

11hc Feb 20 11

Psalm 42 and 43

Heavy heartedness

Ancient Greek civilisation left huge mark on our way of thinking: all sorts of ways

*Greeks: believed that body contained different **humours**, or **secretions**, in balance: but, when one dominated, affected the temperament*

- ⇒ **Phlegm** - unemotional, dispassionate, lethargic sort:
- ⇒ **Blood**: optimistic, resilient -
still around in our language: describe someone as sanguine - sunny, indomitable from latin word for blood; phlegmatic -
- ⇒ *Poor person with too much **black bile** - **melan cholic**:*
- ⇒ *gloomy, pessimistic, moody and despondent*

Which are you ??

Easter long way off this year in Christian calendar:
Lent another three weeks away - two weeks of "ordinary time"
Lectionary - fills in with bits of sermon on mount:

Preacher - choose readings to fill in
chosen **two psalms**: last week, upbeat ps 95, Great God,
our god, reasons for congregational praise and worship

Left some with a question:

What if not feeling particularly upbeat ?

What if - don't want to sing feel-good songs and hymns ?

because many of songs and hymns are upbeat and joyful -

- *easy to think - have to feel joyful and upbeat all the time if you're xtian*
- *and something wrong with you if don't feel like that*

Growing up: fashion to counsel despondent xtians to "praise the lord" for giving the trouble and difficulty, lift self out of despondency or depression; some may have found this helpful

Always - seemed to me to be absurd: why pretend to be happy when not ? hypocritical and dishonest !

In fact, what if, as xtian, feel flat and despondent ?

Psalms: yes, there are joyful exuberant rollicking psalms
But - in minority

Many psalms are laments, full of doubts, questions, and sorrow
Sung, not expressing feelings of joy - but feelings of sadness, frustration, anger, longing, despondency

Today - one of them read to us: psalm **42 and 43**

[somehow - got split in our bibles into 2 separate psalms - but obviously one - same chorus in vv 5 and 11, repeated in v5 of ps 43]

Why so full of heaviness o my soul ?

Psalm written by someone obviously believer in God
 Refers to God as one satisfying spiritual thirst v3 saviour x2 vv5, 43:5
 stronghold and rock, God of my life
 Clear too - used to lead worship v4,
 praying every day v8
 expects God to teach him and guide him 43:3

BUT - in this psalm - he is despondent, and heavyhearted

Language: (NB need to **READ BIBLE VERSES**, as none in PR)

- **disturbed** vv5, 11,5 - emotions in turmoil:
 water through weir - churning and violent
 inner self not still, calm; place of deep unrest and upheaval
 Hebrew - word "disturbed" used of growls of animals:
 maybe restless sighs and moans - (me !) -
 inner pain later - my bones in agony v10
- **full of heaviness** in refrain:
 know how it is: leaden-footed, heavy pack, everything's so much
 more effort; little enthusiasm for anything, just tired
- can't stop **crying** v1 - *know, symptom of depression - tho not
 sure this man is actually depressed*
- **overwhelmed** v7 - *waves crashing over: sea; for Jew: reminder
 of chaos and terror before God ordered world:
 so "the deep" - we should take as referring to some deep-
 seated fear and dread;
 our language too - island race, surrounded by sea
 - everything on top of me,*

- all caving in on me,
- sinking,
- just keeping my head above water

- **forgotten** v9 **rejected, abandoned** v2 **mourning** vv2, 9-
 language of grief and bereavement: remember feelings of loss
 and rejection : something that often accompanies melancholy -
 just feeling bereft
- **suspect** - each of us - felt something like that at some point in
 our lives

Know - some here - medical knowledge or personal
 experience of depression

Thinking to selves - *sounds like this person is clinically
 depressed*

- Some commentators; that may be the case - constant crying,
 lack of energy, feeling overwhelmed;
- ⇒ know - psalm has been great help to xtians prone to bouts of
 depression
- ⇒ William Cowper, CH Spurgeon, mention it;
- ⇒ Martin Lloyd Jones, wrote book "spiritual depression" - classic,
 much of it based on this psalm

[If you get bouts of depression - isn't it encouragement - ?see
 how you feel reflected in parts of Bible and Xtian experience ?
 saints and psalmists felt same !!]

Main reason for melancholia; **isolated**

- long way from God - v1 - far from spiritual home
- long way from spiritual home v4 - exile, perhaps

- in place where values and beliefs of those around him - very different from his own - mocked and taunted v3

Of course - may be factor in depression, if he is depressed

BUT - surely - all relate to this sense of isolation and alienation

As Christians - we are far from home:

- sense in which this world is not our home - just passing through
- aliens here - among people who do not share beliefs - swimming vs tide, mocks, taunts,
- long for time when can be with God forever, long to be with him, long for him to answer prayer, etc - much of themes of psalm
- True for all of us - this is our permanent condition while we are on this earth: -
- We are as far from our heavenly home as the psalmist was from Jerusalem
- this longing, feelings associated with it - part of normal Christian life !
- Groans and sighs, sighing and restlessness - all part of it
- not avoidable - but not unendurable either

Our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you

wrote Augustine: we will all experience that if not already

Important therapy:

1. Honesty - with ourselves and with God

Yes, believers at times feel despondent

Yes, feel frustrated, yes, at times very flat and sometimes angry:

Yes, right to tell God about that !!

Yes, right to ask God why it is ?

Why - ten times !! in psalm

I say to God my rock, why have you forgotten me

Why must I go about mourning ? v9

You are God my stronghold: why have you rejected me ??

2 Self-help - self-counsel

speak to selves, as psalmist:

stand outside ourselves, stop allowing the feelings dictate to you, and instead do the dictating yourself

Soul, why are you feeling like this ?

Why on earth are you in despair ? Hope in God !!

See elsewhere: Bless the Lord, o my soul, and forget not all his benefits

question ourselves - instruct ourselves cajole, direct, in what is right

3 Memory -

V4 READ:

times when were overwhelmed with God's grace to YOU

Very very conscious of loving presence, of guidance and protection

(some - spiritual diaries, reminder)

Remembering - what we do in this service:
done in remembrance of what Jesus has done for us
marks us out however may be feeling now:

as people whose hope is in God

- look back to calvary, where Jesus death brought in the new creation of which by grace we are a part, remember that by taking bread and wine,
- allowing truth of his death nourish us
- look forward to new heaven and new earth, where with God for ever, sighing and crying will be no more, no more sea !

Not in isolation !

Do this looking back, markers of all those Christians through history of church who obeyed his command, stretching back to first breaking of bread when Jesus with disciples: as he was with them, so with us, and we proclaim, *the lord is here*

Do this looking forward: because church will do so in obedience, until his coming again; when united in praise; in meantime, we are not alone

- not just with xtians on earth through its history
- do so in anticipation of heaven: *so with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we worship you father almighty, in songs of everlasting praise.*