psalm 42 and Psalm 22:22. Do you remember in 1 Corinthians 15:28 where Paul has been speaking about "all things being brought into subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ" and he says, "When all things are subjected to Him, the Son Himself will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him so that God may be all in all." And that may sound strange, but you see what's happening there. The Son Himself, having had all things subjected to Him, turns to give all the glory to His Father. He leads the assembly of God's people in worship of the Heavenly Father, whose decree from the foundation of the world has inaugurated our redemption, which is being consummated around the throne of the Lamb and of His Father and of the Spirit. And so Jesus is the Great Worshipper. And the worship of Psalm 42:1-5 is but a foreshadowing of Jesus as the Great Worshipper.

But we also said that Psalm 42:1-5 had experiential applications to us. We were reminded in Psalm 42 that love for God's house is of the essence of true piety: the soul of piety is love for the worship of the Living God. We also learned from this Psalm that sometimes God creates a thirst for Himself in us by depriving us of the means of grace. Have you ever been laid up at home for several weeks and kept away from the assembly of the Lord? Have you ever been laid up at home taking care of someone, and you're not able to be in the worship of the Living God? Have you been in the hospital, and you're having from your own hospital room to wonder what it's like in the assembly of God's people lifting up His praise, and you feel weakened and deprived by not being in the Lord's house with the Lord's people? Sometimes God creates a thirst for Him by removing from us the privilege of our participation in worship. This is how Matthew Henry puts it: "Sometimes God teaches us effectually to know the worth of His mercies by the want of them." And so we come all the more to appreciate the glories of His mercies when He meets His people as they are gathered for praise.

And then we learned that true godliness consists in the heart's desire for more grace and for more fellowship-knowledge of God. And there are lots of hymns

that sing about this. Many of you love Fanny Crosby's hymn, "Draw Me Nearer." Remember how it starts off? "I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice, and it told Thy love to Me, but I long to rise in the arms of faith and be closer drawn to Thee. Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer Blessed Lord, to Thy precious bleeding side." And so Fanny Crosby expresses a desire to be nearer to the Lord. She knows the blessings, the mercies of fellowship with the Lord, but she longs to be drawn nearer. Or there's the hymn, "Nearer My God to Thee," apparently the hymn that was played by the orchestra on the deck of the Titanic as it went down. "Nearer My God to Thee, nearer to Thee, even though it be a cross that raiseth me, still all my song shall be, nearer my God to Thee." And so the hymn writers express their desire to be nearer still to the Living God because true piety, true godliness, consists in the heart desire for more fellowship knowledge of God.

Now we only skimmed the latter half of Psalm 42 the last time, and that's just as well because there is a connection between Psalm 42 and Psalm 43. In fact, many ancient versions have these Psalms together as one. And the connection between Psalm 42 and 43, the progression from Psalm 42 to 43, is especially strong and obvious when you look at Psalm 42:6-11 and then compare Psalm 43:1-5. And so we'll look at these together tonight. Before we do let's pray for God's spirit to illumine us as we read and hear His word proclaimed.

Heavenly Father, we bow before You this night and ask that You would send forth Your light and truth, and that we would see with seeing eyes and hear with hearing ears and believe by the grace of the Spirit the word which You have for us. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's hear God's word. And we'll begin in Psalm 42:6 and read through the end of Psalm 43. This is God's word.

Psalm 42: O my God, my soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan and the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me. The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime; And His song will be with me in the night, A prayer to the God of my life. I will say to God my rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As a shattering of my bones, my adversaries revile me, While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

Psalm 43: Vindicate me, O God, and plead my case against an ungodly nation; O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man! For You are the God of my strength; why have You rejected me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? O send out Your light and Your truth, let them lead me; Let them bring me to Your holy hill. And to Your

dwelling places. Then I will go to the altar of God, To God my exceeding joy; And upon the lyre I shall praise You, O God, my God. Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

Amen. This is God's word. May He add His blessing to it.

Christians know the experience of almost despair in this life. That's life in a fallen world. The Psalmist is at the brink, and his experience has been mirrored in the experiences of hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands of faithful, godly, consecrated Christians over these last two thousand years. But Christians, even as they know the experience of almost despair, can also know the experience of the peace of God. And that's what the second half of Psalm 42 and the whole of Psalm 43 remind us. Let's look at the last few verses of Psalm 42 and verses 6-11 where we see this cry to a troubled heart. And remember we said that this is the picture of the Christian experience of being spiritually disquieted and even almost despairing? And we said briefly last week that in these verses God teaches us that even good folks are sometimes filled with anguish and yet at the same time must trust in God. Look at verses 6 and 7.

I. God would teach us here that even good folk are sometimes filled with anguish, and yet must trust Him.

The Psalmist is here despairing and feels forsaken, "O my God, my soul is in despair within me." And then look at verse 7: "Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me." These words give us a shift in metaphor. Remember in verses 1-4 the metaphor is thirst. He's in a desert, and there's no water. Now the waves are breaking over him. He can't find his footing at the bottom. The metaphor is shifted, and it's a picture of his almost despair.

Even saints have groanings that cannot be uttered, but our experience is outstripped by Christ. When he speaks of the trouble of his soul, when he speaks of the despair of his soul, we have to think of Christ, don't we? Turn with me in your Bibles to the gospel of John. Turn to chapter 11, and I want to walk you through three very interesting experiences in the life of Christ and then look at a follow-up in John 11:33. You remember the circumstance? Lazarus had died. And Jesus has come, and He sees Mary. And she is weeping uncontrollably at the death of her brother. And we read in John 11:33, "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled." So there you see the heart of your Savior troubled. Just as the Psalmist speaks in Psalm 42 and 43, His heart is troubled. Note what He's troubled about. In this case, His heart is troubled over the grief of His people.

Now turn forward to John 12:27. Here Jesus, entering into Jerusalem in the week of His death in verse 27, says this: "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour." Here Jesus confesses the trouble, the travail, of His soul over what He knows is the will of God for His life. Take that in for just a few moments: The Savior is troubled over what He knows is His purpose in life and the will of His Heavenly Father. Now I don't see far to the bottom of that, but there we see the travail of our Savior's soul. He knows trouble of soul.

Now turn forward to John 13:21: "When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.'" Now notice again here that Jesus' trouble is here directed towards His disciples. Now you can speak a peek at verse 20. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." And even as He speaks about the receiving of the Father in the receiving of those who He's sending, His mind immediately goes to the one that He had chosen to be one who would send out His message; who was there to betray Him. And his heart was troubled for Judas! It's the night of His betrayal, and His heart is troubled for Judas.

It's very interesting, John will never again use the word "troubled" for Jesus in this book. Do you know when the next time we see the word "troubled" in the book of John is? It's John 14:1, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in Me." The Savior's travails, you see, are focused on His people. And His concerns are for His people's trouble to be alleviated. And the Psalmist's troubles point to the unspeakably greater troubles of our Lord, the troubles of soul that He knew. You know, many of the old commentators used to take Psalm 42 as a psalm that David may have sung when he was driven out in the rebellion of Absalom. And in light of that, Horatius Bonar says this: "David was driven out by his son, and so his soul was troubled. But Jesus was driven out by His Father, and so His soul was troubled." And that, in one little sentence captures, doesn't it, the unspeakably greater trouble that our Savior has known? Greater than any trouble that we have, are, or ever will know. He knows our troubles.

But what is striking here... Back to Psalm 42, Look at verse 6. What is striking here is that the Psalmist fights on through. He starts out in verse 6, "O my God, my soul is in despair within me," but he continues on. Look at the end of verse 6: "Therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan and the peaks of Hermon, and from Mount Mizar," I remember You. He still remembers God. There's a bold confidence.

And it continues on in verses 8 and 9. "The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and His song will be with me in the night; a prayer to the God of my life. I will say to God my rock." There's a bold confidence here, isn't there? And even when he says, "Why have you forgotten me?" it's like Habakkuk standing on those walls. "I'm gonna stand here and wait, God. I'm

waiting for your answer.” And then it's like Habakkuk at the end, isn't it? “Though the fields do not yield, though the grapevines do not yield, yet I will hope in the Lord.” There's a bold trust in God, and in verses 8 and 9 the Psalmist talks himself into trusting God, and he's still able to recall God's graciousness to him. Through all his trials, his forced absence from worship in 1 and 2, the taunts of unbelievers in verses 3 and 10, the overwhelming trials that he's experiencing in verse 7, God's delay in answering him in verse 9; he trusts. And as saints experience trial, so also must we learn to trust in Him.

And I want you to notice what the Psalmist has anchored his trust in. Review the Psalm with me quickly. Look back, for instance, to verse 4. Notice what he anchors his trust in: first, in verse 4, his memory of the corporate worship of God. My friends, you don't know what you're going to need on the Lord's Day until you need it. And his memory of the worship of God was the first place that he fled for help. That's one glorious reason why we gather with the saints: God is steeling you in the worship of God. He is steeling you, preparing you, strengthening you for what you will face. And so his very memory of the corporate worship of God, “These things I remember, and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God.” He remembers the corporate worship of God and He seeks it as an anchor.

Look again at verse 5: he takes comfort in God and God as the help of his presence. After he says, “Why are you in despair?” what does he say? “Hope in God, for the help of His presence.” And so God Himself, in the help of His presence, is an anchor in His trial.

Thirdly, look at verse 8. Where does he go to in verse 8? He goes to the lovingkindness of God. He goes to the covenant love of God. He goes to the grace of God, God's hessed, God's lovingkindness. “The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime.”

Fourthly, notice again in the second half of verse 8: He says, “His song will be with him in the night.” God's song, the Lord's song, will be with him in the night. What is the Lord's song? Could it be his remembrance and his memorization of the praises sung to God in the assembly of the saints sticking with him in the darkest of night and being turned around as a prayer up to the living God as an anchor point? Yes, I think so.

And fifth, look again at verse 9. The first half of that verse: “I will say to God my rock.” He goes to the nature of God. Who is God? He's a rock. No! He's not a rock: He's my rock. That's who He is. You see, all these objective things are anchors for the trust of the Psalmist in trouble. He runs to those things which don't change. He runs to those things which aren't shakable. He runs to those things that aren't changeable to help him in the midst of his trial. We need to rehearse to ourselves the unshakable, unchangeable things of God beforehand so that we have them ready to hand in the time of our trial like the Psalmist did.

But again, the greatest application of this is to the Lord Jesus Himself, isn't it? What does He anchor Himself in in the time of His trial?

My brother, Mel, is leading a discussion group of Lord of the Rings. You're not surprised by that, are you? And he sent out a great pop-quiz to the group before their next meeting. And one of the questions in that pop-quiz was, "What is the greatest single feat in the history of the Third Age of Middle Earth, as described in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings? And he gives them some options. Is it Aragorn single-handedly fighting off the dark riders on Weathertop? Is it Sam Gamgee plunging Sting into the belly of Shelob, the last child of Ungoliant? Is it the casting of the ring into Mount Doom? What is it? It's none of those things, by the way. You'll have to read my article to find out what it is.

What's the greatest feat in the gospels? What's the greatest feat in the history of Christ's earthly work on our behalf? That's a hard question. But it may well be that the greatest single feat performed by our Savior was when, after experiencing the unmitigated wrath of God and accepting it and drinking the cup to the dregs, to the end, and saying, "It is finished"; He then turns to the God who had bruised Him and says, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." And you see the Psalmist hanging onto a God who is leading him through waters which he acknowledges are His waves rolling over him. It's just a faint picture of the Savior who can say, "Father"-- Father who has bruised Me, Father who has forsaken Me, Father who has abandoned Me, Father who has crushed Me, Father who has condemned Me to Hell, Father who has damned Me -- "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit." This Psalm points to the experience of our Lord, doesn't it?

II. God would teach us here to look to Him for vindication when we are unjustly treated, and to trust in his character, drawing confidence from who He is and what He does.

But then we turn to Psalm 43, and we see the strength and the trust of the Psalmist building. It starts low in Psalm 42:3 and following. But the Psalmist's trust grows, and we see him drawing strength from the character of God. And in Psalm 43 we see not simply the cry of a troubled heart, we see the cry of a heart under human injustice looking for justice from Almighty God.

If Psalm 42 is the Christian experience of thirst for God and the Christian experience of spiritual disquiet and the Christian experience of almost despair, then Psalm 43 is the Psalm of Christian desire for vindication even in the midst of injustice. Psalm 43 is the cry of a heart under human injustice looking for justice. And God would teach us here to look to Him for vindication when we are unjustly treated and to trust in His character and to draw confidence from who He is and what He does.

There's a growing reliance upon God in Psalm 42; we see it from verses 6-11, and that continues here in Psalm 43:1. There's a little defiance in Psalm 43:1, isn't there? "Judge me, Oh God! Test me. They are all judging me as guilty; they are all judging me as forsaken; they are all judging me as worthy of death. You judge me, Oh God! I reject the judgment of sinful men. I reject the judgment of unjust men. You judge me!" And in the midst of his adversity, despite his adversity, throughout the conflict—though that conflict remains unabated in Psalm 43—there's this bold and emphatic trust in approach to God. "Vindicate me." The Psalmist is being dealt with unjustly, and he pleads for the judgment of God. William S. Plumer puts it this way, "When our cause is good, the Lord becomes our advocate." The Psalmist knows that he is right before God, and so he says, God, I would rather You judge me than these unjust and wicked men.

Verse 2 is the final low. You look at verse 5 and say, Oh, but that's low. No, verse 5 has a different tone to it. The final low to the complex of Psalm 42 and 43 is in verse 2. But you know, this "why"—"Why have you rejected me?"—this "why" is as much self-examination as it is directed to God. It's not a demand for God to reveal His secret providence; it's a request: it's a search; it's a prayer; it's a petition for God to show him the practical purposes of what he's doing in his difficulty.

Do we pray that in inexplicable situations in our lives? Do we pray, Lord, I'm not asking to know Your secret purposes. I'm wanting to know what I'm supposed to learn from this. I'm wanting to know what You're trying to teach me here. That's what the Psalmist is praying.

And then he turns full-face towards God in verse 3, and here the Psalmist looks for God to meet him in worship even though he is estranged from the sanctuary, not by his own fault. "O send out Your light and Your truth, let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling places." And there's a delicious ambiguity here. Is he saying in verse 3 that he fully expects God to bring him back to the sanctuary, back to the temple, back to the corporate worship of God in Jerusalem? Or is he saying that God is going to so send out His light and truth to him where he is now that he is going to be able to worship as if he were back in Jerusalem?

There's a great experience in Scottish church history. In 1707, England and Scotland were united as nations into Great Britain. The crowns had been united for some years before, but England and Scotland had been separate countries with separate parliaments. One of the things that the Scottish Presbyterians demanded, when the countries were united into Great Britain is that in Scotland, church government was going to be related to the state in a different way than it was related in England. In England, the state could interfere in the affairs of the church, and very often secular English rulers would interfere in affairs of the church. But in Scotland, in the Treaty of Union, it was written in that it would not be allowed to happen. The nobility would not pick pastors: congregations would

pick pastors.

But it wasn't a decade after the Treaty of Union in 1707 before Scottish nobles decided they wanted to be able to do what English nobles could do. They wanted to be able to pick pastors for the parish churches in their local area. And if the pastor sort of stepped on their toes on Sunday morning, well, they'd just fire him and bring in somebody new that they liked. And the Scottish church resisted that for years and years—for a hundred years, in fact. And finally, the evangelical Party got to be—not to a majority but—close to a majority in the church of Scotland, and over and over over a decade they petitioned for the government to recognize the independence of the church from interference of the state. And it didn't happen. And in 1843, two thousand ministers left their homes, their salaries, and their congregations for the spiritual independence of the church. They walked out of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in St. George's Church on George's Street in Edinburgh, and they walked down the hill and into an abandoned warehouse, The Tannen Mills, where they held the first general assembly of the Free Church of Scotland. And do you know what they sang? They sang the metrical version of Psalm 43. And here's how it goes:

Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against th' ungodly nation. From the unjust and crafty man, O be Thou my salvation. For Thou the God art of my strength, why thrusts Thou me Thee fro'? For th' enemies' oppression why do I mourning go? O send Thy light forth and Thy truth; let them be guides to me, and bring me to Thine holy hill, en'n where Thy dwellings be.

It's interesting, isn't it, in verse 4, the place that the Psalmist wants to be is the altar of God? There's no better place for a sinner to be than at the altar of God, and the altar of God is our Lord Jesus Christ. And when we live in sight of the cross, we live in a safe and secure place.

And in verse 4 he celebrates God as his chief joy, "I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy." God is his first joy, his first love. John Piper says, "The authenticating inner essence of worship is being satisfied with Christ, prizing Christ, cherishing Christ, treasuring Christ." And you can see how this definition of the essence of worship doesn't just apply to Sunday worship services; it encompasses all of life that flows from the heart, but it is tremendously relevant for understanding what worship services should be about. They are about going hard after God. And when we say that what we do on Sunday is to go hard after God, what we mean is that we are going hard after satisfaction in God; we are going hard after God as our prize; we're going hard after God as our treasure, our soul-food, our heart-delight, our spirit's pleasure. Or to put Christ in His rightful place, it means that we are going after all that God is for us in Jesus Christ crucified and risen." That's worship: Going hard after God as our chief joy.

And then comes that final refrain, "Why are you in despair?" But you see the

refrain is now a triumph. It's an ironic question because the Psalmist has convinced himself to believe in God: (verse 1) that God is his vindicating judge, (verse 2) that God is his strength, (verse 3) that God is his faithful guide, (verse 4) that God is his exceeding joy, (verse 5) that God is his never failing hope. That's how the believer wins through despair: by running to God.

But you know what? The hope that Jesus gives us is even better than that. Don't believe me? Turn with me to again to John 16. Well, the Psalmist can take comfort that God is his judge and God is his strength and God is his guide and God is his joy and God is his hope, but to the hurting believer Jesus adds this in verse 33, "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." Jesus, on top of the comforts of Psalm 43, adds this: I've conquered the world; I'm the ruler of the world, and nothing happens in this world but by My hand. Let's pray.

Oh Lord, help us to trust in the deep waters and to hope in You as our God. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Would you stand for God's blessing? Peace be to the brethren and love with faith through Jesus Christ our Lord until the daybreak and the shadows flee away. Amen.

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