

Singing the Blues – Part 2

Psalm 43

7/28/2019

Randy Lovelace

Last week, we looked at Psalm 42. And as I stated to you last week, Psalm 42 and Psalm 43 are meant to be one Psalm. But as the scriptures took shape, numbers were added, verses were added, commas were added. So, therefore, we now have two Psalms that perhaps at first glance seem to be separate. But indeed, they are not. You'll hear the refrain similar to what we heard last week. In fact, it's a continued echoing. This Psalm is a continuance, and so therefore, I did the original idea of calling it Singing the Blues – Part 2.

This is Singing the Blues – Part 2, but it does take a change of voice. Perhaps it may not be obvious at first, but I hope that you can see it. Hear now God's word, Psalm 43.

Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God. 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. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please pray with me again.

Father, we ask for those children who are taking part in our children's church this morning, may they be able to lift up their voices in honor and praise of you. Father, we pray that they would be able to experience and know your grace as you called all of us together as a corporate body to experience it. And we now ask that you would teach us to learn what it means to lament, to call out to you in difficult circumstances, but to do so because our hope and our salvation is in you alone. Rescue us, Lord, from self-dependence and resting on our ways, for yours are above ours. And we acknowledge, O Lord, they are inscrutable at times. And so, we with the psalmist at times ask, Lord, where are you? So, teach us how to ask that question, Lord, to you, our holy, righteous, and loving Father. And it is in Jesus Christ we would ask you and by your Holy Spirit that as we ask that question, where are you, O Lord? Help us to also acknowledge that you are a God of promise, for our salvation is in the Lord alone. Help us, O Lord, and help the teacher. In Jesus's name. Amen.

I was reminded last week at the end of the sermon in a conversation that I had with someone, and they made mention of *The Message*. And *The Message* is a translation of many of both the New Testament, but also of the Psalms. And so, I thought this would be a good week, and it picks up well this Psalm, the feeling of this Psalm. And it is translated this way, "Clear my name, God. Stick up for me against those loveless, immoral people. Get me out of here away from these lying degenerates. I counted on you, God. Why did you walk out on me? Why am I pacing the floor wringing my hands over these outrageous people?" That's quite a stanza. But it gets at the heart of what's going on in this Psalm.

As we stated last week, these Psalms are at the gut-level wrenching of saying, Lord, where are you? I am experiencing suffering at the hands of others, and how do I respond? And so, this week as you look at this Psalm, we're going to look at it in three ways. First, I have to correct my handwriting. When I gave it to the office, it was not clear. That should be "vindication," not indication. I apologize to the office. My fault. Vindication, verses 1-2, vision, verses 3-4, and then confidence, verse 5. Vindication, vision, and confidence.

So, what's great about these first two verses is they are above all else in these two Psalms so easy to relate to. At least, I find it to be so. When he's calling out to the Lord, vindicate my name against those who persecute me, against those who have called down bad things on my name, who have spread lies, who have sought to kill me, who want to do away with me. And Peterson in his translation gets at it. "Lord, why have

you walked out on me? Why am I pacing the floor wringing my hands over these outrageous people?” And so, on the one level, it seems to be easy to relate to because above all else, these verses get out the heart of what really churns in the heart of a western mindset. Do you know what I mean? We like the idea of vindication. We want our pound of flesh.

Now, those of you who are movie buffs might know this. But ten years ago this year, the first edition of *Taken* came to the theaters. If you don’t know about *Taken*, it’s Liam Neeson’s decision at age 56 to become an action character in films. He plays, of course, a government operative. And his name is Bryan Mills. And that film is often remembered for one speech, right? So, follow along. He’s on the phone. And the bad guy’s calling. The bad guys who have his daughter and her stupid friend who went all around Paris, yeah, this is where we live. This is what we’re doing. Come party, whoo-hoo! And then all of a sudden, they’re kidnapped. Oh no, what are we going to do?

You see what I’m saying. It is a pound of American awesomeness; I want to tell you. So, he’s on the phone. And here’s what he says. And I kid you not, you know, goosebumps go over your arms when you hear it. He says,

“I don’t know who you are. I don’t know what you want. If you’re looking for ransom, I can tell you I don’t have money. But what I do have are a very particular set of skills, skills I have acquired over a very long career, skills that make me a nightmare for people like you. If you let my daughter go now, I’ll end it. I will not look for you. I will not pursue you. But if you don’t, I will look for you. I will find you. And I will kill you.”

See, you know whether you saw the movie or not, right? That totally appeals to us. The individual man up against the wall, and it’s his family. And he’s going to do something about it with his Nokia phone and whatever else he’s got, right?

We’ve been playing this theme over and over again in films so much so that it becomes the way we like to think about people who come against us, at least maybe a couple of you. And God bless those of you who are like this. But most of us have experienced some form of this in a car, right? You cut me off? Oh, it’s over now. But you haven’t broken the speed limit. You’re really not going to pursue them, right? But in your mind, you are like Liam Neeson on steroids. Or like, oh, I can’t stand this traffic – forgetting the fact that we’re part of the traffic. We’re in a car.

I felt it this last week. A guy pulls up in a trailer thing, a landscaper. I wish I had his name. I would totally tell you his name. He waited till he was right up on my back wheel as I was riding my bike and laid on the horn. Scared me half to death. Oh, I had a Liam Neeson moment on a bicycle, right? And the light was red. And I was trying to catch up to him. And he started to pull away from me. I’m like, oh yeah, pull away. Pull away, you know? But then, you know, we want our pound of flesh.

And at first, it seems as though this is what the psalmist wants. And in truth, he does. These are outrageous accusations. These are people who have come against him. And he wants the pound of flesh. Now, remember, this is the song that God’s people sang. Remember, this is a song written by those who wrote temple music. Now, we don’t sing like this anymore. But what makes it different, what he’s saying here, and the American version of the Liam Neeson take it up version is this. By calling on God to vindicate His name, he’s recognizing the dangerous nature of human anger.

The Bible recognizes that we do get angry. But in Psalm 4, it says, “Be angry, yet do not sin.” So, anger is not just this emotional pent up soda that’s been shaken and then once you finally get to release it, it spews out everywhere. We like to think of it as this nondescript immoral reality of being human. Now, it is a reality of being human. But the Bible doesn’t see it as immoral. It is, rather, a moral issue. And one can sin in anger, or one can seek to walk in righteousness in anger. But here’s the problem. Anger isn’t just something that we feel, although we do feel it. When we’re angry, we do stuff. We call people names. We use gestures. We raise our voices. Everything changes about us. And the problem is as a human being, knowledge is finite. We don’t know what another person’s motives are. We don’t know what’s going on behind their decisions.

And yet, when we take up anger and seek to come at those who come out against us, no matter how righteous and moral it may feel, it becomes a dangerous place for us because we don't know. And were vengeance left to us, Lord have mercy.

And so, what he's doing is he's calling on the one who does know. He recognizes how God is the Lord and because His knowledge is not finite, but infinite and eternal. And He's all powerful that he can turn to God in his anger and say, Lord, vindicate me. He can be angry at others, yet not seeking to exact his pound of flesh, he turns to the one who can be trusted to exact righteous judgement. And that's the challenge. It's not bad to be angry. It's that we have to be careful with it because misapplied, we can render judgement that actually we're due. We have to be careful with it because if we don't do anything with it, it becomes a place of a deep locked box of resentment.

So, he's showing us that we don't have to lock it away in a box nor are we called to be the ones who seek to render judgement, but rather turn to the one who's righteous and holy and who will do that. And so, he can say to Him, as Peterson says, "Lord, deal with these outrageous people." And the Lord hears our prayers and yet, recognizing our own frailty. And that's hard for us. How can we be angry, not suppress it, and yet not give in to it where we try to take up the sword ourselves, the sword of our tongues, the sword of our fists? This is what he's teaching us. The Lord is the one that we can talk to, that we can yell at and say, Lord, help me. And He does. And he says, Lord, vindicate my name.

And what that enables him to do by turning to the one who can vindicate him that actually frees him to be still. That's what we see in this vision in verses 3-4 when he says, "Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy."

So, that is an amazing journey that he's just made there. He's calling out to God to vindicate him. And then in these next verses, it seems like it just doesn't fit. But it does flow if you understand that by calling out to the one who can vindicate, that actually frees us to find a place of peace. We have a place where we can express our anger. We have one who cares for us and who loves us. And now, he's able to have this vision.

Now, some commentators say, because he's in exile now, is this a vision for when he'll be returned from exile? Now, I'm of the opinion that he's not looking to the end of the exile, but rather what he's calling about here is how I can live in the midst of exile. Because God has not yet rendered defeat over the enemies. Okay. But I can trust and have a vision in the reality that God will do these things. Therefore, I can say, Lord, let your light, His holiness, your truth, meaning His law, guide me. And so, he begins to have this experience of God's grace because of the wisdom and provision even in the midst of exile when he can't see how the end of the story is going to play out.

This is why God's people can avoid a bunker mentality. He's not hiding away in closet saying, just wake me when it's over. Now, he can say because he knows he's cried out to the one who can vindicate him and vindicate God's people, who can render righteous judgement, that enables him not to have a bunker mentality and hide, but rather praise God in the open and actually have a vision for what it looks like to worship God when our circumstances seem to scream out that God's not in control. The psalmist is actually saying, I can avoid a bunker mentality. I can express not a wish, but real joy even in the midst of this challenge because I've called out to the one who can vindicate me.

So, he's walking in faith that I've called out to the one who can vindicate. Now, I'm going to walk out, and I am going to say, praise be to God, your light and your truth, they guide me. This is wisdom literature even in the midst of a lament Psalm.

James, the writer of the letter in the New Testament, he says,

My dear brothers, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak, slow to anger, for a man's anger does not bring about a righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you. [ESV]

James understands as the psalmist understands. I'm going to get this out to you. Therefore, plant your light and your word in me so that I can praise your name. "Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy,

That is what we call a proper biblical look at confidence. It's not positive self-talk. That's trusting in something else to help with what I am facing. I'm not relying on myself. And in properly calling out God, he is now able to say, "I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God."

Now, as a people of God, as they would sing this song in exile, this becomes the song of God's people not just when the Psalm was written, but for the church of Jesus Christ. There is absolutely not a single thing that should ever cause the church to go into bunker mentality. Rather, we can with confidence know and ask, Lord, you are the Lord of holiness and righteousness and vindication. Fight against those who would come against your name and against your people. But as it is for us, guide us in your truth that we might praise you in joy even in the midst of exile.

Now, if you've visited Europe anytime recently, you will not what the future very likely is of the United States, that is the church of Jesus Christ. If you don't believe me, drive west along Triadelphia Road, and you'll come to this intersection at Sharp Road and Triadelphia Road. It is this beautiful, gorgeous old church building that is now the home of an absolutely beautiful interior designer and their office. The church in Europe has largely become a museum of its former self. The future of the church in the United States is very likely the same.

But what we can do is we can say, Lord, rescue us from taking your grace for granted. Rescue us from our own wisdom. And enable us to trust in you that we might walk with you in faithfulness and rejoice because the church in the United States is in exile. The church is no longer the center of a community. It's no longer a bulletin board where people put up announcements. People don't ride by on 108 going, well, I wonder what they do in that building. People aren't wondering about, so, explain that gospel to me again? And in many ways, some would argue that we're in a post-Christian age. I would actually argue we're in a pre-Christian age meaning largely most of the United States, most of the American population is over Jesus or they simply know nothing about Him whatsoever. And what they do know is projected in popular culture.

So, it's actually an opportunity instead of the church responding in fear and wondering who's going to come against us, rather we can say, Lord, that battle's yours. Vindicate your people but enable us to rejoice and not worry about our loss of importance. But maybe it's an opportunity to live out the gospel in a new way, rejoicing and singing that the Lord's grace is sufficient, and your mercy is new every morning. This is what a people at peace with a God who's righteous and vindicates is able to sing and have a vision for what it looks to walk with Him even in exile.

But it leads Him, unlike Psalm 42 where it felt like defiance, now he turns to confidence. He in confidence is calling out God to vindicate. He in confidence has this vision for who the Lord is and why it enables him to praise Him even in the midst of exile. Now, with this confident finish, verse 5, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?" it's not as though the question is being asked as if he doesn't know the answer. No. The question is being posed so that they can recite the known answer. "Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."

His confidence as the confidence of God's people is not in their grasp of God, but in God's grasp of them because their confidence is in His character. He's righteous and holy. Therefore, His wrath will always be doled out in a righteous way. Also, their confidence is in His promises. You have said you will save us. O Lord, in fact, we believe that you have and will again. It's a confidence in His holiness and in His power. So, one flows from the other because in obedience, the people of God are turning to Him because He is the Lord. Because they are calling out in praise of Him even in the midst of difficult circumstances, they can now claim the promises of God's salvation because they're not relying on themselves. They're relying on Him, not their vision, but His vision even though they can't see the end of the story. And this isn't just for those who do not believe. This is calling us out of self-dependence and into greater dependence on the Lord in the midst of lament, in the midst of uncertainty.

A few weeks ago when we had Pastor Kevin Twitt and his son Cooper – Kevin with a team of people was behind the musical movement Indelible Grace, some of those songs we sang this morning – the first hymn that Kevin Twitt retuned was a song that we have not sung this morning but a song that we have sung many times. It's "Arise, My Soul, Arise" by Charles Wesley. And when Kevin was with us, he taught us this. He says, Wesley said he received more letters from people tracing their conversion to Christ to this hymn than any other hymn he ever wrote because it is full of gospel confidence, and it is actually meant to be a communion hymn.

Now, what's interesting is the story behind Wesley's own conversion. At one point in Wesley's life, he thought he was dying and would die soon. When a Moravian brother, Peter Boller, came to visit him and Peter asked him, "Do you hope to be saved, Charles?" "Yes," he responded. "For what reason do you hope it?" Charles Wesley responded, "Because I have used my best endeavors to serve God." And Boller shook his head and said no more. "I thought him very uncharitable saying in my heart, why are not my endeavors a sufficient ground of hope? Would he rob me of my endeavors? I have nothing else to trust."

And so, Wesley would be awakened from his self-dependence, from his self-righteousness, from his self-confidence. And he would be the one who would write the hymn "Arise, My Soul, Arise," which says these words in verse 4, "My God is reconciled. His pardoning voice I hear. He owns me for his child. I can no longer fear. With confidence, I now draw nigh. With confidence, I now draw nigh. And Father, Abba, Father, cry." He was able to write this hymn because he understood that it is so easy to rely on ourselves and our own understanding. And he was rescued from that deception which enabled him to write a hymn like this.

As the psalmist says, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him." It reminds us in our lament when we sing the blues, we're singing the blues of the gospel for I need rescuing from my own self-dependence, and I need reliance on you.

I was reminded of this in my own seminary training. I was an intern at Covenant Presbyterian Church in St. Louis just a few blocks away from the seminary. And they had not only regular morning services, but then they would have a regular Sunday Evening service. And on one of these Sunday evening services, the pastor, who I'm grateful to say would marry Kate and me and we would become good friends and he would be a mentor in the faith, he preached that particular night on Romans 8, but specifically on the role of the Holy Spirit in calling us out of self-dependence and calling on the Lord as dependents.

And in this preaching, he said some things and even preached on verses that I may have studied them, but I'd not heard them. And this was the text upon which he preached.

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. [ESV]

And in that sermon, I was rescued in that time of my life from self-dependence and study of God's word. And here, I heard in that sermon it's not about my knowledge, it's not about my learning. It is about whether I rely on the Spirit of God for my salvation and for every day that I live. The decisions that we make, the decisions we don't make, asking for wisdom, asking and calling out on God in confidence, Abba, Father, have mercy on me. Save me.

And then almost ten years later, I walked from my office over to the sanctuary at a church plant. Now, we were six years into planting. It had been a whirlwind. Caroline was still young. Kate and I were just running around laying track before a moving train. That's what planning a church is like. And it was after six or seven years, we came up and were like, what has just happened to us? And I remember as I walked over to

the sanctuary, I remembered that part of Romans 8. And I saw again how I had been depending on myself and not enough of my confidence and dependence was in the Lord. And I walked over. The sanctuary was empty. And I just began to pour out my confession. Lord, have mercy on me. And what I was lamenting in that moment is how God in His mercy was showing me, Randy, you are so full of pride and self-dependence. Is your confidence in you or is it in me? Have you asked me to move by my Spirit in you and in this church? Or are you asking for me to simply bless your efforts? Two very big different things.

We had faced challenge and difficulty and persecution. And yet, the Lord was yelling out at me, get out of the way, Randy. And I remember that point. And it was at that point that I began to truly (and I still fail) say, Lord, have mercy on me. And as I walked up these stairs, I trust in the Holy Spirit.

I, like you, want to take up vindication. I, like you, am tempted to fall again on my own dependence. But these Psalms tell us of a psalmist and of a people who sing when they're at the end of their own rope that the Lord has been merciful to them for they cannot turn to themselves any longer. They must turn to Him. Lord, have mercy. Be our salvation. Vindicate us that we might praise your name. We are 40 years on. Do we want the Spirit to move? Or we simply want Him to bless our efforts? Are we walking in our own dependence and ability to build? Or are we asking the Spirit, Lord, what should we build? Do we want to take up the mantle, Lord, not to us, not to us, but to your name be glory alone? You are our confidence. You are our shield. Vindicate us. Save us. Redeem us that we might praise you even in the midst of exile.

That is the choice before us. And the psalmist and I call you and testify to you, the Lord alone is the one to whom we can praise. The Lord alone is the one that we call on. May we do that together as we sing the blues but knowing that He is the one who puts the words in our mouth. And He gives us the tune to sing. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your mercy to us. We thank you for your grace to us. Lord, forgive us for when we want to take up our own vindication. Lord, forgive us when we trust in our own anger and our own righteousness. Lord, forgive us. But we turn to you, O Lord, and we ask may you protect your church universal from those who persecute her. May you take up our vindication. And indeed, through the Lord Jesus Christ, you have done that. You are our salvation. We call out as your children, Abba, Father. Help us. Help us to praise you anew. Teach us, for you are our confidence. You are our salvation and our hope. Rescue us from ourselves that we might place our dependence in you. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.