

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- Sunday 26th January 2025 am
TITLE: "Joy in the darkness is possible" TEXT: Psalm 43
Scripture references from the ESV

*Psalm 43: Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people,
from the deceitful and unjust man
deliver me!*

*² For you are the God in whom I take refuge;
why have you rejected me?*

Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

*³ Send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;*

let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling!

*⁴ Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy,
and I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.*

*⁵ 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.*

The Christian life is a pilgrimage. It is a journey that ends, as all journeys do, at a destination, but where is that?

The journey of our Christian lives both begins and ends with God giving us himself.

I will go to God...my exceeding joy (v4 above)

The pilgrimage ends in us coming into the fullness of joy in God to enjoy pleasures forevermore at his right hand. One day we will be stripped of everything but God, and we will be happier then than we have ever been.

- Will we only experience joy in God when Jesus returns to resurrect us?

That is not the case. The Hebrew literally says *God is my rejoicing joy* and Psalm 43 teaches us that

God can, and should, be our exceeding joy now

God is THE JOY above all other joys

There are many joys in this life, and we experience them in a variety of situations, but according to **v4**, God is the joy that exceeds them all. The joy that the psalmist speaks about is not joy in experiencing God changing painful afflictions for us. Rather it is

Joy in God for who he is

This man has discovered God to be the *gladness of his joy* (Spurgeon), and as a result, he is going to God. However, that was not his starting place. We learn where that was in **v2**, and there is something unexpected in that verse. He declares that he takes refuge in God, and this would seem to be most naturally followed by a statement of trust in God to protect him and free him from fear. Instead, he says: **why have you rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?**

Our question too is why? Why does he use these words? What we see here is a man with a divided heart.

- Objectively he knows that God is his refuge, but subjectively he feels rejected by God.

As God's people, this is a common experience. We know the truth in our heads but it has not penetrated our hearts.

The word translated as **mourning** means darkness. There is a darkness that has come over the heart of this man because of his affliction. Although his head says that this God is the one in whom he takes refuge, his heart is saying that God has rejected him.

This may have been your experience in the past, it may come in the future, or it may be where you are right now.

That place of darkness is not generally the place out of which we declare:

God, you are my exceeding joy

- How do we get from the darkness of feeling rejected by God to having God as our exceeding joy, and is that journey even possible?

The Psalmist shows us that it is possible and that to travel that path we need to ask, come and praise.

1. **We need to ASK God for spiritual light and truth.** The Psalmist is being unfairly treated and he wants God to defend him, as his opening prayer shows (**v1**). He asks God to change his circumstances. He wants God to deliver him from those who act unjustly, and to be his refuge to defend him against his enemy. That is a right thing to ask.

However, that is not the agenda that God is working from, so the Psalmist plunges into darkness and thus finds there is a bigger issue at stake. There is an internal issue in this man's heart that threatens him more than the external hostility of his physical enemies.

The darkness in his heart is stopping him from seeing the glory of God with the eyes of his heart

His solution is found in v3, when he asks God to **"Send out your light and your truth"**.

This is a request to see God as real

More than that, it is a request to see the reality of God's faithfulness

The darkness has obscured the reality of God's presence and his faithfulness, leading to the Psalmist feeling rejected by God. Hence, he asks God to shine the light of his own glory into the spiritual darkness of his heart.

- This is a prayer that is unique to God's people.

Unbelievers and nominal Christians will often ask God to change their circumstances and remove their afflictions, but it is only the true believer who will pray for God to reveal the reality of himself and his faithfulness in the midst of any affliction. It is what Paul prays for the church in Ephesians 1:17 -18: **that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened...** This is not intellectual knowledge. In fact, this is an extension of the prayer: **"Send out your light and your truth"** in v3 (above).

We might turn this into prayer for ourselves in this way: *Lord, reveal to my heart what is real, not what my heart feels or my mind imagines to be true. O Lord, scatter the intellectual illusions from my mind and the emotional illusions from my heart. Reveal to me what is true about you when it comes to what I'm currently facing.*

God's response to this would be to show us Christ

2. **We need to COME to God in Christ (v3).** The light of God and the truth of God are like good friends that lead us and bring us to God's presence and God's altar.

For the Psalmist, the altar was the place of sacrifice where he was both reminded of his sin before a holy God and also found God's forgiveness. It was God's provision so that sin could be atoned for. That was necessary to remove from us the barrier to fellowship

with him, so that we could enjoy him. Atonement was not just for the sake of forgiveness. It did something far more wonderful. It brought us to a place where God would not reject us.

Atonement opened up the way into the presence of God for sinful people.

A god who might reject his people is not one who makes provision for sin to be atoned for so that the worshipper can come to him and delight in him.

God does not reject his people

The altar mentioned here points to an even better sacrifice, as we read in Hebrews 13:10-12: **We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. ¹¹ For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. ¹² So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.**

When we ask God to send his light and truth, what we see is (2 Cor 4:4)

the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

That is perhaps the greatest statement that God has **not** rejected us, despite the darkness in our hearts, the afflictions we are going through and what we might feel.

- When God shines that light into the darkness of our hearts, we see Christ who not only felt rejected by God but was actually forsaken by God.

He was forsaken by God so that we who come to Christ will never be forsaken by God.

The only thing that will lead to us being forsaken eternally by God is our sin, but in Christ, all our sin has been atoned for and so God will NEVER forsake his people.

God will never forsake those who have made Christ their refuge from sin.

- Do you think that this God, who was willing to forsake his Son to death on a cross, will forsake you, when he has purchased you for himself at the cost of the precious blood of his Son?

When God sends his light and his truth into our hearts, we see the light of the glory of the gospel of Christ and are assured that we have God himself, and God has us. We will never be forsaken by God.

- How does that make you feel about God? The Psalmist's response was **'I will go ... to God my exceeding joy'**.

The light of the gospel of the glory of God is meant to lead us to experience God as our exceeding joy – indeed, the joy of our joys. What are we meant to do with the joy that rises within us when we contemplate Christ?

3. We need to praise God to complete our joy (v4). True praise is not just speaking or singing words of truth about God. It happens when God becomes our exceeding joy.

- True praise does NOT happen when our joy is in deliverance from affliction, a sermon, a preacher, a particular song or any other earthly joy.
- True praise happens when those things lead us to see the glory of God with the eyes of our heart, and when our hearts are transformed by a miracle of God's Spirit to delight in God above every earthly joy.

Authentic praise is the expression of our experience of God as our exceeding joy
(John Piper)

- Does that mean that it is pointless praising God until your heart is delighting in him, and he has become your exceeding joy?

The answer to that is **no**. Songs that are scriptural will help us see God's glory, so it may just be that singing praise to God will make room for God to shine the light of his glory into our hearts.

However, you should be honest with God before you start, and not pretend that you are praising God when

you know your heart is not right. Instead, follow the Psalmist's lead and express the state of your heart to

God. Then ask him to send out his light and his truth to lead you that place where God becomes your exceeding joy. God requires us to be honest with him.

- Why is this praise of God important for those who delight in him?

Praise of God completes our joy in God

C.S. Lewis expressed it like this: *"I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good*

he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with

Out of love for us, God gives himself to us.

Out of love for us, he shines the light of glory into our hearts so that we come to delight in God as our exceeding joy.

That joy is stunted if it is never expressed in joyful celebration. It would be so frustrating not to express our joy in God.

Praise to God completes our joy in God.

The Christian life is a journey that brings us into the presence of God where **there is fullness of joy [and] pleasures forevermore.** (Psalm 16:11). We can begin to experience that now as we walk through these three steps. However, we need to take note that this is all set in the context of turmoil. Putting this psalm together with the previous one, the Psalmist asks three times: **Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?** Yet, in the darkness of his affliction, he is still able to find joy that exceeds all other joys.

Joy in the darkness is possible

It is possible as we begin by asking God for spiritual light and truth, using this Psalm as a springboard for prayer. It is possible as we turn from hoping in God to fulfil OUR agenda for OUR lives, and instead turn to

Hope in God himself

It seems probable that the Psalmist asks this question for the third time in quite a different way. He has broken through and experienced God as his exceeding joy. He has come to see God in a way that enables him to hope in God in the darkness, and to have the assurance that he will complete that joy with praise to God.

He has come to experience God as his exceeding joy even in the turmoil of life.

When we are honest with God in the place of lament, as the Psalmist was, we begin to change, even if our circumstances do not. When we come to the place where we are hoping in God, our exceeding joy, even in the midst of our turmoil, we can be sure that no matter how we feel, he will never reject us.

- In a coming day, he will bring us into the eternal joy of his presence.

Until then,

- Ask God for spiritual light and truth
- Come to God in Christ

And when you begin to experience God as your exceeding joy then

- Praise God to complete your joy.

I am precious in His sight,
He will hold me fast;
Those He saves are His delight,
He will hold me fast.

He'll not let my soul be lost,
Christ will hold me fast;
Bought by Him at such a cost,
He will hold me fast.

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