

Psalms 42,43

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[0 : 00] Those who happen to be here in the second and third Sundays of January may remember that I started a short series on what it is to grow in grace, to understand a greater awareness of our God, what it is that we might grow and mature.

And I want this morning to continue that theme and God willing we'll look again at it next Sunday morning. And I want particularly this morning to look together at the two Psalms that I read a few moments ago.

Now just a little recap so we know where we are. We looked on that first Sunday at how the Lord Jesus Christ himself grew. We always think of him growing physically from that babe in Bethlehem to the man that we see who walked this earth.

We know that he grew mentally in his understanding but we also saw that he grew spiritually in his walk with God and as he learnt the scriptures.

We saw that Jesus grew in wisdom and we reminded ourselves that the scriptures teach that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and therefore Jesus himself grew in that fear of God.

[1 : 25] And of course we showed that fear of God was not a matter of being terrified of the Lord. For those who know God he doesn't hold that terror for them but it is that we see God in all his reverence and awe as we respect the greatness of our God.

As Christians grow we develop in our understanding of the nature and the character of God. And as I said this morning I want to look at these two Psalms.

Psalms 42 and Psalm 43. I'm reminded that a few years ago, as some of you know I do a little bit of work with Russian publishing and we published a commentary on Psalm 119 and I got the first copy, came from the printers and I was all excited and I got that first copy and there it said in Russian, I can't speak Russian, I can't speak Russian but I was told it's at an exposition of Psalm 118.

I thought oh no, oh no, several thousand copies of this book. So I phoned up my colleague in Belarus and said the cover's all wrong, it says Psalm 118.

He said no, he said in Russian we've always put Psalms 42 and 43 together. They were reckoned to be one originally. And I mention that because I think that might help us in our understanding because we're going to dip into both of these Psalms and you'll see a considerable amount of similarity.

[3 : 04] The other thing about the Psalms of course is that within them we see an amazing description of our own experiences. And they also prepare the way for new experiences that come in the direction of the Christian as God works in the lives of his people.

The theme of both these verses is the same. And if you followed that reading a few moments ago you would have picked up the verse 5 of Psalm 42 and verse 11 of Psalm 43 and verse 5 of Psalm 43 are identical.

And that's really our theme this morning. Why are you downcast oh my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God for I will yet praise him my Saviour and my God.

Psalm 42 opens with the words as the deer pants for streams of water so my soul pants for you oh God.

It's a description of someone who is longing to know God more. That's really where we want to start this morning. If you're not a Christian I've got something to say to you in a little while.

[4 : 17] But if you are a Christian is that your heart's desire? To know God more. To have a greater relationship with him. And when I say to know God more I mean to know the Trinity more.

To know him Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To know our Lord Jesus Christ more and more. As this is the very essence of spiritual growth. As one of the commentators put it, growing is knowing.

The more we grow the more we know. The more we know the more we grow. Being a Christian is not a set of rules. It's not a set of do's and don'ts.

You don't have a series of tick boxes that you have to go through. And if you get so many right then you say well I'm a Christian. It's not like that at all. Being a Christian is knowing God and knowing his Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the very essence of what it is to have a relationship with God. The Lord Jesus in his great high priestly prayer that we read of in John chapter 17.

[5 : 22] Says this, Now this is eternal life that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. That's eternal life.

That's what it's all about. It's not leading a good life though that's important. It's not obedience to God although that's important. It's not making sure that we've got all our doctrine and all the things just right.

That's important. All of those things. But it's this, Eternal life is knowing God and knowing Jesus Christ. Daniel in the Old Testament declared that true men and women of faith are people who knew their God.

And so the heart of the Christian life is knowing the Lord. Knowing the Lord Jesus. And if we're not growing in our knowledge of God then we're not growing at all.

I would suggest that's perhaps one of the greatest weaknesses that we've seen in the church in recent years. So often we've been so taken up with what we sing and what we do and all of those various activities that we've failed to realize that we need to grow in our walk with the Lord God of heaven.

[6 : 43] As a generation of Christians we've tended to major on the minors rather than concentrating on knowing God more. At best we know about him.

But the psalmist longed to know God. And he describes his experience of that journey. So let's look at that this morning. So the first point is this. Quite simply this is my shortest point.

Longing to know God. The true desire to know God is not actually a very comfortable path. The psalmist felt cast down.

That came out in our text wasn't it? Why are you so downcast on my soul? He realized that he did not know God as he needed to. He didn't have that closeness that he really wanted.

Perhaps earlier things had been different. Perhaps earlier in his life they had been much different. He had a closer walk with God. But now they seem to be different.

[7 : 46] Now somehow he feels cold and dry towards God. Do you ever feel that? Sometimes you feel a coldness. God seems afar off.

There's a dryness in your soul. You come on a Sunday. You sing the hymns. You listen, well, to some of the preaching. You enjoy meeting your friends.

But you go away and you really have not been stirred in your souls. The psalmist needed to be revived and restored. Someone suggested, really this man was a backslider.

But I don't agree with that. Had he drifted away from God? No, I don't think that was the case. Was he disobedient? I don't think we've got anything, any reason to suggest such a thing.

Yet the psalm makes no mention of repentance. If he'd a backslider or drifted away, he would have needed to come back in repentance. No mention of sin barring his way to God.

[8 : 47] He speaks of God as his shelter and protection. In verse 9 of Psalm 42, he calls God his rock. Verse 8 of Psalm 42. Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls.

All your waves and breakers have swept over me. It's not that of a backslider. He was suffering because he felt distant from God. And he was being somewhat overwhelmed by all the experiences and circumstances of life.

What he needed to understand. Perhaps these psalms help us in this understanding.

That God was working in the life of this man. He was bringing him to a new stage of spiritual experience. A new stage in his life.

And it was part of his growth as he moved from one stage in life to another. We all have this, don't we? Different stages in our lives. Perhaps as youngsters, we're perhaps converted as youngsters.

[9 : 53] Full of enthusiasm. We have all the experience of first jobs, universities, colleges, whatever. We have the experiences of perhaps getting married, settling down, family, children.

It's not the experience of all, of course. And as you go on, the children grow. They leave home. New experiences come. You come to the matter of retirement. And as days go on, all different experiences which God brings to us.

And each of them is a matter of a new spiritual experience into which we grow. Longing to know God was the psalmist. Secondly, what does God use that we might know him more?

What does God use that we might know him more? This psalmist here desired to know more of God. And God uses the psalmist's own experiences to bring him to that knowledge.

He does by reflecting on the past. Reflecting on the past. As this psalmist calls out to God in his perplexity, he says in verse 4 of Psalm 42, These things I remember as I pour out my soul.

[11:07] How I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God with shouts of joy and thanksgiving with the festive throng. See, he looks back.

His mind was taken back to the time he was in Jerusalem. He saw the great crowds that would go up to the great festivals and sacrifices that were held in Jerusalem.

They were great days. Pilgrims would come from all over the nation. They would go up together and they would worship together. And the psalmist says, I used to go with them. I used to go with the multitudes.

What a great time that was. He looks back and rejoices at the greatness of those occasions. In fact, it was more than that because he says, I was at the front.

I used to lead them. I led the procession as we went up to Jerusalem. And it was all flooding back into his mind. Now let me just give a word of caution here.

[12:10] If we look back, it's good to look back on our lives and reflect how God has been active in our lives. How he's used situation after situation.

But remember this. If all our hopes, all our best experiences lie in the past, and all we do is complain that things are not like they used to be, we're all guilty of that at some time, aren't we?

Saying, well, it was better when I was younger. It was better in my day and all the rest. If that's all we do, they're really signs of spiritual decay.

I love to hear testimonies. It's good for folks to share testimonies. But then sometimes I have a little concern when the one giving the testimony only reflects upon what happened a period ago or whenever it was.

I was just sharing with some of the church officers before the service this morning that my wife Tricia and I were actually converted under Andy Patterson's father.

[13:20] And we just suddenly worked out that that was 53 years ago. Hallelujah. We praise God for that. And that was glorious. But if that's my testimony, there's something wrong.

My testimony has to be my walk with my Jesus today. And how I'm relating to God this instant. Because God is not just a God of my past.

He's the God of my present as well as my future. It wasn't the case with this man. He was looking back. He was remembering the grace and the power of God's presence with his people.

And he was doing so for a specific reason. It was to stir himself up to long and anticipate such things again. That's one of the uses of our memories, isn't it?

We see how God has dealt with us in the past. How God has led us. How he has provided for us. And that reminds us we have the same God today. Paul was concerned about the spiritual growth of his young friend Timothy.

[14:31] So he writes to him and he says in 2 Timothy chapter 1 and in verse 6. He says, He says, For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you.

He's just been talking about the fact that he's been taught the faith by his mother and grandmother. And he reminds him, he says, So fan into flame, don't just leave it there in the past. Develop it. Think on it. Think of its use today. Remember that, Timothy. Let its memory stir you up to seek and serve God now.

The memory of what God has done for us in the past is a spur to serve him now. If you're a Christian here this morning, do you remember those early days when you were first converted? Oh, weren't they glorious days? Full of enthusiasm. You couldn't get enough of Jesus. You couldn't get enough of the Bible. There was so much to learn. Reflect on that memory.

[15:38] Think about it. Then you felt a closeness to God. That you've matured since then and everything's become a little bit more sober and a little bit more stayed.

But really this psalm is suggesting to us that we need to think back to those days and let their memory stir us in our walk with God today.

Let your memory create in you a thirst, a longing, a fresh desire to know God and to sense his presence with you in the way that you did then.

Reflecting on the past, but there's another matter as well. Sometimes we feel isolated. We feel isolated from God. Perhaps this is what the psalmist is indicating here.

Why are you so downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Or verse 6 of Psalm 42. My soul is downcast within me. Therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon, from Mount Mizzar.

[16:46] He's looking back there. But now he seems to be far away from the scenes of his former blessings. He's miles from Jerusalem.

Perhaps he's missing his old friends. We do get like that sometimes. We reflect back to previous churches or previous days when the gospel seemed to go so well.

When the church was full. We do feel like that. I reflect, I have preached here when the whole of that area was packed with people and every seat taken. And we sometimes think, oh, things aren't what they used to be.

Perhaps for this psalmist he's feeling isolated. Perhaps he's feeling cut off from the fellowship of God's people that once he knew, he seems to no longer be able to enjoy the ministries that he once benefited from.

There seems little now to encourage his spiritual growth. He misses his friends. Even more than that, as we said in Jerusalem, he was a leader, but that's not the case now.

[17:54] So he feels his isolation acutely. He's no longer the center of activity. He's older now. He's having a different experience of life.

Age is taking its toll. Every major adjustment in our lifestyle can have this effect of making us feel distanced, perhaps even disorientated.

Perhaps it is we no longer feel we are fulfilling a strategic, purposeful role in our Christian lives that we once did. Change of job. Change of house.

Change of locality. Bereavement. Children leaving home. Retirement. All these things can make us feel isolated and no longer useful.

So what did God teach the psalmist and us? And God wants to teach us lessons in the situation we are in now.

[19:00] Because God deals with us in the present. And we can learn situations and we can learn of God now. We can learn more of his character now that we couldn't learn in other circumstances.

Perhaps in the past, we've perhaps relied too much on the encouragement of others. And insufficiently on the Lord himself. Perhaps we've relied too much on our own activity.

Rather than learning to trust God. Now we must learn to know him. In our present situation. As we deal with these feelings of isolation.

God teaches us to know him more. In the different experiences of life. The psalmist was needing help. That's why he comes to God in this prayer.

The psalmist is facing all sorts of problems. He feels challenged by those who say to him, Where is your God? He's feeling oppressed by those around him.

[20:08] Psalm 43 verse 1. Don't we feel that today? We feel we are surrounded by those who are so opposed to God and his word.

We feel the nation is becoming ungodly. Surrounded by deceitful. And men who have no interest in God.

And we want to stand firm. And really they say unto us, Where is your God? And we feel it acutely. Verse 2 of Psalm 43.

You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning?

Oppressed by the enemy. He's feeling the pressure. Feeling that God has cast him off.

What was happening? What can I suggest is that God was showing him how much he needed to depend on him for protection.

[21:09] It's very easy as we look at our nation and the things that are happening. Throw up our hands in horror. And to feel overwhelmed.

And feel depressed and oppressed by what's happening. But we remember it's the same God who's always been. A God who is sovereign. A God who is in control.

He is the one we can trust. Perhaps in the past our psalmist felt he could hold his own against those who oppressed his faith. But now he felt vulnerable. In the past perhaps a bit too confident in his own abilities.

Now he was feeling the attacks of the devil and he needed help. He felt like the deer being caught up in the chase. As the deer pants for streams of water.

So my soul pants for you, O God. But of course none of these things lay outside of the control of God himself. God wanted the psalmist to turn to him.

[22 : 12] To lean on him. In the depths of his experiences. He was learning to thirst for God. And that thirsting meant his growing desire for God. And in this he would grow.

And in this he would mature. Do you thirst for God? Do you really want to know him more? Are you just satisfied with your little bit of God as it were on a Sunday morning or Sunday evening or the prayer meeting?

Is it part of a daily experience of living closer to our Lord Jesus Christ? Thirdly.

Developing a deeper knowledge of God. Developing a deeper knowledge of God. What were the prayers of the psalmist? Look in verse 3 and 4 of Psalm 43.

Send forth your light and your word. Let them guide me. Let them bring me to your holy mountain. To the place where you dwell. Then will I go to the altar of God.

[23 : 19] To God my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp. O God my God. In other words what's happening here.

Is that God is using various means that he's given us. To bring him to a greater knowledge of himself. And the psalmist is saying I need to get back to the word of God.

The psalmist's prayer is for God's light. The writer of Psalm 119 says this in verse 130. 131. The unfolding of your words gives light.

It gives understanding to the simple. I open my mouth and pant longing for your commands. It is knowing God's word. We have seen that the psalmist feels isolated. Neglected even.

Perhaps he cannot even get to a place where God's word is expounded. We don't know his situation. And he wants God to send light and truth.

[24 : 22] When we became a Christian. We were taken out of darkness. Into the glorious light of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you're not a Christian here this morning. You're in darkness towards the things of God. Peter writes in 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 9 that.

That's our experience. But simply when we become Christians. It was that we were aware in darkness about the word of God. Oh we may have read it. We may have understood some of the stories.

But we didn't know God through it. We didn't understand its reality. Or its relevance to our lives. But now the word gives us understanding. It affects our consciences.

Aren't we moved when the word of God is preached? Aren't we moved as we read the scriptures privately. On our own. By what we read. Do we think that. That applies to my experience.

[25 : 34] When we were first converted. We were amazed. At the things we learnt. None more so. Concerning the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we thought about this glorious son of God. In his humility. Coming as that babe at Bethlehem. Living amongst sinful men and women.

With all the dirt of their iniquity. Yet he remained without sin. And how he suffered. He took our sin. He took the sin of his people. He bore his consequences. This is the heart of the gospel. This is the heart of the gospel. That our sin was placed on Christ. And there he dealt with its consequences. So that we might be made right with God. And how the Holy Spirit of God prepares us for heaven. And such truths came to us with unforgettable power into our minds and lives.

[26 : 41] Old habits that we had. That were trapped. Us in sin were broken. We began to be free from sin. Sin. And sin in our lives defeated by the power of God.

No we're not perfect. Far from it. But we are making progress. As we think and reflect upon the work of Christ on the cross.

Does that still thrill us? Does that still excite us? A book I saw published a little while ago had the title, Christians Need the Gospel Too.

You think for a moment, why do we need the gospel too? We've heard the gospel. We believe the gospel. Why do we need it? Well we need to constantly be reminded of the greatness of God. And the glories that he's done. Because it stirs us up to want to come and worship and praise our God. Sometimes there are times, aren't there, when God's word speaks to us with unusual power. It brings a fresh understanding. A greater assurance.

[27 : 49] A greater sense of the holiness of God. And this is what the psalmist is praying for. If we are to make progress in our Christian lives, we need God to be at work in us.

Moulding us. Shaping our lives. Conforming them to the image of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God accomplished this by his word.

It's a great privilege to hear God's word. And to hear God's word expounded, even by those who are perhaps not particularly good at it. It is as we listen, as we think, as we reflect, that we grow and we mature as Christians.

And such things move us to worship God. The psalmist's prayer in these verses is that God would come to him. And his response is that he would come to God.

In Psalm 43, verse 3 again, Send forth your light and your truth. Let them guide me. Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.

[29 : 07] Bring you to the altar of God. To find God your joy and your delight. What the psalmist is finding is that all experiences, whether they be trials or blessings, whether they be times of difficulties or times of ease, all point him in one direction, to worship his God with all his heart and mind and strength and soul.

That's the authentic sign of spiritual growth. He wants to go to Jerusalem. He wants to go to the place of sacrifice. He believes there he will meet God in grace and power.

He wants to go to that holy altar. Now that holy altar is not a structure made by men. We saw on our TV screens this week, men as they chose a new leader, coming up in all their paraphernalia.

And I'm sorry if I offend anyone, but I just can't attack these things. And they come up one after another, and you saw them kissing the altar. I don't see an altar in this place.

Praise God for that. Because our altar is the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Jerusalem is Christ. As the psalmist wanted to go to Jerusalem, because he knew that that was the place of sacrifice, so we go to Christ, for he is the sacrifice.

[30 : 42] Not going to a place, we don't need to go to some place of pilgrimage. Those that go off to, I don't know, Walsingham each year for some pilgrimage, we go to a person.

We go to the Lord Jesus Christ. And as we go to the place of sacrifice, that is not an altar in a church building. We need no altar.

For the one true and final sacrifice was made at the cross. If you're not a Christian here this morning, that's where you need to go. You need to go to the cross.

You need to go to Christ. You need to cry out to him. You need to tell him that you're really sorry for your sin, and the way that you've disobeyed his law, and that you want to follow him. And you realize that he died on the cross to deal with your sin, and you put your faith in him.

And it's the cross that is the place of our spiritual worship. As we reflect upon what Christ did, and we think of the glories of his resurrection, it's that we might glorify and enjoy him forever.

[31 : 48] Isn't that what the catechism says? Is the chief end of man? That we might glorify and enjoy God forever? Have we lost that enjoyment of God?

Do we not need a new willingness to serve our God fully? The writer of these two psalms longed to know God more. And as we leave these psalms this morning, we see him beginning to discover these things, to discover the blessings of his God.

I love the way that the psalmists often give themselves a good talking to. And that's what he does here. He says, he looks at his own soul, Why are you so downcast, my soul? Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God. For yet I will praise him, my saviour, and my God. Do we thirst for God? May God put in our hearts a desire to know him more, a desire to grow in spiritual maturity, a desire to trust and reflect and trust more, the glories of our saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

May his name be praised. Amen. As we sing and see with you. Good news, how we fuel in thee. May God be praised.

[33 : 13] The gospel, when I listen to you. May God be praised. Way great, my son. May Godlich, I'm a body of fire. May God be praised. May God be praised. May God be praised. May God be praised in the Council of Christ.

May God be praised. May God be praised. May God be praised for ■■■ Radic. May God be praised and unity for all, may God be praised. May God be praised by your days, Never die. Knowing you, Jesus.

Knowing you, there is a great earthy. You're my all, you're the best.

You're my joy, my righteousness. And I love you, Lord. Love you, Lord.
Father, that we might know our Lord Jesus more and more. That we might know that experience of
him in our lives day by day. Help us, our God, to walk more closely with you.
[34 : 23] Help us to reflect on your word. To reflect upon that cross and that glorious resurrection.
That we may know Jesus more and more. Now to him who is able to keep us from falling.
And to present us before his glorious presence without fault. And with great joy to the only God, our
Saviour. Be glory, majesty, power and authority.
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, before all ages. Now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.