

Guest Preacher - Rev. Hugh Ferrier

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Preacher: Rev. Hugh Ferrier

[0 : 00] Well, friends, would you turn with me, please, the words we read together in Psalm 42.! Psalm 42, and reading again at verse 6.! Psalm 42 and verse 6, where the psalmist says, My soul is cast down within me.

My soul is cast down within me. The psalms are what we might call soul songs. That is, they are songs that come from the heart, and they address matters of the heart, especially in relation to God. And sometimes we might find the psalmist expressing his awe, his wonder at who God is and what God has done or is doing or will do in his life.

But we often find the psalmist not so much engaged in awe and wonder as much as engaged in lament, displaying feelings of displacement, disorientation, desolation, wondering what God is actually doing in his life, what God is going to do with his life.

And Psalm 42 is one of those psalms where we find the psalmist speaking about his soul being cast down. He is left with nothing but tears and tormentors.

[1 : 20] And tonight we're going to look at it under three headings. We're going to look at the psalmist's appetite, the psalmist's anguish, and then the psalmist's assurance.

The psalmist's appetite, his anguish, and his assurance. First, the psalmist's appetite, and you see that in verses 1 and 2, where the psalmist draws attention to his appetite.

We can start by noting the details that are given about the psalm. We're told that it's a *mascal*. That is a musical term that highlights that this is a song, and not just any old song, but a song that provides instruction.

We're told that it's to the choir master. It's a song that has been given not simply for private use, but for public worship. And we're told that it's of the sons of Korah.

It has been composed by the descendants of the Levite priest, Korah. And having noted these details, we can hear the psalmist's declaration, verses 1 and 2.

[2 : 20] The psalmist begins with a simile. Look at verse 1. He presents an image, very vivid image, of a deer panting for flowing streams, longing to have its life-sapping thirst quenched.

And he says that his own soul, his whole being, pants for God in a similar manner. Richard Phillips puts it this way, Like a deer that drinks deeply from the refreshing stream, the psalmist knows that through fellowship with God, the vigor will return to his spirit.

The divine presence is not a luxury, but a necessity to his existence. And the psalmist moves from that simile to speaking about his satisfaction.

Look at the beginning of verse 2. He says now that his soul thirsts for God. And the God whom his soul thirsts for, he says, is the living God.

More literally, the God of life. And some suggest that that is a reference to the fact that this is the God who lives. In comparison to the lifeless deities, the lifeless idols of the pagans.

[3 : 31] Others suggest that this is a reference to the fact that the psalmist God is the God who gives life. It probably makes most sense to take it as referring to both.

This is the living God, and the living God gives life. And it's only this God, the psalmist says, who can quench his thirst, who can truly satisfy him.

And after speaking about his satisfaction, the psalmist speaks about the sanctuary. Look at verse 2 again. He asks when he'll be able to come and appear before this God.

That is a standard way of describing attendance at the tabernacle and later the temple where God's presence was concentrated. You know, sometimes we can be tempted to think of the tabernacle and the temple as being places of empty ritual.

Places where endless sacrifices were offered to earn, merit, gain the favor of God. But the whole purpose of the tabernacle and laterally the temple was to draw a person into fellowship with God.

[4 : 42] Draw a person into relationship with God. Draw a person into communion with the God who had chosen to dwell there. And that is why the psalmist is longing to appear before God in his temple, in his tabernacle, in his sanctuary.

He's saying, I'm thirsting for God. And therefore I want to be in the place where my God has said he will be present. Now friends, as we consider these verses, we're being shown the appetite that a believer should have.

The appetite that a believer should have. That's what we see in Psalm 42. Here we find the psalmist speaking about the deer, panting for flowing streams.

And he says that his own soul pants for God, thirsts for God in a similar manner. That is the appetite that the psalmist has.

And that's worth our attention. Many of you probably remember when I first came here 14 years ago and I had a scooter, 125cc scooter. But before that, when I was 18, I had a 50cc scooter.

[5 : 52] Very old vehicle, cheap vehicle, unreliable vehicle. And one hot summer day, I took that scooter out for a run and it stopped running five miles away from my parents' house.

And I had to push it the whole way back up the hill, wearing my leather jacket, wearing the helmet because there was nowhere else to put it. The hot summer sun shining down on me.

And all I could think about, that whole five mile walk, trudging along, pushing the scooter along, was about a can of Fanta that I left in the fridge.

It was driving me crazy. I couldn't think about anything else, anyone else, just that can of Fanta.

And that is the attitude, that is the appetite that Psalm 42 says that a believer ought to have when it comes to the living God.

We're not merely interested in Him. They are rather thirsting after Him. They have a cavernous craving for closeness with God.

[6 : 56] A cavernous craving for communion with God. We find the same sentiment being expressed by David in Psalm 63, where David says, O God, You are my God.

Earnestly I seek You. My soul thirsts for You. My flesh faints for You. As in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Once again, quoting Richard Phillips, True spirituality expresses itself in a longing for God.

Christianity is not a religion that merely consists in knowledge of doctrine, important as doctrine is. It is quite possible to know the Bible. It is quite possible to know the Bible well, yet live a worldly life if we are not thirstily pursuing after God.

And so tonight I want to ask whether or not you have such an appetite. Are you someone who longs after God?

[7 : 58] Are you someone who has a cavernous craving for closeness with God? Communion with God? Fellowship with God?

Intimacy with God? Are you someone who finds themselves saying, As a deer pants for flowing streams, so my soul longs for You, O God?

Or are you someone who lacks such an appetite? Someone who's maybe quite content to come along to church on a Sunday?

Hopes for a place in heaven when you die? Praise when things go wrong? But you have got no real desire for God Himself.

You see, I'm very concerned that it's more than possible for even some professing Christians to desire the gifts of God rather than the giver, God Himself.

[8 : 58] So I ask you the question tonight, friend, do you have this appetite? Do you have this hunger, this thirst, this craving for God and closeness with Him, communion with Him, fellowship with Him, intimacy with Him?

Where you're left saying, As a deer pants for flowing streams, so my soul longs for You, O God.

Well, that's the psalmist's appetite. We come second to the psalmist's anguish, verses 3 down to 7. Where the psalmist draws attention now to his anguish. Verses 3 and 4, the psalmist speaks about his enemies. The psalmist describes his misery at the beginning of verse 3.

He says that his tears have been his food day and night. The psalmist has lost his appetite, at least his appetite for food. All that he's left with is this all-consuming grief that results in tears.

And after describing his misery, the psalmist speaks about the mockers who are contributing to it.

Look again at verse 3. He refers to unnamed people who are speaking to him all the day long.

[10:09] And as they speak to him, they keep presenting him with the taunting question, Where is your God? The question suggests that maybe God isn't real.

And is therefore unable to help him. Or maybe God is real. But he's unwilling to help him. Where's your God? They're saying. And as he speaks about the misery and mockery that he's enduring, The psalmist's memory goes back to better days.

Look at verse 4. He pours out his soul and finds himself remembering certain things. He remembers how he would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God.

He remembers how the multitude would keep the festivals of God with glad shouts and songs of praise. The psalmist is thinking about happier times.

Blessed times. Times of favor. Involving the worship of God with the people of God. But right now, he is isolated from the people of God.

[11:13] And because he is isolated from the people of God, He feels isolated from the very presence of God. I recently listened to a sermon by Melvin Tinker on this psalm.

And he made the following observation. Listen to this. We should not be surprised when people feel far from God if they are not meeting with the people of God.

Vibrant faith is anesthetized, slowly put to death by such isolation. Friends, withdrawal from fellowship from the people of God does a person absolutely no good when it comes to their spiritual life.

Instead, it slowly but steadily erodes their fellowship with God. Their vibrancy, their vitality, their faith. You know that yourself.

That yes, you can maybe listen to wonderful sermons online. Fantastic sermons online. But there is no substitute, is there, for just being with the Lord's people.

[12:24] And you might not hear as well-crafted and well-polished sermons from this pulpit as you might hear from Alistair Begg or John Piper or anyone else online. But friends, there is no substitute for being with the Lord's people.

And that is what the psalmist was missing out on. And he moves from speaking about his enemies to giving an exhortation, verses 5 and 6.

We hear the question that the psalmist asks. Look at verse 5. Throughout the verses, he has been addressing God, but he now addresses his soul, his innermost being. And he asks his soul why it's cast down, why it is in turmoil within him.

And after hearing the question that the psalmist asks, we hear the counsel that he gives. Look at verse 5 and 6 again. He counsels his soul to hope in God.

Reminds his soul that this God is his salvation and his God. And he says that a day will come, a day will certainly come, when he will once again praise his God.

[13:31] And the psalmist moves from giving that exhortation, though, to describing his emotions, verses 6 and 7. The psalmist now, it's very strange, but he sinks into even deeper despondency in verse 6.

He says that his soul is now cast down within him. And while his soul is cast down, he remembers God, while he finds himself in the land of Jordan, the land of Hermon, the land of Mount Mizar.

All three of these areas were in the very far north of Israel, far from Jerusalem, where the temple of God, the tabernacle of God, the presence of God with his people was concentrated.

And the psalmist continues by highlighting the difficulties that he's currently going through, verse 7, while he's in that area. He says now that deep calls to deep.

A picture of one watery abyss calling out to another watery abyss. He speaks about the roaring of God's waterfalls. And he says that God's breakers, God's waves, are going over him.

[14:42] The psalmist feels like he's been swamped. He's been submerged. He is sinking under all the difficulties that God seems to be sending in his direction.

Now, friends, as we consider these verses, we're not just showing the appetite that a believer should have, but also the anguish that a believer can express. That's what we see in Psalm 42.

Remember, in these verses, the psalmist is primarily talking to the Lord, talking to his God. And he speaks to God about his tears and his tormentors and the turmoil that has left his soul feeling so cast down.

This is the anguish that the psalmist expresses. And again, that's worth our attention. I'm not sure if any of the younger ones here have ever read the Chronicles of Narnia.

I love the Chronicles of Narnia. And one of the best books in the series is The Horse and His Boy. And in The Horse and His Boy, C.S. Lewis tells a story about a young boy called Shasta.
[15 : 50] And Shasta is taken from his parents while he's still an infant, still a very young child. And he's brought up by a cruel man who has a vicious temper and treats him as nothing more than a slave.

And eventually, Shasta manages to escape and he makes friends with a girl called Aravis and two talking horses. But he soon finds himself separated from them and he is convinced that they have abandoned him because his whole life has been one of abandonment by various people. And finally, Shasta is cornered by a lion whom he later discovers to be the lion Aslan. But Shasta is terrified. He's convinced that the lion is going to kill him and eat him.

And he wails, I am the unluckiest boy in the whole world. And Aslan gently speaks to him and says, and I love it, he says, tell me your sorrows.

He gives Shasta the opportunity to unburden his heart and share about all the difficulties, all the upsets, all the frustrations that he has gone through in his short life.

[17 : 02] Tell me your sorrows. And you know, friends, what we find in the gospel is a Jesus who allows his people to tell them their sorrows.

This is the Jesus, remember, who knew what it was to feel like his own soul was crushed, overwhelmed to the point of death. He knows.

And he doesn't hide. And he doesn't hide. He doesn't hold back from Mary and Martha, the two sisters of Lazarus, when they come to him with their tears, with their questions, with their troubles. He doesn't run away and say, please don't tell me your problems. I've got enough problems of my own. He doesn't hide away from Mary Magdalene when she's there at the garden tomb and she's sobbing uncontrollably and repeatedly and thinks that the body of Jesus has been stolen by the gardener.

He allows her to bring her tears, her sorrows to him. And friends, Jesus hasn't changed. The Puritan Thomas Goodwin comments on Christ being a sympathetic high priest from Hebrews 4.

[18 : 13] And he goes so far as to say this. Now, listen to this, friends. This is a Puritan. This isn't some modern free church minister. This is a Puritan. And he says this, What a thought.

Christ's heart beats. And his affections yearn toward his people even while he's in glory. And then Goodwin makes this comment.

And you and I would be scandalized if anybody else said this. But Goodwin says that Christ's heart in glory beats a little faster when he sees his people and they lay their hands on his breast.

You know, friends, this means that every single Christian is permitted to bring all their heartache and all their heartbreak to Jesus. All their troubles, all their turmoil, all their torments, all their trauma.

And Jesus will never, never, never turn away. Jesus has given us this psalm. He has given us Psalm 42 to remind us that we can pour out our souls, our hearts, our innermost beings to him.

[19 : 30] And so tonight I want to ask whether or not you are going to Jesus with your anguish. You know, sometimes, this is my hobby horse maybe in the high free, but sometimes we meet people in church on Sundays or we meet people in the supermarket on Mondays or we meet people when we're walking around maybe the castle grounds on our weekdays and they ask us how we are.

And we tell them, we're fine. I'm fine. How are you? I'm fine. I'm fine. But the reality is we're not fine. I often think that the people who say they're fine are the people who are furthest from fine. The reality is that we might feel like our souls are cast down because of something that we are currently going through or maybe something that a loved one, someone whom we love more than life itself is going through.

We are not fine. But friends, we do not need to tell Jesus that we are fine. We can tell Jesus our sorrows.

Isn't that a thought? Isn't that something for you to hold on to as you leave this building later on that you have a Jesus who you can tell your sorrows to?

[20 : 49] Tell him about all the people that are leaving you worried, anxious, upset, angry, frustrated, all the things you're going through that you feel like are breaking you and getting on top of you? You can tell Jesus your sorrows because this psalm shows us we can.

But third and finally, we come to the psalmist assurance. The psalmist assurance, verses 8 to 11, where the psalmist draws attention now to his assurance.

Verse 8, the psalmist speaks about his confidence. And he starts by speaking about what God does. Beginning of verse 8, he says that by day, the Lord commands his steadfast love.

That word steadfast love is the Hebrew word *hesed*. It means loyal love, committed love, love that holds on, love that doesn't let go. And having spoken about what God does, the psalmist speaks about what he himself does.

Look again at verse 8. He says that at night, when things always seem much worse. I don't know if you're like me. I wake up at 3 in the morning, 4 in the morning most nights, and everything seems to be much worse than it is at 7 in the morning.

[22 : 00] It's always worse at night. But here's the psalmist, and he says that even at night, when things might normally seem to be at their very worst, their very darkest, the Lord's song is with him.

And he says that that song is a prayer to the God of his life. And we move from the psalmist's confidence, though, to his complaint. Look at verse 9 and 10.

Don't you see the waves in this psalm? One minute he's up, one minute he's down. The psalmist makes an affirmation at the beginning of verse 9. He speaks about God being a rock, an image of strength, stability, security.

And having made that affirmation, the psalmist immediately speaks about his sense of abandonment. Verse 9 again. He's just said, God is my rock. But now he asks his rock, why have you forgotten me?

He knows in his head who his God is. But at the same time, his circumstances seem to suggest that God is something else.

[23 : 05] His head says, God is your rock. And yet there's a part of his mind that says, well, where is your rock? And after speaking about his abandonment, or at least sense of abandonment, the psalmist speaks about his adversaries again.

Verse 9 and 10. He says that he goes about mourning because of the oppression of his enemy. He says that his adversaries taunt him. He says that their words are like a deadly wound in his bones. And he says that all day long they ask him the same question, where is your God? But we move from the psalmist's complaint to his conclusion. Verse 11.

And we hear the question that the psalmist asks, beginning of verse 11. Once again, he addresses his soul, his innermost being. Once again, he asks his soul why it's cast down, why it's in turmoil.

And having heard the question, we hear the counsel that the psalmist provides, end of verse 11.

Once again, he counsels his soul to hope in God. Once again, he reminds his soul that his God is his salvation and his God.

[24 : 11] And once again, he tells his soul that a day will come when he will praise his God. Please note the way, friends, that the psalm doesn't end with the darkness lifting.

But with the anticipation and the expectation that one day, one day, maybe not even in this life, the darkness will lift.

And he will praise his God, the God of his salvation. Well, friends, as we consider these verses, we're being shown not just the appetite that a believer should have and the anguish that a believer can express, but also the assurance that a believer must hold.

That's what we see in Psalm 42. Here's the psalmist. His soul is crushed. Soul is cast down. But despite this, he reminds himself of one central truth.

Verse 8. God's steadfast love. That is the assurance that the psalmist holds onto in the midst of everything. God's steadfast love that he commands every day.

[25 : 18] And again, that's worth our attention. Dale Rolfe Davis tells a story about when Martin Lloyd-Jones, great preacher from Westminster Chapel in London, went to visit his friend, Paul Cook.

Paul Cook was a pastor, but he was going through a real season of discouragement, despondency, even depression in the ministry. And his wife, Faith, was bearing the brunt of it.

It was a strain for her. It was a struggle for her, seeing what her husband was going through. And as he prepared to leave the house, Martin Lloyd-Jones grasped hold of Faith Cook's hand.

And he said to her, remember the love of God. Remember the love of God. And later in life, Faith Cook would say that it was those words, more than anything else, that carried her through the distress of the months that followed.

Remember the love of God. And then Dale Rolfe Davis goes on to say this, whatever the grimness and the darkness that you might be facing, remember the love of God.

[26 : 40] Sometimes that's all that a believer can hold on to. They've got nothing else to hold on to, just this assurance of God's love that will not let them go.

God's love that has taken hold of them. I love that the apostle Paul could say, nothing in all creation, not even death itself, can separate a believer from.

Charles Spurgeon, who is absolutely no stranger to dark days, writes this in his comments in Psalm 42. He says, And so tonight, I just want to close by asking the question whether or not you, friend, are holding on to this assurance.

Are you someone tonight, friend, who is remembering the love of God? Are you someone who is able to take heart, take a little comfort, take a little confidence, even on your darkest days, your very worst days, even when your soul might feel very cast down?

Because you know that there is a love, God's love in Christ that will not let you go.

[28 : 25] That, friends, is why I love the Word of God. I love the fact, friends, that you and I do not need to rely on feeling loved by God. Because if you're like me, there might be days when you do not feel loved by God.

But the Word of God assures us that His love is steadfast. His love is constant. And He commands it every morning for His people.

So we remember the love of God. Regardless of what our feelings or our emotions or our experiences may tell us otherwise.

Remember the love of God. Well, as we think about this, let's sing these words of the psalm in closing. Psalm 42.

Let's sing psalms version. Psalm 42. Sing psalms, page 53, singing verses 1 down to 5. As pants the deer for flowing streams, so longs my soul, O God, for you.

[29 : 31] I thirst for God, the living God. When can I meet with God anew? My tears have been my constant food, both in the night and in the day. While all day long insistently, where is this God of yours, they say.

And down to verse 5. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why are you so disturbed in me? Trust God, for I will praise Him yet. My Saviour and my God is He. If you're able to stand for the singing, please do so.

As pants the deer for flowing streams, So longs my soul, O God, for you.

I thirst for God, the living God. When can I meet with God anew?

My tears have been my constant food, both in the night and in the day.

[30 : 55] While all day long insistently, where is this God of yours, they say.

As I pour out my soul in grief, These things I do remember still, How with the multitude I went, Up to God's house on Zion hill.

In their procession I would lead, As we approach with cheerful song, And shout of joy and thankfulness, Rejoicing with the festive throng.

Why are you downcast, O my soul?

Why are you so disturbed in me? Trust God, for I will praise Him yet.

[33 : 04] My Saviour and my God is He. Our God and our Father, Our prayer as we leave this building now is that, Maybe even if we came in here with downcast hearts, Maybe feeling crushed in particular ways, That we might be able to leave, Encouraged from being reminded that you are the God who invites people to pour out their anguished hearts to Him.

That we can bring all that might be on our minds, All that might be weighing heavily upon us, To Jesus, The one who, as we saw this morning, Is gentle and lowly in heart, And who doesn't hide or hold back from those who bring their anguish to Him.

And we pray that we would leave this building assured of the love of God in Christ. That even if our feelings might suggest otherwise, Our emotions might suggest otherwise, Our providence, our experience might suggest otherwise, That we would leave this building remembering, Holding on to the steadfast love of God in Christ.

A love that takes hold of a person, And will not let them go. So please part us with your blessing, And an awareness of your presence in our lives, As we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.