

OUT OF THE DEPTHS

A Songwriter's Journey Through The Psalms

RICK LEE JAMES

A companion to Rick Lee James' critically
acclaimed concert film and album

BASEMENT PSALMS LIVE

"Rick Lee James has accomplished what I have been trying to do for decades; bring together the thoughtful reader with the discerning listener. He has written an important introduction to the Psalter which opens the door to his own musical interpretations."

--MICHAEL CARD

Award Winning Singer, Songwriter, & Author

"The Psalms take up more real estate in the Bible than any other book. This ancient Jewish hymnal is an anthology of lyrics for one hundred and fifty songs. These God-obsessed poems are not to be blithely read, but prayed, or better yet chanted and sung. To properly approach the Psalms we need to abandon the didactic and embrace the poetic, but this does not come naturally for everyone. What we need is the artistic sensibilities of a songwriter to guide us. This is precisely what Rick Lee James brings to the Psalms in his wonderful book *Out Of The Depths*. As a pastor/songwriter/musician Rick Lee James is uniquely suited to introduce us to the Psalms and help us see how these three thousand year old songs speak to the whole range of human experience in the light of brutal honesty and radical trust in God. I highly recommend *Out Of The Depths!*"

--BRIAN ZAHND

Pastor of Word of Life Church, St. Joseph, Missouri & Author of *A Farewell To Mars* (2014)

"My friend, Rick Lee James, reminded me that Christian art can still be thoughtful and profound in his beautiful record "*Basement Psalms Live.*" In this companion book, Rick brings the depth of his attentive songwriting to life by highlighting the intention, the community, and the reverence that the Biblical Psalms have demanded from people of faith since their inception.

Most important, Rick's writing expounds on the deep sense of hope and joy that is the palatable foundation of his music. I highly recommend this book."

--MATT LITTON

Author of *Holy Nomad: The Rugged Road To Joy*, Educator, & Speaker

"Part memoir, part biblical commentary, part album liner notes, *Out of the Depths* is a unique and refreshing exploration of the Psalms. Rick Lee James offers a compelling, insightful overview both of the theological contributions of the Psalms but also their inspiration for his own musical pursuits. The result is a soul-enriching journey through the highs, lows, joys and laments of the Christian life."

--BRETT MCCRACKEN

Author of *Gray Matters: Navigating the Space Between Legalism and Liberty*

Chapter Three

Psalm 42: I Will Still Praise Him

1. *As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.*
2. *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?*
3. *My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”*
4. *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.*
5. *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.

6. *My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.*

7. *Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.*

8. *By day the Lord directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.*

9. *I say to God my Rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?”*

10. *My bones suffer mortal agony
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(Psalm 42:1-11 NIV)

"Blues is easy to play but hard to feel" -- Jimi Hendrix

I don't know why, but I've always been a sucker for a really sad song. While in high school, first learning to play guitar, I resided in Dickson, Tennessee. During the early 1990's country music was huge in that neck of the woods. Steve Wariner, Vince Gill, and Ricky Skaggs were among my favorites for two reasons. They could all pick a guitar like nobody's business, and they could all belt out a really sad song in a way that made you feel it.

As my musical horizons expanded I discovered legendary blues music like "The Thrill Is Gone" by B. B. King, "Red House" by Jimi

Hendrix, and "Old Love" by Eric Clapton. These blues greats were using their guitars and voices to tell the story of heartbreak and pain. While I was a relatively happy teenager with little real association with the lyrics and what their world portrayed, for some reason I just loved these sad songs. There was a that time I was convinced of the story of Robert Johnson and the invention of the blues taking place down at the "Crossroads" one night when he sold his soul to the devil. But it turns out that the Blues are much older than that. They were alive and just as, if not more, profound when the Psalms were written.

Now many propose that blues music started being performed at the end of the 19th century. African-American slaves sang earthy songs filled with vivid stories about the trials in their lives, and as a genre, blues music was born. But I'm not simply referring to a general genre of music that fits the characteristics of blues music, I'm talking about The Blues, something every human gets from time to time. As long as humans have walked the planet they have experienced the reality of having The Blues.

If it were up to me, I would classify about 60 percent of the Psalms as Blues Psalms. I named my live album Basement Psalms for two reasons:

- 1.) I wrote most of the songs in my basement.
- 2.) The basement is a metaphor for the lowest, deepest, darkest places of despair (in other words, The Blues).

The Psalms are so unflinchingly honest about the situations in which we find ourselves as human beings in general and more specifically as followers of God. It simply is NOT true that becoming a person of faith will take away all your problems and make you "happy all the day", like we sing in the lyrics of the Isaac Watts' hymn, "At the Cross." More often we discover life was in many ways easier before we began walking the path of faith. The blues only begin to take on real passion when we follow after God.

I've found this to be true in my life as a Christian. The Christian life isn't happy and carefree all the time. Please, do not hear – or read – me incorrectly, this life is full of incomparable joy and I would not trade anything for being counted as a follower of Christ. However, in honesty, to borrow the quote of the late Rich Mullins,

"It's hard to be like Jesus." It isn't easy to love your enemies. It isn't easy to pray for those who persecute you. It isn't easy to bless when others curse you. It isn't easy to walk with the poor and weep with the grieving.

Psalm 42 is both beautifully and brutally honest. This Psalm expresses the struggles and laments of the people of faith throughout history. There is a song that we used to sing quite a lot in church called, "As the Deer." This song had a very sweet singable chorus, almost like a lullaby and was written from the opening lines of Psalm 42. It expressed both the concepts of adoration for the Divine as well as a sense of dependence upon the Lord's presence. It gives you a very peaceful, easy feeling to sing it (no Eagles reference intended). Even though the lyrics came directly from Psalm 42, the beautiful melody, and the imagery portrayed, failed to bring out the heart wrenching cry and expression of the Psalm in its full context. Instead, the Psalm is the deep cry of a person so desperate for God they compare it to a deer nearly at the point of death from thirst, longing in desperation for water. There's no doubt that the writer of Psalm 42 has experienced The Blues.

In much of the western world, thirsting is not something we do for very long. Therefore, it's easy to take for granted how serious the imagery of thirst can be. Go for a day without water, or any other liquid as a substitute, and see how well you feel. Without water the body will rapidly begin to shut down a system at a time. Breath, brain functions, heartbeat, kidney function, muscular mobility, and even the five senses will begin to deteriorate within 24 hours. In harsh environments the lack of water could affect an individual who is already struggling with a health issue to where they may last only a matter of 3 to 6 hours. Even the healthiest person, otherwise in the greatest of health, would experience permanent damage to body systems in a couple days and would not be able to survive for a full week. Water makes up so much of who we are; to remove water is to remove our life. As important as water is to our bodies, the Psalmist is conveying that even more important to our whole being, our soul, is our nearness to the presence of God.

While still in high school, I composed a song called, "Jesus Took My Blues Away". I still play the song regularly at concerts, but I

tell audiences not to get the wrong idea about the song. It is a song about the joy of sins forgiven. Yet, it is not intended to promote the image that Jesus will take every sorrow away that you encounter in life. I truly do believe that things get tougher when you become a Christ follower. Instead of "Jesus Took My Blues Away", maybe I should have called my song "Jesus Brought Me a Whole New Set of Blues." While Jesus does take away our burdens as he proposes in the Gospels, he replaces them with a new and appropriate set of burdens to bear. Among them, He calls us to help others bear their burdens.

In the Gospels Jesus uses language similar to the language of Psalm 42. In both Matthew 26 and John 12 he speaks of his own soul being downcast and disheartened. The Blues are such a common part of the human experience that in becoming incarnate Jesus chose to experience, and fully understand, the pain of the downcast soul. He certainly experienced a troubled soul in his lifetime, and if we follow Jesus then we should not be surprised that we will have those troubles as well.

When thinking of what it means to be a follower of a suffering Messiah, I'm reminded of the lyrics to a song by Steve Green and

Douglas McKelvey entitled "No Surprise." The lyrics speak to us from the same spirit expressed in the words of Psalm 42. They describe the side of Christ that's often been skipped over in the well-packaged, marketed, and user-friendly Christianity of the last 40 plus years. The lyrics are as follows:

Verse 1: He was a man of sorrows, who wept in human pain, He knew the grief of parting and His hunger was the same. He felt the sting of insults, and He bore the weight of sin, He humbly drank the suffering God set before him.

Chorus: And it should arrive as no surprise that tears are gonna come, if you're called by His name you're sure to suffer some. And it should arrive as no surprise that tears are gonna come, if you're called by His name you're sure to suffer some.

Verse 2: He did not seek his happiness, He made no earthly claim, for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross and shame. He was born into the darkness, to shine the light of truth, and if the world hated Him, the world will hate you too.

But consider it joy when you share in His pain, for you'll share in the glory to come.

Let us assume the words of McKelvey and Green to be truth for us: then it should be no surprise to us that Christ will call us not only to have victory over, but victory through and into the heart of our fears and suffering. He calls us not to cower in fear from, but to stand up to the monster that scares us. It is only in confronting our demons in His power that our demons are defeated. Although no one knows the full context of Psalm 42, some scholars believe that the Psalmist had the experience of being kidnapped and was harshly persecuted for his faith. If indeed the writer of Psalm 42 was a victim of kidnapping, and was persecuted by his captors for His faith, then the following lines make a great deal of sense:

"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?'"

"I pour out my soul..."

"My soul is downcast within me..."

"I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"

"...my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

The Blues, while not a welcome part of the journey, are a part of the journey nonetheless. Sometimes it takes a cross to set us free. I know the places of our deepest despair are difficult, but it's often from out of the depths that we experience the greatest opportunities for growth. We may find that our pain will become the balm of healing for the wounds of others. God can use our story of pain to tell of His glory and the story of His healing grace and love. God can, through our weakness, change the world.

There is a story that comes to my mind as I try to envision what the writer of Psalm 42 may have been experiencing. While it is a heartbreaking story of loss, it's also a story that in many ways shaped western civilization. It's my belief that the heartbreaking events of this story led to the salvation of Western Civilization and education as a whole. It is the story of the man whose name we know as St. Patrick.

If you want to talk about The Blues, St. Patrick had more than his share, but God used them, as only God can, to do the miraculous. The experiences of St. Patrick were probably very similar in tone to the experiences of the Psalmist. If the story of the Psalter is one of loss, exile, and alienation from ones homeland faith, then the story expressed in Psalm 42 has everything to do with the story of St. Patrick. Holding to this context, we may find a deeper understanding of how we too could pray along with the writer of Psalm 42 in our deepest times of despair.

Imagine living in Ireland in the early 5th century A.D. It's a land without literacy and a land without our concept of cities. It is a place of magic and superstition where spiritual realities are blurred and intertwined in large part from of the influence of the druids. It is a place where gods were searched for in the stones and trees. It is a place where human sacrifice was an acceptable and practiced means to appease the gods. It is a place where fierce battle-axe wielding warriors brought a savage terror upon their enemies. Stories of enemies' magical shape shifting abilities made them even more terrible. This multi-tiered world of fear and power is the world of St. Patrick.

St. Patrick's given name was Patricius. He was born into a well to do home in Romanized Britain in 387 A.D. Slavery was a common reality in the world and widespread. As a young, able-bodied male, Patricius was of significant value to the slave trade and was kidnapped by Irish slavers and taken back to Ireland, where he would be held for 6 years. You can imagine how terrifying this would be for anyone, but especially for a young child. As a slave, in a terrifying situation, he was forced into the wild countryside to work as a shepherd. It was a life of poverty and brutal isolation. Here, both hunger and nakedness were his only constant companions.

Growing up in Roman controlled Britain, before he was enslaved, Patricius really had no significant faith in or relationship with God. He found priests and talk of God to be foolish nonsense, but later, in the cold, isolated fields of Ireland, having no one else to turn to, he turned to the God of his parents and began to pray. During this miserable six year period of slavery and near total isolation, Patricius became something he likely would have never become otherwise: a holy man. Patricius had been enrolled in the

advanced classes of the school of The Blues, and as a result, he learned how to listen and pray deeply and intimately.

On the final night of his captivity a voice spoke to Patricius saying, “your hungers are rewarded: you are going home.” To make a long story a bit shorter, through the flight of many unseen and dark miles, he made his escape in a lifeboat. Months of travel and trial finally found Patricius back with his family in Britain, but the years of slavery had changed him. He was clearly not the same boy he was when he left. The physical changes were obvious, but so too were the changes to his life socially, emotionally, mentally, and, above all, spiritually. He now had a new identity as a follower of Christ.

Following the call of God on his life, he eventually attended a school in Gaul, became a priest, and then later accepted a call to serve as bishop. One would think that he would have been content to stay in the ease of Britain after his traumatic years in Ireland. However, Patricius instead felt a holy restlessness that can only be described as the leading of God. Unable to escape this call of God upon his life, he returned to Ireland as a missionary.

It's hard for me to imagine the amount of courage it took for Patrick to return to the land of Ireland. For him it was a place of horror. It was a land that had stolen his freedom and his youth. What kind of faith is this that would lead a man to follow his God back into such a frightening place? What kind of trust in God possesses a man to confront bloodthirsty, battle-axe wielding, Irishmen while being armed with only the love of Christ. That is true faith and true courage, my friends.

Now, as brutish as they might have been, Patricius found that the pagans of Ireland were not completely without virtue. Patricius saw the people of Ireland as courageous, loyal, and deeply generous. When they saw that Patricius lived out these same virtues, they developed a kinship with him and became very open to what he had to say. In a very short span of time, Patricius was able to make thousands of converts to Christianity. Like Joseph in the Old Testament, St. Patrick went from being a slave to being a man of respect and authority. He gained admiration and influence with the people of Ireland because of his constancy of character and authenticity in the way he lived out the gospel.

As Patrick's influence grew, he became the first public figure to take a stand against slavery, imploring the Britons to end the slave trade in Ireland altogether. Aside from the slavery issue, St. Patrick's greatest contribution to the world might be the introduction of literacy to the Irish people. The ripple effects of this contribution cannot be overestimated. Years later, when Rome fell to the barbarian (and illiterate) Gothic rule, their scriptoria were, in many cases completely destroyed, their books burned and the employment of copyists ended.

By contrast, the Irish rapidly embraced literacy and education. Amazingly, this once warrior society turned to a Christian worldview, devoid of the brutal bloodshed and slavery that had characterized it years before. Many of the Irish were fascinated by stories of the early Christian Martyrs. Their desire to re-create Martyr-like circumstances, led certain pious men to the concept of the Green Martyr. The Green Martyrs were reclusive holy-men who removed themselves from society. They ventured into forests and other wild places for the purpose of study and prayer.

This is where the concept of monasteries of the desert fathers further developed and flourished. The Green Martyrs would gather

together in places far from the towns and villages of the land to practice intentional solitude, to study, to pray, and also to copy manuscripts. Eventually formal monasteries were built. These Irish monasteries took on the prehistoric Irish virtue of hospitality and all who would seek refuge there were welcomed. This once illiterate land, full of stories of shape-shifters and brutal, bloodthirsty mythologies, now began to fill with libraries and an open-minded brand of Christianity that seems unique even in our “enlightened” Post-Modern era.

After the Tanakh, the Gospels, and many of the Epistles were recorded and redistributed by the copyists, the insatiable Irish desire for knowledge led to the copying and maintaining of Greek mythological stories, comedies, and tragedies. The Irish monasteries viewed all learning as sacred, not just what was found in Scripture. Their open-minded brand of Christianity observed contextualized and re-traditioned holidays like May Day, Halloween, and Easter, even though they had been banned by the Church of Rome.

The irony is that while Ireland was seen as the wild, barbaric mission field to the rest of Europe and the areas around Jerusalem, when Rome fell in the 5th century, it was to Ireland that most of the

well-educated academics fled. As anarchy spread over Europe, the formerly savage land of Ireland became a place of refuge. Exiled, European academics flooded the Irish monasteries where there was both safety and hospitality. The Irish emphasis on the sacredness of learning, combined with the addition of exiled scholars, promoted these monasteries to become academic hubs for both preservation of history and the promotion of hope for the present and future. Here, the last remaining books of antiquity were copied, distributed, and treasured.

This is why St. Patrick is so important, not only to Christianity, but also to the world. I wonder if St. Patrick had any idea that his introduction of Christianity to the Irish people would in turn save western culture. I doubt it, I think he was just following the call of God on his life.

There is a very famous prayer known as “St. Patrick’s Breastplate”. Characteristics of its language would assign it to the 7th or 8th century so it cannot be definitively ascribed to St. Patrick himself, but it is clearly Patrician in its style. Like Patricius, the prayer sees the universe itself as a great revelation of God, designed by a loving Creator to bless human beings. In his book, *How the*

Irish Saved Civilization, Thomas Cahill says of St. Patrick's

Breastplate:

"...it is, in attitude, the work of a Christian Druid, a man of both faith and magic. Its feeling is entirely un-Augustinian; but it is this feeling that will go on to animate the best poetry of the Middle Ages. If Patrick did not write it, it surely takes its inspiration from him. For in this cosmic incantation, the inarticulate outcast who wept for slaves, aided common men in difficulty, and loved sunrise and sea at last finds his voice: Appropriately, it is an Irish voice."

I've copied the St. Patrick's Breastplate below. If we read it in light of Patrick's story, the lament of Psalm 42, and the hopeful assurance of the deliverance provided by the listening God of Psalm 42, we may just see how the hand of God can use our trials as well. The God who – in order to reveal His glorious, healing power – can both hear us and deliver us, regardless of our circumstances. We can raise our own voice with Patrick and the writer of Psalm 42 and say, "Why, o my soul are you so ill-at-ease within me, don't give up, keep your hope in God. Even in these lonely times I will still praise Him."

I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, through the belief in the threeness, through the confession of the oneness of the Creator of creation.

I arise today through the strength of Christ's birth with his baptism, through the strength of his crucifixion with his burial, through the strength of his resurrection with his ascension, through the strength of his descent for the Judgment Day.

I arise today through the strength of the love of Cherubim, in obedience of angels, in the service of archangels, in hope of resurrection to meet with reward, in prayers of patriarchs, in predictions of prophets, in preaching of apostles, in faith of confessors, in innocence of holy virgins, in deeds of righteous men.

I arise today through the strength of heaven: light of sun, radiance of moon, splendor of fire, speed of lightning, swiftness of wind, depth of sea, stability of earth, firmness of rock.

I arise today through God's strength to pilot me: God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me, God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me, God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me, God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me, God's host to save me from snares of demons, from temptations of vices, from everyone who shall wish me ill, afar and near, alone and in multitude.

I summon today all these powers between me and those evils. Against every cruel merciless power that may oppose my body and soul, against incantations of false prophets, against black laws of pagandom, against false laws of heretics, against craft of idolatry, against spells of women and smiths and wizards, against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul.

Christ to shield me today against poison, against burning, against drowning, against wounding, so that there may come to me abundance of reward.

*Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on
my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I
arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in
the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that
sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.*

*I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the
Trinity, through belief in the threeness, through confession of the
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I Will Still Praise Him (Psalm 42) - From Basement Psalms Live

A Cry of Affliction and Lament

Verse 1

As the deer pants for water, so my soul thirsts for You

The living God, the living God.

My tears won't stop falling, in the daytime or the night

And people say, "Where is Your God"?

Psalm 42: I Will Still Praise Him

I used to go to the house of the Lord

With shouts of joy and praise

Oh those were the days

Chorus

Why are you downcast, oh my soul?

Why so disturbed inside?

Put your trust in the Lord your God

In these lonely times, I will still praise Him

Verse 2

Clear my name, deliver me. You're the refuge that I seek

From these evil men, these wicked men.

Send Your light, send Your truth. Have You cast me off from You?

These wicked men are trying to bring me down.

Bring me back to your dwelling place,

Let me sing for joy again. For the wicked will not win.

Back to Chorus

Verse 3

As the deep calls to deep.

As the waves begin to roll over me I will sing Your songs.

Psalm 42: I Will Still Praise Him

Enemies have surrounded, they throw their words at me:

“Where is your God? Where is your God?”

Have You forgotten about me Lord?

The thunder drowns Your voice... But I still have a choice

(Back to Chorus)

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from the land of the Jordan,

the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.

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in the roar of your waterfalls;

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8. *By day the Lord directs his love,*

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longing in desperation for water. There's no doubt that the writer of Psalm 42 has experienced The Blues.

In much of the western world, thirsting is not something we do for very long. Therefore, it's easy to take for granted how serious the imagery of thirst can be. Go for a day without water, or any other liquid as a substitute, and see how well you feel. Without water the body will rapidly begin to shut down a system at a time. Breath, brain functions, heartbeat, kidney function, muscular mobility, and even the five senses will begin to deteriorate within 24 hours. In harsh environments the lack of water could affect an individual who is already struggling with a health issue to where they may last only a matter of 3 to 6 hours. Even the healthiest person, otherwise in the greatest of health, would experience permanent damage to body systems in a couple days and would not be able to survive for a full week. Water makes up so much of who we are; to remove water is to remove our life. As important as water is to our bodies, the Psalmist is conveying that even more important to our whole being, our soul, is our nearness to the presence of God.

While still in high school, I composed a song called, “Jesus Took My Blues Away”. I still play the song regularly at concerts, but I tell audiences not to get the wrong idea about the song. It is a song about the joy of sins forgiven. Yet, it is not intended to promote the image that Jesus will take every sorrow away that you encounter in life. I truly do believe that things get tougher when you become a Christ follower. Instead of “Jesus Took My Blues Away”, maybe I should have called my song “Jesus Brought Me a Whole New Set of Blues.” While Jesus does take away our burdens as he proposes in the Gospels, he replaces them with a new and appropriate set of burdens to bear. Among them, He calls us to help others bear their burdens.

In the Gospels Jesus uses language similar to the language of Psalm 42. In both Matthew 26 and John 12 he speaks of his own soul being downcast and disheartened. The Blues are such a common part of the human experience that in becoming incarnate Jesus chose to experience, and fully understand, the pain of the downcast soul. He certainly experienced a troubled soul in his lifetime, and if we follow Jesus then we should not be surprised that we will have those troubles as well.

When thinking of what it means to be a follower of a suffering Messiah, I'm reminded of the lyrics to a song by Steve Green and Douglas McKelvey entitled "No Surprise." The lyrics speak to us from the same spirit expressed in the words of Psalm 42. They describe the side of Christ that's often been skipped over in the well-packaged, marketed, and user-friendly Christianity of the last 40 plus years. The lyrics are as follows:

Verse 1: He was a man of sorrows, who wept in human pain, He knew the grief of parting and His hunger was the same. He felt the sting of insults, and He bore the weight of sin, He humbly drank the suffering God set before him.

Chorus: And it should arrive as no surprise that tears are gonna come, if you're called by His name you're sure to suffer some. And it should arrive as no surprise that tears are gonna come, if you're called by His name you're sure to suffer some.

Verse 2: He did not seek his happiness, He made no earthly claim, for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross and shame. He was

born into the darkness, to shine the light of truth, and if the world hated Him, the world will hate you too.

But consider it joy when you share in His pain, for you'll share in the glory to come.

Let us assume the words of McKelvey and Green to be truth for us: then it should be no surprise to us that Christ will call us not only to have victory over, but victory through and into the heart of our fears and suffering. He calls us not to cower in fear from, but to stand up to the monster that scares us. It is only in confronting our demons in His power that our demons are defeated. Although no one knows the full context of Psalm 42, some scholars believe that the Psalmist had the experience of being kidnapped and was harshly persecuted for his faith. If indeed the writer of Psalm 42 was a victim of kidnapping, and was persecuted by his captors for His faith, then the following lines make a great deal of sense:

"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?'"

"I pour out my soul..."

"My soul is downcast within me..."

"I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"

"...my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

The Blues, while not a welcome part of the journey, are a part of the journey nonetheless. Sometimes it takes a cross to set us free. I know the places of our deepest despair are difficult, but it's often from out of the depths that we experience the greatest opportunities for growth. We may find that our pain will become the balm of healing for the wounds of others. God can use our story of pain to tell of His glory and the story of His healing grace and love. God can, through our weakness, change the world.

There is a story that comes to my mind as I try to envision what the writer of Psalm 42 may have been experiencing. While it is a heartbreaking story of loss, it's also a story that in many ways shaped western civilization. It's my belief that the heartbreaking events of this story led to the salvation of Western Civilization and

education as a whole. It is the story of the man whose name we know as St. Patrick.

If you want to talk about The Blues, St. Patrick had more than his share, but God used them, as only God can, to do the miraculous. The experiences of St. Patrick were probably very similar in tone to the experiences of the Psalmist. If the story of the Psalter is one of loss, exile, and alienation from ones homeland faith, then the story expressed in Psalm 42 has everything to do with the story of St. Patrick. Holding to this context, we may find a deeper understanding of how we too could pray along with the writer of Psalm 42 in our deepest times of despair.

Imagine living in Ireland in the early 5th century A.D. It's a land without literacy and a land without our concept of cities. It is a place of magic and superstition where spiritual realities are blurred and intertwined in large part from of the influence of the druids. It is a place where gods were searched for in the stones and trees. It is a place where human sacrifice was an acceptable and practiced means to appease the gods. It is a place where fierce battle-axe wielding warriors brought a savage terror upon their enemies. Stories of enemies' magical shape shifting abilities made them even more

terrible. This multi-tiered world of fear and power is the world of St. Patrick.

St. Patrick's given name was Patricius. He was born into a well to do home in Romanized Britain in 387 A.D. Slavery was a common reality in the world and widespread. As a young, able-bodied male, Patricius was of significant value to the slave trade and was kidnapped by Irish slavers and taken back to Ireland, where he would be held for 6 years. You can imagine how terrifying this would be for anyone, but especially for a young child. As a slave, in a terrifying situation, he was forced into the wild countryside to work as a shepherd. It was a life of poverty and brutal isolation. Here, both hunger and nakedness were his only constant companions.

Growing up in Roman controlled Britain, before he was enslaved, Patricius really had no significant faith in or relationship with God. He found priests and talk of God to be foolish nonsense, but later, in the cold, isolated fields of Ireland, having no one else to turn to, he turned to the God of his parents and began to pray. During this miserable six year period of slavery and near total isolation, Patricius became something he likely would have never

become otherwise: a holy man. Patricius had been enrolled in the advanced classes of the school of The Blues, and as a result, he learned how to listen and pray deeply and intimately.

On the final night of his captivity a voice spoke to Patricius saying, “your hungers are rewarded: you are going home.” To make a long story a bit shorter, through the flight of many unseen and dark miles, he made his escape in a lifeboat. Months of travel and trial finally found Patricius back with his family in Britain, but the years of slavery had changed him. He was clearly not the same boy he was when he left. The physical changes were obvious, but so too were the changes to his life socially, emotionally, mentally, and, above all, spiritually. He now had a new identity as a follower of Christ.

Following the call of God on his life, he eventually attended a school in Gaul, became a priest, and then later accepted a call to serve as bishop. One would think that he would have been content to stay in the ease of Britain after his traumatic years in Ireland. However, Patricius instead felt a holy restlessness that can only be described as the leading of God. Unable to escape this call of God upon his life, he returned to Ireland as a missionary.

It's hard for me to imagine the amount of courage it took for Patrick to return to the land of Ireland. For him it was a place of horror. It was a land that had stolen his freedom and his youth. What kind of faith is this that would lead a man to follow his God back into such a frightening place? What kind of trust in God possesses a man to confront bloodthirsty, battle-axe wielding, Irishmen while being armed with only the love of Christ. That is true faith and true courage, my friends.

Now, as brutish as they might have been, Patricius found that the pagans of Ireland were not completely without virtue. Patricius saw the people of Ireland as courageous, loyal, and deeply generous. When they saw that Patricius lived out these same virtues, they developed a kinship with him and became very open to what he had to say. In a very short span of time, Patricius was able to make thousands of converts to Christianity. Like Joseph in the Old Testament, St. Patrick went from being a slave to being a man of respect and authority. He gained admiration and influence with the people of Ireland because of his constancy of character and authenticity in the way he lived out the gospel.

As Patrick's influence grew, he became the first public figure to take a stand against slavery, imploring the Britons to end the slave trade in Ireland altogether. Aside from the slavery issue, St. Patrick's greatest contribution to the world might be the introduction of literacy to the Irish people. The ripple effects of this contribution cannot be overestimated. Years later, when Rome fell to the barbarian (and illiterate) Gothic rule, their scriptoria were, in many cases completely destroyed, their books burned and the employment of copyists ended.

By contrast, the Irish rapidly embraced literacy and education. Amazingly, this once warrior society turned to a Christian worldview, devoid of the brutal bloodshed and slavery that had characterized it years before. Many of the Irish were fascinated by stories of the early Christian Martyrs. Their desire to re-create Martyr-like circumstances, led certain pious men to the concept of the Green Martyr. The Green Martyrs were reclusive holy-men who removed themselves from society. They ventured into forests and other wild places for the purpose of study and prayer.

This is where the concept of monasteries of the desert fathers further developed and flourished. The Green Martyrs would gather

together in places far from the towns and villages of the land to practice intentional solitude, to study, to pray, and also to copy manuscripts. Eventually formal monasteries were built. These Irish monasteries took on the prehistoric Irish virtue of hospitality and all who would seek refuge there were welcomed. This once illiterate land, full of stories of shape-shifters and brutal, bloodthirsty mythologies, now began to fill with libraries and an open-minded brand of Christianity that seems unique even in our “enlightened” Post-Modern era.

After the Tanakh, the Gospels, and many of the Epistles were recorded and redistributed by the copyists, the insatiable Irish desire for knowledge led to the copying and maintaining of Greek mythological stories, comedies, and tragedies. The Irish monasteries viewed all learning as sacred, not just what was found in Scripture. Their open-minded brand of Christianity observed contextualized and re-traditioned holidays like May Day, Halloween, and Easter, even though they had been banned by the Church of Rome.

The irony is that while Ireland was seen as the wild, barbaric mission field to the rest of Europe and the areas around Jerusalem, when Rome fell in the 5th century, it was to Ireland that most of the

well-educated academics fled. As anarchy spread over Europe, the formerly savage land of Ireland became a place of refuge. Exiled, European academics flooded the Irish monasteries where there was both safety and hospitality. The Irish emphasis on the sacredness of learning, combined with the addition of exiled scholars, promoted these monasteries to become academic hubs for both preservation of history and the promotion of hope for the present and future. Here, the last remaining books of antiquity were copied, distributed, and treasured.

This is why St. Patrick is so important, not only to Christianity, but also to the world. I wonder if St. Patrick had any idea that his introduction of Christianity to the Irish people would in turn save western culture. I doubt it, I think he was just following the call of God on his life.

There is a very famous prayer known as “St. Patrick’s Breastplate”. Characteristics of its language would assign it to the 7th or 8th century so it cannot be definitively ascribed to St. Patrick himself, but it is clearly Patrician in its style. Like Patricius, the prayer sees the universe itself as a great revelation of God, designed by a loving Creator to bless human beings. In his book, *How the*

Irish Saved Civilization, Thomas Cahill says of St. Patrick's

Breastplate:

"...it is, in attitude, the work of a Christian Druid, a man of both faith and magic. Its feeling is entirely un-Augustinian; but it is this feeling that will go on to animate the best poetry of the Middle Ages. If Patrick did not write it, it surely takes its inspiration from him. For in this cosmic incantation, the inarticulate outcast who wept for slaves, aided common men in difficulty, and loved sunrise and sea at last finds his voice: Appropriately, it is an Irish voice."

I've copied the St. Patrick's Breastplate below. If we read it in light of Patrick's story, the lament of Psalm 42, and the hopeful assurance of the deliverance provided by the listening God of Psalm 42, we may just see how the hand of God can use our trials as well. The God who – in order to reveal His glorious, healing power – can both hear us and deliver us, regardless of our circumstances. We can raise our own voice with Patrick and the writer of Psalm 42 and say, "Why, o my soul are you so ill-at-ease within me, don't give up, keep your hope in God. Even in these lonely times I will still praise Him."

I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, through the belief in the threeness, through the confession of the oneness of the Creator of creation.

I arise today through the strength of Christ's birth with his baptism, through the strength of his crucifixion with his burial, through the strength of his resurrection with his ascension, through the strength of his descent for the Judgment Day.

I arise today through the strength of the love of Cherubim, in obedience of angels, in the service of archangels, in hope of resurrection to meet with reward, in prayers of patriarchs, in predictions of prophets, in preaching of apostles, in faith of confessors, in innocence of holy virgins, in deeds of righteous men.

I arise today through the strength of heaven: light of sun, radiance of moon, splendor of fire, speed of lightning, swiftness of wind, depth of sea, stability of earth, firmness of rock.

I arise today through God's strength to pilot me: God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me, God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me, God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me, God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me, God's host to save me from snares of demons, from temptations of vices, from everyone who shall wish me ill, afar and near, alone and in multitude.

I summon today all these powers between me and those evils. Against every cruel merciless power that may oppose my body and soul, against incantations of false prophets, against black laws of pagandom, against false laws of heretics, against craft of idolatry, against spells of women and smiths and wizards, against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul.

Christ to shield me today against poison, against burning, against drowning, against wounding, so that there may come to me abundance of reward.

Psalm 42: I Will Still Praise Him

*Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on
my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I
arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in
the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that
sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.*

*I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the
Trinity, through belief in the threeness, through confession of the
oneness, of the Creator of creation.*

I Will Still Praise Him (Psalm 42) - From Basement Psalms Live

A Cry of Affliction and Lament

Verse 1

As the deer pants for water, so my soul thirsts for You

The living God, the living God.

My tears won't stop falling, in the daytime or the night

And people say, "Where is Your God"?

Psalm 42: I Will Still Praise Him

I used to go to the house of the Lord

With shouts of joy and praise

Oh those were the days

Chorus

Why are you downcast, oh my soul?

Why so disturbed inside?

Put your trust in the Lord your God

In these lonely times, I will still praise Him

Verse 2

Clear my name, deliver me. You're the refuge that I seek

From these evil men, these wicked men.

Send Your light, send Your truth. Have You cast me off from You?

These wicked men are trying to bring me down.

Bring me back to your dwelling place,

Let me sing for joy again. For the wicked will not win.

Back to Chorus

Verse 3

As the deep calls to deep.

As the waves begin to roll over me I will sing Your songs.

Psalm 42: I Will Still Praise Him

Enemies have surrounded, they throw their words at me:

“Where is your God? Where is your God?”

Have You forgotten about me Lord?

The thunder drowns Your voice... But I still have a choice

(Back to Chorus)

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Psalm 42: I Will Still Praise Him