

## Psalm 42

Lent 2, March 13, 2022  
Pastor Sam Rodebaugh

*As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.*

*<sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? <sup>3</sup> My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" <sup>4</sup> These*

*things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival. <sup>5</sup> Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. <sup>8</sup> By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. <sup>9</sup> I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" <sup>10</sup> As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" <sup>11</sup> Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.*

In his book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, American Psychologist Daniel Kahneman makes the claim that each of us have two selves, two different identities. There is your Experiencing Self, and then there is your Remembering Self. I don't totally understand all of it, and I don't really get into psychology all that much, but his overarching thesis is that there is a part of us that makes quick decisions in the moment—the part that focuses on the here and now. That's the Experiencing Self. And then there's the part of us that looks back on these experiences, decides which ones have lasting, meaningful impact, and generally composes the story of our lives. That's the Remembering Self. In his conclusion, he states that we *are* our Remembering Selves. His point is that what you remember changes who you are and affects the decisions you make. He says that it's only the memories that we get to keep, we don't actually keep the experiences.

I don't know about all of Mr. Kahneman's theory, but I do believe he is correct about the importance of memory. Both of my mom's parents struggled with memory loss due to Alzheimer's in their latter years, and I remember when we visited them before they passed away how sad it was that my grandparents didn't seem to recognize their daughter anymore. Anyone who's faced similar situations knows the struggle. You see them as who they are, but who they are also isn't really there anymore. Memories are so important! Once we lose them, it's like we've lost ourselves, lost our identity.

Also powerful are the *types* of memories that we remember. People who have experienced great traumas in their lives can have difficulty moving forward. The memory plagues them. One doctor described victims of violence as being "caught in a time warp," as the bad memories are continually replayed. Maybe you know somebody or maybe you *are* somebody that is haunted by certain memories. We can probably all agree, both the ability to remember and the actual memories that we hold onto have a great impact on how we move forward in our lives.

Well, with all of these cheerful thoughts in mind, I would turn your attention to our text this morning. The Psalmist is struggling. He's doing a great deal of remembering, and I think we can say that he is extremely depressed. Not all of his memories are very cheerful. Yet, in the course of his

remembrances, he forces himself to remember something else: that is, he remembers the Lord. He realizes that the only way out of his despair, the only way to free himself of his nagging doubts, is to focus on the Lord and what God has done for him. Today, we'll be doing the same as we consider the theme: **Soul, Remember the Lord**. Through the Lord, **I. Doubt gives way to conviction**, and **II. Despair gives way to confidence**.

Martin Luther once described the Lord as being like the sun, *"Sometimes covered with clouds and sometimes shining out of a clear sky."* That is to say that sometimes God feels very present, and other times God seems almost absent entirely. I think we've all experienced both of those feelings before. There are the times when everything's going right, you can see the blessings of the Lord as He gives them to you. You pray and you are confident He listens, and you know you're at peace with God. Then there are those times when the clouds move in, life grows dreary and troublesome; you perhaps start to wonder if God is punishing you for something and maybe start to doubt whether He's listening at all.

The Psalmist was experiencing the latter of these two extremes as he wrote this Psalm. At the beginning of our text, he reveals that it felt as if God was absent from him. ***"As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?"*** At this point in his life, everything seemed to indicate that there was good reason to doubt the presence of God in his life. Two times in our text, the question is repeated: ***"Where is your God?"***

Have you ever had that question asked of you? Or perhaps, *you* have wondered the same? With every disaster or tragedy, there are those who say, "Thoughts and prayers," and then there are others who respond, "Save your prayers, God's not listening." It is easy at those times when the clouds seem to move in and cover up God to wonder whether or not He is really there, whether He even cares about you at all.

In the midst of these questions and doubts, the Psalmist begins to *remember*. He recalls some important truths: ***"These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival. Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."*** He remembers that there were times when the clouds were not covering God, times when He went into God's house and worshipped Him and *knew* that God was there. And his conviction is that these times *will* return, that God would show Himself once more.

If you can commiserate with the Psalmist and have experience with these same doubts, think about Jesus. Jesus felt this separation from God in a way that you never will. As He hung on the cross, at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*** (Matthew 27:46) At this point, the sun had already been covered up. We're told in the verses before that darkness had covered the land starting around noon. But even with God physically hiding the sun in the sky, nothing compared with God hiding Himself from His own Son. Jesus hung there, with all of your sin and mine and with all the accompanying guilt, and His Father left Him.

And because the Father did this to His Son, it means He'll never do it to you and me. As Moses encouraged the Israelites, ***"The Lord your God goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."*** (Deuteronomy 31:6) With our sins clinging to us, God would have a great reason to abandon us. Yet God has taken them away from us. Christ was forsaken upon the cross, being punished for sin, so that you *would* avoid the same. And even if for a moment it feels like God is absent, or that He's punishing you, or that He's turned a deaf ear towards you—remember the Lord.

Remember what He went through for you upon the cross. Remember, as the Psalmist does, the blessings that God has heaped on you in the past, and know that these times will return—in fact, they've never left. Remember the Lord and turn your doubts—"Where is God?"—into conviction, saying instead, "God is with me. Because that is what He promises me."

Now, even though the Psalmist reaches this firm conviction early on in our text, he seems to keep going back to his despair. He asks God later in verse 9, ***"Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"*** You can tell that the Psalmist is deeply depressed. He describes his sadness and weeping, his loss of appetite, feelings of isolation, pain—he is depressed, plain and simple—just as many of us have been or are or will be. One moment he's hopeful, the next, he's despairing. One moment he's praising God, the next moment he's crying out for mercy. First, he rejoices in God's faithfulness, then He accuses God of forgetting. This Psalm really is a roller coaster of *deep* emotion—and how frequently have we felt the exact same way?

In verse 7, he writes, ***"Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me."*** I remember a vacation my family took to the beach in North Carolina. A storm was coming, which meant the beach had cleared of sunbathers and large waves were crashing in on the shore. Of course, that meant for me and my brothers that it was the very best time to swim. I was boogie boarding, and the realization came that I'd made a rather poor decision when one gigantic wave swept over me. It tossed me a few times underwater—at one point I started swimming for shore and I collided with the sandy bottom. Finally breaking the surface, another similarly sized wave swept over me before I'd had the chance to catch my breath. Thankfully, as that wave subsided, I realized I was now close enough to the shore that I could simply stand up and breath.

That's the picture that the Psalmist is describing, ***"Deep calls to deep. . .all your breakers and waves have gone over me."*** One wave calls out to his friends, "Hey, come crash over here, we have an unsuspecting victim." That's probably happened to you before, when the waves of life crash over you, and you feel like you're drowning. You don't know how to make it out, and just when you think you've finally broken through, you're swept under again as another disappointment threatens to drown you. And the discouragement, the despair, the depression—it's enough to sink you. And yet, God is aptly described in verse 9 as ***"The Rock."*** The one unchangeable in a world off change, He is the one immovable in a relentlessly moving life.

And because of that, as we experience the turbulence of life all around us and the disappointments that threaten to drown us, we can *use* those opportunities to remember the One who does not change. In those moments, remember that you can find your Rock exactly where He has said He'll always be: In His Word and in the sacraments.

Use His Word, to remember that this same God who did mighty acts for the Children of Israel still does mighty acts for you today, to preserve you and to provide for you. Again and again in their history, God bared His mighty arms to defeat Israel's enemies to show that He was God. Then He bared His arms again as He raised them and had them pinned to a cross for you. Once more, God bared His mighty arms for the world to see when He raised His beloved Son from the grave. Because the truth is, the Father did *not* forsake the Son forever, but rather raised Him and glorified Him.

And that's what you ought to remember when you're feeling the same way this Psalmist is. Remember that you have been given an eternal and certain hope, because your hope rests upon the unshakeable Rock. Remember the events on calvary and at the empty tomb and what they mean for you: that you are God's own child that He has joyfully adopted, you are redeemed back from death and hell, and you are the recipients not of God's punishment but of His grace. And nothing—no sin, no failure, no disappointment, no circumstance that this life can offer can ever change who you are in Jesus. Remember that.

Now, if you notice, at the end of our text it appears that the Psalmist is still depressed. He's still struggling. He has not found a quick fix to rid him of his painful feelings due to even more painful memories. He says, ***"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."*** Though we may at times feel that God is hiding from us; though we often feel deeply depressed and discouraged, we can still find solace in the *facts*. When you are at the end of your rope, and you are floundering in darkness and confusion like this Psalmist—even when you simply remain in that same funk despite your best efforts, remember. Remember that you are God's child, and that you, of all people, are standing on the Rock. You may be confident in your salvation, as it is sturdy and guaranteed by the foundation of your salvation.

Daniel Kahneman claimed that we have the Experiencing Self and the Remembering Self, and that we really are our Remembering Self. Well, I'd encourage you to remember that the day is coming when Christ will return to raise you to heaven, and on that day, your Remembering Self will be totally in sync with your Experiencing Self. There will be no need to move from **doubt to conviction** or from **despair to confidence** by making the use of your memory. Because on that day, you will be with the Lord, experiencing His presence in its fulness. You will have hope and joy and confidence in full.

Until that day, remember. And make good use of your memories. Remember all that the Lord has done for you. Remember what Christ did. Remember your baptism. Remember where to look for God. Remember the Lord, and trust in Him. The days of darkness will pass, the days of glory will come. In Jesus' name. Amen.

***"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.