

Talking to Our Souls

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning everyone. Please have your Bible open at Psalm 42, or if you're looking! on your phone or your tablet or whatever it is. Just a wee bit about myself. My name's Dougie. I'm a pastor in Kirkcaldy at a church called New Craigs. I've been there for just over two years. Prior to that, I was in England serving the Lord Jesus there, primarily in a place called Enfield in North London. And before that, as you can tell, I'm a glad Glasgow boy. I grew up in Glasgow, and I have an older brother. And something in our family that would make us laugh was that my brother, it was very obvious when he would start talking to himself. Okay? We'd be sitting watching the telly, and you could see the sort of eyes glaze over, and his lips would start to move silently.

And if Granny Affleck were there, she would lovingly kind of, yeah, just make a wee joke and say, aye, talking to yourself. That's the first sign of madness.

Now, isn't he? Because whether we do it very obviously, like my big brother, or less obviously, there's a conversation going on in our heads a great deal of the day.

Who set the alarm for now? Have I got time for a shower? Will I have porridge? Is it raining outside? Oh, I really hope Graham's speaking this morning. Oh, no. Somebody else. Now, lots of the time the conversation's going on, and we don't realize it.

[1 : 51] But what I want to tell you today is, that conversation is really important. What that voice says to us really matters. Because we're listening to it an awful lot.

In Psalm 42, God has given us words that we need to speak to ourselves, especially during difficult days.

The repeated chorus of the Psalm in verse 5 and verse 11, these are words that we will need to say again and again. Look what it says, verse 5. These are words that servants of Jesus will need to say to themselves repeatedly.

But let me pause for a moment. Because as you're starting a new series today, it's worth saying one or two things about this book of Psalms. Especially if you're new to Bruntsfield, if you're new to faith in Jesus Christ.

The book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible. It's quoted in the New Testament more than any other book. People have helpfully described the book of Psalms as the Bible's songbook.

[3 : 14] But this is important. The Psalms are God's word to us. Before they become words from us, back to God.

These Psalms are a message from God to his people before we sing it back to him. Now if you look at the heading of Psalm 42.

See that under where it says Psalm 42, you'll get a wee bit in italics. It says, For the director of music, a mascal of the sons of Korah. Now it seems the sons of Korah were appointed by King David to be musicians and singers in the temple in Jerusalem.

This Psalm is a carefully crafted experience of one of the sons of Korah. And it seems that it was to be given to the director of music.

And I like to imagine this guy as, okay, there's a guy in the temple who looks after all the songs and he's got an archive. And one of the sons of Korah, I've got a song for you. And it was recorded.

[4 : 19] It was kept. So that the Lord's people in every generation could sing it. Including us. So that every generation of the Lord's people would use it to speak to their souls.

Now I think that's pretty cool. But meanwhile, back in Psalm 42, this chorus, verse 5 and verse 11, helps us to understand what's going on.

And what I want to say today is that this chorus, we see three helpful things that we need to say to our souls, especially if we're going through tough times.

The first thing is this. We need to give our souls a compassionate rebuke. Look at verse 5 again. Why, my soul, are you downcast?

Why are you so disturbed within me? It's as if the psalmist is speaking to himself and giving himself a compassionate, gentle rebuke for believing like hard times will last forever.

[5 : 27] It's hard to miss the emotion in the psalm. It starts with the writer saying, I'm feeling spiritually dry here. I'm like a deer panting for water.

That's how much I miss you, Lord. Verse 2, my soul thirsts for the living God. Where can I go and meet with him? Spiritually, he feels dry, empty.

Verse 3, he's crying a lot. Tears have been his food day and night. His enemies taunt him. Hey, Holy Joe, where's your God? Doesn't he seem to be working for you, does he?

Verse 4, he's not where he feels he should be. I used to go to the house of God. I used to sing with the choir and the temple and write songs.

And now I'm here. Now we don't know exactly when this psalm was written, but it wouldn't surprise me if it was during the time when King David's son Absalom started a civil war and people faithful to King David had to leave.

[6 : 35] This writer is in the back of beyond and he feels it. Verse 7, deep calls to deep. In the roar of your waterfalls, all your waves and breakers have swept over me.

I suspect many of us have felt those times. When life seems so hard, there's no getting away from it.

Like waves sweeping us off our feet. Like the tide dragging us away from the shore. Verse 9, I say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me?

Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? You put it all together. He's spiritually dry. He feels deserted. He feels like his enemies are winning.

He's being laughed at. He's drowning. God, where are you? And how much more of this do I need to take? Maybe it's purposeful that the writer doesn't give us an exact time of when this psalm was written.

[7 : 49] Because followers of the Lord Jesus are not exempt from those times either. We don't get a pass on these feelings.

We can feel like this because of illness. Not being able to do what we want to do. We can feel like this because of relationship breakdown. Because of heartache.

Because of tough times with family. At work. Somebody picking on us. You know, I remember when my father died. And even though he was a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tears were my food day and night. Spiritual circumstances can cause these feelings.

Sin ruins a relationship with God. And we can long for that nearness that we once felt with him. But it's just not there. Now.

[8 : 48] Are we starting to see what the psalmist is getting at? Do we get this even a bit? Sorry, in Kerkorah I'm used to have a wee bit of audience. Kind of. Yeah?

We get this? Yeah? Yeah? Yeah? These sons of Korah help us today. Because what they do is they pour out their souls to God.

And that's the right place to start. Some of you may be thinking, can I do that? Am I allowed? Yeah. He's big enough to take it.

But where does this pouring out of feelings lead? Well, to verse 5. Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why are you so disturbed within me? And in one sense, you may think, duh.

That's why. All this stuff's going on. That's why my soul's downcast. But I think the sense is, we don't need to be so down.

[9 : 53] We don't need to wallow in distress. Yes. Life is tough. But God's not weak and powerless. He's not forgotten us. It's as if the psalmist is saying, yeah, this isn't great.

But come on, soul. That voice in his head, you know, preach to yourself, soul. What do we know about God? These times won't last forever.

It's not minimizing the problems. It's not saying, you know, just pull yourself together. It's not even saying they're not tough. But there's times our soul needs that compassionate rebuke.

Come on, soul. What do we know about God? He's our help and strength, soul. He's at work for our good soul. Even though I might not feel it right now.

You know, in tough times, my soul will need that compassionate rebuke. But it'll also need something else. A plain command. That's the second thing.

[10:57] Look at verse 5. Put your hope in God. That's a pretty plain command, right? Put your hope in God. Often when I'm low physically and spiritually and emotionally, my temptation is to look down and look in.

But the psalm writer says, look up to God with patient expectation. Looking up to God with patient expectation. That's hope. It's about what God is going to do.

It means waiting for him to act, even in the reality of our distress. Look at verse 6. Remember, this guy is in the back of beyond, not where he wants to be. My soul is downcast within me.

Therefore, I will remember you from the land of Jordan, the heights of Hermon, from Mount Mazar. He can remember God even in the back of beyond. Do you know what? I'd much rather be in Jerusalem.

But you know what? I can still sing his praise in Fife. I'm still going to sing about his wonderful story. I'm still going to sing about his loving kindness.

[12:02] Despite the waves and the rejection and the spiritual dryness. Look at verse 8. By day the Lord directs his love. At night his song is within me, a prayer to the God of my life.

Despite the waves and the sorrow, he says the Lord's love is like an arrow aimed straight at him.

Now, I found it interesting.

Maybe you won't. But I found this little detail interesting. Okay? In the psalm, God is usually referred to as God. So look at verse 1.

My soul pants for you, my God. Verse 2. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Where can I go and meet with God? Verse 3. Where's your God? Verse 4. How I used to go to the house of God.

And so on.

But in verse 8. By day the Lord directs his love. Now again, if you're new to Brunsfield, this is an important wee detail.

[13:04] You might think it isn't, but it is. When you see the Lord in wee capital letters like this in the Old Testament, this is the name that God uses when he's making promises to people.

For those of us who have maybe been Christians a wee bit longer, this is God's covenant name. It's God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, Trinitarian name.

The name that speaks of faithfulness and eternity and never letting his people down. And in the dark times, the Lord who is eternal and faithful to his promises and who is always good, well, his love is directed at me.

Even when I don't feel it, it's there because he's faithful. Even when I'm unfaithful, he's faithful. Even when I'm miles from where I should be, he's faithful.

Even when I go to the hospital or the chemotherapy room, he's faithful. In my home, at work or school or university, wherever by day the Lord directs his love, and at night his song is within me.

[14:27] Now, if an Old Testament believer can assure himself of God's love when he feels dry and deserted and in the wrong place and drowning, do you know how much more, brothers and sisters, can we this side of the cross and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ?

We can know and rely on God's love because of this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. I've been shown kindness.

I don't deserve grace. I was without God and without hope in the world. And what did he show me? He showed me mercy. The Lord Jesus was crucified in my place and rose from the dead.

And the cross convinces us that no matter the circumstances, no matter the dark days, nothing will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

Amen? My parents and grandparents were believers in the Lord Jesus.

[15:32] I know not everyone's from that kind of background. It was a great privilege. Singing was a big part of their homes. Now, I don't know how well thought through they were about this, but it seemed to them that singing helped them to lift their eyes beyond the here and now.

And a song that was familiar in those homes was, When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see him there who made an end of all my sin.

It's no coincidence that in the Bible, singing and praying often go together. Singing helped our family look up to God in patient expectation. Look up to God beyond the here and now.

Singing in their homes were part of their prayers. And as we sing and pray, well, like the psalmist, we still be mourning or oppressed or ill or whatever it is, but my eyes are in the right place if they're looking to God.

My soul starts to lift. Once more, I'm looking into the gracious face of the Lord Jesus. And the Bible tells me that if the Father gave his Son to meet my greatest needs, then he will graciously give me everything else I need for anything else that I'll face.

[17 : 05] As I read verse 9 and 10 this week, I say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning or praying?

Do you know what? I can imagine the Lord Jesus saying those words as he suffered on a cross. He experienced the most awful of times. He knew what it was like to be downcast, to have feelings of despair.

At the cross, he was like a drowning man as the waves of God's justice poured over in him again and again. And in the darkness, he must have felt deserted. What did he do?

He put his hope and his Father in heaven. He said, Into your hands I commit my spirit. He was looking patiently to Easter Sunday where he'd be raised from the dead to give us hope in the midst of our darkest times.

So we can say to our souls, why are you downcast? Put your hope in God. Which leads to the third things our souls need to be reminded of.

[18 : 17] And it's a certain promise. Look at verse 11. Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why? So disturbed within me, put your hope in God. For I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

What is the promise that my soul needs to be reminded of? The certain promise that what is happening right now, well, it's not how it will always be. The psalmist says, I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

There's a growing expectation as he says these things to his soul that God's going to be at work. Now, I don't want to steal whoever's preaching's thunder for next week, but you'll see this as it grows.

If you're doing Psalm 43 next week, excellent, okay? But God's going to, like, change things and do things. I don't want to, I'll leave some spoilers for next Sunday, okay?

But in the psalm, it's as if, yeah, there's been dark times, but the believer preached to his soul and his soul responded to God in prayer and even though the waves have come, his wee head sticking out, looking up to heaven.

[19 : 34] You know, that last line, my Savior and my God, reminds me that the hope that the psalm talks about is actually only available to those who know the Lord Jesus as the Savior and God.

The Lord Jesus suffered and died and rose again so that all who trust and know him as their Savior and God would have hope. The hope that knowing Jesus as Savior and God means that we can actually find peace in the middle of our troubles.

And the hope that even though we live in a fallen world now, where tough times will hit us again and again, it won't always be like this. One day, the Lord Jesus will appear.

And do you know those times of when we feel down and deserted and downcast? Do you know those times will be banned? They'll be done away with. One day, because the Lord Jesus lives, my soul will never be downcast and disturbed again.

One day, there'll be no hankies, there'll be no hospitals, there'll be no hersies. Isn't that cool? And all because the Lord Jesus rose from the dead and on that day, yeah, we'll praise our Savior and our God.

[20 : 55] If you're going through tough times this morning, maybe you've got to say, come on soul, let's put our hope in God. Let's remember that it's not always going to be like this.

For those of us who are here, who maybe don't or won't call the Lord Jesus Savior and God yet, well, the emotions that are raised in the psalm, they're spoken of elsewhere in the Bible.

Weeping, separation, darkness, disturbed. You know, those are some of the words that the Bible describes as hell, separated from God forever.

Except that what we'll experience there will be far worse than what is being described in Psalm 42. But there's hope. Because the Lord Jesus died in your place.

He faced these things for us so that we would never need to face that great horror. so that we would trust in Him. And as you trust in Him, you can experience His forgiveness and His mercy and His peace in those dark and troubled times.

[22 : 11] And so for you today, the first step, will you put your hope in our Savior and our God? Will you ask for His forgiveness and mercy?

Will you call on Him now? Because as you call on Him, He'll welcome you. He'll say, yeah, you're forgiven.

You have eternal life. And you'll be part of that family who one day will praise Him forever where there's no hankies, no hospitals, no herses. Let's pray, shall we?

Our Father in Heaven, we thank You so much for our Savior and our God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who loves us and gave Himself for us.

Father, I pray for my brothers and sisters here today whose souls may be downcast and disturbed and life may be really, really tough. Have mercy on them, Lord.

[23 : 15] Would they put their hope in You again? Would they know that that is not misplaced? And would together we be able to encourage them saying, we'll yet praise Him, our Savior and God.

Father, help us today. Would we leave this place encouraging one another with the thoughts of Psalm 42 in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.