

Seeking God And Delighting in Him Together

Psalm 42:1–5

Series: The Joys of Corporate Worship
Sermon by Ken Puls
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When you think about corporate worship, what first comes to mind?

When you are providentially hindered and unable to attend, what do you miss?

When you made the effort to come to the service today, what motivated you to attend?

What brings you the most joy in corporate worship?

Please open your Bibles to Psalm 42. Tonight, we begin a brief series from Psalm 42 and 43 on “The Joys of Corporate Worship.” These two psalms may at first seem like an unlikely source to learn about corporate worship. They are not composed by one who is in the midst of God’s people, enjoying the blessings of gathered worship. They are rather a lament of one who is providentially hindered from joining in worship—he is prevented from being in Jerusalem and is, at least temporarily, separated from the people of God.

In this lament the psalmist pours out his heart to God and reveals his longing to return to Jerusalem and gather once again with the people of God in worship. Through his words, we are taught what should be most desirable about worship. We learn why corporate worship is so necessary for the people of God.

Psalm 42 and 43 are actually a single psalm made up of three sections. Each section ends with a similar refrain. In each section the psalmist sings about an aspect of worship that he especially misses and longs to experience again.

The Joys of Corporate Worship.

- I. (42:1-4) The Joy of Seeking God and Delighting in Him Together
(42:5) *Refrain*
- II. (42:6-10) The Joy of Finding Strength and Encouragement in Times of Suffering
(42:11) *Refrain*

III. (43:1-4) The Joy of Walking Together in Light and Truth
(43:5) Refrain

Tonight, we will focus only on the first section and refrain: The Joy of Seeking and Delighting in God Together (42:1-5). Next week, Lord-willing, we will continue with section two.

Let us begin by reading both Psalm 42 and 43:

PSALM 42 To the Chief Musician, A Maschil of the Sons of Korah

1 As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul for You, O God.

2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?

3 My tears have been my food day and night,
While they continually say to me, "Where is your God?"

4 These *things* I remember as I pour out my soul within me:
How I used to go with the throng,
Leading them to the house of God
With a voice of loud singing and thanksgiving,
A multitude observing *the pilgrim* festival.

5 Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And *why* are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I will again give thanks to Him.
In His presence *is* salvation.

6 O my God, my soul is cast down within me;
Therefore, I will remember You from the land of the Jordan,
And from the heights of Hermon, From the Hill Mizar.

7 Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls;
All Your waves and billows have gone over me.

8 The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime,
And in the night His song shall be with me—
A prayer to the God of my life.

9 I will say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"

10 As with a breaking of my bones, My enemies reproach me,
While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

11 Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And *why* are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I will again give thanks to Him,
The salvation of my countenance and my God.

PSALM 43

1 Vindicate me, O God, And plead my cause against an ungodly nation;
Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man!

2 For You are the God of my strength; Why do You cast me off?
Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

- 3 Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me;
Let them bring me to Your holy hill And to Your tabernacle.
- 4 Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy;
And I will give thanks to You with a harp, O God my God.
- 5 Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And *why* are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I will again give thanks to Him,
The salvation of my countenance and my God.

Translation from Kenneth Puls, *Musical Praise and Thanksgiving in the Old Testament: Word Studies on Hebrew Terms in The Old Testament Related to Praise and Thanksgiving in the Context of Music* (PhD Dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998).

The title of Psalm 42 indicates that it is a *maschil* (מִשְׁכִּיל). A *maschil* was a lyrical poem used in the teaching ministry of the Levites. We often think of the Levites in the Old Testament as the ones responsible to help the priests in the ministry of the tabernacle and the Temple. The Levites, however, had a much wider ministry. They were responsible for teaching Israel to love God and obey His Word. Part of their instruction included the singing of psalms. Psalm 42, in particular, teaches the importance and necessity of corporate worship. The title of the psalm also tells us that it is “to the Chief Musician” —a song given to the Temple musicians for use in the gathered worship of God’s people—and that it is composed by the Sons of Korah.

This psalm is a lament that begins with a cry of longing. In this cry of longing we see the first joy of corporate worship. The psalmist longs again to experience the presence of God.

The first Joy of Corporate Worship is the Joy of Seeking God and Delighting in Him together.

Read again verses 1 and 2:

- Psalm 42:1 As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul for You, O God.
- 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?

When the psalmist thought of going to Jerusalem to the Temple, his greatest longing was to meet with God. What he misses the most about worshipping God with the people of God is delighting in the presence of God.

Notice that he considers this communion with God in worship as a necessity, not an option. He describes his desire of God as a deer panting or yearning for water. As a deer needs water to revive, refresh, and sustain life, so the soul needs communion with the living God.

Our highest desire and greatest delight, as God’s people, must be for God Himself.

Nothing else can satisfy. We were made for God. We were designed and fashioned for His glory. He alone can revive us, refresh us, and sustain our lives.

Psalm 100:3 reminds us:

Psalm 100:3 Know that the Lord, He is God;
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

And so we are exhorted:

Psalm 100:4 Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
And into His courts with praise.
Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

When we enter into worship, we go to meet with God. We go to thank Him, to praise Him, and to bless His name. *He* is our joy and our delight!

How vital is it for us to delight in God?

Turn for a moment to Jeremiah 2:12–13. I want you to see in this passage something astonishing—something that should horrify us—something that God describes as evil. Listen as God indicts His people:

Jeremiah 2:12 Be astonished, O heavens, at this,
And be horribly afraid;
Be very desolate,” says the Lord.
13 “For My people have committed two evils:
They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters,
And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.

What happens when we seek joy and delight apart from God? What happens when we abandon worship, turn away from God, and pursue our own agenda and pleasures? We are, in the words of Jeremiah 2, carving for ourselves cisterns—broken cisterns—cisterns that will certainly, given enough time, break, dry up, and prove to be entirely unsatisfying and unfulfilling.

Notice how terrible God considers this sin. The heavens are astonished! WHY? Because in heaven there is no greater joy than being in the presence of God. Israel committed a great sin, because they forsook God to find delight in other places. They looked for water in dry, broken cisterns, when all the while the Fountain of Life was near.

Consider the abundance of joy God has given us in Himself:

Psalm 16:11 You will show me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 36:7 How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!
Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.
8 They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house,
And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.

For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light.

Our desire for pleasure and joy can only be quenched by God Himself.

We long for the worship of God, for His presence and blessing in the midst of His church, because we realize that God alone is eternally satisfying and worthy of our affections. There is no better use of time and energy and effort than in the pursuit of God. Only this pursuit will prove ultimately worthwhile.

Look now in verse three:

Psalm 42:3 My tears have been my food day and night,
While they continually say to me, "Where is your God?"

The psalmist reveals that he is in the midst of severe trial and persecution. In fact, his suffering and trials are so great that those around him are asking: "Where is your God?" This insult to the glory and honor of God causes the psalmist to weep and lament. He longs to testify to the goodness of God and offer thanksgiving for all the great works of God.

Notice the next verse:

Psalm 42:4 These *things* I remember as I pour out my soul within me:
How I used to go with the throng,
Leading them to the house of God
With a voice of loud singing and thanksgiving,
A multitude observing *the pilgrim* festival.

In the midst of this severe affliction, the psalmist remembers when he was with the people of God, worshipping in Jerusalem. He longs to return. He desires to once again be in Jerusalem celebrating the festivals with loud singing and thanksgiving among the community of faith.

The pilgrim festivals were a significant part of Old Testament worship for the nation of Israel. Three times a year the men of Israel were required to journey to Jerusalem to participate in gathered worship with the whole covenant nation.

Back in verse 2 the psalmist had asked: "When shall I come and appear before God?" In the context of Old Testament worship, this phrase refers to going to the Temple in Jerusalem and worshipping God in the midst of the covenant community of Israel.

These pilgrim festivals are mentioned in Exodus 23:14-16

Exodus 23:14–16 "Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field.

The pilgrim festivals were:

- **Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread** at the beginning of the harvest of the winter barley crop in the spring.
- **The Feast of Weeks or Harvest** at the end of the wheat harvest in the summer.
- And the **Ingathering or Feast of Tabernacles** in the autumn at the harvest of olives and grapes.

These were times of national celebration and the desire of every Israelite was to be in Jerusalem at God's Temple for these special times of worship.

These festivals would include the bringing of offerings. One of these offerings was the peace offering, where the worshipper would give thanks and publicly testify to the goodness of God in his behalf. His thanksgiving was made public in the service so that all Israel could be encouraged and join in his thanks, as they heard how God was at work in their midst.

Here in Psalm 42 the psalmist longs for these times of public worship to encourage his soul.

Turn for a moment to Psalm 137. This is another lament.

This lament is sung by those in exile as they longed for the corporate worship of God's people.

Psalm 137:1 By the rivers of Babylon,
 There we sat down, yea, we wept
 When we remembered Zion.

2 We hung our harps
 Upon the willows in the midst of it.

3 For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song,
 And those who plundered us requested mirth,
 Saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

4 How shall we sing the Lord's song
 In a foreign land?

5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
 Let my right hand forget its skill!

6 If I do not remember you,
 Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—
 If I do not exalt Jerusalem
 Above my chief joy.

Their chief joy was gathering with the people of God to give thanks and worship to God. This was the utmost desire of the psalmist in Psalm 42 as well.

But notice in Psalm 42:5 what the psalmist does next, in the refrain:

Psalm 42:5 Why are you cast down, O my soul?
 And *why* are you disquieted within me?
 Hope in God, for I will again give thanks to Him.
 In His presence *is* salvation.

Here the psalmist turns from remembering to meditating. Instead of addressing and instructing others, he addresses himself. In other words, he starts preaching to his own soul.

He places his trust fully in God, knowing that God will save him and bring him out of his difficulties. He is confident that he will again return and bring an offering of thanksgiving to testify of God's mercy in the hearing of all God's people. He sees his present affliction as an opportunity for God to manifest His salvation and as an opportunity for future praise and thanksgiving among the whole congregation. His suffering will one day serve to strengthen all of God's people as they rejoice in His deliverance. He trusts this to be true. But he must remind himself. He must preach truth to his soul and exhort himself once again to look to God.

Let me close now with a few words of application.

How does your attitude toward church, the gathering of our congregation for worship, compare to the heart of the psalmist?

What is your chief joy in coming to this place to be present in the services?

- Do you come primarily for the preaching? to hear a good sermon
- Do you come for the teaching? to hear good theology and instruction
- Or do you come for the music? to enjoy the singing

These are all good things, but they are means of worship, outward forms that profit nothing unless you are first and foremost in pursuit of God and coming to meet Him.

What is your chief joy?

Can you say with the psalmist that your heart most longs to meet with God and enjoy Him?

We have little reason to come to church if it is only to observe the ordinances and practice the outward ceremonies and acts (be they preaching, singing, teaching...). These activities in themselves will never keep our attention and sustain our interest. If our hearts do not love God and long for Him (by the power of His regenerating Spirit), we will not find the simple corporate worship of God's people attractive and inviting.

Ask yourself: Why did I come this evening?

- Perhaps you are here because you are expected to be here
- Because it is part of the weekly routine, part of the schedule
- Because people would notice if you were not here
- Maybe you are here because you have to, because your parents insist

Now, God may use all these things in His providence to bring people to church, but God offers much greater motivation for being here: the joy of His presence!

If you have not known that joy, if you have not tasted the delight of His salvation, then accept His gracious invitation. Come to Christ and you will find that God will make Himself precious to You. You will find great delight in seeking God and worshipping Him together with His people.

I want to leave you this evening with a question to ponder. I am not going to answer the question—we will return to it, Lord-willing, next week when we continue our study of the psalm. BUT I want to give you the question now so you can think about it this week.

We know that God is present everywhere. David asks in Psalm 139, “Where can I flee from Your presence?” Even in the Old Testament, God was always near His people.

So, tell me—

Why does the psalmist in Psalm 42 and 43 have this thirst for God and His presence? Why does he so long to seek after God in a setting of *corporate* worship?

And what about today in the New Testament age?

In Hebrews 13:5 God promises that He will never leave us or forsake us. We need no longer travel to Jerusalem to worship; God has made our hearts the Temple of His Spirit. We can worship God in Spirit and in truth in any place and at any time.

So, is it really as important as the psalmist seems to indicate, that we gather together to seek God? Is it really necessary to worship God as a gathered church?

Or can we worship God just as well apart from each other, in the privacy of our own hearts and in our own homes?

Consider these questions this week as you look forward to and anticipate the meeting of God’s people on the Lord’s Day.

Let us pray.

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