

Deep Calls to Deep

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 September 2010

Preacher: Tim Mildenhall

[0 : 0 0] As we stand, Heavenly Father, we pray now as we meditate on your word, that you give us clear heads and soft hearts, that we might bear fruit for you in this life and enter into the world to come.

In Jesus' name we pray. Please be seated. You'll find it helpful to have the psalm open in front of you, Psalm 42 and 43, and also some of you will have an outline of where we're going.

That will be helpful too. Can I just begin by saying thank you to Andrew, but to the wider group, thank you. Although it's quite chilly down here and I still need my coat, it's been a warm welcome here and amongst other friends in Melbourne.

So it's very significant for us, if I can just take a moment, it's very significant for us out in the wilds, in the remote areas of the Northwest, to know that we have friends and partners in the work who remember us in prayer and help us financially and in all kinds of material ways.

And it's very special to be able to be here and meet some of you and be able to say thank you and how much we value your partnership in the gospel.

[1 : 2 4] In the Kimberley, in this month, we're actually approaching the month, in some ways the worst month of the year, where the heat and the humidity start to ramp up and evening temperatures don't go down as low as 17 or 18.

What was it yesterday here? Maximum? Perhaps it's 25 or 28 overnight and sleeplessness is endemic and the exhaustion that comes from sleeplessness means that people start getting snappy at each other and the difficulty of getting exercise means that you go around with a fuzzy brain.

You know that kind of thing, don't you? You know the thing you need is exercise, but you just can't quite get there. And then you've got the thought, it's another six months of the same. And people start to get down.

They start to get not just snappy, but depressed. And actually it's a serious time for people taking their own lives. I've lost count of the number of friends we've lost up there.

Now the psalm today deals with a difficult topic if we're willing to face up to it and have a look at it. It deals with the downs of the ups and downs of life.

[2 : 5 3] And amongst us here today, no doubt some of us will relate to those downs. But others, how do I put this? Others have got no idea what I'm talking about when I say the downs of life.

As we get older, I think I've noticed that the psalms become more and more meaningful to us because they're written from the experience of life. And in this world, there's no choice really.

You can die or if you live, you'll eventually come up against things that are bigger than yourself. And you'll come to down times, those blue times. Or at least you'll be in contact with others close to you who will experience that.

Is that true? It's a matter of time, isn't it? We're in that zone, in that place. Now what we've got in front of us this morning in Psalms 42 and 43, it's more than just one person's reflection on their experience of being down.

We are dealing, we believe, with a text which is breathed out by God, yes? And which comes to us not just as a letter on its own, but in a whole Bible context, a canonical context.

[4 : 09] That is, it comes to us as two out of the 150 psalms. And those psalms themselves are within a section of the Bible called the writings, which make up together with the law and the prophets, the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, and together with the New Testament, make up our Bible, the book.

For we're people of the book, aren't we? Not of the ink on the page, and the glue in the spine, and the gold leaf on the fly cover, but we don't kiss that artifact.

That's not what we mean by being people of the book. We believe God has given us a self-authenticating, self-interpreting, unified word, which speaks corporately to us and intimately to us, at the same time, to all of us.

And today, as we look fairly briefly at this Psalm 42 and 43, we'll see why in a moment, we need to see it in this context, I think. In other words, let me say a few things about what I'm not doing.

I'm not a psychiatrist. I'm not about to give a psychiatric assessment of depression. And I'm not trying to give just some self-help hints about how to be a positive person.

[5 : 24] We are engaging in a theological reflection this morning, which is bigger than either of those two perspectives. And we need to be clear about the framework and the angle that we're approaching this Psalm from.

Enough already. Let's just look at it together. And on our outline here, we're up to a look at the Psalm. Let's look at the heading first of all, because that's the kind of thing that often we just gloss over.

But it's actually there in the original text. Let me read it. To the leader, a masculine of the Korahites. That's probably why we skip over it. What does that mean? Well, the Korahites were the sons of Korah.

Not that sons of Korah. They're a group of singers that the King David organized. They're a subgroup of the priests whose ministry was singing.

We can read about them in places. But one place, 2 Chronicles, chapter 20, verse 19. The Levites, of the children of the Korahites and the children of the Korahites, stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with an exceeding loud voice.

[6 : 39] They're the worship band. They're the worship leaders. And what it tells us is that this psalm was sung. Yeah? You got that, Phil?

Now, it also says a masculine of the Korahites. What does masculine mean? It's one of those words like hallelujah, which we all kind of know. But do we know actually what it means?

The reason we don't know what it means is because it's one of those words that's come into English, straight out of Hebrew. In the case of hallelujah, it means, well, what does it mean?

A bit louder. Praise the Lord. That's right. Praise Yahweh. But we don't really know quite as clearly what masculine means. It's a bit like a verb which means instruct or a noun instruction or a point of wisdom.

Now, that's very helpful. We can have a bit of a guess. Let's go with that one. So, what the heading tells us is this is a song for instruction.

- [7 : 45] A song for instruction. So, that we might feel the song, poetry. That's what songs do, don't they? They get us in touch with our emotions. That's what poetry does.
- It evokes imagery and stirs us emotionally. It's a song for instruction. To help us to think.
- And the aim. The aim. Of us having a look at this psalm. The aim of us having this psalm.
- The aim of God in giving us this psalm. Is so that when the next wave breaks over us in life. We would be more like this godly, wise and depressed and churned up man.
- That's where we're going. We're just going to zoom back a little bit and have a look at the overview of the summer. And particularly pick up on the structure.
- [8 : 49] Let me read to you from verses 5 and 11 and 43.5 all at the same time. How am I going to do that? Well, they're the same words. Why are you cast down, O my soul?
- And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God. For I shall again praise him. My help and my God. If you see verse 11 and verse 5 in Psalm 43, they're the same.
- In other words, it's a structural marker to show us that the theme of this psalm is actually the same. Psalm 43 doesn't actually have another heading, does it?
- If you look there, you'll see it's got no heading. It's another marker that actually Psalms 42 and 43 need to be taken together. This identical refrain or chorus makes its way through Psalms 42 and 43.
- So we're going to take them together as one this morning and see what they say about this theme of being down. Now, the other thing we need to notice is that we don't actually know what the circumstances were precisely.
- [10 : 06] There are a few pointers, for example, to the external circumstances of the psalmist. So in verse 6, we see hope in God. My soul is downcast within me.
- Therefore, I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon from Mount Musa. In other words, he's not at home. He's away. He's away. Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts.
- And we see further on in verse 10. As a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me. Well, they say to me continually, where's your God?
- Now, some of us who are Christians are not unfamiliar with being taunted. And in particular, in the public square with some more militant atheists in the last little while.
- There's some familiarity with all of us probably with the idea of taunting. But there's something else going on here. Taunting's one thing.
- [11 : 11] But for them to be doing it at the moment, it must also look like he's abandoned. Do you get that? Something's gone wrong in this guy's life.
- We don't know the exact situation, as I say. Other psalms, they do describe the setting. But not this one. But the point is, in the external circumstances that have gone wrong, which generate an internal set of circumstances, we read the psalmist's response.
- And this is the response in verse 2. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? Verse 2. He's away.
- He's feeling distant. The external circumstances are generating the internal. And verse 3. My tears have been my food day and night.
- While people say to me continually, where is your God? For those of you who've got kids, you'll know what it's like when nothing you can do satisfies them.
- [12 : 25] When they get so tired that, okay, it's time, John, for breakfast? No! Okay, well, why don't you sit on the couch until you're ready? No! All right, these pancakes are just about ready now.

I'll put the maple syrup on. No! What about wheat germ and yogurt and honey? No! How about chips and ice cream and chocolate? No! You just can't satisfy.

They're just on the edge of tears. And for this psalmist, tears, they're food, day and night.

It's an extraordinary diet. And more than that. And more than that, in verse 7. Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts. All your waves and your billows have gone over me.

He feels like he's drowning. The external circumstances. The external circumstances and the internal circumstances. The third thing I want us to see is that he's still in the ring.

[13 : 30] He's still fighting. So verse 7. Verse 7. Your waves and your breakers have gone all over me. But what does he say in verse 5?

Why are you cast down on my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God. For I shall again praise him. My help and my God.

The external and the internal churning, churning. But he's still in the ring. And he's saying, I'm not praising God.

And I can't praise God at the moment. I'm away. I'm away. But I want to get there. And again in verse 11. Look at verse 11. Why are you cast down my soul?

And why are you disquieted? You see, it's the kind of thing that he needs to keep saying. He's still in the ring. He hasn't given up. Do you see?

[14 : 32] The repetition of that chorus shows he hasn't given up. The external, the internal, but he's still in the ring. This man's faith is noble and valiant.

And it raises the question, well, what about the happy ending? Because if you're anything like me, raised on a diet of six o'clock on Sunday nights, was it Disney World or something like Disney, the wonderful world of Disney, you know, in 43 minutes, you'd have a terrible conflict and then a resolution, all in 43 minutes.

So where's the happy ending here? He's drowning. And there isn't a happy ending, actually, is there?

He's calling out to God. But by the end of the psalm, are things fixed? No, it's to show us how to think God's way and how to feel God's way when we're in the midst of trouble.

God doesn't promise when we follow him to take us around the troublesome things. What this psalm is instructing us about is how to trust him in the midst of the difficulties.

[15 : 52] Do you get that? It's not promising a happy ending. It's not promising no troubles. It's not even delivering no worries. Saying how to endure in the middle.

You need to get this now, actually. Because when you're in the ring fighting, it's very difficult to assimilate new information. You'll fall back on what you already know and what you already believe.

When you feel like you're drowning, it's very hard to concentrate on getting new information and getting new learning. And so you need to get this now when you're not drowning.

Yeah? And God equips us before the next down of the ups and downs of life. So we're ready. When the breakers come, when the waves wash over us, and it will happen, you're equipped.

So I've got a couple of things to, a couple of points to make from this psalm. We've looked at it in a, in a kind of a, taken the verses from here and there to see the structure and the theme. Let me make some statements about what the psalm's teaching.

[17 : 07] Firstly, being down is not ungodly. Being down is not ungodly. Now, I suspect this is especially a word to those who are not downcast.

And perhaps there are people who, you know, who do approach life in a depressive kind of way and are very familiar with being downcast. Sometimes people who are not downcast or who haven't had that experience find it very difficult to know what to say or do when they're meeting and trying to be kind and loving with people who are downcast.

This psalm ought to alert us that being down is not ungodly. I want to just flag another example of someone who was down.

If you remember Job who after those three tragic messages came into him he sat for a week and didn't say anything. And what does the book of Job tell us about Job?

That he was a righteous man, godly and upright, blameless. He didn't know everything. He had something to learn about God and about himself and about this world and he had finally something to repent of but he wasn't wrong or sinful for being down.

[18 : 46] It's one of the reasons why I love the psalms, friends, because they're full of realism. They give me the words to express what I go through in life and the more life I go through the more I value the psalms.

They help me to put into words what I'm feeling but don't know what to say. And it's not just the psalms that teaches that being down is not ungodly. There's a whole book of the Bible called Lamentations.

Lamentations. It's not ungodly to lament. And we read of the Apostle Paul who writes in 2 Corinthians 1 4 God comforts us in our affliction.

And that's not just the external circumstances that Paul's in in 2 Corinthians 1. In verse 8 2 Corinthians 1 8 he says this We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired even of life itself.

Do you hear the internal agony there? It's not just the external it's the internal struggle. No being down is not the same as being ungodly.

[20 : 05] The second point is closely connected to that first point. God is able to be God even when circumstances are bad. God's able to be God even when circumstances are bad.

Some must take good circumstances for being in the centre of God's will. And you can even find verses in the Bible that perhaps seem to point in that direction.

But Psalm 42 and 43 points in a different way. Because first the psalmist prays to God. and I want to say if God is not God over everything then don't bother praying.

Don't bother. If God isn't sovereign over all things then why bother? I was talking with another pastor a little while ago and I must say my jaw hit the ground because what he said was the things that happen in life that are good things that bring me comfort things that I like they're from God and the things the things that are bad the things that happen that I don't like that don't bring me comfort they're from the devil.

You hear what he's saying? In other words there's a whole area of life where actually God is not achieving his purposes where God is not sovereign. It's known as dualism dualism but look at the psalm again look in particular at verse seven decourse the deep with the thunder of your cataracts all your waves and breakers have broken over me do you hear it?

[21 : 57] The psalmist recognizes that the things that have happened are under God's control all your waves response and whatever is happening externally and whatever his response internally God is right there God is sovereign God is worth crying out to and he's still worth calling out to even if the circumstances are not fixed immediately according to how he reckons they ought to be my idea of God fixing up the world basically revolves around my comfort but God's way of being God is so much bigger he is even God in disaster he is even God when I'm churned and down and of course we see this supremely in the cross don't we was God in charge when Jesus died God but do you remember

Jesus words in the garden if it's possible take this cup from me nevertheless not my will but yours you see the picture of God's godness that is at one with this psalm God is God even in the difficult times of life even with the external circumstances as bad as they were for Jesus in the garden we hear there the cry of a distressed man and internally what does Jesus say I'm overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death the external circumstances he was about to face gave rise to that internal churning and downness nevertheless not my will but yours be done and the extraordinary thing is this that as

Jesus hangs on the cross enduring that suffering it's the same Jesus who said come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I'll give you rest he offers welcome to burden ones precisely because he goes through that pain and suffering our God the true and living God is not just God when things are going well he brings good from bad

God you're not at work God now friends sometimes when somebody is an extremist like this they don't always dot their theological I's and cross their theological T's sometimes they say things that aren't quite right I just want to suggest when we're listening or sitting with someone who is in a situation like this don't be picky about the language they're using it's okay for them to cry out and it's okay for them to get things wrong at that point they don't need you to be their theological instructor then just let it go it's okay to ask

God why the next point I want us to see is this surprising truth that in fact pain is a gift pain is a gift both physical and emotional pain are gifts for one thing they tell us we're alive see pain lets us know that there's something wrong isn't there I've got four kids and each of them have gone through this testing by fire for one reason or another we've been camping or hanging out somewhere it's cool down in southwest western australia and the kids they don't see fire a lot and so they want to reach out and touch it and each of our kids has been mildly burned at one point just once and they don't do it again you see pain teaches us that there's something wrong at their best emotions of which this crying out is an example emotions produce creativity and maintain and sustain life at their worst emotions can lead to destructive vengeance vengeful and violent behavior towards others and the self but the psalmist calls out to God in his distress pain is a gift it helps us to see that there's something wrong and helps us to orient ourselves towards God hope in hope in hope in

[28 : 12] God for I shall again praise him there's something wrong with this world friends isn't there there's something wrong if we never felt pain in this world that would be wrong we would never be oriented towards God's plan and God's purpose in this world and finally this psalm tells us about genuine Christian faith Christian faith has a moral dimension to it we do talk about truth and falsehood we do talk about good and bad but Christian faith is not moralism it is not just one way of being good amongst many different ways of being good genuine

Christian faith must have in it this longing for Jesus to return that's what's there in incipient form here isn't it put your hope in God for I shall again praise him my help and my God the psalm instructs us about the kind of things which are essential for genuine Christian faith and that is a longing hope is the New Testament word who hopes for what he already has no one how's your faith stack up against that are you waiting for Jesus to return or that get in the way of your building project or your plans to get married or where are you sending your kids to school or that car that you really want to get you're waiting for Jesus to return are you orienting your life in light of your belief that he will return well friends it's time to wrap it up

God gives us these psalms to feel their songs and poetry and to be instructed through the word and he gives them to us ahead of time before we go through the downs of the ups and downs of life he gives them to us for the dark hours he gives them to us for our children to pass on the wisdom he gives them to us for our reflection and meditation he gives them to us for our building up of one another so we don't fall into the trap of Job's friends and he gives them to us so that we might take our place amongst the godly who know what it is to be up and down and to praise God in both circumstances who honour him when the times are good and the times are bad he gives them to us out of his kindness so whoever's got ears to hear let them hear

Amen