

## "On Being Cast Down"

**INTRODUCTION** I know that some of you have probably come here this morning fully expecting to hear a sermon in connection with the observance of Mother's Day. I also know that some of you may have noticed already that the title of this sermon is different from the one that was previously announced to you in our monthly church paper. I know that the disappointment will not be too great when I say that I have chosen to pass over these other various themes and to preach a sermon on a theme that actually has very little relationship to the wider observance of this particular day.

The title of this sermon is "On Being Cast Down". It has to do with depression. Let me just reassure you right now at the beginning of this sermon that it has nothing to do with an economic depression, but rather it is concerned with emotional depression. (Parenthetically, I might just add however, that I have seen enough of life to know that there is some connection between the two.) But this morning, I would like for you to think of "depression" as it usually refers to a person whose spirits are very low. We often talk about people who are depressed. A depressed person is one for whom the ceiling of life is very low, the visibility is very poor, the days are long, dreary and monotonous, and there's very little cause for rejoicing. We know from our own experiences that there are some people who become depressed very easily, very often, and very severely. We also know from our experiences that there are some people who never seem to become depressed, no matter what happens to them. But I would add this comment, that the number of such people, according to my observation, is indeed very small.

I think that modern psychiatry has done a great deal in helping people overcome depression. You know as well as I do that there are some forms of depression that are so severe, and so extreme that the ordinary processes of thought are of very little use. We ought to be thankful, and I think we are, for the success that psychiatry has had in helping people overcome depression. My only observation is that sometimes the great success of psychiatry has led people to forget that religion has always helped people over their moods of depression, that religion has a great deal to offer people in helping them to handle what you might call the normal rise and fall of the emotional tides.

We have a very good example of how religion can help a person overcome depression in the case of the man referred to in the forty-second psalm. I read this psalm to you for our scripture lesson this morning, and I would like you to focus your attention upon this man for several minutes as I use him as a guide and as a help in trying to bring our religious techniques and experiences to bear upon our moods and our moments of depression.

**HIS MOOD OF DEPRESSION** To begin with, the first thing that I noticed about this particular man who wrote this psalm is that he had a very good reason for being depressed. His depression grew out of the fact that he was living in a place where he did not belong. He really belonged in Jerusalem. He had been born and brought up in Jerusalem. More especially he belonged in the Temple. He was, as it were, on the staff of the Temple. He was a temple musician. He directed the great ceremonial observances that took place in the temple. And I think this too, that the man was something of a mystic, for in his mind, he seemed to associate God and the Temple as being synonymous. To be separated from the temple was to be separated from God. Now when he wrote this particular psalm he was living in the wild and rural area far to the north of the city of Jerusalem. There was no Temple. There were

forbidding hills and roaring cataracts. He was lost living in this environment, and it seemed to him that he had also lost God. He was greatly depressed, and I think we can understand why. I suppose his situation might compare to that of a man who loves the theater, and who has lived most of his years in NYC where he has known many of the actors and producers involved in the theater, and who for some reason is suddenly forced to move to a small town in the northern part of the state of Maine where there is no theater. He is depressed, and his depression increased when he realizes that all there is in this small town is a second rate moving picture house. That's the way it was with this man who wrote this psalm. He was away from Jerusalem. He was away from the temple and the things and people involved in the life of the temple. For this reason he was depressed, and we can understand why he was depressed.

Now I don't know what your experiences tell you, but mine tell me this that there are usually some good reasons behind our moments and our moods of depression. Sometimes it's due to something that has happened in the outside world. For instance, you pick up the morning newspaper and you read about a group of teen-age boys who have brutally killed another teen age boy. And if you have any sensitivity at all to human personality you become depressed. Or for instance, you pick up the morning paper and you read about the graft and corruption that exists in our city and federal government, and if you have any sensitivity to goodness, you become depressed. Or sometimes it's due to something that has happened to you personally. It may be a case of one blow too many. Isn't it true that the blows of life always seem to come in rapid succession. You just recover from one experience, and then it seems that you're hit right away with another experience. As I say it may be a case of one blow too many. You become depressed. Your spirit begins to sag, and your heart becomes heavy. Or perhaps it's due to something that has happened inside of you. You may be depressed over something that you did or said. It disturbs you and bothers you. You may feel that you're not the person that you'd like to be or the person that people think you are. All of this does something to a person. It takes some of the light out of the sky, and the clouds begin to press in on you. You begin to say with the psalmist of old: "Oh my God, my soul is cast down within me." Oh to be sure, you don't say it in so many words, but you share that particular feeling.

Now all of this is simply leading us into one of the main thoughts of this sermon, and that is this, that in the case of the man who wrote this psalm, the depression was way out of all proportion to the cause or the reason for it. To be sure, he had a reason for being depressed, that is something had caused him to feel this way. He was separated from the Temple, from Jerusalem, and from those he loved, but already the depression had gone to deep. It had gone too far. It had lingered too long, and had taken far too much out of him. His experience of depression was way out of proportion to the reason or cause of it. And I would venture to say that it's often the same way with our moods of depression. Isn't it true that sometimes they're way out of all proportion to the cause or reason. Perhaps this man began to wonder along these lines "Others have been through this experience. I wonder if they have suffered to the extent that I'm suffering" Perhaps in the course of things he began to realize that the trouble did not rest so much with the circumstances surrounding his situation as it rested with himself. In other words, he gradually and painfully came to the realization that the trouble was with himself and not with the situation. And at this point real progress begins. He may not have been able to change the circumstances surrounding his own situation, but he could change his mental and spiritual outlook. The trouble was with himself. Recognition of this

fact is the first step on the way out and up from any mood of depression. For instance, when a young man who is depressed because he has lost his job sees clearly that the loss of the job may be the immediate cause of his depression, but not adequate reason for its continued existence, then he is on his way out and up.

INTERESTING TO WATCH  
THIS MAN.....

I found it very interesting to watch this man climb slowly out of his mood of depression, and I think you'll find it interesting too as you read this psalm this afternoon in the quietness of your home. The first thing that he did was to pour it all out to himself. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he poured it all out to God. But at any rate, he began by talking to himself. You might say that he performed a kind of self analysis.

He certainly had a great gift for words. He put it down on paper. He wrote it all out. These are some of the things that he said: "My tears have been my meat day and night" I'd venture to say that it wasn't easy for him to admit that he would weep at the slightest provocation. And then he went on to say this: "All thy waves and billows have gone over me" That is, he felt like some one in the depths of the sea. The storms of life had really borken upon him. And then he went on to say, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Once again I'd venture to say that it wasn't easy for him to think that perhaps God had forgotten him.

I think there's a clue in this for us. It's simply this, that when you're in a state of mind like this, don't be afraid to pour it all out and to put it all down. To be sure, don't pour it out to everyone you meet, but pour it out to someone you trust - a doctor, a minister, a close friend, a person within the family circle. Pour it out to yourself. Put it down in writing. There's nothing peculiar about this. It happens to old and young alike. This was the first thing he did.

He then went on and asked hi self this question: "O my soul, why art thou cast down within me, and why art thou so disquieted within me?" In his own mind he began to go over the reasons once again as to why he was so depressed. As he went over the reasons, he came to the realization that somewhere along the line he had lost sight of God. "My soul" he said, "is athirst for God". And the more that he thought about this, the more he realized that it wasn't a good reason at all. "Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God". It was as though he saw for the first time that if he could find God in the temple, he could still find God in the resounding cataracts and forbidding hills of the wild and rural lands to the north of Jerusalem.

And so for those of you who would like to have all of this translated into less technical religious language, let me put it this way: This man began to see what so many others have seen as they began to climb out of their moods of depression and work their way through these hard experiences of life, that life wonderfully and marvelously provides its own remedies and resources. Life carries its own restoratives. They work quietly if we given them the opportunity. The natural thing for a wound is for it to heal. The natural thing for a disturbed nervous system is for it to right itself. The displaced person tends to adjust himself. The grief stricken person eventually straightens himself out.

We all know enough about life to know that circumstances do not always change and work out to our liking. The important thing to remember is that the life that a person has been given enables him to rise above circumstances and to make the changes in his own life that are necessary. The psalmist began to see this very thing. "Why art thou cast down, Oh my soul?" In other words, the God that I am thirsting for, the God that I am separated from, the place where I would like to be, the person I have lost, the person I would like to be, the job I would like to have - in these very things as they happen to me, in these very situations, can be found the great restoring and renewing strength of the living God which enables us to handle life. It's good to know, and if you've ever been through it you'll know what I mean!

THE CONCLUSION      And finally, we observe that the man in this psalm prayed. The prayer comes in the 43rd psalm. This is his prayer, and it may be familiar to you:

"O send out thy light and thy truth that they may lead me, and bring me unto thy holy hill and to thy dwelling"

This is the last clue that he had to offer us. After he had passed through this experience of self analysis, and after he had come to face reality, he found no adequate reason for his depression to continue. And at this point he prays:

"O send out thy light and thy truth that they may lead me, and bring me unto something that is good, which I neither anticipate and expect, but toward which I am moving in confidence and in trust."

His prayer ought to be our prayer. It ought to be more than just a matter of words. It's not enough to get down on your knees and repeat that prayer. Your prayer ought to be a living expression of the fact that you trust the restorative powers of the living God, and that you will give them an opportunity to work in your own life. And so we come once again to the end of a sermon. Those of you who follow the preaching of this pulpit with any degree of regularity know that I always like to end my sermons on a positive or dramatic note. It's not always easy to do. Yesterday morning as I was putting the finishing touches upon this sermon, I thought that perhaps the best way to end would be by bringing together the main thoughts involved in this sermon. When you find the ceiling of life low, and the visibility poor, and the days long dreary and monotonous, ask yourself these questions:

Why am I depressed? Is the cause of my depression adequate reason for its continued existence? Have I lost sight of God somewhere along the line. And am I giving the spiritual resources and restoratives ample opportunity to function in my own life?

Let us pray: Guide us our Father through the dark places of life. Help us never to lose sight of Thee. Help us always to remember that life renews itself if we give it time and are willing to wait. Amen

"Why are you cast down o my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God for I shall again praise him. My help and my God."