

Psalm 42:11

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[0 : 00] We shall turn again to Psalm 42, reading at verse 11. Psalm 42 and verse 11.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Now, all of us accept that the Bible as the word of God is the final rule of faith and life for all Christians.

We accept that it has the right to determine our doctrines, the right to determine our conduct, the right to govern our worship, the right to govern our church polity.

We are quite conscious of its role as a rule of faith in all of those areas. We are maybe less conscious that the Bible is also the rule of faith for our own emotional lives as Christians.

And that God's word is a good deal to say about the various moods and states of feeling that we are subject to as Christian believers.

[1 : 49] We tend, in fact, to have a very fatalistic attitude to the ebb and flow of our own emotions.

We tend to regard these as somehow beyond our control and beyond the reach of biblical command, beyond the reach even of divine judgment.

And yet we find that the Bible does often take to do with our emotional states.

That it forbids many of the moods that we ourselves are subject to. And moods in which we sometimes wallow in a kind of pious self-pity.

The Bible forbids anxiety. The Bible forbids discontent. And both of those are emotions.

[2 : 58] The Bible forbids depression. And that's what is taught so clearly in the words of our text tonight. God's great why uttered over and against the despondency of a human soul.

You will find, in fact, if we look very broadly at this verse. There is being before us two great truths. It is, first of all, reminding us that the people of God are subject to very deep and very black and very despondent emotional states.

That a believer can go right down into the abyss and depression. That is the way it was with this man.

The soul was cast down. And it says he was disquieted. There was tremendous upheaval.

[4 : 19] There was disturbance. There was a raging torrent. There was furious ebb and flow in his own emotional condition.

He was so profoundly disturbed. He was, as it were, shaken to the very core of his being. He was a child of God.

And yet he was cast down. He had God for his God. And yet he was so profoundly disturbed. Time and again, we find the Bible reminding us that, us Christians, we are not immune to such a condition.

We find Elijah, after that great triumph and cardinal, we find him cast down in the same kind of blackness. We find Job wrestling with God and arguing with God and quarreling with God.

As he himself feels this overwhelming and suicidal feeling of black despair, filling his own heart.

[5 : 49] There is no questioning the discipleship of those men. There is no questioning the vitality of their relationship with God or the directness of their communion with him.

And yet in those souls, there is despondency. In those souls, there is this profound disturbance. In those souls, there is this inability to handle, at the emotional level, the way that God is dealing with them.

And it has often been so with the Church of God. You remember William Cooper and all those terrible, devastated years that he spent in absolute spiritual despair.

There is no questioning again that man's relationship with God. There is no doubting his contribution to the Christian Church through his hymns and through all the influence of his own fragrant life.

[7 : 10] And yet virtually all he did for God was rescued from the days of his despair.

We have the same even more tragically in Humila. We did so much for the Christian cause in this land and so much for truth.

A man to the free Church owes more than it has ever acknowledged. And yet that man's life ends in a tragic despair.

One overwhelming moment of intolerable strain in which he feels that the burden is insupportable is cast down and his mind breaks.

And I'm saying that we must accommodate in our view of the range of possibilities open to us as Christians.

[8 : 27] That kind of mood. The terrible possibility of overwhelming depression is that there are days in the lives of some of God's people and they walk in darkness and there is no light.

And those of us who by God's grace have never known such moments. We should try to understand and try to help and try not to be contemptuous or dismissive or insensitively critical. You bear in mind that the most characteristic element in that whole state is self-depreciation. and for us to move in with further criticism and further disparagement is only to aggravate that already tragic condition.

But then the text says something else. Not only that God's people may feel that downcast but it says that they have no right to feel that downcast because they come again to this it is God's why.

[10 : 04] What is the explanation? What is the reason? What is the justification for this mood? for this despondency for this despair?

Why? There is the allowance that yes God's people do go through that kind of experience and yet there is no tolerance of it as a permitted thing.

There is no recommendation of it. There is no approving of it. There is only God's pride over against all Christian despondency and over against all Christian despair.

There is another words this that no matter what our situation may be we have no right to be depressed.

The greater than some ways a terrible teaching that there is no conceivable human condition to which depression is the God enjoined reaction.

[11 : 20] There is the teaching that in the absence of pathological and medical factors we never have any right before God to be depressed.

God's high standing over against all our darkness and over all our blackness and over all our despondency.

There is absolutely no conceivable state in which we as God's people have the right to be depressed.

let me go on for a moment tonight to analyze what I mean. I mean first of all that depression is not the answer to our sin.

It is very, very easy when we are made conscious of our own sin to react to it simply by getting cast down.

[12 : 32] We can't go right down into the most marvelous depression because all of a sudden we have stumbled upon the fact of our own sin.

And of course that can be a terrible discovery as we see something of the colossal egotism of our own hearts.

As we see something of the unmanageable the fury of our own lusts and our own desires. As we see something of the pain that we ourselves have caused through unfaithfulness and through unlovingness in our own personal relationships.

As we see in occasional terrifying moments the lengths to which our hearts are prepared to go in their defiance of God.

it can be an absolutely terrifying experience to stand face to face with the evil in our own hearts, to look at the record of the way it's been with us in personal relationships, to see how close we sometimes go to the position of Faust selling our souls to the devil, willing to run the risk of the wrath of God for the momentary enjoyment of a particular sin.

[14 : 29] And when we see that sin in all its gravity to a mansion, the only answer is depression. Remember when Cain slew Abel and God confronts him with the enormity of his crying, we are told that Cain went out and his countenance fell.

He went right down into despair. We have the same thing in the case of Judas Iscariot. There is a man who betrays innocent blood.

That man feels the enormity of his own sin and the enormity of his own guilt. And he goes out and hangs himself again because of his despair.

And it may be tonight that one or two of us is face to face with a terrible reality of our own guilt and our own depravity.

And maybe our reaction is one of despair we're cast down. And we hear the psalmist saying, why are you cast down my soul?

[15 : 49] And our soul says, because of my sin. And if you knew my sin, my guilt, my depravity, then you'd understand that I cannot help being depressed.

I must be depressed. I must be cast out because of my record and because of all the depravity and all the corruption in my heart and life.

And I'm still saying, why? Why do we think that depression is the proper reaction to sin? Why do we think that despair is God's enjoyed reaction to our own sin?

The Bible points us in two different directions. It says this to us first of all, let us come with boldness to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy.

Instead of despair over the indelibility of sin, let us instead come to God's throne with it and ask God for a covering.

[17 : 01] You remember the words of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, as she, in her terrible dream, the night may, contemplates the reality of her own guilt.

And she looks at her blood stained hands and she says, can all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hands?

And now she concludes terrifyingly, no, these my hands will rather the multitudinous seas and carnadine making the green one red.

she is looking at what she thinks is the indelible stain of her own guilt. It is inerasable. It is unforgivable.

It is there on the record, there on the register, and it is unforgettable. And by contrast, that word of the gospel that says, come to the throne and get mercy.

[18 : 20] Come to the throne and get it covered. Come, says God, in one of the outstanding utterances of the Old Testament.

Come and let us reason together, says the Lord. Let's discuss this sin. Though your sins be as scarlet, they can be white as wool.

Though they be red like crimson, they can be like the snow. Let us reason together. Let us not only consult human moralists and psychologists.

Let us not only consult your own consciences. Let us consult God. Let us reason together, saith Jehovah, about this past, this sin, this guilt.

God saying, whatever it is, my child, whatever it is, let us discuss it. There are sins that you and I may dread to admit to God because we dread to admit them to ourselves.

[19 : 33] Yet we must bring them to God, or they shall fester in an evil conscience to the threshold of eternity and possibly beyond.

It is not God's answer to simply despair. It is not God's answer to say that this is so great it can never be dealt with.

It is God's answer to bring it to himself for cleansing, to bring it to him that the guilt may be dealt with, our sin can be covered.

And I dare say as I reflect tonight upon Paul's affirmation that he was the chief of sinners, and as I reflect tonight upon my own total unworthiness to stand before you in the capacity of a spiritual leader, I dare say out of what Paul says, I dare say out of what God has done for me, I dare say that whatever the sin, whatever the pain, the damage, the hurt, the blasphemy of which we have been guilty, whatever that seizing, raging sea of lust and passion within ourselves, there is being to God, and God can cover it,

God can deal with the guilt, ah yes we say, but what of its power, and what of its pollution, God covers it, but I cannot handle it, I cannot control it, do it, and I feel so helpless, in the presence of those passions, I feel so unable to maintain stable relationships, I feel that I cannot but despair over my power to manage my own personality, humanity, and there we go again, into that great can't help it syndrome, and we're in despair, in despair about our own sanctification, in despair about the possibility of growth and grace, but I say again, that is not

[22 : 27] God's answer, I say again, God will not tolerate it, God will not let me say that I can't manage and God will let me say that I can't help it, God says to me, mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, I do not want despair, I do not want depression, he says, I don't want the conclusion stated in various forms of eloquence that you cannot manage and you can't help it, I command you, I command you to deal with it, I command you to mortify, I give that command to you as a new man, who has put off the old man, I give you that command as a man united to Christ, I give you that command as a man indwelt by the spirit of God, you have the resources out of which you may mortify sin, is it not possible that depression is the easy option, is it not possible that depression is preferable to waging war of sin, is it not possible that my depression over my own depravity, that that depression is a form of escapism, that I'm evading God's imperatives, trying to avoid the force of

God's directives, that I deal with the disorders of my own personality, God will not tolerate despair over our guilt, God will not tolerate despair over our ability to hear his word that says, mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, love, and then let me go beyond that, sometimes we are cast down because of the inadequacy of our own talents, we look at others and we are so envious of all their aptitudes and all their gifts and all the resources of intellect and personality, all that they have in terms of God-given endowments, and we're depressed because we ourselves cannot match them, or we look at the greatness of the task that God imposes, the work to be done, the burden laid upon us, and we despair and we say to

God, Lord, I haven't the resources, I haven't the aptitudes, I haven't the gifts, and we add to that sometimes, not only, Lord, do I not have that man's gifts, not only do I feel overwhelmed by the burden imposed upon me, but you're asking me to do all these things while I carry at the same time a thorn in my own flesh that causes me constant pain, humiliation, embarrassment, day in and day out, and we say to God, Lord, I'm under this juniper tree, I'm here in this depression because what can you expect with my limitations, facing my burdens, aggravated by the thorn in the flesh, the more you think, the more depressed you get, the bigger the burden gets, and the fewer the talents seem, and at last the whole thing seems so actually overwhelming, and yet I say again, that to that black mood of inadequacy, and those black feelings of self-depreciation,

God is saying, why, and no matter how rationalized it, and how we explain it, and how we argue with God, he is still saying why, and he's still saying, I'm not convinced, and he's still saying, I don't accept it, you have no right to be in that mood, simply because of the inadequacy of your own talents, why, because at one level, the service God requires is our service, ours personally, mine personally, a service within the parameters of my personality, a service within my developmental limitations, that is what God wants, a service which is mine, and which has upon it the hallmark of what

God has made me, and I think sometimes it's so enormously important to be prepared to offer God simply that, I believe with all my heart, that we have to maximize our own gifts, I believe we have to cultivate them, I believe we have to strive constantly for greater efficiency, and proficiency, and skill, and competence, in whatever field of service God has called us to, and yet strive, study, train, discipline ourselves as we will, we have the parameters of our own personality, we have our own inbuilt limitations, upon against which we find ourselves coming day in, day out, and yet at last I say to God,

[29 : 07] Lord, here is my service, it is not as great as that month, it is not as big as the task, but it is my service, let me add to it something else, that God has given every one of us gifts and talents commensurate with our own obligations, there is no test given to us greater than the equipment that God confers, the moment I know I must do something, the moment I know it's my obligation, that moment I know that I have the equipment for it, it's a terrifying experience very often, if one reflects on what has to be done tomorrow, or the day afterwards, because it seems so overwhelming, it's so strange, so mysterious, so demanding, it seems sometimes, my friends, it seems quite laughably absurd, that we should be asked to do some of the things God asks us to do, what me

Lord, and yet one learns, if it's an obligation, God will give us strength, whatever the mountain, whatever the river, whatever the burden, whatever the hazard, we find day in, day out, God gives the strength, let me add to it something more, something more perplexing, that many times our problems arise from our own egotism, that's why there is so much truth in the principle, if it's worth doing, it's worth doing badly, there are occasions in the life of the church of God, where there is no ten-talent man to perform a certain essential service, and in that situation, the obligation may fall on

the two-talent man, and the two-talent man may very often know that it's not a ten-talent man, he knows he won't do a great job, he knows it won't be a spectacular job, he knows it won't win many plaudits, he knows it may damage his reputation, but he may also know that there is no one else to do it, and if he doesn't do it, then nobody will do it,

I would hope, that every two-talent man will make way for the ten-talent man, when there is a ten-talent man, but the two-talent man must be humble enough on occasion, to do things to the utmost of his own ability, knowing that he cannot do it excellently, and let's be very, very careful, lest it's our own pride, that keeps us from doing what we know we do, only moderately well, if it has to be done, then let us do it moderately well, rather than leave it totally undone.

I've had to learn that there are many, many areas that I cannot handle. I've had to climb many a mountain that I'm not fit to climb.

I've had to stand in many an emergency for which God never fitted me. I've got to be prepared to do as well as I can, and that often means to my own profound embarrassment, knowing how unwell and how incompetently it may be done.

[34 : 03] Let us therefore have the humility to do it badly, rather than leave it utterly and totally undone. But I learned something else which is even more marvelous.

I learned not only that God wants my service, I learned not only that God gives grace for every obligation, I learned not only that sometimes God wants a two-talent man to do something moderately well, rather than leave it wholly undone, but I learned the greatest thing of all, that our service is acceptable to God through Christ Jesus.

Present your body's living sacrifices, in reasonable service, present your sacrifices as the members, the component parts of the spiritual temple, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Christ. I'm an ungodly man, yet I'm acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. I bring to God ungodly sacrifices, I bring to God imperfect sacrifices, I bring to God an imperfect service.

Christ. But I believe that the God who accepts my ungodly personality in justification, that's in God accepts my imperfect and my incompetent service in and by Christ Jesus.

[35 : 54] everything in life needs the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.

Everything I do needs to be justified by faith. That includes our Christian service. there is nothing more glorious than that.

That what we bring in all its imperfectness and all its inadequacy is yet acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Many men would think that tonight I ought to go home and spend a sleepless night worrying over the quality of today's preaching.

But I shall not do that. I have never done that. I have preached very conscious of its limitations.

[37 : 08] But I shall go home and I shall sleep because it is acceptable to God. by Jesus Christ. I believe that if God accepts us, then we must accept ourselves.

But then there is a third argument men may use. They won't let their sins depress them possibly. They won't let the inadequacy of their gifts and talents depress them.

But they say they are depressed because they lack assurance. They have no assurance of being Christians. And that means that because of all their doubts, they say surely there is an inevitable depression and despair that my soul, my soul may be lost, I may not be saved, I may be going to hell.

Surely it's right that I should be cast down. Surely if I don't have assurance I have every right to be disquieted, to be disturbed, tormented, and upset.

Well I don't think so. We have again this terrible problem of the fatalistic acceptance of our own lack of assurance.

[38 : 44] We sometimes seem to be saying I lack assurance. There it is, can't help it, I lack assurance. And we seem to be waiting for some mysterious providence of strange action on God's part to take away this lack of assurance.

Well let me say this. Suppose tonight, suppose the worst, suppose you have every reason to lack assurance.

assurance. Of course many who lack assurance, or say they lack assurance, would be terribly insulted if the pastor were to say to them, you have every right to lack assurance.

Let us beware. Sometimes the lack of assurance is a status that we have sought.

We're leaving our side. Let me say to you, I accept your lack of assurance. Let me say I accept that you should lack assurance.

[40 : 10] Let me say I believe you have no right to assurance. Let me say I believe you are no believer. I believe you are not born again.

I believe you are lost. I believe you're a sinner. I believe you're going to hell. Suppose all that, suppose that's where you stand and you say surely I have every right to despair, every right to be cast down.

if I lack assurance and if over and above that you say I should lack assurance. But when I get you to that point where you are a lost sinner, when I get you to that point, I tell you this, there is a word that I hear and a word that I want you to hear, a word that says, come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

That is a word for those who lack assurance. That is a word for those whom God assures tonight, those who be assures of being in a lost state, I would say to you, even to be a lost sinner is not to be hopeless, to be unsaved is not hopeless, to be Christless is not hopeless, because to your sinnership and to your lostness and to your Christlessness there is a word, come, come, come, I don't want you wallowing in the luxury of being one of those who in feature circles are called exercise Christians and put on pedestals because they lack assurance.

I don't want you in despair because you've gone beyond lacking assurance to the assurance that you lost.

[42 : 48] Remember the great word of Rabbi Duncan, sin is the handle by which I get Christ. he came to save sinners, said John Duncan.

And after all my reflection and all my self-analysis, all my evaluation of myself, it always comes back to this.

Not as an interested sinner sinner, or a convicted sinner, or an inquiring sinner, or a born-again sinner, but John Duncan is a sinner.

And that is the handle by which John Duncan gets Christ. That is all that we are, that is all that I am, simply, to thy cross, I cling, just as I am, without one plea.

Without one arm, it's difficult to get to that level of self-denial, not one plea. Will all us find one, one, one.

[44 : 20] just as I am. Why are you cursed down? Because I love assurance.

Why are you cursed down? Because I'm convinced I'm lost. Well, don't just lie there. despair. Don't just despair. Don't just wallow in your condition.

Get up, come to Christ, and come as a sinner. well, you see the glory of the conclusion of this marriage.

It would be easy for me tonight to say that I find it incredible. Hope, love, God, for I shall yet praise thee.

[45 : 28] I, I shall yet praise him who is my God.

The whole problem, as he sums it up, is these people, this man, had ceased to hope in God. He is tracing his despondency mercilessly to his own unbelief. God was there. God was his God, and yet he had lost his hope.

Where is your faith? God can deal with my guilt. God can deal with my personality.

God can deal with my lack of talent. God can deal with my lostness. I have hope.

[46 : 41] God will fulfill my hope. God will not fulfill my hope in the precise terms that I wish, but God will fulfill it because he is my God.

and that great word I shall yet praise. Some hourless thing the way he can remember in verse four. And hourless it is how in the closing verse he stands at the midpoint. He can remember days when he praised God.

when I remember these things in verse four. I poured out my soul.

For one day I went with the multitude. I went with them to the house of God with a voice of joy and praise. He can remember it.

[48 : 01] There may be tonight there are those here to whom joy is only a memory. I think that God is saying why that is so.

But I still allow that you may be a brother or sister in Christ even although joy is only a memory. but it's more than that.

Not only can I remember the days when he he too had joy days when he too praised praised but he says I shall yet praise I shall yet praise I want tonight to stand on that I shall yet praise an affirmation of faith they shall be brought with joy and birth on every side into the palace of the king and there they shall abide.

Ah there are many of the Lord's people but tonight it's difficult to believe under persecution in bereavement and desolation and broken relationships and for those others who struggle with the volcanic eruptions of their own passions and personalities that one day they'll praise that is this man's confident affirmation that that is the vision that we have said not in the apocalypse they sang the song of Moses and of the lamb you remember that marvelous appendix that we have to Newton's hymn amazing grace when I been there ten thousand years bright shining as the sun there's no less time to sing

God's praise than when I first began I may wish that I could be born tonight unconscious from this point to the threshold of eternity begin to sing that song now but I must wait God's time and you must wait God's time many of you many of you are singing praise God and praise and praise and praise let none of us seek suffering let none of us seek depression whatever lessons it may afford they're dearly dearly bound but even those who can't sing tonight one day they'll sing that vision of the apocalypse again where we are told that there was a noise like the sound of many waters but melodious like the music of the heart and how tonight we long for that why my soul art thou cast down that's the question and the affirmation in response to God's question

[52 : 02] I shall yet praise I cannot tonight he says I can remember what I did but I cannot tonight but I shall yet praise that's what we live for let not your heart be troubled believe in God believe also in me let us pray O Lord we ask thee in grace to have pity upon us we ask grace lest that pity become a cloak for our sin use us in thy service and for thy glory guide thy poor children who tonight have to walk through the valley of despondency may it be O

Lord that each one of us here shall emerge from it to sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb and help those Lord who suffer most and despair most to cling to the affirmation I shall yet praise him Amen