

Talking To Your Soul

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[0 : 00] Well, I'd like us to turn back to Psalm 43. Initially, although, as I said, we'll be mentioning some of the other psalms we've read or sung tonight.

But let me read again at verse 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.

This verse and the other verses that I'm going to highlight are examples of something very, very interesting that you see just a few times in the Psalms. If you look at that verse, you can see that the psalmist is speaking to his own soul.

He says, why are you cast down, O my soul? And so what we see is that he's deliberately speaking to himself. He's not actually speaking to God. He's not saying, help me, O God, because I'm downcast.

He's actually speaking to himself. He says, why are you count downcast, O my soul? The psalmist is deliberately speaking to himself. And you see this in lots of other places.

[1 : 03] The same verse is repeated in Psalm 42, verse 5 again, and verse 11. You'll have noticed when we were reading the same language repeated. That's one of the reasons why most scholars think that Psalm 42, Psalm 43 were originally written as one poem.

The language also appears in the psalm we sang at the start of the sermon, Psalm 103. In fact, Psalm 103 opens and closes with this practice.

It begins with the words, bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. And then you go to the very last verse. It has the same, bless the Lord, O my soul.

So this deliberate talking to your soul is at the start and at the end of Psalm 102. You actually see the same in the very next Psalm. Bless the Lord, O my soul, starts off Psalm 104, and it ends Psalm 104.

And in our call to worship in Psalm 146, we see the same thing. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul. And a couple more examples we sang, 62.5, for God alone, O my soul, wait in silence.

[2 : 17] And then the words we just sang in Psalm 116, return, O my soul, to your rest. It's quite unusual, this language. You don't see it very often, but you see it the several times that I've highlighted.

And although it's unusual, it's actually pointing us to something that's incredibly important. When we come to church each week, and as we go through our daily lives as Christians, we need to remember to talk to ourselves.

And it's reminding us that there's really three categories of conversation that we need to have as Christians. Obviously, we need to talk to God. And we do that in prayer.

We do that in praise. That's something that we want to do as much as we can. And you can do it at any time and in any context we talk to God. Second category is that we need to talk to each other.

That's obvious as well. We want to build up our relationship, our friendship, our love as a church family. And we want and need to talk to each other. And that can be about the most everyday things, but also it's about the things that we maybe find if we're struggling or needing to help one another.

[3 : 30] So a crucial part of discipleship is encouragement, accountability, teaching, sharing burdens. You can only do that if you talk to one another. So we talk to God, we talk to each other. But the third category that we maybe don't think about enough is that we also need to talk to ourselves.

And I think the chances are many of us don't do that enough. And so we're going to think about that tonight. We've seen it in the Psalms. We want to see it in our own lives.

And our title is Talking to Your Soul. And this whole subject reminds me of a wonderful quote that I read in a book written by Martin Lloyd-Jones.

Now, Martin Lloyd-Jones was a minister in London, originally from Wales, but minister in London at Westminster Chapel, primarily in the 60s. He was there before that and a little bit into the 70s.

But primarily in his 60s, and he was, I think it's probably safe to say, he's one of, if not the most well-known English-speaking preacher of the 20th century.

[4 : 32] So hugely influential figure, certainly in Britain, a massively influential figure. And he filled his church as people came to hear him preach. Many of his sermons were then later published as books.

And one of them is a book called Spiritual Depression, which sounds like the most depressing book to read. But it's not. It's actually a very, very encouraging book. And it's a book that I'd highly recommend.

Lloyd-Jones wrote this book called Spiritual Depression. In this, he discusses Psalms 42 and 43 that we've read tonight. And he said this, Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?

Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they start talking to you. They bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who's talking to you? Yourself is talking to you. Now, this man's treatment to the psalmist, this man's treatment was this. So he's talking about the psalm writer.

[5 : 41] This man's treatment was this. Instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. Why art thou cast down, O my soul?

He asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, Self, listen for a moment. I will speak to you.

Do you know what I mean? If you do not, you have but little experience. The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand.

You have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul, Why art thou cast down? What business have you to be disquieted?

You must turn on yourself, upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself, Hope thou in God.

[6 : 37] Now, that's a fascinating quote. It's a fascinating example of Martin Lloyd-Jones' style. Before becoming a minister, he was a medical doctor. And very often, his style was diagnosis, treatment.

And so he would speak in a way that diagnosed the issue. And then he would highlight the treatment that the gospel applies to that. And that's a great example of it here in this passage. And so we're going to look at this whole subject together, and we're going to do so under three headings. As we think about talking to your soul, we need to remember to praise, we need to refuse to despair, and we need to return to rest.

So first of all here, remember to praise. Here our focus falls onto Psalms 103, 104, and 146. And in these, you see the phrases, Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Praise the Lord, O my soul. And in Psalm 103, you see a specific connection with remembering. And so it says, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

[7 : 43] And what's explicit in Psalm 103 is implicit in Psalm 104. If you read through the whole of Psalm 104, you'll see that it's just this, it's a beautiful meditation on God as creator and provider.

And in Psalm 46, there's this wonderful song about God, again as creator, but also as savior and helper. In other words, in each of these Psalms, the Psalmist is looking back and thinking about what God has done, remembering what God has done, and finding reasons to praise him.

So in each of these Psalms, he's talking to his own soul. He's talking to himself, and he's telling himself to praise God.

And in each of them, whether it's implicitly in 104 and 146, or explicitly in 103, that self-directed instruction to praise God is tied to remembering all that God is and all that he's done.

And that's really important because it's very easy to get the order of things muddled in our minds at this point. Because when we say, well, it's so important to remember to praise, we can easily think of that in terms of duty.

[8 : 56] It's almost as though we're saying, you know, don't forget to praise God. And there's a sense in which that's appropriate because we're all God's creatures. We owe him everything. We

owe him our praise.

But I don't think that that's what the focus is here. I don't think that this is really wanting to hammer us with a sense of duty. What I think these Psalms are trying to do is get us more to just reflect on our experience of reality.

And so it's not so much, you know, you have a duty to praise, so you better remember. It's rather more, if you only just remember who God is, and remember everything he's done, then we cannot help but praise him.

And one of the most important things that we can highlight here is something that Psalm 103 speaks about and also something that's just central to our theology.

And that's the fact that God is the fountain of all goodness. And that's a phrase I'll use quite often. It comes from the period of the Reformation. In the creation, the Reformers were so anxious to emphasize that whatever our understanding of God is, we have to recognize him as the fountain of all goodness.

[10:12] Psalm 103 speaks about that as well, that he's the one that gives us so many benefits. He satisfies us with good.

He gives us so many wonderful things. everything that's good in life, everything that's positive, everything that's a benefit, all of it comes from God.

In fact, God is the whole reason why we can have a philosophical category of goodness that's real and not an illusion. God gives us that real, unshakable, eternal category of goodness.

It's not just a temporary illusion. It's not just something that society constructs for itself. And a fundamental emphasis of our theology is that everything that's good in our lives, everything that's good in our lives, comes from God.

And one of the reasons why the Reformers were so keen to emphasize this, and one of the reasons why it's so important for us to remember that is because the effect of sin on all of us means that there is a voice inside every one of us that will try to tell us that that's not true.

[11:30] And if you look back to the beginning of the Bible, when Adam and Eve sinned against God, the devil didn't get Eve to sin by telling her to be an awful person. He didn't say, be an awful person.

He just got her to doubt that God was actually being good to her. And that's one of the great markers of the influence of sin in our own souls, the voice that questions whether God is really good.

And there's so many different aspects to that, from the Christian who struggles with the thought that actually, that deep down God can't stand them, all the way to the atheist who thinks, well, God's not good because he doesn't exist in the first place.

It's all the same thing. It's all questioning whether God truly is the fountain of all goodness. And we need to counter all of that by talking to ourselves.

And there's two aspects to that. First of all, we must remember what God has already given to us. And one of the things that's crucial to remember here is that that does not apply simply to church stuff.

[12:37] It applies to everything. That's one of the great truths that's core to our theology, that God is the creator of everything. If you stood outside this afternoon under the warm sun, that is God's goodness being poured onto you.

If you enjoy a delicious meal, that is God's goodness. It comes from him. If you have opportunities to work and achieve things in your life, that's God's goodness.

If you enjoy a spectacular view, there's probably going to be an amazing sunset later tonight, that's God's goodness towards us. If you achieve things in art or technology, all the things that humanity is able to accomplish, that's God's goodness.

Friendship and laughter, all these wonderful moments that we share together, side by side, that is God's goodness. He's given it to us. The things that we enjoy as a community, even things like the joy that is shared around football and other things like that where people come together, where we share moments together, all of that's God's goodness.

Opportunities to learn, even school, despite the fact that there's lots about school that's hard.

There's so much about that that's actually brilliant, being able to learn these opportunities. The fact that we have the capacity to learn, that's God's goodness.

[13 : 55] Falling in love and enjoying that precious relationship with someone who you love and who loves you in return, all of that, all of that is stuff that God has given us.

And of course, alongside all of that, in fact, towering above all of that is the gift of God's Son, our Lord Jesus, who God has given to be our Savior and in whom we are given perfect salvation. you need to talk to yourself about all of that. And so, everything good that you enjoy this week, everything good that you've had in the past week, we need to remember that, think about it, talk to ourselves about it.

But at the same time, it's also crucial that we remind ourselves what God is not going to give you. And that's so, so important because if you're a Christian or if you become one, then there is so much that God is not going to give you.

There's so much that God is not going to do to you. And so, God is not going to abandon you. You're not one mistake away from stuffing it all up. You're not going to be found out before Him as just actually not being good enough or not being acceptable.

[15 : 09] He's not going to abandon you. He's not going to manipulate you. He's not going to deceive you. He's not going to promise with one hand and then rip away from you with the other. He's not going to waste suffering or disappointment in your life.

And so, when things are difficult and they are going to be difficult and maybe they are really difficult right now, God's not going to waste that. It's not pointless. It's never pointless. He's able to work in it and through it for good.

God is not going to treat you as anything other than your precious, than His precious child. And God is not and He is never going to stop loving you. And your soul will no doubt tell you that you deserve to be abandoned and you don't belong in God's family and everything is going to go badly and you're going to stuff things up or you have stuffed things up.

And when your soul says all of that to you, you need to stop listening and start talking. We need to talk to our soul. We need to remind ourselves that God's the fountain of all goodness and when we do that, we will find ourselves praising God.

It's so, so important to remember to praise. But it's also equally important to refuse to despair. And here we turn to the Psalms we read in Psalm 42 and 43 and these two Psalms, which like we say are likely originally one, they're written in the context of fear, sorrow, suffering.

[16 : 42] So you're reading all of that. It's got the imagery of a thirsty deer, an animal longing for a thirst to be quenched. Verses one and two use that imagery.

It then speaks of tears, feelings of abandonment and longing. Verse four looks back to better days. Things seem so much better in the past. Now it's hard.

Later on in the Psalm, moving through it, you've got the feeling of being abandoned by God, being mocked by others. Going into Psalm 43, there's this kind of language of opposition and mocking, mistreatment from others.

All of these, as we've said, are examples of how the Psalms speak not just to the joys of life but also to the deepest struggles and sorrows. And so you've got all this stuff going on in these two Psalms and yet throughout it all you've got this repeated phrase that comes in 42.5, 42.11, 43.5, why are you cast down O my soul?

Why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God. Now that word turmoil is a really interesting word. It can also be translated to growl or to rage or to make a noise, to be in uproar.

[17 : 55] It could even be translated as thunder. And that might initially make us think of things outside of us. You think of noise, commotion, difficulties, struggles. it's stuff out there.

And yet this Psalm is reminding us that so often that noise and turmoil and uproar isn't outside us. It's within us. And this is where Lloyd-Jones' quote resonates so powerfully. Very often the voice that oppresses us the most is the voice that comes from within.

And so much of our sorrow and anxiety and fear comes from the fact that we listen to it. And so we listen to the voice that says we're useless.

We listen to the voice that says that everybody else is judging us and they don't really like us. We listen to the voice that says that we don't fit in. We listen to the voice that says we've messed up too many times.

[19 : 00] Now for some of us maybe this growling happens occasionally. For others it might happen more often. For some of you it may be feel like this voice is constantly at you.

And Lloyd-Jones is telling us to do what the psalmist does. We need to stop listening to ourselves and start talking to ourselves. And this is reminding us that a key part of our growth as Christians comes when we refuse to despair.

Now that doesn't mean that we never find it hard and I've said that several times but I'm just going to keep saying it again and again and again because the psalms and the whole Bible makes that absolutely clear. The Christian life is never about pretending that things are always good and these psalms are not telling us about how never to struggle.

They're telling us about how to respond when we inevitably do. And the key instruction from this verse is to hope in God.

Now again it's so important to explain that. The word hope in Hebrew it's not expressing blind optimism. Often we use the word in that sense that we hope for good weather. We hope that Carlaway are going to beat Westside.

[20 : 16] We hope this. We hope that as though we don't know the outcome. That's not the emphasis in this word at all. The emphasis here is much more conveying the idea of confident expectation.

And the word can actually be translated as wait. And the key point is that there's this sense of trust in God. Even though things are tough now he is going to help.

And the key point behind that is to say that when we are trusting in the Lord our struggles are never ever the final word. or to put it another way when our circumstances give us a thousand reasons to despair this command to hope this command to wait with confident expectation is telling us that God is not finished.

And so often despair comes when we think that something's over. So to use a football at a station you have this sense of hope you think we hope we're going to win we hope we might win the league we hope we might win the cup and sometimes you can get really close and you fall short and then it's over and there's nothing else to wait for.

Maybe it's the same with exams you hope for exam results and then it comes and you didn't get what you wanted. You hope for a job and it's gone and you fall in love with someone but they don't feel the same about you and there's just that sense of it's over there's nothing else to wait for and life can feel like that we feel in despair we feel that our happiness has evaporated our dreams have slipped away and our biggest fears have become a reality that can happen with health it can happen with our careers it can happen in relationships it can happen with self-esteem it can even happen with our faith and when that happens we need to talk to ourselves in fact we need to preach to ourselves I've got an interesting question to ask you Martin Lloyd-Jones as I said one of the most famous most prominent preachers ever in the UK certainly in the last hundred years

[22 : 26] I want to ask you the question who's the most influential preacher in your life if you think about who have I listened to over the years who do I like to listen to who's helped me the most who is the most influential preacher in your life I know the answer to that question I know the answer to that question to every one of you the most influential preacher in your life is yourself and as a preacher I know that's true because I can try very very very hard to persuade you of things and it only takes one word from you to disregard everything that I'm trying to say the most influential preacher in your life is yourself what does that mean it means you have got to get your message right you've got to get your message right and the message one of the many messages you need to tell yourself is that if you're a

Christian or if you become one then it means that in terms of despair and struggle and turmoil it is never over until you are with Jesus in paradise that's when it's over and everything we struggle with every disappointment that we have every failure every battle every tear everything that's really hard that we experience right now all of that is within the boundaries of God's sovereign purposes and all of these things are actually being used to bring us closer to Jesus and all of that means that if we are trusting in Jesus we have the unbreakable right to refuse to despair now that doesn't mean we always have the strength to refuse to despair because sometimes we don't sometimes things overwhelm us we feel we feel crushed we feel like it's too much and you know we don't have the strength and that was how the psalmist felt when he wrote these psalms but when that happens we need to talk to ourselves because you have the right and you have the authority and you most definitely have the theology to refuse to despair or to put it a lot more bluntly you can tell the voice inside you that's crushing you to shut up because sometimes that voice talks absolute rubbish to you and we need to stop listening we need to start talking to refuse to despair and to set our hope

our confident expectation on the

God who is never ever going to let you down so we need to remember to praise we need to refuse to despair and finally we need to return to rest this takes us to psalms 62 and 63 the ones that we sang second and third psalm 62 says it's got the same oh my soul language for God alone oh my soul wait in silence for my hope is from him he only is my rock and my salvation my fortress I shall not be shaken on God rests my salvation and my glory my mighty rock my refuge is God the psalmist waits on the Lord he sets his hope on him he finds stability and security then in psalm 116 we have the direct language of verse 7 return oh my soul to your rest so my heading return to rest that's where I'm taking it from and both the psalms again are in the context of fear of struggle of anxiety and in both of them the psalmist speaks to himself and he tells his soul to settle and I want you to see that the word return is telling you something amazing that's the command in 167 the imperative there it's telling us to return to our rest and that's teaching us something crucial it's teaching you that if you're a

Christian or if you become one rest is where you belong and we should return to rest because that's where we belong and so often our experience is the opposite we drift away from rest or sometimes we're buffeted out of rest sometimes we're thrown right out of rest because of the things that happen in our lives and it can happen so much that we sometimes feel that the place of worry and fear is actually where we belong and so we imagine the worst case scenario all the time everything that we enjoy has a but what if attached to it and we can even reach the point where we actually feel guilty if we feel happy or comfortable and we think well this is too good something's going to go wrong I'm bound to mess it up and the crucial thing is that none of that none of that is what God wants for you it's not where we belong the place where you belong is where your heart and your mind is settled where you have rest in other words when you feel distressed and anxious

God is saying you don't belong here this is not where I want you to be you belong in a place where your soul is at rest now we always need to make sure we have an accurate view of rest rest again from a biblical point of view it's not just sitting in an armchair doing nothing it means much more it speaks of being content of being safe of being secure of being able to thrive in other words it actually just speaks of being very happy and you know something crucial and this is massively important for our theology we must never forget that if God wants anything for us he wants us to be very very happy and you know remember we used the language the reformers used the language of saying that God is the fountain of all goodness and just have that imagery in your mind God's the fountain of all goodness and he wants you under that waterfall he wants he wants that goodness to just pour and wash over you relentlessly and the basis for that happiness and the key to finding that happiness is to understand the truth of the theology that the

[29 : 24] Bible is revealing and there is such a good phrase here in Psalm 116 verse 7 it says that the Lord has dealt bountifully with you and really that phrase dealt bountifully that's reformed theology in a nutshell because the gospel is all about the unprompted undeserved generosity of God he deals out to us what we have not earned he gives to us what we could never demand and it's all arising from his generosity it's never something that's earned it's something that's dealt out by God he gives us everything that we need and that operates always to the level of abundance and so when we say God is the fountain of all goodness if you had in your mind imagine that if you had like a wee fountain in a park in your mind that's not a good enough illustration it needs to be the biggest fountain you've ever imagined in your life and it needs to have water just blasting everywhere because the gospel is all about God giving to us what we do not deserve and he always does that at the level of abundance and that abundant sufficiency of the gospel means that we can rest and so for the accomplishment of our salvation for fixing everything that's wrong with us for dealing with the fact that sin is the biggest problem the accomplishment of the fixing of that has been done by Jesus and it's been done totally and completely and fully that means you can rest you don't need to add anything and the victory of Jesus over death in the resurrection means that for security in life and in death you can tell your soul to rest and that's so interesting in life just now so often for us to find security financial career everything we have got to work in the gospel you can tell your soul to rest for quenching our deepest thirsts we can tell our souls to rest and receive from Jesus for the forgiveness of your mistakes all the things you wish you'd never done all the ways in which you feel like you're just a long way from what you want to be you can tell your soul to rest and every time you say yeah but what about yeah but what about yeah but what about you can tell your soul to rest because

Jesus has dealt with it all for the healing of our wounds you can tell your soul to rest that Jesus will help you and heal you and even for the accomplishments that we seek in our lives yes that involves our efforts our works our activities but for the ultimate success that we want to achieve it's not about us at all it's about God working through us and we can tell our souls to rest so often that voice inside us tells us to worry to worry about what people think about us to worry about what might happen to us or to the people that we love to worry about what we've done wrong or what we failed to do right to worry that we're going to be found out one day we must not listen to ourselves we must talk to ourselves I've mentioned reformed theology a few times I'm going to close by saying this reformed theology the way that's often described is as

Calvinism I'm pretty sure John Calvin he was a reformer I'm pretty sure he would hate the fact that generations since have used his name as a label for that I would imagine he would not have liked that but history has done that and so Calvinism is just another word for reformed theology one of the big emphasis of reformed theology is that God is sovereign in everything that he is ultimately in control and that salvation is all about grace it's not about us earning anything before God it's not about us being good enough it's about Jesus doing everything for us and salvation is given to us and once we are saved we are secure we can't be lost Jesus is not going to let us go he's not going to turn his back on us and all of that comes back to the fact that God is sovereign in it all and so we're Calvinists in this church and that's fascinating in terms of theology and I love all the theology of Calvinism it's amazing to study but do you know one of the you know what I think is maybe the most amazing thing about being a Calvinist is that you really can turn to yourself and say it's going to be okay that's what that's what our theology gives us a certainty that ultimately it's going to be okay and we can rest in that and of course okay is like the biggest understatement of my life because what

Jesus promises us is way way way way more than okay but we're often and I'm the same so often anxious that things are hanging by a thread and our theology Jesus is saying it's not hanging by a thread you're absolutely safe if you're trusting in me the Calvinist really can say to himself or herself it's going to be okay and so this is I think a really really helpful lesson for us we need to stop listening to ourselves and start talking to ourselves and in Jesus if we are trusting in Jesus we have every reason to praise and we have the right to refuse to despair and he's calling us to return to rest these are some of the many many many reasons why Jesus is just amazing amen let's pray