

Word Notes Sunday 24/07/16
Tony Hodge: “Why are you cast down O my soul?”

Summary (read this bit out to remind cell members what was said on Sunday, listen to the podcast if you missed the talk <http://www.newmarketcommunitychurch.co.uk/podcasts.htm>)

Key Text; Psalms 42 and 43

These psalms might easily overwhelm us with their melancholy, the writer appears to be in the depths of depression – how can they possibly be encouragement to anyone? Once again we see that The Bible does not shy away from the difficulties of life, instead it faces them head on and if we journey alongside the writers we will see the encouragement God brings into our darkest times.

Why is the writer so down? Here’s his list of woes:

- Distance from home and the presence of God (42:2, 42:6)
- Taunting unbelievers (42:3, 42:10)
- Memories of better days (42:4)
- The present absence of past spiritual highs (42:4)
- Overwhelming trials of life (42:7)
- God’s seemingly slow response (42:9)

Any of the above would be good reason to feel down, together they can easily be the root of what today we would call clinical depression. Psalm 42 is the writer’s immediate response – and there’s good and bad:

- Self criticism: “Why are you downcast” – surely this shouldn’t be!
- Starts to speak wisdom to himself ; “Hope in God!”
- Recalls his journey with God (v7)

Yet

- There is this constant noise
- It’s like he’s submerged
- It’s terminal (a deadly wound)
- Can’t just “buck up his ideas”

So back to the question.

But there is a way out. Psalm 43 seems to come from a different place or time – perhaps time has moved on because the writer is now of a different mind and spirit, his words have a different perspective:

- Verse 1 He asks to be vindicated (specific to persecution or attack?)
- Verse 2 God seems distant – NB that if he didn’t know God in the first place he wouldn’t have this problem, if you’re feeling this way then there is no sense of denial or doubt.
- Verse 3 He asks God to “send your light and truth”. Jesus is both The Truth and the Light of the World. Let light and truth bring me into your presence so I can praise and worship you.
- Verse 4 He cries out to Elohim God – Creator God (Gen 1:1) the God of beginnings. Get back to basics, see just how big God is compared to your present troubles.
- Verse 5 And he ends with declaration of hope in that same God.

Can you be depressed and be a Christian – yes. This is an honest outpouring of the soul and included in the scriptures for a reason. Know and understand what’s going on in your heart and which is affecting your spirit. God may seem distant but he never changes and, as Clare showed us in Psalm 8, he’s humongous-mongous big! If God hasn’t moved then if we’re honest it’s us that needs to change. Here’s how Psalm 43 can help:

- Trust in God to deliver you and be your refuge (43-1,2)
- Keep Good Company – don’t dwell with the scoffers (42:3; 42:10, 43:2)
- The Light and Truth is found in Jesus. Look to him, get close to him. (43:3) Let him be your rock when waves pound over you (42:9)
- Can you find your way back to God (43:3), what works for you? For me it’s worship (43:4), for others I know it’s the Word, maybe for you it’s prayer and meditation. A bit like finding your “love language”.
- Look back, see the deep, then look up (43:5)

Application *(this is the bit where cell members get to participate. Lead discussions around these points)*

Take a look at the language of Psalm 42. Depression is *“to experience intense emotions of anxiety, hopelessness, negativity and helplessness, and the feelings staying with them instead of going away”*.

- a) How does this description fit with what the writer is expressing? Is he depressed in your view?
- b) Does this honest outpouring encourage or discourage you in regard to what life might hold for a Godly person?

Read the “list of woes” in the first set of bullets above.

- a) Do they jibe with your experiences? If so how do you overcome in such situations?
- b) How would you answer if a Christian brother or sister shared one or more of them with you?

Psalm 43 uses the same form of words at the end – it’s like he’s a broken record – but why should they be read in a much different tone this time?

My analysis above of how Psalm 43 can help could seem simplistic and formulaic which would be of little or no help to someone chronically depressed. How can we use this to help ourselves climb out of the gloom? How might we compassionately counsel others?

Witness *(this is the bit where the cell talks, plans and prays about how to share the Good News)*

Summer is coming – make plans to get out and interact with your neighbours.