

THE QUESTION WE ALL ASK

Psalms 42, 43

Intro: It is generally accepted that these two Psalms are actually one.

You will notice that there is a heading for Psalm 42, but not for Psalm 43, which also adds to the idea that the two Psalms were originally one. But the conclusive argument for their unity is that they both have the same refrain. See 42:5 and 11 and 43:5. Much has been written about this division, but since it adds nothing to our understanding to know when or why this division was made, I am going to leave this matter to the scholars and deal with what is obvious from the text itself. This is that the two Psalms are in reality one, one Psalm with three stanzas, each stanza concluded with the refrain which, as I have mentioned, is found in 42:5, 42:11, and 43:5.

The word *maschil* simply means that it is a poem or song to emphasize the wisdom of God, and one commentator that I read said that it emphasizes the fact that the Psalmist did not write it primarily for himself, but for others, that is, for the people of God who would have a similar experience that they might understand more of the wisdom of God by reading of his experience. And it is an experience that does not necessarily appear, and then it is gone, but it can appear at different times and under different circumstances that the lesson in these Psalms might be impressed more and more, and in deeper ways, by the Spirit of God using the message here again and again.

Let me make a few observations as we begin which I hope will help us to understand these two Psalms. The first is that it was written by a very godly man. Some expositors think that this is a Psalm of David written when David was fleeing from Absalom, and it may be. But I don't think that is necessarily the case. But whoever it was, he had to be a very godly man to be able to write what he wrote in verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 42. In fact, his godliness is seen all throughout both Psalms.

Another point of importance concerning these Psalms is that the Psalmist was not in Jerusalem. He was in the north of Israel, probably near the mouth of the Jordan River in the vicinity of Mount Hermon, and "the hill Mizar, which may have been one of the peaks of Mt. Hermon. This is the only place in the OT that Mizar is mentioned.

Now we know that the Lord God is, and always has been, omnipresent.

That is, He is everywhere present at the same time. But in OT times there was a special way in which the Lord God manifested His presence in the Tabernacle first, and later in the temple at Jerusalem. So that is why the writer of this Psalm mentioned “the house of God” in verse 42:4, and “thy holy hill, and to thy holy tabernacles” in 43:3. “The altar of God” in 43:4 is another reference to the temple in Jerusalem.

So, for some reason the Psalmist was away from Jerusalem, and for the present at least, he could not get back. He knew that the Lord was with him, and could hear his prayer, but he also knew that there was no place on earth in those days like Jerusalem. This is one thing that makes the prayer request in Psalm 122:6 so important: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.”

We can also say that this person who wrote this Psalm was under persecution. And they were continually tormenting the Psalmist by saying, “Where is thy God?” Evidently the Psalmist had publicly boasted of His God, and they were throwing salt into his wound which seemed to be indicating that God was not as great as the Psalmist had said that he was. And the Psalmist himself was feeling that there was some distance between him and his God because he was asking himself according to verse 2, “When shall I come and appear before God?” So he was thinking, not that God would come to him, but that he had to go to God. And this, too, was a reference to the Temple.

So the Psalmist’s enemies were saying, “WHERE is thy God?” And the Psalmist was saying, “WHEN shall I come and appear before God?”

But you have probably noticed that I have given my message for today, the title, THE QUESTION THAT WE ALL ASK. There may be times when we ask WHERE and WHEN questions, but they are not the question that I had in mind. THE QUESTION THAT WE ALL ASK, not just once, but many times throughout our lives is WHY?

This word and the question it introduces are found ten times in these two psalms:

- 1) In 42:5 – two times.
- 2) In 42:9 - two times.
- 3) In 42:11 - two times.
- 4) In 43:2 - two times.
- 5) In 43:5 - two times.

Now it is not wrong to ask that question, but a lot depends upon the attitude that we have in asking it. Years ago I saw a cartoon that pictured a man in trouble, and he was looking up into heaven and asking God, “Why me?” And the Lord responded to him from heaven, and said, “Why not?”

If I were to ask you this morning, How many of you have ever asked the Lord, “Why?”, I am sure that most of you would raise your hand. With the Bible program I have on my computer I checked to see how many times the word *why* appears in the Bible. It told me 282 times.

When the Lord came down from the mount of transfiguration, a man approached the Lord and told him that he had brought his son to the disciples to cure his son, but they couldn’t do it. Later when the disciples had the Lord by Himself, you remember that they said to the Lord, “Why could we not cast him out?” (Matt. 17:19). When the Jews were crying out for the Lord to be crucified, you will remember that Pilate’s response was, “Why, what evil hath He done? (Matt. 27:23). Another interesting occurrence of the word *why* was when the Lord appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, and said to him, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4). A series of messages on the word *why*, would be an interesting series, wouldn’t it? It introduces questions we all have asked.

But let us look at our Psalms.

When I read verses like verses 1 and 2, I ask myself, “Could I honestly say to the Lord what the Psalmist said?”

A “hart” is a deer. How often is a deer interested in water? You know that a deer is interested in water every day, and many times a day. Its primary interest at the beginning of every day is to find water. They can’t live without water. Is that how you and I feel about our times with the Lord reading His Word so that we can drink in the living water which is Christ, and His Word?

This Psalmist got up every morning, his waking thought was, “When shall I come and appear before God?” Is that our first interest in the morning? Are we more interested in the morning paper than we are in meeting with the Lord, or do we get to our Bibles as soon as we can so that we can be with the Lord even before we spend time with our families?

Illus: John and Isobel Kuhn excusing themselves early in the evening after dinner because of their morning time with the Lord.

In verse 3 we move from a feeling of elation to see how the Psalmist faced the reality of his then present circumstances. He had something that occupied him at this time in his life. What was it? Tears!!! Why? It was because of what his enemies were saying to him: “Where is thy God?”

Then the Psalmist in verse 4 began to draw upon his memory bank as he remember the good times that he had had with the Lord’s people in the past. He loved to be with the people of God and to go with them to the house of God. Those were days of “joy and praise.” But at the moment things had changed for him, and we come to see that after pouring out his soul in him remembering the good times he had had with the Lord and His people in the past, he began to speak to himself.

Do you know what a healthy thing this can be, speaking to your soul? It was in a sermon by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones that I first learned this. Dr. Mitchell, with whom I worked for several years, had an aunt which lived with him and Mrs. Mitchell for many years. A friend of hers who was also in her eighties, complained to Dr. Mitchell’s aunt that she was very lonesome because nobody came to see her. His aunt said, “I am never lonesome because when I am by myself I just speak to myself, and so I am never lonesome.”

Well, that is not exactly what our Psalmist meant, but in the midst of trials he did talked to himself. In verse 5 he was really lecturing himself. His soul was “cast down” and “disquieted,” To be cast down means *to be sunken in depression*. To be disquieted means *to be all torn up inside*. And then he told himself that he needed to “hope in God,” and you know that means simply to trust God. Is He not God? Is He not in sovereign control over all that goes on in our lives? And better than that, does He not have some good purpose for letting me get into this situation, and isn’t He going to use it for His glory and for my good?

So what can I absolutely count on? “If I am trusting Him, if my hope is in Him, “I shall yet praise him for the help of His countenance.” Hope means to wait, but to wait patiently. “Help” here is the same word from which the name *Joshua* is formed. God was his Joshua, his Savior, his Deliverer! And “countenance” speaks of His Person, His presence. The Psalmist may not be in Jerusalem, but nevertheless he was where God

was, or we can turn it around and say that God was where He was.. He may have felt alone, but the truth was that he was not alone. God was there in the northern part of Israel.

In verse 6 the Psalmist begins to speak to God, and now he pours out his soul to God – to himself in verse 4; now to God in verse 6. The one led to the other. And so here in verse 6, miles and miles away from Jerusalem, he casts his burden on the Lord.

It seems that in verse 7 the Psalmist was looking at the natural situation around him, and they pictured to him his situation. Waters came tumbling ceaselessly down, and it seemed billows of water, one after another, sought to destroy him. The waters that fell over the falls seemed to be calling others to come, and so trouble had been followed by more trouble as though it would never stop.

But verse indicates that now the Psalmist had his eyes not on his circumstances which had troubled him so greatly, but on the Lord Who was in change. Notice the words, “will command.” He has issued a charge that covers twenty-four hours of every day. “His lovingkindness” is a translation of the wonderful word *chesed* which speaks of God’s love, His mercy, His kindness. This takes care of the day. So as a result in the night the Psalmist has a continuous song, and his prayer is directed to “the God of my life.” God is the God of His people not only when things are going badly, but He is the God of His people always. He is sovereign over all of the days of our lives.

But what does he say to God in verse 9 in this prayer which began in verse 6?

Well, it is one thing to talk to ourselves, but it is very important that we cast our cares upon the Lord. Talking to ourselves is very important, but it is never to be a substitute for talking to God.

So here in verse 9 the Psalmist brings his *why*’s to the Lord. He brings his questions to the Lord in verse 9, and tells the Lord in verse 10 how bad and difficult his enemies have been to him.

And then in verse 11 we see him ministering to himself again. I think that this shows that it usually takes time for us to come to a place of peace and real trust and rest in the Lord. We have to talk to ourselves more than

once, actually, over and over again. The word “health” in verse 11 is a translation of the same word that is translated “help” in verse 5. It means Joshua, Savior, or salvation. But here it is not “His countenance,” *i.e.*, the Lord’s countenance, but “my countenance,” *i.e.*, the Psalmist’s countenance.” This indicates that you can usually tell by the face of a child of God if he, or she, is really trusting the Lord, or not.

So it seems here that the Psalmist has gotten the victory over his despondency, and you can see it in his face. And so he adds by saying, “and my God.”

But now let us go on to Psalm 43 to complete the Psalm which began with Psalm 42,

Those who think that the Psalmist here, and in Psalm 42, is David, have a point. The Psalmist pleads with God for vindication against both “an ungodly nation, and deliverance from “the deceitful and unjust man. The nation is Israel; the man could be Absalom. But it does not necessarily follow. The nation must be Israel, but expositors have differed as to why the Psalmist spoke of a man. So we have to say that there are some questions that we have for which there is no answer in Scripture.

But several things are certain which we can say about Psalm 43.

The first is that the Psalmist wanted to be vindicated by God. It has been said, “If God is your Friend, it makes no difference who your enemies might be.” It can also be said, “If you are cleared of all charges in the court of heaven, no charge against you on earth can possibly stand. So the Psalmist looked to his God, and to his God alone, for his vindication.

A second main point that is clear in this Psalm is, and which is brought out by Spurgeon in his commentary on this Psalm, is the restoration of his fellowship with God in Jerusalem would be the clearest evidence of his deliverance from his enemies. There is probably a connection between the truth expressed in Psalm 4:6 and the truth we have here in Psalm 43:

6 There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.

The Psalmist is pleading here for the Lord to vindicate him, and what could be greater proof of God’s blessing upon him than for him to be brought back to Jerusalem and to God’s “holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles”?

Psalms 42, 43 (7)

This whole 43rd Psalm is a prayer. It is clear that the Psalmist has felt alienated from God. But while it is clear that he wants to be restored to Jerusalem and to God, yet the purpose is not that he would be glorified, but that God would be given the glory. Notice that in verse 4 he expressed his intention to go to the altar because it was God's altar, and that in going there, he would be going "unto God my exceeding joy where upon his harp he would praise God Whom he called, "God, my God."

And then as he reviews the trouble that he has been through in verse 5, he expressed again "for I shall yet praise Him, Who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

Concl: Let us pray that our love for the Lord, and our conscious need for the Lord, will match the saints of the OT, like the one whom we have been thinking about in these two Psalms which are one. In times of discouragement and of opposition, let us learn to trust the Lord more fully, and seek Him with the same joy and determination that the Psalmist of Psalms 42 and 43 sought Him.