

Theme: In times of despair, Christians sustain hope in God by remembering His past faithfulness, experiencing His Presence through the means of grace He has given us, and anticipating His promised deliverance.

I. The Dark Night of the Soul and Anfechtungen

- A. Dark Night of the Soul - St. John of the Cross
- B. This was a stage of purification of the soul; mystical
- C. Luther went through a time he called Anfechtungen
- D. These were “challenges” that plunged him into despair
- E. Historian David Steinmetz describes the terror which Luther experienced at these times as a fear that “God had turned his back on him once and for all,” abandoning him “to suffer the pains of hell.” Feeling “alone in the universe,” Luther “doubted his own faith, his own mission, and the goodness of God—doubts which, because they verged on blasphemy, drove him deeper and deeper” into despair. His prayers met a “wall of indifferent silence.” He experienced heart palpitations, crying spells and profuse sweating. He was convinced that he would die soon and go straight to hell. “For more than a week I was close to the gates of death and hell. I trembled in all my members. Christ was wholly lost. I was shaken by desperation...”
- F. This is similar to Psalm 42-43 - and our experiences!
- G. How do we walk through this & find hope in Christ?

II. The Experience of Times of Despair

- A. Psalm 42 and 43 describe the experience of despair
 1. They may have been one Psalm originally (AfterHours)
 2. They certainly describe the experience of despair

3. They also describe how to sustain hope in despair

B. The rhythm of despair/lament and hope

1. Psalms 42-43 have a back-and-forth rhythm of despair/lament and hope
 - a. Despair/lament (42:1-3)
 - b. Hope (42:4-5)
 - c. Despair/lament (42:6-7)
 - d. Hope (42:8)
 - e. Despair/lament (42:9-10)
 - f. Hope (42:11)
 - g. Despair/lament (43:1-2)
 - h. Hope (42:3-5)
2. This is true to the experience of time of despair! We despair, seem to find hope, and then plunge into despair again!

C. The unceasing nature of despair in these times

- My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” Psalm 42:3
1. The despair lasted day and night with no reprieve
 2. The sense of despair was so strong that he cried day and night so that his tears were like daily food - it was like the Psalmist was stuffed with despair!
 3. During times of doubt and despair, it seems like there is no escape. During such times, even nights are often spent lying awake in despair, doubt, and worry!

D. The depths of despair in these times

1. We can despair because God seems distant

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?.. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon — from Mount Mizar. Psalm 42:1-2, 6

- a. We often think of this cry as positive - but the Psalmist is thirsty because he seems far from God's Presence!
- b. He is far from the Temple (Jordan, Hermon), and it seems like his access to God has been cut off.
- c. We no longer have to go to the Temple, but despair often begins when we simply feel distant from God.

2. Despair is encouraged by the enemy of our soul

My tears have been my food day and night, **while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"** Psalm 42:3

My bones suffer mortal agony as **my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"** Psalm 42:10

Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against **an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men.** ² You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, **oppressed by the enemy?** Psalm 43:1-2

- a. God may seem distant, but enemies are close!

- b. There are always those who will question our trust in God or even outright mock it.

- c. There are certainly many humans who revile and mock God and our faith, but the ultimate "enemy" (43:2) of our souls is Satan himself.

- d. In times of difficulty and despair, when God may feel distant, Satan will press the question, "Where is God? Why are you trusting Him? He is not rescuing you!"

- e. Whether through other humans or Satan's voice whispering in my ear, I must not allow these thoughts to take root in my soul or it will deepen my despair and doubt.

3. The sense of despair deepens until we feel God has forgotten us

I say to God my Rock, **"Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"** Psalm 42:9

- a. This is deeper than feeling a bit distant from God - it feels like God has forgotten him!

- b. We also experience this in our times of despair - Luther felt alone, and his prayers met a wall of indifferent silence.

4. The bottom of despair is when we feel like God has rejected us!

I say to God my Rock, **"Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"** Psalm 42:9

You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? **Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?** Psalm 43:2

- a. Notice how 43:2 parallels 42:9

1. God my Rock/God my Stronghold
2. Why have you forgotten/rejected me
3. Why must I go about mourning, oppressed...

b. But despair has deepened between 42:9 & 43:2

c. This is beyond feeling forgotten or overlooked by God - he feels like God is actively rejecting and abandoning him!

d. He feels like God has handed him over to his enemies. Luther said he felt like he would die and go to hell!

e. It is not true that we are rejected by God - but it can feel that way in the depth of despair!

E. The experience of times of despair

1. We vacillate between despair & hope, doubt & faith
2. Despair seems unceasing, pressing in day & night
3. Despair can intensify until we feel rejected by God

III. Sustaining Hope In Times of Despair

A. I must speak words of hope to myself!

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and ⁶ my God. Psalm 42:5-6

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. Psalm 42:11

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. Psalm 43:5

1. This is repeated 3 times for emphasis!

2. This is the beginning, heart and soul, and end of sustaining hope in times of despair!

3. Our soul is downcast, disturbed, and full of despair, but we must point it to God and His promises!

4. The voice of Satan and those who mock God taunt my faith and try to deepen despair and doubt, but I must speak words of truth and hope to my soul to sustain it in the face of these lies!

5. During times I am tempted to doubt and despair, I must remind myself of God's faithfulness to me in the past.

B. I must experience God's Presence through the means of grace

1. Means of grace - the specific activities God has given to His people through which He has promised to meet them and strengthen them by His grace.

2. Psalm 42 and 43 mention several of them:

a. The Psalm is a prayer and song to God

b. Psalm 43:3 speaks of God's truth and light, which guide us - this is the Scripture.

3. But the main focus here is not on private devotions but gathering with God's people for the public worship of God, which is a primary means of grace.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. **When can I go and meet with God?**... ⁴ 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 42:2, 4

Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them **bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.** ⁴ **Then will I go to the altar of God,** to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. Psalm 43:3-4

4. The Psalmist can pray to God on his own, but he longs to gather with the people of God at the Temple.
 5. We no longer go to the Temple, but we can not sustain hope in isolation from God's people!
 6. When we struggle with despair and doubt, we are strongly tempted to withdraw from fellowship and gathering with God's people for worship, but this ultimately only deepens the despair and doubt.
 7. If we truly desire for God to draw near us and restore our hope, our prayers will come to fruition as we gather with God's people to experience His Presence in and through corporate worship!
 8. "There is overwhelming empirical support for the value of being at a house of worship on a regular basis on all kinds of metrics — mental health, physical health, having more friends, being less lonely," Ryan Burge
 9. If we wish to sustain our hope, there is no substitute for gathering with God's people for worship and to receive from God through the means of grace.
- C. I must continue to speak words of hope for future deliverance
1. Remember the Stockdale paradox that began this series - "you must maintain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the

difficulties, and at the same time, have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."

2. The Psalmist speaks words of hope for the future! Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? **Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him,** my Savior and my God. Psa 42:11
 - a. This is hope built on a future when the Psalmist will come through the trial and praise God.
 - b. We must remind ourselves that God will keep His promises - through trials, difficulties, and even death itself!
3. The Psalmist is speaking to himself in these verses, but he is speaking to others in this whole Psalm.
4. I too must speak words of hope to myself & others.
5. When our present circumstances bring despair, we not only remind ourselves of God's past faithfulness, but in faith we speak of His future deliverance. This is how we sustain hope!

IV. Applying the Word - Sustaining Hope

- A. Do I understand the nature of despair?
1. Many of us do not understand the nature of despair, doubt, grief, and other "negative" emotions
 2. They are actually part of normal life in this fallen world, but we have tried to ignore them to our own peril.
 3. If we do not understand despair (or doubt, grief, etc.), we will struggle to journey through it in a healthy manner.

4. You may want to look at the notes or re-listen to the early part of this teaching and meditate on the Psalms to understand despair, doubt, and grief better.
 - a. We vacillate between despair & hope, doubt & faith
 - b. Despair seems unceasing, pressing in day & night
 - c. Despair can intensify until we feel rejected by God

B. Practices to sustain hope in times of despair

1. Psalm 42-43 gives us positive practices to sustain hope through times of despair
2. It is also important to practice these when we are NOT in times of despair - it is better to sweat in peace than bleed in war!
3. Which of these practices do I need to grow in:
 - a. Speaking words of hope to myself, especially reminding myself of God's past faithfulness
 - b. Experiencing God's Presence through the means of grace He has given us, especially in corporate worship
 - c. Speak words of hope to myself and others regarding God's promised future deliverance
4. Let the Spirit speak to the area you need to practice to sustain hope.

C. The Table of Hope

1. This Table is a primary means of grace
2. This Table is not just ritual - the Lord will meet You to nourish and sustain You as you look to Him!

3. Here we look back to God's past faithfulness, experience His present Presence, and proclaim our future hope!
4. Come and have your hope strengthened!

Christ Our Hope In Times of Despair

Psalms 42-43
August 10, 2025
Communion
Psalm 20:1-5

Teaching keywords: Hope; suffering; sorrow; prayer; means of grace

May the LORD answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you. ² May he send you help from His sanctuary and grant you support His Holy Hill. ³ May he remember all your prayer and worship ⁴ and may he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed. ⁵ May the LORD grant all your requests. Psalm 20:1-5

For the director of music. A maskil of the Sons of Korah. ¹ As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? ³ My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" ⁴ 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. ⁵ Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and ⁶ my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon — from Mount Mizar. ⁷ Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. ⁸ By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me — a prayer to the God of my life. ⁹ I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" ¹⁰ My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?" ¹¹ Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. Psalm 42:0-11

Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men. ² You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? ³ Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. ⁴ Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. ⁵ Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. Psalm 43:1-5