

Exposition on Psalm 44

by St. Augustine

St. Augustine's exposition on Psalm 44 emphasizes the enduring faith of believers amidst suffering and the hope of God's ultimate deliverance.

Scripture: Psalm 43:3, Psalm 44:13, Psalm 44:16, Psalm 44:21, Matthew 7:13, Romans 8:36, 1 Corinthians 4:6

Topics: "Persecution And Faith", "Gods Redemption"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on Psalm 43, highlighting the connection between the suffering of the Martyrs and the Passion of Christ, emphasizing the endurance and faith of believers amidst persecution. He delves into the past experiences of God's deliverance and the hope for future victory over enemies. The Psalmist expresses the deep sense of abandonment and shame faced by the faithful, questioning God's apparent absence in times of trouble. Despite the trials and humiliations, there is a call for God to awaken, help, and redeem His people for His Name's sake, acknowledging that salvation and strength come from Him alone.

Transcript

1. This Psalm is addressed to the sons of Korah, as its title shows. Now Korah is equivalent to the word baldness; and we find in the Gospel that our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified in the place of a skull. It is clear then that this Psalm is sung to the sons of His 'Passion.' Now we have on this point a most certain and most evident testimony from the Apostle Paul; because that at the time when the Church was suffering under the persecutions of the Gentiles, he quoted from hence a verse, to insert by way of consolation, and encouragement to patience. For that which he inserted in his Epistle, is said here: For Your sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Romans 8:36 Let us then hear in this Psalm the voice of the Martyrs; and see how good is the cause which the voice of the Martyrs pleads, saying, For Your sake, etc....

2. The title then is not simply To the sons of Korah, but, For understanding, to the sons of Korah. This is the case also with that Psalm, the first verse of which the Lord Himself uttered on the Cross: My God, My God, look upon Me; why have You forsaken Me? For transferring us in a figure 1 Corinthians 4:6 to what He was saying, and to His own Body (for we are also His Body, and He is our Head), He uttered from the Cross not His own cry, but ours. For God never forsook Him: nor did He Himself ever depart from the Father; but it was in behalf of us that He spoke this: My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me? For there follows, Far from My health are the words of My offenses: and it shows in whose person He said this; for sin could not be found in Him....

3. O God, we have heard with our ears; our fathers have told us the work that You did in their days, and in the days of old Psalm 43:1. Wondering wherefore, in these days, He has seemingly forsaken those whom it was His will to exercise in sufferings, they recall the past events which they have heard of from their fathers; as if they said, It is not of these things that we suffer, that our fathers told us! For in that other Psalm also, He said this, Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and Thou delivered them. But I am a worm and no man; a reproach of men, and the outcast of the people. They trusted, and Thou delivered them; have I then hoped, and have You forsaken me? And have I believed upon You in vain? And is it in vain that my name has been written in Your Book, and Your name has been inscribed on me? What our fathers told us was this:

Your hand destroyed the nations; and You planted them: Thou weakened the peoples, and cast them out Psalm 43:2. That is to say: You drove out 'the peoples' from their own land, that You might bring 'them' in, and plant them; and might by Your mercy establish their kingdom. These are the things that we heard from our fathers. But perhaps it was because they were brave, were men of battle, were invincible, were well-disciplined, and warlike, that they could do these things. Far from it. This is not what our fathers told us; this is not what is contained in Scripture. But what does it say, but what follows?

For they gat not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them; but Your right hand, and Your arm, and the light of Your countenance Psalm 43:3. Your right hand is Your Power: Your arm is Your Son Himself. And the light of Your countenance. What means this, but that You were present with them, in miracles of such a sort that Your presence was perceived. For when God's presence with us appears by any miracle, do we see His face with our own eyes? No. It is by the effect of the miracle He intimates to man His presence. In fact, what do all persons say, who express wonder at facts of this description? I saw God present. But Your right hand, and Your arm, and the light of Your countenance; because You pleased in them: i.e. so dealt with them, that You were well-pleasing in them: that whoso considered how they were being dealt with, might say, that God is with them of a truth; and it is God that moves them.

4. What? Was He then other than now He is? Away with the supposition. For what follows?

You are Yourself my King and my God. Psalm 43:4. You are Yourself; for You are not changed. I see that the times are changed; but the Creator of times is unchanged. You are Yourself my King and my God. You are wont to guide me: to govern me, to save me. You who commandest salvation unto Jacob. What is, You who commandest? Even though in Your own proper Substance and Nature, in which You are whatsoever You are, You were hid from them; and though You did not converse with the fathers in that which You are in Yourself, so that they could see You face to face, yet by any created being whatsoever You command salvation unto Israel. For that sight of You face to face is reserved for those set free in the Resurrection. And the very fathers of the New Testament too, although they saw Your mysteries revealed, although they preached the secret things so revealed to them, nevertheless said that they themselves saw but in a glass, darkly, but that seeing face to face 1 Corinthians 13:12 is reserved to a future time, when what the Apostle himself speaks of shall have come. When Christ our life shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory. Colossians 3:4 It is against that time then that vision face to face is reserved for you, of which John also speaks: Beloved, we are now the sons of God: and it does not yet appear what we shall be. We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. 1 John 3:2 Although then at that time our fathers saw You not as You are, face to face, although that vision is reserved against the resurrection, yet, even though they were Angels who presented themselves, it is Thou, Who commandest salvation unto Jacob. You are not only present by Your own Self; but by

whatsoever created being You appeared, it is Thou that dost command by them, that which You do by Your own Self in order to the salvation of Your servants: but that which they do whom Thou commandest it, is done to procure the salvation of Your servants. Since then You are Yourself my King and my God, and You command salvation unto Jacob, wherefore are we suffering these things?

5. But perhaps it is only what is past that has been described to us: but nothing of the kind is to be hoped for by us for the future. Nay indeed, it is still to be hoped for. Through You will we winnow away our enemies Psalm 43:5. Our fathers then have declared to us a work that Thou did in their days, and in the days of old, that Your hand destroyed the Gentiles: that Thou cast out the peoples; and planted them. Such was the past; but what is to be hereafter? Through You we shall winnow away our enemies. A time will come, when all the enemies of Christians will be winnowed away like chaff, be blown like dust, and be cast off from the earth....Thus much of the future. I will not trust in my bow, even as our fathers did not in their sword. Neither shall my sword help me Psalm 43:6.

6. For You have saved us from our enemies Psalm 43:7. This too is spoken of the future under the figure of the past. But this is the reason that it is spoken of as if it were past, that it is as certain as if it were past. Give heed, wherefore many things are expressed by the Prophets as if they were past; whereas it is things future, not past facts that are the subject of prophecy. For the future Passion of our Lord Himself was foretold: and yet it says, They pierced My hands and My feet. They told all My bones; not, They shall pierce, and shall tell. They looked and stared upon Me; not They shall look and stare upon Me. They parted My garments among them. It does not say, They shall part them. All these things are expressed as if they were past, although they were yet to come: because to God things to come also are as certain as if they were past....It is for this reason, in consequence of their certainty, that those things which are yet future, are spoken of as if past. This it is then that we hope. For it is, You have saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us.

7. In God will we boast all the day long Psalm 43:8. Observe how he intermingles words expressive of a future time, that you may perceive that what was spoken of before as in past time was foretold of future times. In God will we boast all day long; and in Your name will we confess for ever. What is, We shall boast? What, We shall confess? That You have saved us from our enemies; that You are to give us an everlasting kingdom: that in us are to be fulfilled the words, Blessed are they that dwell in Your house: they will be always praising You.

8. Since then we have the certainty that these things are to be hereafter, and since we have heard from our fathers that those we spoke of were in time past, what is our state at present? But now You have cast us off, and put us to shame Psalm 43:9. You have put us to shame not before our own consciences, but in the sight of men. For there was a time when Christians were persecuted; when in every place they were outcasts, when in every place it used to be said, He is a Christian! as if it conveyed an insult and reproach. Where then is He, our God, our King, who commands salvation unto Jacob? Where is He who did all those works, which our fathers have told us? Where is He who is hereafter to do all those things which He revealed unto us by His Spirit? Is He changed? No. These things are done in order to understanding, for the sons of Korah. For we ought to understand something of the reason, why He has willed we should suffer all these things in the mean time. What all things? But now You have cast us off and put us to shame: and goest not forth, O God, in our powers. We go forth to meet our enemies, and You go not forth with us. We see them: they are very strong, and we are without strength. Where is that might of Yours? Where Your right hand, and Your power? Where the sea dried up, and the Egyptian pursuers overwhelmed with the waves? Where Amalek's resistance subdued by the sign of the Cross? Exodus

17:12 And You, O God, goest not forth in our powers.

9. You have turned us away backward in presence of our enemies Psalm 43:10, so that they are, as it were, before; we, behind; they are counted as conquerors, we as conquered. And they which hate us spoiled for themselves. What did they spoil but ourselves?

10. You have given us like sheep appointed for meat, and hast scattered us among the nations Psalm 43:11. We have been devoured by the nations. Those persons are meant, who, through their sufferings, have by process of assimilation, becomes part of the body of the Gentile world. For the Church mourns over them, as over members of her body, that have been devoured.

11. You have sold Your people for no price Psalm 43:12. For we see whom You have made over; what You have received, we have not seen. And there was no multitude in their jubilees. For when the Christians were flying before the pursuit of enemies, who were idolaters, were there then held any congregations and jubilees to the honour of God? Were those Hymns chanted in concert from the Churches of God, that are wont to be sung in concert in time of peace, and to be sounded in a sweet accord of the brotherhood in the ears of God?

12. You made us a reproach to our neighbours; a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us Psalm 43:13. You made us a similitude among the heathen Psalm 43:14. What is meant by a similitude? It is when men in imprecating a curse make a similitude of his name whom they detest. So may thou die; So may thou be punished! What a number of such reproaches were then uttered! So may thou be crucified! Even in the present day there are not wanting enemies of Christ (those very Jews themselves), against whom whenever we defend Christ, they say unto us, So may thou die as He did. For they would not have inflicted that kind of death had they not an intense horror of dying by such a death: or had they been able to comprehend what mystery was contained in it. When the ointment is applied to the eyes of the blind man, he does not see the eye-salve in the physician's hand. For the very Cross was made for the benefit even of the persecutors themselves. Hereby they were healed afterwards; and they believed in Him whom they themselves had slain. You made us a similitude among the heathen; a shaking of the head among the peoples, a shaking of the head by way of insult. They spoke with their lips, they shook the head. This they did to the Lord: this to all His Saints also, whom they were able to pursue, to lay hold of, to mock, to betray, to afflict, and to slay.

13. My shame is continually before me; and the confusion of my face has covered me Psalm 43:15. For the voice of him that reproaches and blasphemes Psalm 43:16: that is to say, from the voice of them that insult over me, and who make it a charge against me that I worship You, that I confess You! And who make it a charge against me that I bear that name by which all charges against me shall be blotted out. For the voice of him that reproaches and blasphemes, that is, of him that speaks against me. By reason of the enemy and the persecutor. And what is the understanding conveyed here? Those things which are told us of the time past, will not be done in our case: those which are hoped for, as to be hereafter, are not as yet manifest. Those which are past, as the leading out of Your people with great glory from Egypt; its deliverance from its persecutors; the guiding of it through the nations, the placing of it in the kingdom, whence the nations had been expelled. What are those to be hereafter? The leading of the people out of this Egypt of the world, when Christ, our leader shall appear in His glory: the placing of the Saints at His right hand; of the wicked at His left; the condemnation of the wicked with the devil to eternal punishment; the receiving of a kingdom from Christ with the Saints to last for ever. These are the things that are yet to be: the former are what are past. In the interval, what is to be our lot? Tribulations! Why so? That it may be

seen with respect to the soul that worships God, to what extent it worships God; that it may be seen whether it worships Him freely from whom it received salvation freely....What have you given unto God? You were wicked, and thou were redeemed! What have you given unto God? What is there that you have not received from Him freely? With reason is it named grace, because it is bestowed (gratis, i.e.) freely. Romans 11:6 What is required of you then is this, that thou too should worship Him freely; not because He gives you things temporal, but because He holds out to you things eternal....

14. All this has come upon us; yet have we not forgotten You Psalm 43:17. What is meant by, have not forgotten You? Neither have we behaved ourselves frowardly in Your covenant.

Our heart has not turned back; and You have turned aside our goings out of Your way Psalm 43:18. See here is understanding, in that our heart has not gone back; that we have not forgotten You, have not behaved frowardly in Your covenant; placed as we are in great tribulations, and persecutions of the Gentiles. You have turned aside our goings out of Your way. Our goings were in the pleasures of the world; our goings were in the midst of temporal prosperities. You have taken our goings out of Your way; and hast shown us how strait and narrow is the way that leads unto life. Matthew 7:14 What is meant by, hast turned aside our goings out of Your way? It is as if He said, You are placed in the midst of tribulation; you are suffering many things; you have already lost many things that you loved in this life: but I have not abandoned you on the way, the narrow way that I am teaching you. You were seeking broad ways. What do I tell you? This is the way we go to everlasting life; by the way ye wish to walk, you are going to death. How broad and wide is the road that leads to destruction: and how many there be that find it! How strait and narrow the way that leads unto life, and how few there be that walk therein! Matthew 7:13-14 Who are the few? They who patiently endure tribulations, patiently endure temptations; who in all these troubles do not fall away: who do not rejoice in the word for a season only; and in the time of tribulation fade away, as on the sun's arising; but who have the root of love, according to what we have lately heard read in the Gospel.. ..

15. For You have brought us low in the place of infirmity Psalm 43:18: therefore You will exalt us in the place of strength. And the shadow of death has covered us Psalm 43:19. For this mortality of ours is but the shadow of death. The true death is condemnation with the devil.

16. If we have forgotten the Name of our God. Here is the understanding of the sons of Korah. And stretched out our hands to a strange God Psalm 43:20. Shall not God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart Psalm 43:21. He knows, and yet He searches them out? If He knows the secrets of the heart, what do the words, Shall not God search it out, do there? He knows it in Himself; He searches it out for our sakes. For it is for this reason God sometimes searches a thing out; and speaks of that becoming known to Himself, which He is Himself making known to you. He is speaking of His own work, not of His knowledge. We commonly say, A gladsome day, when it is fine. Yet is it the day itself that experiences delight? No: we speak of the day as gladsome, because it fills us with delight. And we speak of a sullen sky. Not that there is any such feeling in the clouds, but because men are affected with sullenness at the sight of such an appearance of the skies, it is called sullen for this reason, that it makes us sullen. So also God is said to know when He causes us to know. God says to Abraham, Now I know that you fear God. Genesis 22:12 Did He then not know it before then? But Abraham did not know himself till then: for it was in that very trial he came to know himself....And God is said to know that which He had caused him to know. Did Peter know himself, when he said to the Physician, I will be with You even unto death? Luke 22:33 The Physician had felt his pulse, and knew what was going on within His patient's soul: the patient knew it not. The crisis of trial came; and the Physician approved the correctness of His opinion:

the sick man gave up his presumption. Thus God at once knows it and searches it out. He knows it already. Why does He 'search it out'? For your sake: that you may come to know your own self, and may return thanks to Him that made you. Shall not God search it out?

17. For, for Your sake we are killed all the day long: we are counted as sheep for the slaughter Psalm 43:22. For you may see a man being put to death; you do not know why he is being put to death. God knows this. The thing in itself is hid. But some one will say to me, See, he is detained in prison for the name of Christ, he is a confessor for the name of Christ. Why do not heretics also confess the name of Christ, and yet they do not die for His sake? Nay more; let me say it, in the Catholic Church itself, do you think there either are, or have been wanting persons such as would suffer for the sake of glory among men? Were there no such persons, the Apostle would not say, Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits me nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:3 He knew therefore that there might be some persons, who did this not from charity, but out of vainglory. It is therefore hid from us; God alone sees this; we cannot see it. He alone can judge of this, who knows the secrets of the heart. For, for Your sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. I have already mentioned that from hence the Apostle Paul had borrowed a text for the encouragement of the Martyrs: that they might not faint in the tribulations undergone by them for the name of Christ.

18. Awake; why sleepest Thou, O Lord? Psalm 43:23. Who is addressed, and who is the speaker? Would not he be more correctly said to sleep and slumber, who speaks such words as these? He replies to you, I know what I am saying: I know that He that keeps Israel does not sleep: but yet the Martyrs cry, Awake; why sleepest Thou, O Lord? O Lord Jesus, You were slain; Thou slept in Your Passion; to us You have now awaked from sleep. For we know that You have now awaked again. To what purpose have You awaked and risen again? The Gentiles that persecute us, think You to be dead; do not believe You to have risen again. Arise Thou then to them also! Why sleepest Thou, though not to us, yet to them? For if they already believed You to have risen again, could they persecute us who believe in You? But why do they persecute? Destroy, slay so and so, whoever have believed in You, such an one, who died an ill death! As yet to them Thou sleepest; arise to them, that they may perceive that You have awaked again; and may be at rest. Lastly, it has come to pass, while the Martyrs die, and say these things; while they sleep, and awaken Christ, truly dead in their sleepings, Christ has, in a certain sense, risen again in the Gentiles; i.e. it becomes believed, that He has risen again; so by degrees they themselves, becoming converted to Christ by believing, collected a numerous body: such as the persecutors dreaded; and the persecutions have come to an end. Why? Because Christ, who before was asleep to them, as not believing, has risen in the Gentiles. Arise, and cast us not off for ever!

19. Wherefore hidest Thou Your face: as if You were not present; as if you had forgotten us? And forgettest our misery and trouble? Psalm 43:24.

20. For our soul is bowed down to the dust Psalm 43:25. Where is it bowed down? To the dust: i.e. dust persecutes us. They persecute us, of whom You have said, The ungodly are not so; but are like the dust, which the wind drives away from the face of the earth. Our belly has cleaved to the earth. He seems to me to have expressed the punishment of the extreme of humiliation, in which, when any one prostrates himself, his belly cleaves to the earth. For whosoever is humbled so as to be on his knees, has yet a lower degree of humiliation to which he can come: but he who is so humbled, that his belly cleaves to the ground, there is no farther humiliation for him. Should one wish to do still farther, it will, after that point, be not bowing him down, but crushing him. Perhaps then he may have meant this: We are bowed down very low in this dust; there is no farther point to which humiliation can go. Humiliation has now reached its

highest point: let mercy then come also....

21. Arise, O Lord, help us Psalm 43:26. And indeed, dearly beloved, He has arisen and helped us. For when he awoke (i.e. when He arose again, and became known to the Gentiles) on the cessation of persecutions, even those who had cleaved to the earth were raised up from the earth, and on performing penance, have been restored to Christ's body, feeble and imperfect though they were: so that in them was fulfilled the text, Your eyes did see my substance yet being imperfect; and in Your book shall they all be written.

Arise, O Lord, help us, and redeem us for Your Name's sake; that is to say, freely; for Your Name's sake, not for the sake of my merits: because You have vouchsafed to do it, not because I am worthy that You should do it unto me. For this very thing, that we have not forgotten You; that our heart has not gone back; that we have not stretched out our hands to any strange god; how should we have been able to achieve, except with Your help? How should we have strength for it, except through Your appealing to us within, exhorting us, and not forsaking us? Whether then we suffer in tribulations, or rejoice in prosperities, redeem Thou us, not for our merits, but for Your Name's sake.

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