

“Spiritual Depression – The Causes”
Psalms 42-43
(Preached at Trinity, October 3, 2010)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. With the 42nd Psalm comes the beginning of Book 2 of the Psalter which covers psalms 42-72. With the second book comes some changes. In Book 1 all but four of the psalms are ascribed to David. Psalms 1-2 are introductory and two others have no superscription. In Book 2 eighteen are ascribed to David,, one is ascribed to Asaph, one to Solomon, and seven are ascribed to the Sons of Korah.
2. Psalms 42-43 are of those ascribed to Korah although some believe it is a psalm of David. The descendents of Korah were Levites employed with the business of Temple music. It is interesting that those charged with leading the worship of God had such a wicked ancestry. When Israel was wandering in the desert Korah was the leader in a rebellion involving 250 of Israel’s chief leaders against Moses. They were judged of God and destroyed in a fearful demonstration of God’s wrath.
Numbers 16:32-35 – “And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that *appertained* unto Korah, and all *their* goods. ³³ They, and all that *appertained* to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. ³⁴ And all Israel that *were* round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up *also*. ³⁵ And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.”
3. This psalm is dedicated to the Sons of Korah. For some reason the sons of Korah were spared from the destruction of their father and allowed to continue in the service of the Temple. It would seem that these men became models of God’s grace and mercy and in gratitude they dedicated themselves to God and spent their days preparing music that would honor and glorify God.
It demonstrates to us that God can save the children of the most wicked parents.
4. Another point of interest as we enter Book 2 is the change of emphasis on the name of God. In Book 1 the name Jehovah occurs 272 times while Elohim occurs only 15 times. In Book two this emphasis is reversed – Elohim occurs 164 times while Jehovah 30.
5. The theme of both Psalms 42 & 43 is a subject we don’t often consider – Spiritual Depression. Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote a book in the mid-1960’s based upon a series of sermons he preached on the subject of “Spiritual Depression.”
 - A. Lloyd-Jones was a medical doctor before God called him to preach the Gospel. He would have known that there is some depression that can be linked to physical conditions. There can be conditions affecting the brain that can cause depression. It has long been known that temporary depression can follow major surgery. This is common with open heart surgery.

- B. But there is also depression that defies any physical diagnosis. It is more common than most would imagine and every Christian can testify to this reality at different points of their Christian journey. It has affected the greatest of saints – Abraham, Moses, Elijah.
- C. By no means, however, is this a statement excusing such depression. Lloyd-Jones – “Unhappy Christians are, to say the least, a poor recommendation for the Christian Faith; and there can be little doubt that the exuberant joy of the early Christians was one of the more potent factors in the spread of Christianity.”
- D. God is Lord over His Kingdom and He is sovereign over its advancement. But it is also true that He extends His Kingdom partly through ordinary people.
- a. Is it not important that when lost people look at Christians they see lives full of joy in Christ?
 - b. People can look at us and quickly discern whether we are living with joy or sorrow.
The downcast man is easily recognized. You can see it in his face.
Verse 11 – “for I shall yet praise him, *who* is the health of my countenance”
“Countenance” refers to the face.
He *looks* disquieted, perplexed, troubled.
This is a contradiction. The Christian should be known by peace, comfort, joy. We aren’t talking about a false mask. We are talking about the reality of our relationship with Christ.
 - c. Is it not harmful when they see Christians living unhappy, joyless lives? What would entice them to embark on such a life? Should they not be able to look at us and desire what we have?
6. The subject of spiritual depression is the focus in Psalms 42-43 –
The psalmist is depressed, unhappy.
Psalms 42:3 – “My tears have been my meat day and night”
Psalms 42:5 – “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and *why* art thou disquieted in me?”
7. This psalm is the second psalm identified as a Maschil. It is a psalm of instruction. The psalmist is teaching us the causes and cure of spiritual depression.
8. We have to understand this is a real issue. It isn’t enough to simply tell someone, “Get over it.” You have to get to the heart of the issue and then offer sound solutions.
9. Let’s begin by looking at some of the causes of Spiritual Depression. There are many things that can cause us deep grief at the depth of our soul. The Psalmist lists but a few but these are among the most frequent causes.
- I. Estrangement from God – **Verses 1-4**
- A. The psalmist was separated from the Temple
1. Again, we aren’t positive who the author of this psalm is. The superscription does not tell us.
 - a. Most today believe it is one of the sons of Korah
 - b. Many in the past believed it was David. Spurgeon believed adamantly that it was David
 - c. What we do know is he was far from Jerusalem and the temple worship therefore he felt cutoff from God.

2. He mourned in the absence of God. With all of his heart he longed to come into the presence of God
Psalm 42:1 – “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.”
 3. Because of the continued absence of God he had fallen into a terrible state of depression
Psalm 42:6 – “O my God, my soul is cast down within me”
- B. There are several reasons a Christian may feel separated from God – these times can throw us into a deep state of sorrow
1. The chief cause for a feeling of separation from God is sin
 - a. Sin will hinder our prayer life. It will hinder our worship.
 - b. Sin crushes the believers confidence and robs him of his assurance
 - c. Sin always affects our fellowship with God
 God will seem distant. We long for the times when He was near.
 As time stretches on we fall into great sorrow
 2. This is often a form of God’s chastisement
 - a. We will never be abandoned or forsaken but there are times when God withdraws the fullness of His countenance from us for a season.
 - b. We read in the 1689 Confession , Chapter 5: Divine Providence: “The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave for a season his own children to manifold temptations and the corruptions of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon himself; and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for other just and holy ends.
 3. Sometimes through sin or neglect we fall into the valley of darkness where prayer is hard and our fellowship with our Father is difficult.
 David was a man after God’s own heart, yet he sometimes felt abandoned by God.
 4. Sometimes during these times of intense spiritual trauma we tend to internalize it and fall into self-pity and fear. This can lead to despair.
- C. For the Christian separation from God is the greatest sorrow
1. Our chief desire is God
Psalm 27:4 – “One *thing* have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.”
 2. In His absence we press towards him like a deer dying of thirst pants after water.
 3. You can survive for days without food, but without water death is an agonizing trauma. Every thought is captivated by a desire for water.

- a. Strong thirst added to our Lord's misery on the cross. One of the statements from the cross was, "I thirst" His misery is described prophetically in Psalm 22
Psalm 22:14-15 – "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. ¹⁵ My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death."
- b. There is no thirst like soul thirst
Psalm 42:2 – "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God"

II. Memories of better days – Verse 4

- A. The psalmist remembers previous times, better times
"When I remember these *things*"
 - 1. He remembered past times when he joined with other believers as they gathered in the house of God.
 - 2. He was homesick
 - 3. These memories of times past only made his depression deeper
- B. This is often a source of depression
 - 1. There are more suicides during the holiday season than any other time. The loneliness is more than they can bear.
 - 2. People long for the experiences in their memories of days gone by.
 - 3. Often people falsely elevate the past. This is the danger of nostalgia. The good ole days were never as good as people pretend. People become melancholy as they long for the past.
 - 4. Christians are often full of joyless sorrow now longing for some religious feeling they had in the past rather than looking unto Jesus now

III. An over-estimation of our problems – Verse 7

- A. The psalmist describes his situation
Psalm 42:7 – "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me."
 - 1. He describes his situation – only he is describing it in the worst possible terms
 - 2. He ponders silently with himself, he communes with his heart. One thought fed off another
 - a. He saw his afflictions as coming from the wrath of God.
 - b. He saw his afflictions as giant billowing waves ready to consume
 - 3. These are very descriptive words but most likely an exaggeration
- B. We are prone to this all the time
 - 1. We ponder our situation. We think about every detail and magnify each one.
 - 2. Sometimes we brood over the situation like a hen hovering over her eggs. I have a sign on my desk that reads, "No Brooding"
 - 3. All of us do what is called, "Self-talk." But we can talk ourselves into fear and despair.
 - 4. Hyper introspection is often caused by our love of self. It is pride that causes us to look to self and forget God.

IV. The insensitive words spoken by other people – **Verse 10**

Psalm 42:3 – “My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where *is* thy God?”

Psalm 42:10 – “As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where *is* thy God?”

- A. It was bad enough that the psalmist was away from home, he was surrounded by those who taunted him
1. They mocked him, “Where is your God.”
 2. This magnified the suffering of Christ
Mark 15:29-32 – “And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days, ³⁰ Save thyself, and come down from the cross. ³¹ Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save. ³² Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him.”
 3. These enemies caused the psalmist great grief.
Psalm 43:1-2 – “O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man. ² For thou *art* the God of my strength: why dost thou cast me off? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?”
- B. One of the powerful advantages of belonging to a church is having a multitude of allies
1. Those outside the church mock and criticize
 2. This is why we must be careful to build up and not tear down. This doesn't mean we never correct but we must do so for their good – Just as when God corrects us.
 3. The absence of caring brethren can fill our lives with grief. God never intended us to be alone.
 And when we are surrounded by those who mock us it is source of great grief.

Conclusion:

1. These are but a few of the many situations that can lead to depression. Things that can cause us to be downcast and filled with sorrow instead of joy.
2. The major cause the same in every situation.
 The primary cause of our unhappiness is unbelief. We begin to focus upon ourselves and our situation rather upon Christ. Our contentment becomes fixed on something apart from Christ. We set our hope on something apart from Christ.
3. As I said at the beginning, it is a terrible testimony before the unbelieving world because they see us behaving exactly like them.
4. The command given to us is to be filled with joy. We are filled with joy when we take our eyes off ourselves and we fill our lives with Christ.
5. Next time we will examine this cure for spiritual depression.