

BIG PROBLEMS? BIGGER GOD!

Part 18: The PROBLEM OF DESPAIR

Psalms 142

INTRO: W. Post headline . . . All of us know someone who struggles with despair and perhaps depression. It could be you – or me (I have). Stats show . . . Some get so low and stay so long that taking their lives is better than enduring it longer. Suicide stats. . . Despair has been described as a black hole, an abysmal cave. It may not be as deep and dark as depression. Maybe we are despondent and hopeless, feeling listless, blue, discouraged. David understands because that’s how he felt when he wrote Psalm 142 – let’s read. . .

THE TITLE has 4 parts:

1. “A Maskil” – Used to describe 13 psalms. It means “to give insight and instruction,” specifically in this psalm on how to handle times of despair, discouragement, hopelessness, and perhaps depression. The wise will listen and heed.
2. “of David” – He composed about half of the psalms, more than anyone else by far.
3. “when he was in the cave” (also in Psa. 34, 57). Which cave? Scripture records two: En Gedi (1 Sam. 24) and Adullam (1 Sam. 22). Probably the latter (22:1-2). Read and tell story. . . David is hated and hunted. No sooner 400 frightened, discouraged, discontented join him (401 counting David!). David is “elected” leader. No wonder he was despaired, “What now? Why me?” He wrote a song, Psalm 142. This is a very personal psalm (“I”, “me”, “my” – 29x in 7 verses).
4. “A Prayer” – Spurgeon, “Caves make good closets for prayer.” Psalm is actually a prayer. Great place to go when in such a state of mind and in such a place (cave, pit).

THE PSALM

I. DESPAIR (vv. 1-2) – David’s Plea

- A. (v. 1) “I cry aloud” is “I shriek!” I groan in despair “to the Lord” (2x) and “before the Lord” (2x). He “pleads for mercy.” He seeks God’s favor. He feels unworthy and useless (his self-image is shot). He needs God’s favor (touch). We understand, don’t we? We need to remember how God sees us (Ps. 139) – loved, needed. So, David turns “to the Lord” going “before Him.” Shriek to Him, but don’t stay and lick your wounds. In prayer, declare your need for the favor of God (say it!).
- B. (v. 2) His specific request. David explains his problem to God in v. 2. . . “Complaint” is anxiety. “Trouble” is to be bound up, tied tightly, cramped” – in a tight fix! He gets gut-level honest with God. We pray not to inform God of our situation (He knows), but to enable us to receive from Him the things that we ask. How often do we get totally

honest with God about our troubles and how we feel? Why was David in such despair? What were the circumstances?

II. DESPERATION (vv. 3-4) – David’s Plight

- A. He was fearful. Pressures from within (v. 3a) and problems without (v. 3b). Read Job 23:10-17. . . I’m not sure which is greater problem: alone in a cave fearing for your life or being with 400 malcontents looking to you for leadership.
- B. He was alone, at least at first. He was socially (v. 4a) and spiritually isolated (v. 4b). He felt no one cared. Who hasn’t been there? Then, he changed his perspective. Attitude is always a choice.

III. DISCERNMENT (vv. 5-6) – David’s Portion

He looks to the “Mighty Counselor” our best Friend, that sticks closer than a brother (Pro. 18:24). He found God again.

- A. Our Protector (v. 5 “refuge”; v. 6). God is our refuge, *not* the cave (Ps. 46:1).
- B. Our Portion (v. 5). He still had God. So do we! David knew it was so good to be alive (even in despair).
- C. Our Strength (v. 6). My persecutors are strong. I am weak. You are stronger!

IV. DELIVERANCE (v. 7) – We need hope to go on – David’s Prospect

David knew God would see Him through his valley of despair. He had done so before. In confident faith, he anticipated:

- A. Freedom (v. 7a) – out of my “spiritual” prison
- B. Fellowship (v. 7b) – “the righteous will surround me” – still in the future.
- C. Fullness (v. 7c) – God had “dealt bountifully” with him. There’s nothing stingy about God, is there?

Note phrase “that I may give thanks to your name” (v. 7) – David wants God to answer his prayer so he can glorify His name.

CONC— Psalm ends, David is still in the cave of despair, but he is now hopeful. He has been “brought very low” (v. 6), but now he is looking up (v. 7). If our troubles don’t lead us to go deeper in faith and prayer, then we’ve missed the biggest lesson of the cave. Let your cave hear your best prayer. A Maskil – Psalm written by a fellow struggler to instruct and to encourage us in the cave of despair. AMEN?