

PSALM 42

If the book of Psalms be, as some have styled it, a mirror or looking-glass of pious and devout affections, this psalm in particular deserves, as much as any one psalm, to be so entitled, and is as proper as any to kindle and excite such in us: gracious desires are here strong and fervent; gracious hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, are here struggling, but the pleasing passion comes off a conqueror. Or we may take it for a conflict between sense and faith, sense objecting and faith answering.

I. Faith begins with holy desires towards God and communion with him (v. 1, 2).

II. Sense complains of the darkness and cloudiness of the present condition, aggravated by the remembrance of the former enjoyments (v. 3, 4).

III. Faith silences the complaint with the assurance of a good issue at last (v. 5).

IV. Sense renews its complaints of the present dark and melancholy state (v. 6, 7).

V. Faith holds up the heart, notwithstanding, with hope that the day will dawn (v. 8).

VI. Sense repeats its lamentations (v. 9, 10) and sighs out the same remonstrance it had before made of its grievances.

VII. Faith gets the last word (v. 11), for the silencing of the complaints of sense, and, though it be almost the same with that (v. 5) yet now it prevails and carries the day. The title does not tell us who was the penman of this psalm, but most probably it was David, and we may conjecture that it was penned by him at a time when, either by Saul's persecution or Absalom's rebellion, he was driven from the sanctuary and cut off from the privilege of waiting upon God in public ordinances. The strain of it is much the same with 63, and therefore we may presume it was penned by the same hand and upon the same or a similar occasion. In singing it, if we be either in outward affliction or in inward distress, we may accommodate to ourselves the melancholy expressions we find here; if not, we must, in singing them, sympathize with those whose case they speak too plainly,

and thank God it is not our own case; but those passages in it which express and excite holy desires towards God, and dependence on him, we must earnestly endeavour to bring our minds up to.

PSALM 42:1-5

DESIRING COMMUNION WITH GOD

To the chief musician, Maschil, for the sons of Korah.

Holy love to God as the chief good and our felicity is the power of godliness, the very life and soul of religion, without which all external professions and performances are but a shell and carcase: now here we have some of the expressions of that love. Here is,

I. Holy love thirsting, love upon the wing, soaring upwards in holy desires towards the Lord and towards the remembrance of his name (v. 1, 2): “*My soul panteth, thirsteth, for God, for nothing more than God, but still for more and more of him.*” Now observe,

1. When it was that David thus expressed his vehement desire towards God. It was,

(1.) When he was debarred from his outward opportunities of waiting on God, when he was banished to the land of Jordan, a great way off from the courts of God's house. Note, Sometimes God teaches us effectually to know the worth of mercies by the want of them, and whets our appetite for the means of grace by cutting us short in those means. We are apt to loathe that manna, when we have plenty of it, which will be very precious to us if ever we come to know the scarcity of it.

(2.) When he was deprived, in a great measure, of the inward comfort he used to have in God. He now went mourning, but he went on panting. Note, If God, by his grace, has wrought in us sincere and earnest desires towards him, we may take comfort from these when we want those ravishing delights we have sometimes had in God, because lamenting after God is as sure an evidence that we love him as rejoicing in God. Before the psalmist records his doubts, and fears, and griefs, which had sorely shaken him, he premises this, That he looked upon the living God as his chief good, and had set his heart upon him accordingly, and was resolved

to live and die by him; and, casting anchor thus at first, he rides out the storm.

2. What is the object of his desire and what it is he thus thirsts after.

(1.) He pants after God, he thirsts for God, not the ordinances themselves, but the God of the ordinances. A gracious soul can take little satisfaction in God's courts if it do not meet with God himself there: "*O that I knew where I might find him!* that I might have more of the tokens of his favour, the graces and comforts of his Spirit, and the earnestness of his glory."

(2.) He has, herein, an eye to God as the living God, that has life in himself, and is the fountain of life and all happiness to those that are his, the living God, not only in opposition to dead idols, the works of men's hands, but to all the dying comforts of this world, which perish in the using. Living souls can never take up their rest any where short of a living God.

(3.) He longs to *come and appear before God*, — to make himself known to him, as being conscious to himself of his own sincerity, — to attend on him, as a servant appears before his master, to pay his respects to him and receive his commands, — to give an account to him, as one from whom our judgment proceeds. To appear before God is as much the desire of the upright as it is the dread of the hypocrite. The psalmist knew he could not come into God's courts without incurring expense, for so was the law, that *none should appear before God empty*; yet he longs to come, and will not grudge the charges.

3. What is the degree of this desire. It is very importunate; it is his soul that pants, his soul that thirsts, which denotes not only the sincerity, but the strength, of his desire. His longing for the water of the well of Bethlehem was nothing to this. He compares it to the *panting of a hart*, or deer, which is naturally hot and dry, especially of a hunted buck, *after the water-brooks*. Thus earnestly does a gracious soul desire communion with God, thus impatient is it in the want of that communion, so impossible does it find it to be satisfied with any thing short of that communion, and so insatiable is it in taking the pleasures of that communion when the opportunity of it returns, still thirsting after the full enjoyment of him in the heavenly kingdom.

II. Holy love mourning for God's present withdrawals and the want of the benefit of solemn ordinances (v. 3): "*My tears have been my meat day and night* during this forced absence from God's house." His circumstances were sorrowful, and he accommodated himself to them, received the impressions and returned the signs of sorrow. Even the royal prophet was a weeping prophet when he wanted the comforts of God's house. His tears were mingled with his meat; nay, they were *his meat day and night*; he fed, he feasted, upon his own tears, when there was such just cause for them; and it was a satisfaction to him that he found his heart so much affected with a grievance of this nature. Observe, He did not think it enough to shed a tear or two at parting from the sanctuary, to weep a farewell-prayer when he took his leave, but, as long as he continued under a forced absence from that place of his delight, he never looked up, but wept day and night. Note, Those that are deprived of the benefit of public ordinances constantly miss them, and therefore should constantly mourn for the want of them, till they are restored to them again. Two things aggravated his grief: —

1. The reproaches with which his enemies teased him: *They continually say unto me, Where is thy God?*

(1.) Because he was absent from the ark, the token of God's presence. Judging of the God of Israel by the gods of the heathen, they concluded he had lost his God. Note, Those are mistaken who think that when they have robbed us of our Bibles, and our ministers, and our solemn assemblies, they have robbed us of our God; for, though God has tied us to them when they are to be had, he has not tied himself to them. We know where our God is, and where to find him, when we know not where his ark is, nor where to find that. Wherever we are there is a way open heaven-ward.

(2.) Because God did not immediately appear for his deliverance they concluded that he had abandoned him; but herein also they were deceived: it does not follow that the saints have lost their God because they have lost all their other friends. However, by this base reflection on God and his people, they added affliction to the afflicted, and that was what they aimed at. Nothing is more grievous to a gracious soul than that which is intended to shake its hope and confidence in God.

2. The remembrance of his former liberties and enjoyments, v. 4. *Son, remember thy good things*, is a great aggravation of evil things, so much

do our powers of reflection and anticipation add to the grievance of this present time. David remembered the *days of old*, and then *his soul was poured out in him*; he melted away, and the thought almost broke his heart. he poured out his soul within him in sorrow, and then poured out his soul before God in prayer. But what was it that occasioned this painful melting of spirit? It was not the remembrance of the pleasures at court, or the entertainments of his own house, from which he was now banished, that afflicted him, but the remembrance of the free access he had formerly had to God's house and the pleasure he had in attending the sacred solemnities there.

(1.) He *went to the house of God*, though in his time it was but a tent; nay, if this psalm was penned, as many think it was, at the time of his being persecuted by Saul, the ark was then in a private house, ^{<10B>}2 Samuel 6:3. But the meanness, obscurity, and inconveniency of the place did not lessen his esteem of that sacred symbol of the divine presence. David was a courtier, a prince, a man of honour, a man of business, and yet very diligent in attending God's house and joining in public ordinances, even in the days of Saul, when he and his great men *enquired not at it*, ^{<13B>}1 Chronicles 13:3. Whatever others did, David and his house would serve the Lord.

(2.) He *went with the multitude*, and thought it no disparagement to his dignity to be at the head of a crowd in attending upon God. Nay, this added to the pleasure of it, that he was accompanied with a multitude, and therefore it is twice mentioned, as that which he greatly lamented the want of now. The more the better in the service of God; it is the more like heaven, and a sensible help to our comfort in the communion of saints.

(3.) He *went with the voice of joy and praise*, not only with joy and praise in his heart, but with the outward expressions of it, proclaiming his joy and speaking forth the high praises of his God. Note, When we wait upon God in public ordinances we have reason to do it both with cheerfulness and thankfulness, to take to ourselves the comfort and give to God the glory of our liberty of access to him.

(4.) He *went to keep holy-days*, not to keep them in vain mirth and recreation, but in religious exercises. Solemn days are spent most comfortably in solemn assemblies.

III. Holy love hoping (v. 5): *Why art thou cast down, O my soul?* His sorrow was upon a very good account, and yet it must not exceed its due limits, nor prevail to depress his spirits; he therefore communes with his own heart, for his relief. “Come, my soul, I have something to say to thee in thy heaviness.” Let us consider,

1. The cause of it. “Thou art cast down, as one stooping and sinking under a burden, ¹⁰²⁵Proverbs 12:25. Thou art disquieted, in confusion and disorder; now why are thou so?” This may be taken as an enquiring question: “Let the cause of this uneasiness be duly weighed, and see whether it be a just cause.” Our disquietudes would in many cases vanish before a strict scrutiny into the grounds and reasons of them. “*Why am I cast down?* Is there a cause, a real cause? Have not others more cause, that do not make so much ado? Have not we, at the same time, cause to be encouraged?” Or it may be taken as an expostulating question; those that commune much with their own hearts will often have occasion to chide them, as David here. “Why do I thus dishonour God by my melancholy dejections? Why do I discourage others and do so much injury to myself? Can I give a good account of this tumult?”

2. The cure of it: *Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him.* A believing confidence in God is a sovereign antidote against prevailing despondency and disquietude of spirit. And therefore, when we chide ourselves to hope in God; when the soul embraces itself it sinks; if it catch hold on the power and promise of God, it keeps the head above water. *Hope in God,*

(1.) That he shall have glory from us: “*I shall yet praise him;* I shall experience such a change in my state that I shall not want matter for praise, and such a change in my spirit that I shall not want a heart for praise.” It is the greatest honour and happiness of a man, and the greatest desire and hope of every good man, to be unto God for a name and a praise. What is the crown of heaven's bliss but this, that there we shall be for ever praising God? And what is our support under our present woes but this, that we shall yet praise God, that they shall not prevent nor abate our endless hallelujahs?

(2.) That we shall have comfort in him. We shall praise him *for the help of his countenance*, for his favour, the support we have by it and the satisfaction we have in it. Those that know how to value and improve the light of God's countenance will find in that a suitable, seasonable, and

sufficient help, in the worst of times, and that which will furnish them with constant matter for praise. David's believing expectation of this kept him from sinking, nay, it kept him from drooping; his harp was a palliative cure of Saul's melancholy, but his hope was an effectual cure of his own.

PSALM 42:6-11

COMPLAINTS AND CONSOLATIONS

Complaints and comforts here, as before, take their turn, like day and night in the course of nature.

I. He complains of the dejections of his spirit, but comforts himself with the thoughts of God, v. 6.

1. In his troubles. His soul was dejected, and he goes to God and tells him so: *O my God! my soul is cast down within me.* It is a great support to us, when upon any account we are distressed, that we have liberty of access to God, and liberty of speech before him, and may open to him the causes of our dejection. David had communed with his own heart about its own bitterness, and had not as yet found relief; and therefore he turns to God, and opens before him the trouble. Note, When we cannot get relief for our burdened spirits by pleading with ourselves, we should try what we can do by praying to God and leaving our case with him. We cannot still these winds and waves; but we know who can.

2. In his devotions. His soul was elevated, and, finding the disease very painful, he had recourse to that as a sovereign remedy. "My soul is plunged; therefore, to prevent its sinking, I will remember thee, meditate upon thee, and call upon thee, and try what that will do to keep up my spirit." Note, The way to forget the sense of our miseries is to remember the God of our mercies. It was an uncommon case when the psalmist *remembered God and was troubled*, ^{<197B>}Psalm 77:3. He had often remembered God and was comforted, and therefore had recourse to that expedient now. He was now driven to the utmost borders of the land of Canaan, to shelter himself there from the rage of his persecutors — sometimes *to the country about Jordan*, and, when discovered there, to *the land of the Hermonites*, or to a hill called *Mizar*, or *the little hill*; but,

(1.) Wherever he went he took his religion along with him. In all these places, he remembered God, and lifted up his heart to him, and kept his secret communion with him. This is the comfort of the banished, the wanderers, the travellers, of those that are strangers in a strange land, that *undique ad caelos tantundem est viae* — wherever they are there is a way open heavenward.

(2.) Wherever he was he retained his affection for the courts of God's house; from the land of Jordan, or from the top of the hills, he used to look a long look, a longing look, towards the place of the sanctuary, and wish himself there. Distance and time could not make him forget that which his heart was so much upon and which lay so near it.

II. He complains of the tokens of God's displeasure against him, but comforts himself with the hopes of the return of his favour in due time.

1. He saw his troubles coming from God's wrath, and that discouraged him (v. 7): "*Deep calls unto deep*, one affliction comes upon the neck of another, as if it were called to hasten after it; and thy water-spouts give the signal and sound the alarm of war." It may be meant of the terror and disquietude of his mind under the apprehensions of God's anger. One frightful thought summoned another, and made way for it, as is usual in melancholy people. He was overpowered and overwhelmed with a deluge of grief, like that of the old world, when the windows of heaven were opened and the fountains of the great deep were broken up. Or it is an allusion to a ship at sea in a great storm, tossed by the roaring waves, which go over it, ~~1475~~ Psalm 107:25. Whatever waves and billows of affliction go over us at any time we must call them God's waves and his billows, that we may humble ourselves under his mighty hand, and may encourage ourselves to hope that though we be threatened we shall not be ruined; for the waves and billows are under a divine check. *The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of these many waters*. Let not good men think it strange if they be exercised with many and various trials, and if they come thickly upon them; God knows what he does, and so shall they shortly. Jonah, in the whale's belly, made use of these words of David, ~~311B~~ Jonah 2:3 (they are exactly the same in the original), and of him they were literally true, *All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me*; for the book of psalms is contrived so as to reach every one's case.

2. He expected his deliverance to come from God's favour (v. 8): *Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness*. Things are bad, but they shall not always be so. *Non si male nunc et olim sic erit — Though affairs are now in an evil plight, they may not always be so*. After the storm there will come a calm, and the prospect of this supported him when deep called unto deep. Observe

(1.) What he promised himself from God: *The Lord will command his lovingkindness*. He eyes the favour of God as the fountain of all the good he looked for. That is life; that is better than life; and with that God will gather those from whom he has, *in a little wrath, hid his face*, ^{<341>}Isaiah 54:7, 8. God's conferring his favour is called his *commanding* it. This intimates the freeness of it; we cannot pretend to merit it, but it is bestowed in a way of sovereignty, he gives like a king. It intimates also the efficacy of it; he speaks his lovingkindness, and makes us to hear it; speaks, and it is done. He *commands deliverance* (^{<344>}Psalm 44:4), *commands the blessing* (^{<343>}Psalm 133:3), as one having authority. By commanding his lovingkindness, he commands down the waves and the billows, and they shall obey him. This he will do *in the daytime*, for God's lovingkindness will make day in the soul at any time. Though *weeping has endured for a night*, a long night, yet *joy will come in the morning*.

(2.) What he promised for himself to God. If God command his lovingkindness for him, he will meet it, and bid it welcome, with his best affections and devotions.

[1.] He will rejoice in God: *In the night his song shall be with me*. The mercies we receive in the day we ought to return thanks for at night; when others are sleeping we should be praising God. See ^{<342>}Psalm 119:62, *At midnight will I rise to give thanks*. In silence and solitude, when we are retired from the hurries of the world, we must be pleasing ourselves with the thoughts of God's goodness. Or in the night of affliction: "Before the day dawns, in which God commands his lovingkindness, I will sing songs of praise in the prospect of it." Even in tribulation the saints can *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*, sing in hope, and praise in hope, Romans v. 2, 5:2, 3. It is God's prerogative to *give songs in the night*, ^{<350>}Job 35:10.

[2.] He will seek to God in a constant dependence upon him: *My prayer shall be to the God of my life*. Our believing expectation of mercy must not supersede, but quicken, our prayers for it. God is the God of our life, in whom we live and move, the author and giver of all our comforts; and

therefore to whom should we apply by prayer, but to him? And from him what good may not we expect? It would put life into our prayers in them to eye God as the God of our life; for then it is for our lives, and the lives of our souls, that we stand up to make request.

III. He complains of the insolence of his enemies, and yet comforts himself in God as his friend, v. 9-11.

1. His complaint is that his enemies oppressed and reproached him, and this made a great impression upon him.

(1.) They oppressed him to such a degree that he went mourning from day to day, from place to place, v. 9. He did not break out into indecent passions, though abused as never man was, but he silently wept out his grief, and went mourning; and for this we cannot blame him: it must needs grieve a man that truly loves his country, and seeks the good of it, to see himself persecuted and hardly used, as if he were an enemy to it. Yet David ought not hence to have concluded that God had forgotten him and cast him off, nor thus to have expostulated with him, as if he did him as much wrong in suffering him to be trampled upon as those did that trampled upon him: *Why go I mourning?* and *why hast thou forgotten me?* We may complain to God, but we are not allowed thus to complain of him.

(2.) They reproached him so cuttingly that it was a *sword in his bones*, v. 10. He had mentioned before what the reproach was that touched him thus to the quick, and here he repeats it: *They say daily unto me, Where is thy God?* — a reproach which was very grievous to him, both because it reflected dishonour upon God and was intended to discourage his hope in God, which he had enough to do to keep up in any measure, and which was but too apt to fail of itself.

2. His comfort is that God is his *rock* (v. 9) — a rock to build upon, a rock to take shelter in. The rock of ages, in whom is everlasting strength, would be his rock, his strength in the inner man, both for doing and suffering. To him he had access with confidence. To God his rock he might say what he had to say, and be sure of a gracious audience. he therefore repeats what he had before said (v. 5), and concludes with it (v. 11): *Why art thou cast down, O my soul?* His griefs and fears were clamorous and troublesome; they were not silenced though they were again and again answered. But

here, at length, his faith came off a conqueror and forced the enemies to quit the field. And he gains this victory,

(1.) By repeating what he had before said, chiding himself, as before, for his dejections and disquietudes, and encouraging himself to trust in the name of the Lord and to stay himself upon his God. Note, It may be of great use to us to think our good thoughts over again, and, if we do not gain our point with them at first, perhaps we may the second time; however, where the heart goes along with the words, it is no vain repetition. We have need to press the same thing over and over again upon our hearts, and all little enough.

(2.) By adding one word to it; *there* he hoped to praise God for the salvation that was in his countenance; *here*, “I will praise him,” says he, “as the salvation of my countenance from the present cloud that is upon it; if God smile upon me, that will make me look pleasant, look up, look forward, look round, with pleasure.” He adds, *and my God*, “related to me, in covenant with me; all that he is, all that he has, is mine, according to the true intent and meaning of the promise.” This thought enabled him to triumph over all his griefs and fears. God's being with the saints in heaven, and being their God, is that which will *wipe away all tears from their eyes*,

618 Revelation 21:3, 4.