

Psalm 42 & 43: The Lesson of Lament

For the director of music. A maskil of the Sons of Korah.

¹ *As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.*

² *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?*

³ *My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”*

⁴ *These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.*

⁵ *Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.*

⁶ *My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.*

⁷ *Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.*

⁸ *By day the LORD directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.*

⁹ *I say to God my Rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?”*

¹⁰ *My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”*

¹¹ *Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?*

*Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.*

¹ *Vindicate me, my God,
and plead my cause
against an unfaithful nation.*

*Rescue me from those who are
deceitful and wicked.*

² *You are God my stronghold.*

*Why have you rejected me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?*

³ *Send me your light and your faithful care,
let them lead me;*

*let them bring me to your holy mountain,
to the place where you dwell.*

⁴ *Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God, my joy and my delight.*

*I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.*

⁵ *Why, my soul, are you downcast?*

*Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.*

Preamble:

In the Hebrew Bible, most existing manuscripts show that Psalm 42 and 43 are joined as one Psalm. This is why we are doing them as one unit.

For the director of music. A *maskil* of the Sons of Korah.

What is a maskil?

We aren't quite sure, but the root word, *sakal*, means insight or teaching.

Who are the Sons of Korah?

Well, they are a clan of Levites who during the time of the wandering after the exodus, rebelled against Moses.

They were judged by God and swallowed up in an earthquake.

The descendants of the Sons of Korah, however, continued on and became servers in the temple - door keepers

Some became great warriors in the time of David.

And still others reached the pinnacle of worship arts and expression by writing psalms.

25 psalms are attributed to the Sons of Korah.

We see the journey of a who clan and family move from rebellion and judgement to grace and devotion in 7 generations.

We also identify this psalm as a lament.

A Lament is not about crying or sadness although those elements are very present.

But have you ever heard a sad song?

Here is a modern day lament:

Johnny Cash's video rendition of "Hurt"

"Hurt"

(originally by Nine Inch Nails)

*I hurt myself today
To see if I still feel
I focus on the pain
The only thing that's real
The needle tears a hole
The old familiar sting
Try to kill it all away
But I remember everything*

[Chorus:]

*What have I become
My sweetest friend
Everyone I know goes away
In the end
And you could have it all
My empire of dirt
I will let you down
I will make you hurt*

*I wear this crown of thorns
Upon my liar's chair
Full of broken thoughts
I cannot repair
Beneath the stains of time
The feelings disappear
You are someone else
I am still right here*

[Chorus:]

*What have I become
My sweetest friend
Everyone I know goes away
In the end
And you could have it all
My empire of dirt
I will let you down
I will make you hurt*

*If I could start again
A million miles away*

*I would keep myself
I would find a way*

Lament: Christ is Risen - So What?!

Christ is Risen!

(He is Risen indeed!)

... So what?

What now?

Has the whole world changed?

Has evil been driven from it's lair?

Have the Romans stopped their crucifixions?

Have the Pharisees and Sadducees stopped their hypocrisy?

Has anything really changed for the Christ followers in Jerusalem or Judea or Galilee?

Has ISIL laid down their arms?

Has Boko Haram stopped killing in Africa?

Have refugees in the Ukraine found homes?

Have enemies become friends?

Have the power brokers in politics, business or media decided to stop pursuing greed or fame?

Has corruption left the church?

No more inquisitions, divisions and ostracising?

Is there peace in your home?

Between husbands and wives, parents and children?

Is everything fixed now?

No?

Those who carry the light of hope will always feel the barbs of a broken reality more acutely.

Laments take on the deepest dimensions of human experience.

They are meant to deepen the soul of a person as they wrestle with the agonies of living and dying.

How does a person deal with darkness, depression and pain?

The answer either leads to hope, or it leads to death.

Talking to Yourself: The Sure Sign of Insanity or Insight? (42:5,11; 43:5)

Why, my soul, are you downcast?

Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God,

for I will yet praise him,

my Savior and my God.

This is the thrice repeated refrain of the passage.

It is said that a sure sign of insanity is when you start talking to yourself.

But this is not true.

In fact, a sure sign of a life well lived is the ability to self-reflect.

Self reflection requires that you examine what you are doing and why.

Then when you have considered the way you live, you have a chat with yourself.

It is the ability to challenge yourself of your pre-conceptions.

It is the way way by which you can grow and in fact, stay very sane.

The psalmist here faces a very deep reality.

They are sad.

They are losing hope and depressed.

And I thank God for this psalm.

One of my profs, Dr. Houston was reported to have said:

"We sometimes expect a Christian to be happy all the time.

But the person who is happy all the time is not a Christian,

That person is insane and needs a doctor!"

No one in their right mind is happy all the time.

We all have hard days and bad days.

Jesus did not come to save us from unhappiness.

He came to save us from evil.

And sadness, even suffering is not necessarily evil.

In fact, sadness can be an appropriate reaction to the suffering true evil and sin brings.

Suffering is felt as a result of sin and evil

or as a result of the struggle between good and evil.

Pain is a natural reality of a fallen world.

Tell me what is hurting you now.

Illness, relationships

We live within a system and when one part of the natural or relational system is broken
we feel it.

Casting for Solutions

Where then is our ultimate hope?

There are real helps in the world God has placed at our disposal.

We are not snake handlers living in the back woods of appalachia.

But in the end, there are some wrongs, some brokenness, some evils around and within us
that nothing can change.

Nothing but a miracle.

We often think that a miracle means a lot of flash and spectacle but it isn't

If raising someone who is physically dead is miraculous, then we really are ignorant.

What Jesus came to do was not raise the physically dead.

He came to raise the spiritually dead.

A people lost without God.

A people without purpose.

A people who think only about themselves and their own.

People who work by fear and insecurity and compulsion.

He came to raise me, to raise you from the dead.

And that is the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

What then do we do in the meantime when we feel pain?

What do we do when we are sad?

What do we do when we feel hope is slipping away.

When we desire a spouse, when we desire friendship when we want to have a child when we are worried
about finding work?

Memory (42:4,6,9)

⁴ *These things I remember*

as I pour out my soul:

how I used to go to the house of God

*under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.*

⁶*My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.*

Our identity is defined by our memories.
Not only our memories, but our current interpretation of our memories.
An amnesiac who loses their memory in a way loses themselves.
And all their loved ones, as you can imagine, lose the person they once knew.

Your memory is a powerful thing and the psalmist now relies on memory.
When I was in depression in 2004 one thing was suggested to me which at first I thought was really stupid.
Eudora told me that one of the helps was to write down at least ten things you were thankful for.
This might seem like no big deal,
but asking a depressed person to write down things they are thankful for is really a stretch for them.
depression binds us into a very small and narrow box.
There is nothing in that box but the fixations on all the feelings and thoughts that are painful.
Writing down things you are grateful for forces you to look outside that box.
It makes you look at the world beyond yourself to creation, to loved ones and yes to God.
This simple act of remembering the good things... worship, the Jordan, Mount Hermon and Mizar
Helps us look up.

Exercise:

Take a moment to think of 5 things you are really thankful for in your life.
Share 3 of them with others.
Share one with us.

But sometimes even memory is not enough to bust us out.

⁹*I say to God my Rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?”*

Sometimes we feel abandoned by God.
It is indeed a distortion, but pain distorts perception.
So what are we left with?

There is a reason why Psalm 42 & 43 are one.
It ends with the refrain, but it is Psalm 43 that provides the real answer to lament.

The True Point of Lament: Trust

At rock bottom, when you cannot carry yourself, you surrender.
Either you trust God or you don't.

What you do with your pain is what leads to hope of destruction.
Who you trust is what leads to hope of destruction.

Psalms 43 turns in its suffering, in its questions towards God.
Here's a real life example.

Meet Rob Herjavec

Rob is a multimillionaire who has it all.

Book deals, TV shows, vacation homes - he is the poster boy of the Canadian and American Dream combined.

From a family of dirt poor immigrants to Canada from the former Yugoslavia.

Last month, he revealed in an interview that in July last year (2014) he wanted to kill himself.

His marriage of 24 years had disintegrated and his three kids were lost for a time to him.

He stood on a balcony and thought of ending it all.

But then in his pain he reached out in trust.

He called his pastor and told him he wasn't going to make it to the next day.

Yeah, Christians think about killing themselves.

But at that point, Rob decided to trust.

To trust God, to trust God's people, to reveal that under all that money and fame and power
was a broken person.

Rob's pastor wisely told him to volunteer at Union Gospel Mission in Seattle, incognito.

And there he found solace, humility and hope.

You see, Psalm 43 is ultimately a prayer.

It is not about turning to your own self.

It is about turning to God, turning to his people.

It is about trust.

And prayer, in its most beautiful and pristine starts in lament but ends in praise.

Lament leads to Worship

Trusting God seems like a saccharine and simplistic solution.

It may seem counter-intuitive, but the answer is given by the lamenting psalmist.

It echoes the words of Job & Habbakuk.

"Still my lips will praise Him."

"I will worship Him."

What is worship?

It is what we sometimes forget to do on Sunday mornings.

It is saying - God you are good.

You have saved me

you are saving me

you will save me.

Roy's Story - without names.

My depression.

Why are you still here?

Because we hope - we trust.

The love of God in our suffering and troubles?

How and why?

Because of the cross, because we believe in the resurrection of the dead.

Because of Jesus.

Learn the Lesson of Lament.