

# Finding Strength and Encouragement In Times of Suffering

Psalm 42:6–11

Series: The Joys of Corporate Worship  
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Open your Bibles this evening to Psalm 42 and 43. Last time I had an opportunity to bring God's Word to you, we began a study of these two psalms as they relate to corporate worship. The psalmist who composed Psalm 42 and 43 was one of the sons of Korah. He was providentially hindered from being in Jerusalem and thus could not take part in the pilgrim festivals of Israel and worship God with all those who gathered. He was in the midst of trial and persecution, and was separated, at least for a time, from the people of God. As he pours out his lament and seeks God's help, he reveals his longing to worship God with the multitude in Jerusalem. He reveals, as well, why corporate worship is so precious to him.

This evening I want us to once again consider **the joys of corporate worship**.

What is it about *corporate* worship—

That worship of God that we enjoy, as we gather at certain times in a designated place to seek God together, to sing and pray together, and to hear God's Word read and taught together

What is it about *corporate* worship that is so necessary and desirable? Why does the psalmist long for worship in the company of God's people?

If you remember, last time I left you with a question. We understand from Scripture that God is present everywhere. He has promised never to leave us or forsake us. God was near the psalmist as he poured out his lament. So, what is this thirst that the psalmist has for God and His presence?

Why does he long to meet with God in a setting of corporate worship?

**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?**

I hope to demonstrate for you as we continue to work through this psalm, that *corporate worship* really is necessary in God's design of worship, both in the Old and New Testaments. It is essential that we come together as God's people, as His gathered church to seek Him in worship. There are joys and blessings that we will miss and sorely lack if we neglect the frequent and consistent meeting together of the visible church in this place.

As I mentioned last week, the two Psalms (42 and 43) have three larger sections or stanzas, each ending with a refrain. In each section the psalmist sings about an aspect of worship that he especially misses and longs to experience again.

Last time we met we looked at the first stanza in Psalm 42:1-4 and its refrain in verse 5.

In this stanza the psalmist expressed—**The Joy of Seeking God and Delighting in Him Together**

The first thing that the psalmist mentions, when he thinks about going to Jerusalem to worship, is the presence of God Himself. Seeking God, meeting with God, hearing of God, learning about God, lifting praise to God, knowing God, and enjoying God—this was the psalmist's chief joy in worship.

This evening we are going to consider the second joy of corporate worship, the focus of the second stanza in Psalm 42 (verses 6-10) and the second refrain in verse 11.

### **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*

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).

Stanza two begins in Psalm 42:6 with a restatement of the plea of the refrain from verse 5. Though he has questioned his soul and exhorted himself in verse 5 to “Hope in God,” he confesses in verse 6 that he is still downcast and troubled. He prays:

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.

The psalmist is in the midst of a difficult trial, facing persecution from his enemies because of his affliction. But he has already meditated on knowing and enjoying God in the first stanza (verses 1-4). He remembers the joy of being with God's people, conversing about God, speaking with one another about God, hearing what God has done in the lives of His people in their afflictions.

Like in the first stanza, the psalmist does not dwell on his troubles, but begins again to focus on God. He begins to remember places where God had displayed His power, saving and delivering His people: the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon, the Hill Mizar, ...

Scholars have debated as the exact location and significance of these places, but they were all most likely places mentioned in the prayers of God's people and in the songs of Israel sung in Jerusalem as they brought their peace offerings, giving praise and thanksgiving to God.

The psalmist recalls each place as a testimony to answered prayer. Each place was a reminder to Israel to look to God and give thanks. The psalmist here in Psalm 42 identifies himself as a member of the covenant community. And what God has done for Israel, God has done for him. Likewise, what God has shown He will do for Israel, God can indeed do for him!

This recounting of God's acts of strength and kindness in behalf of His people is the second joy of corporate worship. The psalmist longs to be with the people of God because there he finds—

### **The Joy of Strength and Encouragement in Times of Suffering**

In corporate worship we testify to one another in our praise and thanksgiving of the goodness of God. We are united together as one body, one building set upon the Cornerstone of Christ. Because we are so knit together, our joys and trials are shared. When one suffers, we all suffer. We all go to God in petition and lamentation. When one rejoices, we all rejoice. We all join together in praise and thanksgiving.

I find strength in the goodness that God gives to each of you, because we are one body in Christ and are united in serving Christ. I sorrow when you are suffering, because, as God afflicts His people to work good in us, the affliction touches and sanctifies us all. It is God's design that we are sanctified and conformed to Christ's image *together*.

When we separate ourselves from worship and from being with God's people, we set ourselves up for unnecessary misery. We will lack the strength and the encouragement that God gives in corporate worship—strength that comes through our ministry to one another.

In fact, the psalmist fears in this psalm that his strength is too weak. He says in verse 7—

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

Here the psalmist reveals the intensity of his sorrow and suffering. Deep calls unto deep—that is each trouble seems to summon more and more. This time of trial has confounded him; he cannot of himself understand why it is happening. He describes his suffering as a torrent or waterfall that is bringing an overwhelming flood.

But again, he remembers God.

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.

The psalmist looks toward a future deliverance with the certainty of God's help and mercy. Even in the midst of trial the psalmist is hopeful that God will hear and answer prayer.

Notice that the psalmist expresses confidence in God both in the daytime and in the night. Regardless of whether life seems dark or light, God is in control and God's people can rejoice. In the next verse the psalmist refers to God as "my Rock."

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?"

God is the Rock, the immovable place of refuge in time of storm.

In these two verses the psalmist pleads with God about his suffering and persecution. He is concerned for God's glory—his enemies are taunting him because he is suffering, saying that God must have forsaken him to allow him to be in such difficulty. This grieves him to his very being, crushing him as if these enemies were breaking his bones.

The psalmist is, I believe, trying to understand his suffering, trying to make sense of what God is doing in his life, by bringing this affliction.

### **And this is why, the psalmist longs for and desires worship!**

It is only in the greater context of God's glory that our afflictions and suffering will make sense. If we stay in our own little worlds and keep our eyes reigned in on ourselves, we can never understand, or have hope of understanding, why things happen the way they do. We must look to God and live by faith, trusting that He knows best in all our circumstances and affairs of life.

This brings us back to worship—there is no better place to be, in order to gain a larger perspective on the glory of God than in worship. If things are happening to you in your life right now that you just can't explain, that you just can't figure out, that stretches your theology to the limit, then your heart should long to be with the people of God in pursuit of God in worship.

Where can you go when life just doesn't make sense? What can you do when life seems backwards? How can it be that the wicked so often seem to prosper, while those who love God endure hardship and suffering?

Turn for a moment to Psalm 73. Asaph, the composer of this psalm, is struggling with this very question. He is trying to make sense of life. I want to you notice *where* he discovers the answer that he seeks. Listen as I read Psalm 73.

Psalm 73:1 Truly God is good to Israel,  
To such as are pure in heart.  
2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;  
My steps had nearly slipped.  
3 For I was envious of the boastful,  
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.  
4 For there are no pangs in their death,  
But their strength is firm.  
5 They are not in trouble as other men,  
Nor are they plagued like other men.  
6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace;  
Violence covers them like a garment.  
7 Their eyes bulge with abundance;  
They have more than heart could wish.  
8 They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression;  
They speak loftily.  
9 They set their mouth against the heavens,  
And their tongue walks through the earth.  
10 Therefore his people return here,  
And waters of a full cup are drained by them.  
11 And they say, "How does God know?  
And is there knowledge in the Most High?"  
12 Behold, these are the ungodly,  
Who are always at ease;  
They increase in riches.  
13 Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain,  
And washed my hands in innocence.  
14 For all day long I have been plagued,  
And chastened every morning.  
15 If I had said, "I will speak thus,"  
Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children.  
16 When I thought how to understand this,  
It was too painful for me—  
17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God;  
Then I understood their end.  
18 Surely You set them in slippery places;  
You cast them down to destruction.  
19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment!  
They are utterly consumed with terrors.  
20 As a dream when one awakes,  
So, Lord, when You awake,  
You shall despise their image.  
21 Thus my heart was grieved,  
And I was vexed in my mind.  
22 I was so foolish and ignorant;  
I was like a beast before You.  
23 Nevertheless I am continually with You;  
You hold me by my right hand.

24 You will guide me with Your counsel,  
 And afterward receive me to glory.  
 25 Whom have I in heaven but You?  
 And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.  
 26 My flesh and my heart fail;  
 But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.  
 27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish;  
 You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.  
 28 But it is good for me to draw near to God;  
 I have put my trust in the Lord God,  
 That I may declare all Your works.

Notice verse 17 of Psalm 73. It is when Asaph joined with God’s people in worship that he finally began to understand. What he *thought* was prosperity was actually a slippery slope leading down to destruction and eternal misery. What he *thought* was affliction was actually a blessed gift of God to cause him to lean and trust more in God for his own good.

**Worship corrects our thinking and causes us to see things in their true light.**

It is as we rest in God and worship Him, that we realize more and more that all things exist for Him and for His glory. He works all things together for our good and for His own glory, to those who are the called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

In an earlier study (Psalm 1), we looked at an overview of the psalms. We saw how the very structure of the book of Psalms teaches us this truth. Near the beginning of the book there are numerous laments and petitions, but as you get closer to the end, praise more and more dominates, until the last verse where “everything that has breath” is praising the Lord to His glory.

As we come to worship, we are like the psalmists. We each have our own struggles, trials, and afflictions. We also come with our joys and our testimonies of answered prayers. By ourselves, our small troubles may seem very large and be very perplexing. But in worship, God draws us together from all of our various pursuits and directions, and He gives us ONE pursuit and ONE direction—His glory. And as we seek His glory together, all of our lives begin to make sense. Even though we may not understand the details, we see that we fit into a greater plan that exalts and magnifies our God.

**In worship everything moves toward praise.**

Notice now in the next verse (verse 11) the psalmist repeats the refrain:

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.

Here the psalmist once again turns from remembering and begins meditating. He once again preaches to himself, confident that he will again return to Jerusalem and participate in worship with God’s people. He is confident that God will turn this time of suffering into an occasion for

praise, that his life may serve to strengthen and encourage all the people of God as they hear of the greatness of God.

The psalmist desires corporate worship, because here he can make sense of his suffering. Here he can see more clearly how his life is in God and is made to serve God and honor God. Here he can see God at work, not only in his own life, but in the lives of fellow believers. Here their sufferings also make sense.

Worship is essential, because it is in worship that we gain a proper perspective of life and all our circumstances. This is where we can look beyond ourselves and see the bigger picture and begin to make sense of life. We can see how all our small trials and troubles fit into a much larger plan, all moving towards God's glory and our good.

In Psalm 46, another psalm by the sons of Korah, we read of a river that brings delight.

Psalm 46:4            There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God,  
                                 The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.  
                                 5            God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved;  
                                 God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.

Notice the source of this joy that "shall make glad the city of God." It is God Himself dwelling in the midst of His people. "God with us" was their joy. God made Himself manifest in the midst of His people as they gathered regularly to honor Him in worship.

One of the joys of corporate worship is the strength and encouragement we gain, even in the face of overwhelming trials, because we can see in the testimonies, in the praises, in the songs, in the proclamation of God's Word—in all we do together, united by God's Spirit, that **God is in our midst**. The Lord of hosts is with us! There is something much greater going on in this world than just our small lives!

### **We are gathered in His name and He is here in our midst!**

Do you believe that? Do you understand the implications of that? This marvelous truth can stop us and quiet us and calm us and make us still before God. All of life makes sense when we know that God is in our midst and He is working His perfect plan to complete the good work He has begun.

Let us pray.

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