

Horsley Evangelical Church ([www.horsleyec.org.uk](http://www.horsleyec.org.uk))

Minister Rev Ken McIntosh 6<sup>th</sup> September 2020

### Psalm 43 Send forth your light and truth

Last week we began book 2 of the Psalms as we studied Psalm 42. The second book of Psalms is made up of Psalms 42-72. As in book 1, many of these Psalms are written by David, but in book 2 most were written before David became king and was on the run from King Saul. However, the opening Psalms of book 2 (42-49) have in the title *of the Sons of Korah*. The Sons of Korah were Levites who had non priestly duties. Some were gatekeepers both of the Jerusalem sanctuary and the Jerusalem city walls. But some were given special responsibility by David for the music in God's sanctuary – both the singing and the instrumental accompaniment.

And this group, the Sons of Korah, may have been responsible for *composing* these Psalms, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Or, as others think, David may have written at least some of them and then entrusted the words to the sons of Korah who would then set them to music and sing them in the tent of meeting which later became the temple.

But it's interesting just to remember who Korah was. Most scholars think that this Korah was one of three ringleaders who became insolent and led 250 others in the desert to rebel against Moses and his authority. They wanted a more priestly role for themselves. And so they criticised Moses and said he took too much responsibility for himself.

But you may remember how the Lord dealt with this rebellion against Moses. The Lord caused an earthquake to swallow up the tents and the families of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers chapter 16) and then fire came out from the altar of incense to consume the 250 others who had followed these ringleaders.

But it's very interesting that here we have *the sons of Korah*, the descendants of this same Korah now helping to lead God's people in their worship of the Lord. If their ancestor was indeed a leader of a very serious rebellion against the Lord, then here are that man's descendants now given the privilege and responsibility of leading others in the praise and worship of God.

I find that both interesting and encouraging, for it reminds us of God's mercy. It reminds us that although we may make mistakes and sin against the Lord, he does not right us off. Indeed, the Lord's character is such that may still use us in his service in ways that at one time we could not imagine possible.

Now what is the relationship between Psalms 42 and 43? Some think that Psalms 42 and 43 were originally one. And so, if there are two stanzas or divisions in Psalm 42, what we have in Psalm 43 is the third stanza of the original Psalm.

Well, that is possible, but personally I'm not convinced. Along with others I think 42 and 43 are separate Psalms written on different occasions, but which share similarities. Verse 5 of Psalm 43 is the same as verses 5 and 11 of Psalm 42. Then in both Psalms, the writer is facing enemies who prevent him from going to the sanctuary of God in Jerusalem. And in both Psalms, the writer longs to meet with the Lord and his people in the temple. But I think 43 is a fresh Psalm, not simply a conclusion to Psalm 42.

When I saw Kathleen last week we read Psalm 42 together and I read from her own AV New Testament and Psalms. And the comment before Psalm 43 was something like, “David, praying to be restored to the temple, promises to serve God joyfully.” And I think that’s about right. I think the original writer of Psalm 43 is David, on the run from Saul, praying to be restored to the Jerusalem sanctuary and promising to then serve the Lord joyfully.

Let’s look at this Psalm under 3 headings this morning. First in verse 1 we have **pleading for God’s vindication**. **Read verse 1**. The plea for vindication (1) is a plea for justice. The Psalmist believes he has been unjustly treated by men and there is no one he can take his case to. His words of verse 1 are presented as if he were in some court of law, but he does not present them to any human court – his plea is before God. The Lord is the only one he can take his case to. But then again, the Lord is the one true Judge of all people. He alone knows all things and he alone is able to judge fairly and justly.

And so the Psalmist asks the Lord to show that he is in the right and that others who have falsely accused him be shown to be in the wrong. And every believer rests in that knowledge - that the Lord is Judge. And we believe that he will judge all people justly and perfectly on the Last Day. This is one of the reasons why God’s people look forward to his coming again, because on that Day the Lord of all will bring justice to the earth.

But of course the Scriptures give us plenty examples of the godly pleading to the Lord for justice *in this world*. And we have seen examples before in the Psalms. **Read Psalm 26:1 and 35:1**. And so now – **read verse 1 again**. The *ungodly nation* is more likely to be the nation of Israel rather than one of the surrounding nations since the word ‘ungodly’ is associated with the covenant. The Psalmist is saying that the nation of Israel has, on the whole, not been faithful to the demands of the covenant the Lord has made with her. The nation of Israel has not loved the Lord as she ought. And this is partly why the Psalmist is suffering as he is.

The men of Israel are mostly deceitful and wicked. There were of course exceptions to this, but this is how it appeared to the Psalmist in his situation. And it is not the only time that Israel has been so accused. Indeed Israel is often described like this by the prophets. For example - **read Isaiah 1:4**. And so the Psalmist takes his case concerning the whole nation to the Lord. Charles Spurgeon comments on this verse, “Popular opinion weighs with many, but divine opinion is far more weighty with the gracious few. One good word from God outweighs ten thousand railing speeches of men.” By which Spurgeon means that if we are on God’s side, then it does not matter how many are on the other side. We are on the Victor’s side

And that is a helpful reminder to keep praying for a nation. We may fear that the whole nation is ungodly and is full of deceitful and wicked people. And we may feel that some of its laws reflect this general ungodliness. But what can *we* do? Well, the Christian can pray. It doesn’t matter what the majority say or how large the majority is, for God can overturn and overrule whatever men say, if he chooses. And therefore we are to pray for justice and righteousness in the land. We are commanded to do this. God is sovereign . He is the King and the Judge, and he answers prayer.

**Pleading for God’s vindication**, but then secondly **pleading God’s promises** in verse 2. **Read verse 2**. One of the messages in book 2 of the Psalms is that God is true to his word, and despite evidences to the contrary he does come to the support of his people and his king. And that’s what this verse is concerned about.

The Psalmist first reminds God of who he is and has promised to be – *God my stronghold or the God of my stronghold*. The Psalmist is reminding the Lord of the covenant relationship he is in with him and of the promises God has given to him and all his people in the covenant. God has promised to be his

people's stronghold. We can compare this with the opening of Psalm 27. **Read Psalm 27:1-3.** David is confident because God is his stronghold. The Lord has promised to be with us and to defend his people. When evil men advance against David he will not be afraid, because the Lord is with him.

But the Psalmist here is not experiencing this protection from the Lord – even though he is in a covenant relationship with God. Instead it seems that the Lord has *rejected* him (2). The Psalmist goes about *mourning* rather than rejoicing in the Lord's deliverance (2). He is *oppressed* by the enemy rather than knowing God's protection from the enemy (2).

And so he is reverently asking the Lord why and is *pleading the promises of God*. "Lord my God, this is what you have promised: You have promised to be my stronghold. Why then is this happening to me?" And there is a place for doing that. The Bible does not discourage us from asking such questions, as long as we do so with the right attitude of reverence and humility. Asking such questions comes from faith. It is because the Psalmist believes God's covenant promises that he asks the question. If he didn't really believe the promises of God he wouldn't ask the question. But because this man is a believer, he cannot understand why the Lord seems to be treating him like this.

It's sometimes described as *wrestling with the Lord in prayer*. And such *wrestling* is much better than *bottling* - when we pretend everything is fine when it is not, and we bottle up our emotions and our hearts grow bitter against the Lord. Better to ask the Lord 'why'. Better to speak to him who is our loving heavenly Father about the matter. There is a place for such questions. Surely we remember one of the questions our Saviour asked the Father on the cross. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Such questions come for faith not from unbelief. Often we are not told the answers to such questions, just as Job was not told the answers to his questions as to why the Lord should allow him to go through his suffering. But it was right for Job to ask. We may not understand why the Lord does or allows certain things to happen – then again why should we expect to understand him who is infinite. His ways are past finding out. But he has given us great and precious promises which we are to hold on to. The Lord does all things well and he is never unfaithful to his word. But when we do not see that, we can speak to him about it. We must. **Read verse 2 again.**

Then in verses 3 - 5 we have **pleading for God's deliverance**. The Psalmist finally pleads that the Lord will deliver him from his time of exile. **Read verse 3, 4.** At the time of writing, the Psalmist only knew the darkness and deceitfulness of men who have oppressed him and prevented him from going to the sanctuary in Jerusalem. But now he asks for the Lord's *light* instead of their darkness and for the Lord's *truth* instead of their lies.

In Psalm 23 David says that the Lord's *goodness* and *love* follow him all the days of his life and that he will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. But here the Psalmist is asking that God's *light* and *truth* lead him and bring him to God's holy mountain.

Almost certainly the Psalmist is thinking back to the journey that the Israelites took through the desert from Egypt to the mountain of Sinai. Back in the days of Moses, God led his people through the desert with his *light* (as the pillar of cloud became the pillar of fire by night) and by his *truth* (as his word came through Moses). And he led the people until they came to God at Mount Sinai. But now the Psalmist, who feels as if he is in a spiritual wilderness, is asking that the light and truth of God will lead him to the Lord's holy mountain - to Mount Zion or Jerusalem where the sanctuary was found.

And so his longings are similar to the writer of Psalm 42. He longs to be near God and to be able to meet with the Lord in his tabernacle. He doesn't long to be near family or friends so much as he longs to be near God. And he feels it very keenly that men have prevented him from doing this.

This longing to be back in God's sanctuary is confirmed in verse 4. **Read verse 4.** He longs to be back in the Jerusalem sanctuary or temple. He longs to bring to God's altar a thank offering for the Lord's deliverance. And he longs to be near to the Lord, to worship him with other people, praising the Lord with the harp.

And so in this Psalm, *the Sons of Korah* are reminding Israel of the important and joy of meeting together in the Jerusalem tabernacle or temple to praise and worship the Lord. Here is a great privilege which the Lord has given his people and they should not neglect it.

And this reminds us of the importance of collective worship. The Psalmist's predicament doesn't mean that is unable to pray to the Lord. But as we noted in Psalm 42, he craves to be in the company of God's worshipping people. And he pleads with the Lord, whom he describes as his joy and his delight, to guide him through this wilderness time in his life so that he is brought back to the worship at Jerusalem.

Now we can be sure that one of the tactics of our great enemy the devil at this time is to prevent us from meeting together to worship the Lord. For Satan knows the importance of gathered worship.

We don't equate the temple or the Jerusalem sanctuary with a church building or a chapel. For us, the temple has been fulfilled and replaced by Christ. We go to Christ to meet with God. We do not go to a building to meet with God. It is Christ who has made us right with God through his great sacrifice on the cross. Nevertheless just as the enemy has denied the Psalmists in Psalms 42 and 43 access to the gathered worship of God, we know that our enemy, the devil, will try to do the same.

I'm not saying that the coronavirus pandemic is all a work of the devil. I'm simply saying that one of the tactics of Satan in this present situation is to prevent and hinder the church from meeting together. And we are not to be unaware of his schemes. Yes, there are reasons why it is not possible to meet as we once did. But the devil will surely try to use this present situation to harm the church, to divide the church and to stifle the message of the gospel.

But God is our delight and our joy. And the Lord hears and answers prayer. Again, we see how this exile has affected the Psalmist in the last verse - **read verse 5.** It is a disturbing thing not to be able to meet together for the worship of God. It make us downcast. And yet the Psalmist here is confident that in time he will be restored to the temple and therefore restored to knowing that joy of collective worship. And our prayer must be similar. We should be earnest in prayer that Christ's churches can soon meet again without restriction. But we trust God in all things. He is the sovereign God.

And with the Lord, the best is always to come. The future is always bright. We always have hope. For we know that ultimately God will lead us to heaven where we shall worship him for all eternity in the company of the saints. And with this thought, the thought of heaven, we do comfort ourselves. **Read verse 5 again.**