

Session 3

January 27, 2019

WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES OVERWHELM

Psalm 42:1-3,6-8; 43:3-5

The classic poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote, “Into each life some rain must fall; some days must be dark and dreary.” But he was not the first to admit that everyone has both good days and bad! Job lamented that all of our lives are “short of days and filled with trouble” (Job 14:1). In our focal passage, we walk with the psalmist through the valley of despair and discover the hope that delivers him from the shadows and back into the light. While there is no author assigned to these psalms, it’s hard to believe it’s not David. The intimate nature of the language and the alternating themes of anguish and hope are familiar to the shepherd king. Notice the three-step progression made during this painful journey.

Longing for “the living God” (42:1-4). The older translation as the deer “panting” is an accurate picture of the struggle. Whether being pursued by the hunter, or exhausted from the desert search for water, the deer is desperate to quench its thirst. The dryness of the desert is used elsewhere to depict the feeling of being separated from God (e.g.: Ps. 63:1, Ps. 143:6, Amos 8:11, et al.). Being spiritually “parched” contrasts nicely with the refreshment Christ gives as living water. Notice three things from these verses. First, even a man after God’s own heart (see Acts 13:22) at times feels separated from God. There is no great sin here to confess; just a season of difficulty to endure. We do a great injustice to others when we assume that all feelings of separation are the result of sin! Second, the psalmist finds encouragement in the past faithfulness of God. His memories are no doubt bittersweet; he longs for those joyful times (v. 4), yet they make him miss God even more. Nevertheless, they give him confidence in the God he serves. Third, the psalmist is not running *away* from God in this season of despair, but rather *to* Him. How often do we forsake God the moment we feel forsaken by Him? We would do better to *long* for the living God in times of trouble, rather than *avoid* Him!

Praying to “the God of my life” (42:5-8). Once the psalmist acknowledged the living God, he placed Him back into his life. He does this in a variety of ways. First, he acknowledges his own feelings of despair (vv. 5-6). It doesn’t make sense to deny how we feel before the One who already knows how we feel! This is no simple trial, but an ongoing series of defeats. The “deep calls to deep” verse (v. 7), speaks of waves crashing on top of one another. The psalmist can’t catch his breath; the traumas continue to come! Second, he reaches out to God through future hopes, declaring, “I will still praise Him” (v. 5), as he looks forward to a fresh outpouring of God’s love (v. 8). Finally, he looks back once again to remember God’s unfailing faithfulness in his past. British commentator Mathew Henry wisely wrote, “The way to forget our miseries, is to remember the God of our mercies.”

Hoping in “God, my God” (43:3-5). Now that the psalmist has affirmed the “living God” and admitted He is still the “God of my life,” he turns his attention from himself, to the person of God. This is really an act of worship. The English word *worship* comes from the term for “worth;” hence, to worship is to declare one’s worth. When we worship, we are inherently realigning ourselves in proper relationship to God. These final verses show us how. First, there is a prayer for God’s truth to lead the desperate to the holy mountain; the place where God can be

found (v. 3). Second, there is a pause before God's altar, the place where submission and sacrifice take place (v. 4). The next act is joyful worship, characterized by praise (v. 4). Finally, there is the proclamation of God's victory; the testimony of God's child, and the earnest plea for others to put their hope in God (v. 5).