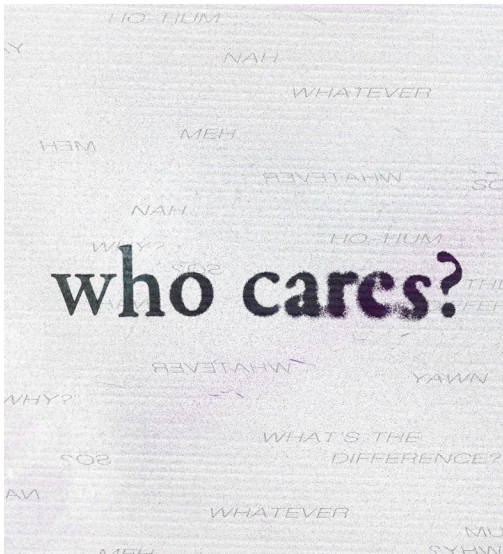




Sermon Growth Guide

September 29, 2024

Who Cares?



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Who Cares? - "Why?"

Psalm 42

Key Verse: "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." (Psalm 42:5)

Foundations

This psalm is a song of lament. Many scholars think that Psalm 43 was originally a part of Psalm 42, because both contain the same words and themes. It is clearly the cry of a mature believer who feels that God is off in the murky distance somewhere far away. This was probably written by the leaders of worship in the Temple. They were now, along with David, cut off from Jerusalem because of the revolt of Absalom, David's son. David and the Temple worship leaders have been betrayed.

The psalm begins by describing a thirst that must be quenched or the result will be death. The image is that of a deer that is being hunted by enemies and who has come to the end of all its resources. The psalmist says that being away from God's Temple and worshipping with God's people leads to despair.

The psalmist is talking to his soul, but it is not self-talk. His point of reference is not himself. It is God, for during his despair, he knows that his hope...his only hope is in God.

Dealing with treachery and betrayal at the hands of enemies, the writer doesn't blame God. It seems as if his dire situation increases his desire for God. He then intensifies that desire as he then seeks the living God and finally the face of God.

Understanding God's Word

Together read Psalms 42 and 43 as one psalm. In both psalms the writer asks, "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why are you so disturbed within me? How would you describe the circumstances that cause him to ask this question? Having described the condition of his heart, how would you then describe the desire of his heart?"

Applying God's Word

C.S. Lewis says that the imagery of "panting" for water is describing the psalmist's "appetite for God." Not only does the psalmist have an appetite for God, but he also wants to praise God. Worship with God's people is essential to him. In what specific ways do you think worship can satisfy our appetite for God? How have you experienced worship as satisfying your thirst for God?

Witnessing God's Word

In those times when God feels distant and you feel disturbed, how can you bear witness to the hope that is within you? How can remembering the goodness of God in other times help you live before others with the assurance that in "life and in death" we belong to God?

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We are learning about apathy. We are really motivated to learn about apathy. Aren't we? From what I have heard so far, this resonates with you. Either you feel it yourself, or you see it out there and you want to understand it better. We are living in a Who Cares? moment. The Simpsons is probably more my own generation than the younger folks. I mentioned two weeks ago that we think the word "meh" came out of the Simpsons. In another episode, the dad, Homer, was about to tell his kids that he needed triple-bypass heart surgery, but the mother, Marge, thought it might upset them. Lisa and Bart, the kids, said, "Nothing you say can upset us. We're the MTV generation. We feel neither highs nor lows." "Really? What's it like?" Homer asked. Lisa replied, "Eh." Why? When something feels off, we want to know why. What is making us feel this way? Why do I feel numb and apathetic? And what do I do with it? Is it even okay for a Christian to feel this way?

In *Overcoming Apathy*, Uche Anizor shares seven causes of this malaise. (1) Unresolved doubt or uncertainty. It is not wrong to doubt. We all do. Let doubt push you to search the Scriptures, pray, talk with others. Unresolved doubt dampens the fire of zeal. (2) Unhealed grief and loss. Again, grief is normal and universal. Are you dwelling there or moving forward through the "slough of despond"? (3) Triviality, living in a sea of trivial information (it is hard to find the needle of what matters in a haystack of meaningless trivialities); (4) Feelings of inadequacy (I can't make a difference anyway); (5) Lack of discipline; (6) Fragility (the more we avoid hard things the less resilience we develop to overcome hard things); and (7) Lack of purpose. We are picking away at these along the way in this series. We have seen the danger of apathy, the appeal of apathy, and today I want you to understand the commonality of apathy. Today is a day to give ourselves grace, to receive God's grace. This feeling is common. Everybody feels it at some point, and everyone is feeling a little of it.

God understands. It is okay to feel this way. What you do about it is what matters most. But first, it is important to just acknowledge and understand the way it feels. We have maybe absorbed the false idea that Christianity is supposed to make us comfortable. A sociologist studied teenage religious thinking about twenty-five years ago and coined the phrase "moralistic therapeutic deism" to describe what they were being taught about God. Basically, that God wants you to be kind and nice and fair, and in return God will make you happy, wealthy and wise. That's not Christianity. C. S. Lewis said, "I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity." Jesus didn't come to make good people comfortable; He came to make dead people come alive. But because we expect faith to make us comfortable, we are confused when we feel something wrong. We think it must not be working. Why do I feel like this? Is this counter to the Bible?

In fact, the Bible understands how we feel. "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'" (Psalms 42:1-3) This is called lament. My soul feels painfully dry, scorched and thirsty. I can't find my way to God. My tears are my food. People look at me and see something is wrong, they question my faith and the goodness of my God. Lament. We can be so success-oriented that it feels wrong to be honest about pain. We need to be open about hard things. We need room to express our brokenness, where our souls are bruised. One-third of the Psalms are Psalms of Lament, prayers through pain that, by being open and honest and raw, lead to healing. How do you pray when you can't pray? How do you trust when you

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can't trust? How do you hold on to God through pain and suffering?

A friend of mine, Mark Vroegop is a pastor who wrote a book called "Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy." Some years ago, after praying and struggling to get pregnant, his wife called him in his car on the way to work and she had miscarried. He pounded on the steering wheel in tears saying, "God, I know you are good; but right now I have to say, why are you being so mean?" That was not a lack of faith; it was actually because he was full of faith. He knew God was good. He knew God was trustworthy. He knew God wanted a world without suffering, and pain, and injustice, and miscarriages, but right now it hurt. So, he learned to pray through the patterns of lament found in the Psalms, to take time to feel the pain, acknowledge the hurt and disappointment. A lament Psalm goes through a pattern: turn to God; voice your pain; ask bold asks; and choose to trust. Mark learned to pray that pattern. Turn to God, voice your pain, ask bold asks, choose to trust, and he found himself finding peace. God is not surprised we feel pain. Actually, life without pain is irregular.

Why do I feel this way? It is not uncommon. Apathy is not uncommon. Follow this Psalm along. The Psalmist talks to his soul. Do you talk to yourself? "Of course I talk to myself. Sometimes I need expert advice." The Psalmist talks to his soul. "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." (Psalms 42:5) Sometimes you need to talk to your soul. You can sort of get objective with yourself, measure your feelings, evaluate your reactions, and add information. Your soul is the deepest part of you, the root, the core, fundamental to your being. Most problems are soul problems. If the soul rots out nothing else is healthy. If there are problems in the foundation, they run all the way up. Do you ever try to make

one of those stone stacks—cairns—on the trail in the mountains? If the bottom rock is shaky, you aren't going to get anywhere with the rest. There's no amount of shift or counterbalance to make up for an unsteady foundation. Your mind, your body, your will, all these things rest on your soul at the foundation.

That's why Jesus said, "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" (Matthew 16:26) On one side is everything in the world: all imaginable wealth, all the land, all the power, all the animal kingdom, everything at your disposal you could imagine. On the other side is your soul. Jesus makes the claim that if you took the world and lost your soul it would be a bad deal. Your soul is more valuable. Seems like we should spend more time caring for our souls. Do you know how to talk to your soul? The Psalms can teach you.

When your soul is disturbed, everything else in your life goes wobbly. Most problems are soul problems. We try to settle our soul on wrong things. You may have heard how Blaise Pascal said there is a God-shaped whole in every heart. That's the Tweet-able version. What he wrote was that there is a deep and unsatisfied and helpless craving in each of us: "What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself" (Pascal, *Pensees*). We strike out looking for anything and everything to satisfy the soul. But what the soul, the eternal soul needs is an eternal God. The little stands we try to rest our souls on are just too small and wobbly to rest an eternal and infinite

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object. Only God can satisfy your soul. Only God is a foundation strong enough, solid enough. Only the hands of the living God are sure and steady enough to keep your soul. Talk to your soul.

Why do I feel this way? Where does this apathy come from? Why am I drenched in malaise? It may be a soul problem. The soul longs for deeper meaning and purpose. Your soul remembers a time when it was vital and full of life. "These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng." (Psalms 42:4) Better talk to your soul. "My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me." (Psalms 42:6-7) Deep calls out to deep. Some of these emotions, these feelings, or this lack of feelings, this apathy emerges from the deep fathoms. A person is a deep sea. You are a deep sea. You might need help figuring out what's down there. The emotions on the surface are just that, on the surface. Remember you are not alone. Keep crying out to God. "By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me— a prayer to the God of my life." (Psalms 42:8) His song is with you. He is only a prayer away. And God can take your complaint. "I say to God my Rock, 'Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?' My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'" (Psalms 42:9-10) Cry out to God, voice your pain, ask bold requests, and resolve to trust in Him.

"Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." (Psalms 42:11) It repeats. A litany. A prayer. Why? Why do I feel this way? Is it okay that I do? Yes. It is very common. Turn to God again.

Who is the Lord? He is your Rock. A fishing boat was lost at sea off the coast of England years ago and a young Irishman was the only survivor. He was found clinging to a rock off the coast shivering and shaking with hypothermia. As they picked him up, they asked him, how did you stay alive all night? How did you survive? He said, "No matter how I shivered and shook, the rock never moved." We shiver and shake, tremble and waver, and the Rock never moves. Who is the Lord? He is your God. Remember when you praised Him with joy? Worship can lift our hearts. Worship can remind us God is good. Who is the Lord? He is your Savior. He is Jesus. Move out of stupor toward your Savior. Apathy is a danger. Apathy is a temptation. Apathy is very common. Jesus knows what is in the deep. Jesus went down to the deep, and He loves your deepest you. He loves your soul. He gave His life to save it. Talk to your soul about Jesus.

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