

From Sinking to Singing

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[0 : 00] But we're going to be looking this morning at Psalm number 40, and I'd like you to turn there now in your Bibles. Andrew Whitmarsh, who normally is preaching and leading in our Farsi congregation, is with us this Sunday morning.

And next, and we're going to be looking at this very helpful psalm over these two weeks, Psalm number 40. And I'm going to read the whole psalm, although it's mostly the first half that we're going to be dealing with in detail this morning.

So Psalm 40 then, and reading from verse 1. To the choir master, a psalm of David. I waited patiently for the Lord.

He inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog. And set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.

He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust.

[1 : 12] He doesn't turn to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie. You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts towards us. None can compare with you.

I will proclaim and tell of them. Yet they are more than can be told. Sacrifice and offering you have not desired, but you have given me an open ear.

Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, Behold, I have come. In the scroll of the book, it is written of me. I desire to do your will, O my God.

Your law is within my heart. I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation. Behold, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord.

I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart. I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation. I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the congregation.

[2 : 16] As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me. Your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me.

Your evils have encompassed me beyond number. My iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head.

My heart fails me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me. O Lord, make haste to help me. Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether who seek to snatch away my life.

Let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who desire my hurt. Let those be appalled because of their shame who say to me, Aha! Aha!

But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. May those who love your salvation say continually, Great is the Lord.

[3 : 19] As for me, I am poor and needy. But the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer.

Do not delay, O my God. Amen. And may God bless to us this is Word, which is full of comfort and hope.

Well, good morning, and please can I encourage you to open your Bibles to Psalm 40. Waiting is never easy.

Whether it's the child on a long journey repeatedly asking, Are we there yet? Or the adult making that important phone call only to be left on hold for what feels like an eternity.

Waiting is not something that anyone enjoys. And especially in the fast-paced world of next-day delivery and instant gratification that we live in today, I think we're getting less and less used to waiting.

[4 : 26] Of course, these are fairly trivial examples, but the Christian life is often marked by waiting, isn't it? Waiting on the Lord. And often that is far more difficult, far more painful.

We wait for answered prayer. Will my situation ever change? Will I ever move beyond the struggle with that particular persistent sin in my life?

Will I ever emerge from the depths of depression or illness? Will that colleague who keeps giving me so much grief for following Jesus ever stop?

As we wait, we wish God would answer now. We long for rescue, for restoration, for things to be put right in our lives and in the world.

Well, Psalm 40 is a psalm that is all about waiting. Firstly, looking back on waiting in the past only to know God's deliverance.

[5 : 32] But he's doing that while in the midst of waiting in the present. This is the final psalm in a series of Davidic psalms where waiting is a prominent theme.

Beginning in Psalm 37, David begins to unpack something of what it means to wait on the Lord. In a world where the wicked so often seem to prosper, David encourages us, wait for the Lord and keep his way.

And he will exalt you to inherit the land. You will look on when the wicked are cut off. The psalms which follow immediately, meanwhile, show that waiting put into practice in intensely personal and often painful ways.

Psalm 38 in particular speaks of struggling, waiting on the Lord in the midst of guilt, disease, distance from friends. And as if all that wasn't bad enough, it's compounded further by enemies plotting against him.

In these psalms, we see something of the pain and the turmoil of waiting on the Lord. Yet by the beginning of our psalm, Psalm 40, that kind of waiting seems to be in the past.

[6 : 48] We might have a sense that the problems finally are behind us. The only way is up. But the pattern of this psalm is a little unusual. Many psalms, as I'm sure we can think of, begin with a cry to God for help.

And we're taken on a journey from a place of great hopelessness to a place of great hope and thanksgiving, from a crisis to a resolution. But Psalm 40 is different.

For in this psalm, we begin with joy and thanksgiving, looking back, before ending with David waiting on God once more in a place of great difficulty.

He's poor and needy, crying to God once more in the final verse. But this is wonderfully real. It's helpful.

It is much to teach us about real Christian life and experience. We're going to be spending some time this Sunday and next looking at this great psalm in two parts.

[7 : 51] This morning, the first ten verses, where we join David in reflecting on a journey from sinking to singing, looking back, going from the depths to deliverance and delighting in the Lord.

Then next week, in verse 11 to 17, we'll think about waiting and crying out to God for deliverance once more. My prayer is that as we get to grips with some of the many wonders this glorious psalm has to teach us, we'll be better equipped to navigate the trials and challenges of life as we wait on the Lord.

So having briefly set the scene, let's get into this great psalm together now, which we'll look at in four sections. As David teaches us how we can wait well.

Firstly, in verse 1 to 3, we're encouraged to remember God's help. Remember God's help. David's words in verse 1 are a little understated in our Bibles.

I waited patiently. Makes it sound like he's a British person twiddling his thumbs in a queue at the supermarket. It's very understated, seems insignificant.

[9 : 06] But as we see from the verses around, that couldn't be further from the truth. Indeed, it literally says, waiting I waited. There's a sense of anguished longing.

Yet in the midst of that, an expectation. Notice where David is in verse 2. He was in a pit of destruction, a miry bog.

As we read, you get a sense of floundering, struggling, sinking. We don't know the precise nature of the situation, but clearly it's one of helplessness, horror even.

As David cried to the Lord, waiting and waiting and waiting, the outlook was bleak. Hope was fading, but wonderfully the Lord answers.

The sovereign Lord of the universe isn't too busy. He isn't experiencing high call volume and unable to process David's request. No. He hears and he answers David's cry.

[10:15] The language of the second half of verse 1 is beautiful. The Lord inclined to me and heard my cry. We're being reminded God is not distant and far off.

No. He turned and he listened to David's cry. Think of a little one upset and in floods of tears, having fallen down and hurt themselves, unable to get up.

Helpless to do anything for themselves. Only for a parent to kneel down, get alongside them on their level, seeing what's causing their upset and lifting them up once more.

And everything is okay. And as David looks back here, everything truly was okay. He's gone from danger, from darkness and despair to verse 2, safety, security, and solid ground by the end.

He's been hauled out of the pit of destruction by the Lord. He's been drawn up out of that boggy ground where he was sinking deeper and deeper and deeper.

[11:25] And now he is on solid ground once more, able to stride on, sure-footed. And as he remembers God's great goodness in the past, he's met with a sense of joy and wonder.

In verse 3, the result is a new song, great joy. And notice, this new song is put in his mouth by the Lord. Even this song of praise to God is a gift of God's great grace to David.

That new song is one that can only be sung by those who have known God's redeeming power at work in their lives. One which comes having known and experienced God at work in a wonderful new way.

He's giving praise and glory to his covenant Lord, having tasted and seen that the Lord truly is good. And notice the impact this song has on others in the second half of verse 3.

It flows out in such a way that glory is given to God. Others come to recognize not merely David's great rescue, but the great rescuer behind it.

[12:40] It's not a case of, well, that's nice for him. No. It's fruitful. It's borne out in others' lives being changed too. It leads to seeing, fearing, and trusting in the Lord for themselves.

So David looks back and remembers God's help in delivering him from a truly desperate situation. And if we know the Lord, then that too is our experience, isn't it?

For anyone who has come to the painful realization of the horror of our sin and turned to Christ in repentance and faith, recognizing that we are enslaved, dead, helpless, and hopeless in and of ourselves, but has come to know the Lord lifting us up from that pit.

That is how we come to know him and his glorious rescue. Wonderfully, the Lord does hear the cries of needy sinners as we cry out to him for his mercy and grace.

And of course, we can look back and remember other instances, many instances, I'm sure, of the Lord bringing us through difficult times in our own lives. It might be an answered prayer.

[13:56] It might be in protection, sustaining us through great challenges and trials as he helps us to see his hand at work even in the midst of the most dark and difficult times of life.

And when we look back and remember, it does give us confidence, doesn't it? It does help us to be assured that the Lord is with us, that he hasn't forgotten us.

We rightly often speak about looking ahead as we wait for Christ's return. But here, David is reminding us of the great benefits in looking back at the Lord's great faithfulness in the past.

It reminds us, even while we wait and wait and wait for the Lord, even when he seems far off, he does hear, he does answer the cries of his children.

So we've seen David encouraging us to remember God's help in the past, and our second section very much flowing out of that is we're encouraged to trust the God who delivers.

[15:06] We see that in verses 4 and 5. In verse 4, David presents us with two alternatives, similar in some ways to what we see at the very beginning of the Psalter, two ways to live, a way that leads to blessing on the one hand, trusting in the Lord, and a way that we're warned against that leads to perishing and disaster.

that is by turning and looking to the proud. Now, throughout the Old Testament, this word proud is used to represent the anti-God world, which so often appears to have the power, the influence, and the resources that we need, especially in times of difficulty.

It can be so tempting, can't it, to look there in times of crisis. As we wait for the Lord, we wonder, has He forgotten about me? Should I go elsewhere?

Should I look to the world and those around me? We can see real appeal in proud, self-sufficient humanity, which stands in opposition to the Lord.

At first glance, it promises so much. It says, if you want to know safety and security for you and your family, we'll put earning money ahead of serving the Lord and His people.

[16:27] If you want to progress in your career, we'll just sideline God and His Word. Join forces. Align with those powerful lobby groups who hold so much sway in the world today on issues like gender and sexuality.

Or if you want to know satisfaction and true happiness, we'll just forget about God. Pour everything into finding a husband or wife, even if that means going after someone who doesn't love the Lord. Well, David reminds us, if we listen to the world and turn to the proud and seek these things, well, we end up going astray after a lie.

Just as in the Garden of Eden, Satan promises much, but he never delivers on it. What looks so enticing, what holds so much sway and appeal will ultimately prove empty. rather than delivering delight, it will only deliver disappointment and disaster in the end. Ultimately, if we look to these things, we'll end up even deeper in the pit.

[17:36] So these are the negatives of not going after the proud anti-God world. But this is not like an election where you're forced to settle for an underwhelming candidate because the alternatives are so grim.

No, David directs us to the many reasons why the Lord can be trusted to deliver. We've already seen past deliverance on the personal level in David's life, but now in verse 5, his horizons broaden. He recognizes not just God's goodness to him personally, but now it's God's goodness to all his people towards us. These great things don't just apply to David as the anointed king of Israel, but they are an offer to all of the Lord's people.

We can look back and see God's wonderful track record of delivering for his people again and again and again. As he looks to this, David points us to the Lord's wondrous deeds and his thoughts. We might wonder what does he mean by that? Well, wondrous deeds in Scripture are used to speak of God's miraculous acts in delivering his people.

[18:52] In places like Exodus 15, we read another new song where Moses speaks of the Lord delivering his people from slavery in Egypt. Listen to what Moses says of the Lord in very similar terms to what David is using here.

Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you? majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders.

David is saying the God who has done these wonderful things in the past for his people in the Exodus can be trusted to do them again in the future, even as we wait in the midst of great trials. No one is like him. None can compare with him. So why would we turn anywhere else? And what about the Lord's thoughts?

Well, these refer to God's plans and purposes. In Psalm 139, David writes, How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

[20:01] He's saying God's plans are truly great. They are precious to those who know and love him. Even when we don't comprehend or understand them, we can trust him.

So David is looking back at all God has done in the past and he's looking forward to what God has planned to do in the future. He's telling us the Lord has a track record.

He can be trusted. He always delivers his people and he always delivers on his promises. They're not just one or two isolated examples of this, but there are more than can be told.

As we wait, David encourages us, we can trust the God who delivers. And of course, on a Sunday morning, as we're surrounded by church family, that seems obvious, doesn't it?

It's a no-brainer. Of course we'll trust the Lord. We won't side with the anti-God world around us. But of course, in the midst of life's challenges, it's often so tempting, isn't it, to keep our heads down when we feel outnumbered to go with the crowd, to side with the world rather than the Lord, particularly when that's unpopular.

[21:17] We need to be constantly reminded and to be reminding one another that true blessing is found in making the Lord our trust, not in turning to the proud, for they go astray after lies.

And we, don't we, have the wonderful privilege of an even greater revelation of the Lord's past deeds and future plans than David would have known.

For we can look to David's greater son and all he did in his life, death, and resurrection. The one who, where every one of his deeds to be written down, the world itself could not contain all the books.

And we've been told of the great future plan of people from every tribe and tongue and nation bound down before him in the new creation. This is a God who truly can be trusted, who has done

and is doing so much for his people.

As we reflect on all that God has done as David does it, well, it leads to the question, how are we to respond? What is it that God desires from his people in response to his great acts of deliverance?

[22 : 34] Well, a faithful Israelite in David's day would look at the scriptures and respond, provide a sacrifice. Leviticus lays out clearly how the Lord's people are to present sacrifices to him, both for sin but also in thankfulness to him.

So we might wonder what David means when we read verse 6. In sacrifice and offering, you have not delighted. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.

Has God changed his mind? Has David missed Leviticus as he reads through his Bible? Well, no. He's pointing to what those things are really all about.

What God really wants from him and from his people. Many of you will know that I used to work as a dentist. Imagine I'm wanting to go back to work so I apply for a job and ask, what is it that you want? What do you require? The answer from the employer comes back. You need a degree in dentistry and you need a certificate to confirm you're registered and can practice in the UK.

[23 : 44] So I produce these certificates and I get the job. But imagine on my first day I turn up half an hour late. I'm running late right from the beginning so to get back on track I barely look at any of my patient's teeth for the first few checkups to get back on track.

Someone comes in that morning with excruciating dental pain but I fold them off with some painkillers rather than bothering to deal with their problem. Well if my new boss comes to me having heard about this at lunchtime how is he going to react?

He's not going to be very pleased. But if he speaks to me and I say but all you said you wanted was my degree was these certificates. You didn't mention anything about caring for my patients.

Well it's not going to go down very well is it? For these certificates are worth nothing if I'm not actually doing what they're pointing to what they're all about.

It wasn't really the degree that was wanted it was what it points to. It's not that these things are not good or aren't important they're essential. But the issue is that I'm not living up to what they point to.

[24 : 58] Well similarly the sacrifices outlined in the Old Testament sacrificial system are of course good. God commanded them he graciously provided them to his people but they were never where things were meant to stop.

Rather it was to be the beginning a demonstration that the people were ready and willing to offer thanksgiving and service to the Lord for his great grace.

It was pointing to what was meant to be an inward reality in their hearts saying just as this animal was being offered up in your service so too I am offering myself up in service of you oh Lord in thanksgiving for all you have done for me.

And verse 6 to 8 show us what God desires. He wants us to delight in doing his will to delight in doing his will. We see that in the middle of verse 6 those verses that I skimmed over but you have given me an open ear.

You'll see in the footnote in your Bible that literally says ears you have dug for me. Those holes on the side of your head well they're for listening it's the sort of thing we would say to a child.

[26 : 16] We don't say that simply listen and receive information the point is that you listen and obey you do something about what you hear.

And that's what David is getting at here. He recognizes that God doesn't want religious rituals without listening and doing God's will. No, God wants his people to delight in doing his will.

It's about responding rightly to his great mercy. Ralph Davis helpfully calls this the Romans 12 of the Old Testament. It's an appeal as we're looking back with David to God's mercies to present our bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God our spiritual worship.

In light of a God who graciously makes a way that sinful people can be justified before him who delivers his people from the pit in all manner of ways will the only right response is offering up our whole lives in willing service to him.

That's what David is saying here and that's what Paul is teaching in Romans 12. God wants his people to delight in doing his will. Not simply going through the motions not just performing religious rituals but giving our whole lives to him.

[27 : 40] We can so easily fall into the trap of thinking well I'll go to church I'll go to growth group maybe even prayer meeting on a good week that will please God or I'll serve in church by cooking or cleaning leading a Bible study even preaching as if that will tick the box and keep us in God's

good books for a few days.

Now of course these are good things but if we stop there if we merely do these things and it's just like pointing to these certificates and failing to care for my patients God wants our whole hearted obedience to listen and obey him putting his word into practice in every area of our lives on a Monday morning in the office on the sports field in every single area of life what David is saying here is echoed by the hymn writer love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all and David goes on to give a clear example of what this worship and obedience looks like in his life it's in declaring the kindness and faithfulness of God in his deliverance and we see that in the final section verse 9 and 10 where we're encouraged to rejoice in sharing

God's goodness rejoice in sharing God's goodness all the way through this psalm there is an outward focus there is there's a desire that God's glory is made known to others that more and more people will come to know the same deliverance that David has experienced his joy and his delight overflow to others firstly we see that within the Lord's people in verse 9 and 10 as David tells the glad news of deliverance amongst the great congregation we see all the things he says he doesn't do he hasn't restrained his lips he hasn't hidden God's deliverance within his heart he hasn't concealed all that God has done in his steadfast love and faithfulness then notice what he does do he tells the glad news he speaks of God's steadfast love and faithfulness for David when God's law is in his heart well it doesn't remain there it overflows outwards he's bursting to share about God's wonderful grace with other believers and that is a task we too can be involved in as we point one another to the Lord we're encouraged in the New

Testament in our singing as we address one another in psalms hymns and spiritual songs we're building one another up after the service as we encourage one another with what we've heard from God's word as we open the Bible together during the week we're telling the glad news of God's deliverance we're encouraging one another as we see the Lord's mercies in our lives and we're spurring one another on and living in obedience to him and notice too the content of David's message it's not simply an introspective look at me look at all that God has done for me look at what I've got as if he's at the center of the universe it's not merely David's testimony it's not simply what he has known rather notice he speaks of God's character he points to his steadfast love and covenant faithfulness we're reminded he is always true to his word his love never fails and notice this sharing too goes beyond the Lord's people we saw that earlier didn't we in verse three the new song is not merely a song of praise from

David to his Lord it has an impact on those outside many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord and it's true isn't it when outsiders who don't yet know the Lord come into our midst and hear the words of our praise to him for all that he's done some will recognize that this is real as we praise the Lord it's not like the singing of the crowds at Murrayfield or at a Taylor Swift concert it's far deeper far more meaningful far more significant and a real sense appoints others to the Lord who is to be revered and can be trusted with everything when we recognize it's about the Lord and not us well that's a great encouragement isn't it it takes the pressure off as we share the gospel with others it's not just about me and my testimony of God's work in my life we point beyond ourselves to the [32 : 36] Lord as Paul writes in 2nd Corinthians what we proclaim is not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord and as we share the gospel with others there's hope that they too might be freed from the devil's lies that the light of the gospel can shine into their hearts too it was wonderfully encouraging wasn't it on Wednesday evening at our congregational meeting to hear stories of that happening in our midst of others being rescued from the pit of their own sin and coming to know the Lord's deliverance for themselves yet as we look around there are still so many living in darkness so many still in the mud and the mire perhaps even unaware of it oblivious of their helplessness and horror due to their sin before the Lord how they need to cry out to him and know the salvation which he alone can offer to see to fear and trust the Lord for themselves too and this wonderful news this wonderful deliverance is not just for us it's to share with others these verses teach us that as we look back on all that the Lord has done it will be natural to share it with others both inside and outside our fellowship and notice

David is saying these words even in the midst of trials even as he waits for the Lord the wonderful news of the Lord who inclines to hear our cry the Lord who draws us up from the pit of destruction and sets our feet upon a rock making our steps secure we truly do have so much to give thanks to the Lord for as we look back as we live for him and as we speak of him with others let's pray heavenly father we give you thanks that you are a God who we can cry out to in the midst of

whatever difficult and painful situations we find ourselves in we give you thanks that this psalm teaches that as we wait on you we can find great confidence in looking back at all that you've done in the past and as we consider your glorious plans help us to have hearts that are filled with thankfulness for all that you have done in our lives hearts that delight in doing your will ears that are open to hear your word lips that are eager to speak of you and lives that are ready and eager to respond in glad obedience to your word we ask these things in Jesus Christ's precious name amen well as we come to finish our service together this morning let's sing my heart is filled with thankfulness this morning to meet so next we let's go ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■