

ViralStJames Bible Study #8: Far from home

The Background: Far from home

Psalm 42

After 3 months of lockdown, the exile from meeting together continues. For us, this may be a new and unwelcome experience, but exile was a familiar picture for the Israelites in Old Testament times. This Psalm appears to have been written by someone familiar with leading worship in the Temple in Jerusalem (v4), but now living well over 100 miles away near the source of the River Jordan (v6) and experiencing the pain of missing God. For the Israelites at this time, God was to be encountered in the Temple at Jerusalem. That was his dwelling place. When the author of the Psalm was cut off from it, he was cut off from friends, priests and seemingly, God's presence. How does he get by?

The Passage

Psa. 42:0 *To the leader.*

A Maskil of the Korahites.

¹ As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.

² My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.

When shall I come and behold
the face of God?

³ My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me continually,
"Where is your God?"

Psa. 42:4 These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng,
and led them in procession to the house
of God,
with glad shouts and songs of
thanksgiving,
a multitude keeping festival.

⁵ Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help ⁶ and my God.

My soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember you
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.

⁷ Deep calls to deep
at the thunder of your cataracts;
all your waves and your billows
have gone over me.

⁸ By day the LORD commands his steadfast
love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

Psa. 42:9 I say to God, my rock,
"Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I walk about mournfully
because the enemy oppresses me?"

¹⁰ As with a deadly wound in my body,
my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me continually,
"Where is your God?"

Psa. 42:11 Why are you cast down, O my
soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.

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The Questions

- 1) How does the Psalmist describe his desire to meet with God? (v1-2)
- 2) What appears to sustain him during this exile? (v3-4)
- 3) What was he able to do in his previous meetings with God? (v4)
- 4) Can you identify with the feelings of the Psalmist, or do you think he is over-egging it? Thirst is a strong image, implying he can't live without it – does that resonate?
- 5) The Psalmist is missing his previous role (leadership); the communal celebrations (festive throng) and the opportunity to praise God (shouting/singing). What are you missing most in the lockdown?
- 6) The Psalmist is clearly feeling down (downcast, disturbed (v5), overwhelmed (v7) tearful (v3). What is his response? Do you feel able to respond in these ways? Can we question God? (v9)
 - *Jesus uses a Psalm to express his anguish on the cross (Psalm 22 v 1) – and this too ends with a shout of confidence, of faith (Psalm 22 v 31) as does this Psalm (v 11)*
- 7) The Psalmist was thirsting for God and the festivities at the Temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was their joyous celebration of the harvest and commemoration of God protecting Israel during the wilderness wanderings. Now read John 7 v 37-39. What does Jesus say when he goes to the Temple for this Festival?
- 8) Whilst we may miss our buildings and the opportunity to meet with others in person, Jesus makes it clear that God does not dwell in buildings. How can we slake the thirst for God, for life?
- 9) The Psalmist's search for life-giving water appears to be a personal one. How does Jesus take this one step further? How can we give life to others?
 - *The Psalmist seems to be telling himself to put his hope in God (v 5, 11). Jesus says that those who put their faith in him will not only feed themselves, but become a life-giving source for others (John 7 v38).*
 - *Think of the experience of the woman at the well in John 4 – she receives the living water and brings her fellow townspeople to Jesus*
 - *(John 4, 13,14 and 39-42)*
- 10) What do you take away from this reflection?

The Space for notes
