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“Why Are You Downcast, O My Soul? Hope in God.” Part 1

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Hope Thirsts for God Psalm 42:1-6a

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The word from God through which the Holy Spirit comforts us with hope in Christ is Psalm 42

To the director of music, a teaching psalm by the sons of Korah.

As a deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When may I go and see the face of God? My tears are my food day and night, as people say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”

As I pour out my soul, I want to remember this that I crossed over with the assemble and led them in procession to the house of God with shouts of joy and thanksgiving with the crowd celebrating.

Why are you downcast, O my soul, and moan within me? Hope in God, for I will still praise him, my Salvation and my God. (Psalm 42:1-6a).

This is the word of our Lord.

Dear friends in Christ, fellow saints washed clean in the blood of our risen Savior:

A deer panting for water. Was it being chased, hounded by wolves on the hunt? Had there been a period of drought with thirst slowly creeping in until it became overpowering? Either way what a deep longing thirst creates! First, the mouth dries out, the lips crack, the throat becomes parched. Soon every cell in the body is demanding water. Every thought, every wish, every desire dreams of a cool, wet drink moistening the throat and quenching the thirst.

Hope thirsts for God. That's the theme today as we begin a three part series on Psalm 42 and 43. The theme for the entire series are those words repeated as a refrain three times in these two Psalms: “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Hope in God.” Dear Christian friends, even as our bodies long for water, so our souls thirst for God. How downcast, distressed, and disturbed we are when God seems so far away! For he alone is our hope. Hope thirsts for God, enduring the taunt of others and remembering the fellowship of God's people around God's word.

A. Enduring the taunt of others

The Psalmist writes, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Where can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’” (Psalm 42:1-3 NIV84).

Only the Lord God -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- is the living God. All others are dead idols. He is life itself and the source of all life. He alone provides physical life, and he alone can give spiritual life, eternal life, to us who were born dead in sin. “My soul

thirsts for God, for the living God” (Psalm 42:2 NIV84).

Such thirst grows in the believer, whether that's the Psalm writer or you and me, dear Christian. The unbeliever thirsts for other things, since the natural mind is hostile toward the true God. But once the Lord enters our life through Baptism and graciously grants us to taste of his goodness in Christ, that new, spiritual life he's created in us thirsts for him more and more.

We feel that thirst especially during times of trouble and distress. How troubled the Psalm writer felt. He had lost his appetite. Tears were his only food, so great was his distress. For he had to endure the taunt: “Where is your God?”

you see, when a believer suffers, how easily that taunt comes out of the mouth of unbelievers! “You think you're a child of God? Then why are you suffering like this? Do you think God would really do this to his child? Where is your God?” Such words not only feed our own doubts about our relationship to God, but they also attack God's goodness and faithfulness. Is he really the kind, merciful heavenly Father he says he is? Will he really keep his promise to work all things for the good of his people?

This is one of the attacks the devil tried to use against Jesus. After Jesus had fasted for forty days and nights in the wilderness, the devil came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread” (Matthew 4:3 NIV84). Let's expand on Satan's intent here. “You, Jesus, claim to have that unique relationship with God that you are the eternal Son. Then why does the Father let you suffer from hunger? Satisfy that hunger by turning these stones into bread. Don't you think the Father wants you to do that if you are the Son?” And the same temptation comes at Jesus again at the cross. Do you remember how people taunted him, “He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Matthew 27:55)? Where is your God?

Jesus defeated that temptation for you and me, dear friends. So through faith in him we can endure the taunts the devil speaks through others, and even the taunts he speaks through our own sinful flesh. For isn't this as well a struggle we go through, dear Christians? Even if others don't say, “Where is your God?” isn't there a voice from our sinful flesh whispering, “Where is God when you really need him? Why isn't he helping you now? Is he that unreliable? Or have you done something to alienate him?”

The devil's aim in all this is to draw you away from God, so that you satisfy your thirst with something else, anything else, except the true God. But Christian hope thirsts for God, for the living God. Close your ears to the taunts of others and listen to your God. Drink in his word. This brings us to the second part.

B. Remembering the fellowship of God's people around God's word

See what the Psalmist recalls. “These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng” (Psalm 42:4 NIV84). He remembers the fellowship of God's people around God's word centered at God's house in joyful thanksgiving to the Lord.

In the Old Testament the Lord God chose Jerusalem as the one place for worship and sacrifice. How the Psalm writer thirsts to be able to go back to the temple and share in the worship celebrations! For there the word of God was proclaimed. There the

sacrifices foreshadowed the one, great sacrifice of the Messiah to atone for all sin. How his soul thirsted for God in order to drink in God's word in the fellowship of God's people!

Where does God meet his people face-to-face today? Not at a certain building in Jerusalem, but wherever his word is rightly preached and his sacraments rightly used. And what fellowship his word and sacraments bring us -- fellowship with our God and with our brothers and sisters in Christ!

Often we fail to fully appreciate the thirst-quenching water of his word and sacraments, poured out as we celebrate with our fellow Christians in God's house. Shutins express to me that thirst to be back here in church. Do we able-bodied Christians have that same longing? Are we willing to say no to other things so that we can satisfy this god-pleasing thirst by gathering with our fellow Christians in regular worship?

Hope thirsts for our God. How does he meet us to satisfy that thirst? He meets us in his word and sacraments. So hope drinks them in. What hope his word brings us! For his word reveals our Savior. We pray with the hymn writer, "Lord, your words are waters living Where I quench my thirsty need" (Christian Worship 283:3 "Speak, O Savior; I Am Listening"). Is your soul downcast? Does your sin disturb you? Then drink in his word of promise. For the Bible reveals the mind of God toward us. From before he created the world, he choose you in Christ according to his own good will and pleasure. For you see, dear Christian, nothing in you or me could draw God's love toward us. But what grace and mercy! Despite what we were, he sent his Son for all sinners, so that through faith in Christ you are God's dear child, redeemed by the blood of Christ. What hope his word gives! What hope for which we praise our Savior and our God!

Is your soul downcast? Does your sin disturb you? See Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, take away the sin of the world. Yes, he took away your sin. He did that for you -- you who eat his body and drink his blood in his Supper, remembering his sacrifice on the cross for you. How his new covenant, his promise of forgiveness, lifts up our souls and comforts our sin-troubled hearts. As you come to the Lord's table, exclaim with the hymn writer, "Here, O my Lord, I see you face to face; Here would I touch and handle things unseen, Here grasp with firmer hand eternal grace, And all my weariness upon you lean" (Christian Worship 315:1 "Here, O My Lord, I See You Face to Face"). What hope his Supper gives! And what an answer to the Psalmist's question: "When can I go and meet with God" (Psalm 42:2 NIV84)!

Is your soul downcast? Does your sin disturb you? Is there that burning thirst in your throat? Do you feel the taunt from other people or your sinful flesh: "Where is your God?" He is right here in his word, recorded in the Scriptures and made visible in the sacraments. Through these he pours out the fullness of his grace and mercy. Hear his message brought to you in word and water and bread and wine. Your sins are forgiven. Rejoice as you remember the fellowship you have with God and one another. Hope thirsts for the living God. Only his word and sacraments satisfy that thirst. Drink in deeply. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.