

Trusting Through Trials

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[0 : 00] But this morning, Andrew Whitmarsh is going to be preaching a second week in Psalm number 40. And so if you turn with me now, we're going to read Psalm 40 together in our Bibles. We looked at the first half of this last week.

We're focusing on the second half this week, but we'll read the whole Psalm together. If you need a Bible, one of the stewards will be glad to bring one to you. There's plenty outside, so stick your hand up or just go to the door and somebody will be glad to give you a Bible so that you can follow along.

And if you do have one of those church Bibles, I think it's page 705 that we are reading. Psalm number 40. And I'm going to read the whole of the Psalm.

And you'll see it's addressed to the choir master. And it's 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.

[1 : 06] 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, who does not 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 written within my heart. I've told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation.

Behold, I've not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord. I've not hidden your deliverance within my heart. I've spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation. I've not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the congregation.

[2 : 19] As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me. Your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me.

For evils have encompassed me beyond number. My iniquities have overtaken me. I cannot see. They're 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 : 24] 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 his word. Well, please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 40, where we'll be focusing mainly on the second half, verse 11 through to verse 17.

What is normal Christian experience? Well, if we were only to read the first half of this psalm, the ten verses which we looked at together last week, we might think it's all about a life of triumph, of deliverance from each and every struggle we face, of victory over sin, freedom from difficulties, nothing but ease and pleasure.

A smooth ride through life, protected from trials and challenges, until the day when we are with Jesus in heaven. Indeed, there are some in the world today who would make such claims.

If we know Jesus, you will know a life full of health, wealth and happiness. And of course, that holds obvious appeal. Who wouldn't want a life like that?

[4 : 51] But for most of us who've been following Jesus for any length of time, we'll know that doesn't fit with our experiences. Nor does the Bible promise it.

Perhaps if you're a new believer, you've seen real transformation in your life. You know the sort of joy David speaks of in the opening verses of this psalm. The Lord has heard your cry.

You've been rescued from a life of darkness and hopelessness. Perhaps he's taken you out of the pit of a life enslaved to following religious rules with no confidence that you could ever measure up.

Or perhaps you've been delivered from the gloom and hopelessness of atheism. Now your life has a real purpose. You know the living Lord. You've experienced his grace and been rescued from sin.

The great high, the joy, seeing all God has done for you leads to you longing to live for him. Longing to share his goodness with others. It can feel at these times as if the only way your life can possibly go is up.

[6 : 01] However, in time, you start to realize things are not quite as smooth as you first thought. Perhaps friends and family members begin to notice a change in you.

They hear things you say about Jesus being the only way to God. And they think you're rather intolerant all of a sudden. As you share what the Bible teaches about heaven and hell and other things, people might call you a fundamentalist.

Perhaps people mock you in the staff room when they hear you go to church and are living in a way that seeks to please God and not others.

And in time, those old sinful habits which you thought you'd seen the back of, well, they raise their ugly head once more. And you're reminded of the pain and hurt you've inflicted on others.

Non-Christian friends and family are very keen to bring these things up. questioning how someone who has done those things can now claim to be right with God. That sense of liberation, of feet being on a solid rock, well, it seems long in the past.

[7 : 11] When life's like that, we can easily feel like we're slipping and sliding from one bog to the next. We think, is this really how life as a Christian should be?

Have I gone off course? Has God abandoned me? Well, if you've ever felt like that, this psalm is for you.

Because Psalm 40 is very much a psalm of two halves. As we saw last week in verse 1 to 10, David is looking back to past deliverance. He recalls a time when he was waiting on the Lord, crying out to him from a desperate and hopeless situation, sinking in a pit of destruction, only for the Lord to rescue him, setting his feet on a rock.

And that led to great rejoicing a new song, to great confidence in the Lord who truly can be trusted. And David longed to pour out his whole life in thankful worship to the Lord.

It's a wonderfully helpful part of Scripture, full of great encouragement to all of us. However, as we read through this psalm, the second half has a rather different tone.

[8 : 28] What began with joyful thanksgiving at past deliverance, now ends up back in the pit once more. We go from David rejoicing with great thanksgiving, sharing God's goodness, to him crying out in verse 17, longing for God to deliver him a poor and needy man, totally helpless.

We've gone from the soaring highs of the first 10 verses to crushing lows of verse 11 to 17. But notice this psalm isn't marked by despair.

No, there's real confidence. It's not here to depress us, but point us to the reality of Christian life. Helps us to have confidence and hope, even in the midst of dark and difficult times.

The two halves of this psalm are so different that some people even suggest they don't really belong together, as if they've been clumsily forced together at a later date by some ham-fisted editor.

Yet those who make such suggestions seem to be totally divorced from the reality of Christian life. For the whole Bible is clear that Christian life isn't a straightforward journey.

[9 : 45] When we're saved from our sin and then somehow cruise serenely to a glorious destination without any challenges. No. The true Christian life can sometimes feel more like a brutal assault course where we overcome some apparently insurmountable obstacle by the Lord's help.

We know great relief and joy. But then soon after, we plunge back into some new trial, which we have to continue through with great difficulty.

This psalm is so real. It's so helpful, so encouraging for anyone finding the Christian life a slog. We can take heart that we've not gone off course when this is our experience.

And the first half of the psalm sets us up for these difficulties. As James Phillips says, in times of trouble, the memory of past deliverance will garrison the heart and provide a bulwark that no stormy seas will ever finally shake.

So this psalm helps us to think and to pray rightly as we cry out to God, as we continue waiting for our ultimate deliverance.

[10 : 55] It's a psalm that is realistic, it's reassuring, and gives great hope in the midst of life's challenges. We're going to look at this psalm together under three headings this morning.

Firstly, we see David's situation in verse 11 and 12. David's situation of real difficulty, but not despair.

Last week, we saw David praising God for his many glorious deeds towards his people in verse 5. He said they were too many to number. But now look at verse 12.

David faces evils encompassing him, and now it is they which are beyond number. It's true, isn't it, that in the midst of great challenges, when things are hard, it can feel that the problems we face are as big, if not bigger, than all that God has done.

Many of us will have been there. It feels like we're surrounded by evil. There's no escape. That's what David says. There's evil all around him and also within.

[12 : 02] He says, my iniquities have overtaken me. There's a sense that his guilt and sin has caught up with him. He feels exposed, found out.

He's painfully aware of his wrongdoing. As he puts it in Psalm 38, verse 4, my iniquities have gone over my head like a heavy burden.

They are too heavy for me. We know, don't we, if we've been saved by God's grace that we've been rescued from the penalty that our sins deserve. But of course, in this world, the pain and consequences of our sins so often remain.

David knew that better than most, of course. The consequences of his adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent killing of her husband having catastrophic effects, both for him and his family.

And for us too, the mess that our sin leaves behind isn't simply wiped away when we come to Christ. We know, don't we, broken relationships, pain and hurt caused to those we love by our wrongdoing, ongoing guilt and struggle with shame, even effects perhaps on our physical and our mental health.

[13 : 15] There can be times when we're particularly aware of these things. It can feel like our past sins have overtaken us. We feel the debilitating effects of it and the crushing guilt.

The sense of blindness and incapacity that David feels is highlighted as he says, I cannot see. He's speaking not just about his vision. It won't be solved by a trip to spec savers.

No, Alec Mateer says this is an inability to see in every sense that the word is used. He can't see what is true and right and real.

He can't see a way out. He can't see where to go from here. He's stuck. He's in the pit once more. And notice he says, my heart fails me.

It's as if he just can't keep going. And we can feel like that sometimes, can't we? It's just too hard. I thought my problems were behind me after coming to Christ, but now I'm discovering a whole load of new issues as I try to walk rightly before him.

[14 : 24] Even as I grow in holiness, well I'm discovering ways in which I'm sinful that I'd never even thought about before. Is this really what I signed up for? For David, the problems within are also met by evils around him.

The evildoers that surround and encompass him seem to be finding great joy in the midst of his difficulties in verse 14 and 15. People are wanting to take his life. They're delighting in his hurt.

They're crying out with great pleasure as they gloat over his misfortune. There is a sense in which the problems David speaks of are of his own making.

But notice, he doesn't wallow in this pit. For while it is a true crisis for David, he doesn't lose confidence in the Lord. even in this great difficulty, there is no sense of despair.

And the reason is that David doesn't look within. It's not about positive thinking, saying, well, you aren't really that bad. Your sin wasn't as serious as you might think. No.

[15 : 32] There are no attempts to minimize it or to skim over it. His sin is terrible. There is real grief over it. And notice, he doesn't look to those who stand against him.

He doesn't try to make peace with the proud. He doesn't even call upon any military might he might have at his disposal as king to deal with it. No. He looks up in verse 11.

He looks to the Lord. Having reminded himself of all that the Lord has done in the past section, well, now he remembers who God is in the present.

Look with me at verse 11. We see why it is he has such confidence even in this crisis. David is painfully aware, yes, of his sin, but he reminds himself and reminds the Lord of his great mercy.

He says, As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me. Your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me. The reason for his confidence?

[16 : 37] Well, it's God's unchanging goodness. His steadfast love and faithfulness will preserve him forever. We saw last week David reminding us, Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust.

He's saying God won't restrain his mercy. Just as David said, his lips won't be restrained in proclaiming God's goodness back in verse 9. He knows exactly what the Lord is like.

He's remembered his great acts in the past and his glorious plans. And that means for David and for us there is no need to despair. Not because of who we are, not because of the resources at our disposal or our own ingenuity, but because of the Lord we look to.

One who's not tight or stingy with his mercy. The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. God delights to pour out his mercy on his people as they cry to him for help.

He hasn't held back in the past and he won't hold back in the future. David knows he can offer nothing but his sin. He's totally reliant on God's mercy and grace.

[17 : 58] So for David, knowing the Lord who he cries out to puts his problems into perspective. And for us, how true is it that when faced with the reality and the horror of our sins, we can so easily be tempted to despair.

When confronted with the mess of our own selfishness, of addiction, of past sin, or when we lapse into that sin again. Satan does love to whisper in our ear, God couldn't possibly love you.

You've gone too far this time. Or when we're feeling the squeeze at work or school for following Jesus. When people love to see us slip up or are quick to make our lives a misery because we dare to take God's word seriously.

David reminds us, look up. When darkness veils his lovely face, I look to his unchanging grace. And in times of difficulties, it's so easy to turn inwards to isolate ourselves.

Yet the Lord has given us each other. It's often the last thing we want to do when times are really hard, but there is real benefit, isn't there, in gathering together to be reminded of who God is.

[19 : 12] To point one another to the one who is abounding in steadfast love, who will ever preserve his people, even through great hardships and challenges.

So David says we can avoid despair in the midst of these difficulties by looking to the Lord. And secondly, in verse 13 to 16, we see David's prayer.

David prays for God's justice and for God's glory. As David cries to the Lord, he pleads for deliverance in verse 13. There's a sense, isn't there, of urgency.

Make haste to help me. I'm waiting for you. I need your help. And David fleshes out his request with an unpacking of what that deliverance looks like.

He prays firstly for God's justice seen in the bringing of shame to his foes. And secondly, for God's glory in the praise of his people.

[20 : 12] So firstly, for justice, David looks to the Lord to act in judgment on the proud anti-God world around him. Just like in the Exodus when God's people were rescued from slavery in Egypt through acts of judgment upon God's enemies, so too, David is asking that the Lord will rescue him by bringing judgment on his enemies.

The language used here is of reaping what they sow. We're told in these verses they're wanting to snatch away the life of the Lord's king. They're delighting in his hurt.

They're gloating over his desperate situation. David knows that his present problems are at least in part his own fault. But he's clear that doesn't give these foes the right to rejoice in his difficulties.

It's for God alone to bring him low, not these evildoers. And in putting themselves against the Lord's king and the Lord's people, well, they're ultimately putting themselves against the Lord himself.

So David cries to God that they will be put to shame. They'll be disappointed, that they will be brought to dishonor, discredited, exposed, shown to be who they are, that they will reap the shame that their acts deserve.

[21 : 33] Now, we might find this language difficult, maybe even shocking, but it's proportionate. It's entirely just. It's not taking matters into his own hands.

It's not shutting off the possibility of repentance. But it's asking God to be true to his character and trusting that he will deal justly with the enemies.

We can take heart that those who continue to oppose the Lord and his people will reap what they sow. We see in Revelation it's only possible for the Lord's people to be safe and secure forever once his enemies have been finally defeated.

And as a result, the great multitude cries out in heaven, Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God for his judgments are true and just.

The Lord delights in delivering his people from those who delight in doing his people harm. And how reassuring that is when we're being blasted by people in school because we belong to a church that takes God's word seriously.

[22 : 41] Or when we're holed up before a boss for refusing to endorse the pride agenda. Or even more so, how comforting that must be for brothers and sisters in North India experiencing such intense persecution with destruction of buildings and belongings, facing physical violence and even death.

In such situations, all we can do is cry out to the Lord asking that his enemies will be brought to shame. That they will reap what they sow, receive what they are due, trusting that to him, confident he will deliver his people.

Ultimately, because he's done it many times before in the past. So God's justice in delivering his people is part of David's prayer. But we also see him asking for God's glory in receiving the praise of his people in verse 16.

I don't know about you, but often when coming to God in prayer, particularly in difficult times, it very quickly turns into a list of me and my problems. Our horizon so easily claps down.

Lord, help me with this problem. Bring me through this difficult situation. Be with me as I do this difficult task. It's almost as if when I pray, it's only between me and God.

[24 : 07] I forget about everything else beyond. But remember, when Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he didn't teach them to begin my father, but our father.

Doing this reminds us that we don't come to God by ourselves. We're part of his people. As we noted last week, David, throughout this psalm, has a sense of being part of something bigger right the way through.

Of course, his king, his position, his welfare are caught up with that of the Lord's people all the way through. But David has all of the Lord's people in view even as he cries out to God in these intensely personal ways.

In verse 16, we see his deliverance is not just about him and his salvation, but he longs that others will take heart and be encouraged crying out to the Lord in praise too.

Just as David couldn't restrain his lips in praising God back in verse 9, well, now we see in praying that all those who love the Lord, all those who know his great salvation, unable to stop proclaiming, great is the Lord.

[25 : 16] David's ultimate desire is that God will be glorified even through his trials. Just as Jesus teaches his followers to pray, hallowed be your name.

So David prays that God's name will be given the honor that it is due. And of course, Jesus teaches us we can also pray, deliver us from evil. But isn't that a great challenge?

In our difficulties, how often is that our attitude? As I pray, am I considering God's glory or simply my grief?

As we cry out to the Lord, are we thinking about his kingdom or simply our comfort? There's great help in shifting our perspective and recognizing we're part of something far greater as David prays for God's justice and God's glory.

Thirdly, and finally, we see David's hope as a helpless man crying out to a great God in verse 16 and 17. As we approach the end of this psalm, in a sense, David's situation is as bad as ever.

[26 : 32] He cries out to the Lord in verse 17, knowing that he is poor and needy. It's a pretty shocking assessment of himself. I am nobody.

I'm weak. I'm needy. I'm feeble and frail. Seemingly wracked with guilt facing goading of enemies and he sees there's nothing he can do about it.

Yet the journey which David has taken us on shows us why he can remain so steadfast. He has remembered God's goodness in the past. He's looked to his steadfast covenant love and that gives him great confidence.

We mentioned last time the unusual nature of this psalm and that is in a sense backwards, beginning with thanksgiving before returning to this unresolved cry to the Lord for help.

Well, another unusual feature is that this psalm quotes almost verbatim from another psalm in verse 13 to 17. For these words are very similar to Psalm 70.

[27 : 36] But there's one key difference and we see that in verse 17. David says, As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me.

The Lord takes thought for me. In Psalm 70, there isn't a mention of God's thoughts. Yet David looks to that here. If you remember from last week, we thought of how God's thoughts are mentioned in verse 5.

Speaking of God's great plans, his purposes, his designs. It reminds us that this is one psalm, not a cobbling together of two unrelated ones.

God's plans are truly wonderful for all of God's people, but also for us individually. The Lord does have a good and perfect plan.

He sees the struggles of his people. He recognizes the pain. And David's reminded he is with us in the midst of them. The difficulties that we face, they are not a sign that we have failed.

[28 : 43] They're not a sign that God has abandoned us. No. We can take great confidence. He sees. He knows. He takes thought for us.

So as we look at ourselves and our situation, acknowledging our weakness, powerlessness, helplessness, and sinfulness, of course, we must recognize these things.

But we can't stop there. We can't keep wallowing in the pit. Rather, we must look up. As one writer said, God delights when a poor and needy man calls him my God.

He won't be slack to vindicate his servant's confidence and magnify his own name. For such an appeal goes straight to the heart of God. God delights And as David looked up, he looked to the Lord in whom he placed his trust.

And as we look up, we look to the Lord Jesus, one who gives us supreme confidence. Last week from verse 68, we saw that God wants his people to delight in doing his will.

[29 : 52] But that language is picked up on by the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 10. And he takes these words and takes them to be the words of Jesus Christ himself.

The one who truly and perfectly delighted to do God's will. The one who all the scriptures are speaking of. The one whose life was won every single moment of sinless obedience to his father.

Not requiring sacrifice for his own sins, yet he delighted to do his father's will as he offered his body as the once for all sacrifice for our sins on the cross.

Bringing an end to the repeated sacrifice of animals, which of course served as a constant reminder to the people of their sins. And the writer of the Hebrews tells us he sat down, finished, job done, complete, no more sacrifices are necessary.

Sin has been paid for. God's wrath is satisfied. Salvation for all God's people is secured. David had such confidence even in the midst of such a crisis because he could cling to who God was, remembering all God had done for his people in the past.

[31 : 10] He was trusting in the Lord's promises, looking ahead to one who was still to come. Well, how much more should we, knowing the Lord Jesus, who is our ultimate king, the full and final sacrifice for sin, have even greater confidence in him through the trials and difficulties that we face in our lives.

For if we've come to him in repentance and faith, then we have known deliverance from our sin and the just judgment it deserves. And what a wonderful and glorious thing that is.

But of course, this psalm teaches us that each deliverance we have known from the trials and challenges in this life will give way to new ones. And so too will be the case with each future deliverance until, that is, Christ returns when he will bring about full and final deliverance for all his people, when enemies will be vanquished once and for all, when the struggle with sin will be no more, when faith will be sight, and when all who love the Lord's salvation join with the heavenly host in proclaiming great is the Lord for all eternity.

What a delight it is to serve this Lord, even as we cry out to him in the midst of life's challenges, with certain hope in the one who delights to deliver his poor and needy people when they cry out to him for his mercy.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we give you thanks that we, poor and needy people, so painfully aware of our guilt and our shame and the many issues that we face in life can cry out to you for mercy and grace, confident that you hear and will answer as we wait for you.

[33 : 18] Please help us to look beyond the struggles and the difficulties of this life and look to you, remembering your steadfast love and faithfulness, seeking your justice and your glory as we cry out to you for our deliverance.

We ask these things in Jesus Christ's precious name. Amen.