

A Homesick Soul

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[0:00] Okay, morning folks. Lovely to see you today. My name is Graham. I'm the pastor here. I'm a bit tired this morning. I haven't been on that weekend away yesterday, but it is lovely to be together as a church family. If you have a Bible, you're going to need Psalm 43 open in front of you.

Also worth having a finger in John chapter 14, which is, surprise, it's just where we're going to end this morning. Two places that are going to be helpful for us to have God's Word open in front of us so that you can see that what I'm saying, I hope, is what God says in His Word. But maybe to get us started and to get us into the situation of this Psalm, complete the phrase on the screen.

It's given away. There's no place like home. So I wonder who here this morning is the furthest away from home. Michaela, what do you think? Which is home in it? Where's home again? Michigan. I can think of one person in this room who might top that, but go for it. Yeah. 10,000 miles. Wow. Putting the proclaimers to shame with their 500 miles. Hayden, you're who I was thinking of this morning. Where are you from, buddy? Where's home?

South New Zealand. South New Zealand, which I don't think you could actually get much further away from here, could you? Puts my 12 minutes down the road to shame. But you know that phrase that we have, okay? There's no place like home. When was the last time you found yourself saying that? We don't say it when we're away from home, do we? We actually say it when we're in our bed and we're at home. Actually, there's no place like home. But we all know that feeling, don't we? That my body might be somewhere, but my heart is way back there. And that longing, bring it to this psalm, and you begin to understand the situation into which this is written.

[2:05] Take it with you to Psalm 43. Right? My body might be here, but my heart's way back there. That's where the writer of this psalm is in Psalm 43. Here's the geography of this psalm.

Currently, if you look at verse 6 of Psalm 42, the writer of this psalm is miles away from Jerusalem, up in the north, miles away from home. But their heart is back in Jerusalem, back at home. But this is about way more than just homesickness. No wish you were here postcard from his mates back home. He's going to soften the blow that the psalmist feels from being miles away from his home.

There's a way bigger spiritual dimension going on in this psalm for us to see. What we're going to see this morning is the reality of how hard life can be.

We're going to think about the beauty of who Jesus is. And then we're going to think about the wonder for every Christian of the glory of home. And this is what is pulled out in this psalm today.

[3:20] So if you're in that place where actually life is really hard just now, and you're longing that it wouldn't be the case, there's wonderful balm for your soul in this psalm.

The detachment, if you look at verse 2 of Psalm 43, the detachment, if the writer's trying to describe what this feels like, do you see the word beginning with M that they go for? It's not miss, a miss home.

This detachment feels like mourning. That's how there's been a death in the family word, isn't it? It's mourning. And the strength of that word there makes us want to ask, why so strong?

Two things I think explain it. Here's the first one. I think it's his job, the psalmist job. Now, Psalm 43, you'll notice, doesn't have underneath the word Psalm 43. It doesn't have an assigned author.

But if you look at Psalm 42, and there's good reason to think of Psalm 42 and Psalm 43 going together, we'll come back to that. Underneath the words of Psalm 42, do you see what's written in

italics?

[4:33] It is a mascal, and that word just means a song that's written in order to impart wisdom, right? So you can imagine you go to Spotify, you type in, I want a wisdom song. This is the one that's coming up.

It's that kind of gig, okay? A mascal, song to, written to impart wisdom, and written by the sons of Korah. Now, the sons of Korah were the musicians who served at the temple back in Jerusalem. So they are, for all intents and purposes, if you want to understand it in our language today, they are the worship leaders at the temple. That's their job, but it's more than just their job.

This is not something kind of Dolly Parton, 9 to 5. This is just what we do. No, this is, and you get it in this psalm, this is their job, and it's their job. Love doing this.

But now, this psalmist, because he's away up north, away from home, away from his job, away from his people, this psalmist is staring early retirement from the thing that they love doing right in the face, and they wonder if they'll ever get back to do it again.

[5:42] That's the first thing. It's their job. But the second thing that explains it, it's all to do with the reason that they've ended up away from Jerusalem in the first place.

And it's not because they typed the wrong digits into Satnav and got lost and refused to ask for directions. They've been driven away from Jerusalem, way up to the north, because their enemies have forced them out.

And the combination of both of those things, this is a double whammy. The combination of both of those things, and notice the word verse 5, it has left them feeling downcast.

And that's a hugely emotional word. Of all the words they could have picked, downcast. And it's spelled out with graphic metaphors all the way through Psalm 42.

Take, for example, verse 3. Do you see it of Psalm 42? My tears have been my food day and night. Now there's a metaphor and everything in that phrase.

[6:48] Have you ever done that? Have you ever cried so much that the taste from the salt of your tears hits your mouth and you begin to taste it? That's the idea that's going on here.

This person, this psalmist, is at rock bottom. And if life were a boxing match, this is the point where you would be winded, lying on the canvas, thinking to yourself, do I have the strength to get myself back up again and go again?

And do you know what? There will be times for all of us, I think, as Christians, as we follow Jesus, when we're there. We're downcast.

We're overwhelmed. And we're just really sad. We're low. And it's not that we've done anything wrong.

It's just living in this world where it's broken. You know, there's no indication that the psalmist has done anything wrong here. There's no sin involved here.

[7:51] But I think the very fact that God has given us this hymn book of the Psalms is God's way of saying, do you know what? In life, you will feel like this.

And here's my permission slip, as it were, as a parent, to say, it's okay to feel like this.

And I'll go better than that. I'll give you a song that you can sing when you feel like this, and you can just sing it back to me. Do you not love that God is big enough to handle our questions?

Do you not love that God is loving enough that he invites these kind of questions as a father who knows us? Here's what we can sing in the times when we're downcast.

And we need to add this song to the Spotify playlist of our Christian lives. Because do you know what this is? This is a hymn for the hurting and homesick heart.

[8:53] It's a hymn for the hurting and homesick heart. And just look what is going on in this psalm if we get into the details of it. They're crying out. This psalm is two things. Just crying out to God. Look at the first thing.

Firstly, verse 1. Do you see that? God, here's the first cry. Declare me right. Do you see the first word there, verse 1? Literally the first word. Vindicate.

Straight from the law court. What's going on here? Vindicate me. Because currently the enemies living round about me are saying, Oi, Bible basher.

Where's your God now? Did he miss the memo? Is he asleep? And so the Sabbath is saying, God, would you, in your perfect way, would you declare in the sight of the watching world that I'm in the right for trusting you and they're in the wrong for mocking and defying you?

That's what he's, he's crying out to God. Right? I don't know about you, but I found it in my own soul this week as you kind of watch the stuff that was going on in the parliament, the votes, and just the heaviness of that.

[10:03] You know, we're living our lives in a world that is just hostile to God. Just pursuing our own ways. And of course, we engage in those debates compassionately, but we engage with conviction as well.

But a world that says, no, do we want to go our own way? We're not going God's way. I found that overwhelming. The psalmist is saying, declare me right in the eyes of the watching world for trusting you.

And the second thing, verse three, if the first cry is declare me right, the second cry is bring me home. Do you see the language here? Send me, verse three, let them, let them.

So here's what I think the psalmist realizes as he says those words. I think he realizes that he is powerless to change this situation. Being there, God, this has to be all of you because I ain't got nothing.

And look specifically at the plea of verse three. Send me your light and your faithful care.

[11:12] Some of your translations will say truth. Send me your light. Send me your truth. Maybe he's thinking in the Bible story, of course, if he's a worship leader at the temple, he's singing about how God has delivered his people over the past.

Maybe he's thinking specifically about how God led his people from Egypt through the wilderness and to the promised land by a pillar of fire by night. Maybe that's what he's thinking of in his head. And he's saying, God, I want you to do it again. And I want that light, I want that truth to lead me, as it were, carry me all the way to your, do you see it? Holy mountain. And what's the deal with God's holy mountain in this psalm?

It is the place where God dwells. So he's not after a bit of real estate, is he? He's after the very presence of God himself, which at the time of writing would have been the temple at Jerusalem. He's saying, God, bring me to you. I want you. My soul is lost.

[12:14] It is, look at verse 1 of verse 42. I'm like a deer panting by streams of water. I've actually not seen many deer in my life, believe it or not, but I've seen a lot of dogs do this.

Just desperate, desperate for water. And that's what he's saying, Lord, I'm desperate for you.

Because you are my joy and you are my delight, would you bring me home?

But this is all of you. I can't do this. Would you bring me home? And then we get that inner pep talk repeated at verse 5. He's saying to himself, come on soul.

Come on soul. Remember. Remember who this God is. Remember he's the Lord. Capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D. He's the God who promises. He's the God that delivers.

And I know it's looking bleak out here, but come on soul, remember who this God is. He will act. He will be faithful to his promises. And do you see how these are the exact same words?

[13:18] This is a total copy and paste job. Right? This was the plagiarism check when you submit your essay at uni. This would be flagging up. Right? We've seen this before.

Three times we get it. See verse, sorry, Psalm 42 verse 5. Psalm 42 verse 11. And here we go, Psalm 43 verse 5.

Three times it's exactly the same phrase. And that tells us something really important about the Christian life. Our soul needs to hear the same truths from God's word over and over and over and over again.

Pride says, I've heard it before. Humility says, I need it again. Over and over and over. What do they say about repetition?

It's the mother of all education. Here's his advice. This song, put it on your record player.

[14:21] This advice, why are you, my soul, so downcast? Play it on repeat. Play it on repeat. Feel no embarrassment about putting it on repeat. My kids are always like that.

Dad, we've heard this song. We heard another one. No. Let's hear the same one. Hope in God. That's what he's saying. In other words, remember soul because of who God is and what he said is true.

One day, all of this is going to pass and I'll be home with God. And here's the thing. We can sing this today ever so, so much more confidently than the psalmist here could sing this.

Do you know why? Because that plea that the writer has made away from home, God, would you send me your light and your truth and would that light and truth lead me home to you?

We can say to ourselves this morning that God has answered that cry and he's answered that cry in the person of the one who called himself the way, the truth and the life.

[15:27] Jesus says that about himself in John chapter 14. Do you want to skim there? You can turn there to John chapter 14. And it's a wonderful chapter of John's gospel and the context is that Jesus has just told his 12 disciples that having been with them for three years, he's leaving them and he's going to his father in heaven.

So he's no longer going to be physically with them. And imagine the questions flying about their minds at this point. How are we going to cope when our main guy is not around?

How are we going to stand for him when he's not by our side? How are we going to experience knowing him when he's not physically with us anymore? Will we ever get home?

You see the disciples are panicking in John 14 but Jesus isn't. And he speaks words of truth to troubled hearts.

And if you see is it verse 1 of chapter 14? Jesus says do not be troubled. And so when we cry why? Why?

[16:42] God? How long? Lord? There are no sweeter words for our souls to hear than Jesus saying don't be troubled. And what makes those words more than just one of those thinking of you cards that you'd pick up in the card factory and gives them gravity is that Jesus says in John 14 that he goes to prepare a place for us.

And before he's talking about heaven what we need to understand is that place that he's talking about is the cross. That's the place where he's going first and foremost. The place where he will willingly die bearing the punishment for all of our mistakes, all of our sin, all of our shame, all of our regrets.

He goes there to make us right with God. It's there that we are made sons and daughters adopted into the family of God as the Spirit is sent to live inside of us.

Salvation is all of him. It's all of him. The psalmist is saying God it has to be all of you and Jesus comes along and says John 14 do you know what?

It's going to be all of me. salvation is all of him. I feel that burden off of you this morning. Salvation is all of him. I like to think of it like this when it comes to salvation.

[18:05] You know when you go out with a friend for dinner something to eat and there's that awkward moment when it comes to paying and if you haven't agreed this in advance what often happens in those moments is just say we're going to split it.

Yeah? We're going to split the bill. See when it comes to salvation friends we don't split the bill with Jesus. This is all of him.

Jesus goes to pay it all and because he goes to the cross God vindicates him at the resurrection and 40 days later he ascends to heaven and do you not love the intimate and homely language that Jesus uses to speak of heaven?

This is not the father's hotel. This isn't a place where guests check in, stay the night have breakfast leave a review on TripAdvisor and then check out again.

This is the father's house. Children live there with their father. I don't know maybe home for you wasn't a good place when you were growing up and I'm really sorry to hear that that was your experience but this will be everything that we ever want in a home.

[19:24] A place of warmth, a place of protection, a place of communion, a place of delight. Of course in the bigger Bible story this is everything that Adam and Eve had, Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 before sin entered the human equation.

How often we think of heaven as a place where our dreams come true like heaven is this never ending round of golf or it's a never ending week long shopping trip in Milan.

What makes heaven heaven is what Jesus says about it that one day he will return and he will take us to be with himself.

So what makes heaven heaven is the fact that he's there. Meanwhile Thomas chips in at verse 5, Lord how will we know the way?

So we're going to be away from you, we're going to be away from our home. How are we going to know the way? So he's out with his map and his compass, he's wanting GPS digits and Jesus says unashamedly and yet unreservedly that he is the way, the truth and the life.

[20:34] You've got to notice the definite article there. He's the way, the truth and the life. So Jesus doesn't give Thomas a postcode. As it were he gives him a person.

And he says, look at me. You see, Jesus is the light and the truth sent from the Father. He is the light and the truth that's mentioned in this psalm.

He is the one who has acted and he is the one who will return one day to take us home. And so see when we're downcast, see when we're lying on that canvas, see when we're wondering if we can get back up again.

The psalmist pep talk to himself is hope in God. For us, this side of the cross are waiting for Jesus' return.

Filled with the spirit, the advice to us is to look to Christ. All eyes on him. Why, my soul, are you downcast?

[21:41] Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God. Lift your eyes to Christ. Remember who he is and remember where he is. Just as we finish, let's just close on that note.

There was a story once told of Charles Spurgeon, a famous preacher down in London in the early, mid-18th century. He once did a kids' talk and he got the children to gather around and he had on the stage a big bucket of water and he said to one of the kids, I want you to put your hands in it for 30 seconds.

So they put their hands in it for 30 seconds and then he asks them to everyone watching, can anyone tell me why that child hasn't drowned? And of course the answer that the little girl did who was doing the demonstration said, it's because my head's not in the water.

And he said precisely because if your head's alive, it doesn't matter if the rest of you is in the water.

What the most important thing is where your head is. And I just find that little illustration, see when I'm in these places of being downcast, I just find that so helpful to remember that our head, Jesus, he's there.

Right? He's victorious, he's there. So I might be struggling down here, I might be weary, I might be weak down here, but he says look to me, look where I am. I'm victorious at God's right hand.

[23:05] I've paid for your sin on the cross, you're mine, I've bought you to myself and I've sent my spirit, my spirit lives in you so that you can know, you can know the future as hard as it gets down here, you can know who I am, you can know communion with me and you can know the glorious future that's ahead of you.

Because one day what happened to Jesus in the eyes of the watching world when he was vindicated, when he returns friends, the same thing will happen to us. If our trust is in him today, we will be vindicated in the eyes of the watching world.

When our king returns, evil will be banished, sin will be a distant memory, tears will be redundant, doctors will be unemployed, death will no longer be a thing and we will be physically with the God who is our delight and our joy.

You know, no one puts this better than English hymn writer Charles Wesley in his song and can it be. And let me just finish with this.

This is his chorus. No condemnation now I dread. Jesus and all in him is mine. Alive in him my living head and clothed in righteousness divine.

[24:28] Bold I approach the eternal throne and claim the crown through Christ my own. Amazing love, how can it be that thou my God should die for me.

Let me pray. And so Father we thank you so much for your word this morning. Thank you that we have it in our own language that we can pick up, read, understand and know who you are. Thank you that you're a God who is delighted to reveal yourself. And you still speak through what you have spoken. And so Father I pray for any of my brothers and sisters here this morning who are downcast.

For whatever reason Lord and we're all there at some point that we're just low and maybe we're weary and maybe we're doubting.

Maybe we're full of questions and so Lord I pray that by your spirit as your word goes forth as it does its work in our lives. Lord that we would leave here today knowing that you're a God who invites us to come to you with our questions.

[25:43] But knowing that you are a God who has wonderfully answered that prayer of the psalmist to send out your light and your truth. And so Father I pray Lord that we would be captivated this morning with the glory of the one who said that he is the way, the truth and the life.

Help the eyes of our hearts be fixed on him. So Lord we thank you for your commitment and your steadfast love to us this morning and we pray all of these things in Jesus' precious name.

Amen.