



Christ Our Hope In Times of Despair

Key idea:

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.

Key text:

Psalm 42

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 43

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.

Key points:

1. Despair, doubt, and grief are common human experiences, even for believers.
2. The Psalms provide an honest portrayal of these struggles and how to find hope.
3. There are recognizable elements or stages of despair/doubt/grief:
 - 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
4. There are practical steps we can take to sustain hope during difficult times.
 - 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. Speaking words of hope to myself and others regarding God's promised future deliverance

Discussion Questions:

1. How have you experienced the 'dark night of the soul' in your own life, and how did it impact your faith journey? What do you remember most about that time?
2. The teaching described different stages of despair, from feeling distant from God, to feeling forgotten by God, to feeling rejected by God. Have you experienced any of these stages? How did it feel?
3. How does understanding the cyclical nature of despair (moving between hope and despair) help us when we're going through difficult times?
4. Why do you think it's important for Christians to acknowledge and discuss struggles like doubt and despair rather than ignoring them?
5. Bret mentioned that during times of despair, we often isolate ourselves. Why do you think this is our natural tendency? How can we resist this urge?
6. In what ways might our modern, individualistic culture hinder our ability to find comfort and hope through community, as the psalmist longed for?
7. The teaching emphasized the importance of corporate worship. Have you ever been tempted to avoid gathering with other believers during your times of despair, doubt, and grief? Why is this a temptation for us? How can gathering with other believers help you during times of struggle?

8. Think about or discuss the three practices for sustaining hope mentioned in the teaching: a) Speaking words of hope to yourself b) Experiencing God's presence through means of grace, especially corporate worship c) Speaking words of hope about future deliverance. Which of these do you find most challenging? Why?

Practical Applications:

1. This week, practice speaking words of hope to yourself daily. Write down specific truths from Scripture or reminders of God's past faithfulness to you.
2. If you're currently struggling, reach out to a fellow believer for support instead of isolating yourself.
3. Make a commitment to attend corporate worship regularly, even (and especially) when you don't feel like it.
4. Choose a psalm (like Psalm 42-43) to meditate on this week when you're feeling discouraged.
5. As a group, practice encouraging one another with words of hope about God's future deliverance.
6. Listen to the song [Psalm 42 \(I Will Praise Him Again\)](#) by City Aight to cement practices of hope in times of despair, doubt, and grief.