

Psalm 40 “A Song of the Incarnate King”
Psalm 40
Hebrews 10:1-10

September 17, 2023

Psalm 40 takes the somewhat odd form of a movement from thanksgiving to lament.

At least – it sounds odd to us!

Shouldn't the movement be from sorrow to joy?
Shouldn't we go from death to resurrection?!
Shouldn't every song have a happy ending?!

No.

What do you sing when you are in the middle of a horrible part of the story?

What do you sing when you are poor and needy?
When the world, the flesh, and the devil are trying to destroy you?

In the middle of your pain and your affliction,
you can sing Psalm 40.

As we have seen during this series,
the latter part of Book One contains some very dark songs –
songs that cry out for God to make things right!

The first part of Psalm 40 gives us the answer:

the answer is the coming of our Lord Jesus – the one who comes to DO God's will!
But the second part of Psalm 40 includes a petition that those who seek to snatch away my life
will themselves be put to shame and brought to dishonor.

How do we sing this?

It can be very tempting to try to *tell God what to do!*

But Augustine has some wise counsel on this (p315):

Do not attempt to *coerce* God.

“if you invoke God as your ally when you are minded to make merry
over someone else's misfortune,
you are making him collude with your malice.

And if you do that,
you are not calling on him with praise but trying to manipulate him.”

When we ask God to bring vengeance
we must not do this out of malice and envy,
but out of *love*.

Let's take an easy example.

Why do I pray that God will thwart the plans of terrorists and put them to shame?
Because I love terrorists!

And what they are doing is so awful
that it *must* be stopped.
Love for terrorists demands that they be stopped.
And so we pray that those who delight in hurting others
would be turned back.

Vengeance belongs to the LORD – so we ask him to take care of it!
We hand vengeance over to him – so that we can simply love our neighbor as ourselves.

Sing Psalm 40
Read Hebrews 10

I have titled this sermon “A Song of the Incarnate King” –
because Hebrews 10 tells us
that Jesus sang Psalm 40 “when he came into the world.”

I’ve been telling you that the Psalms were written for Israel to sing with David –
which is why the Church should sing these songs with Jesus.
But now you can see where I get this from.
The New Testament *tells us* to think this way!

Psalm 40 is the song of the incarnation –
the song of the Christ, when he came into the world.

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.

If this is a Psalm of David – how does it connect to us?

We need to hear the Psalms in the voice of David
because of God’s promise to David that his Son would sit on God’s throne forever.
As Israel learned to sing the Psalms in and with David,
so also we need to learn to sing the Psalms in and with Jesus.

Of course, that means that it *does* apply to us! –
precisely because Jesus has sung this Psalm first.

In Psalm 40 we hear first how to thank God for his past deliverance –
and second how to lament and ask God for future deliverance –
all because the incarnate King is sitting on his throne.

The king gives thanks to God for past deliverances –
and with that past deliverance in view,
he asks God to do it again.

The last part of Psalm 40 – verses 13-17 –

are found in almost exactly the same words as Psalm 70.
This is important because both Psalms are found near the end of their respective books.
Book One is Psalms 1-41 – so Psalm 40 is the next to the last Psalm in Book One.
Book Two consists of Psalms 42-72 – so Psalm 70 is very near the end of Book Two.

Books One and Two of the Psalter both presuppose that the King is sitting on the throne.
They speak as though the Son of David is ruling.
The Kingdom has come.

And yet – things are not the way they should be.
This is useful for us who live under the Kingship of Christ.
Because the Son of David *is* ruling.
He sits at God’s right hand until his enemies are made his footstool.

But we do not see everything under his feet.
Things are *not* the way they should be!

1. The King’s Thanksgiving for Past Deliverance (v1-10)

As we’ve seen Sunday evening in our series on Samuel,
because of Israel’s failure in the time of the Judges,
God has rejected Israel.
God called David to succeed where Israel had failed.
Only when there is a faithful Son of David
will there be a faithful Israel.

That’s why the *whole* Old Testament from the book of Judges onward
is *all about* David.

And that’s why David starts in the first person singular:

a. God Raises the King from the Pit (v1-3) **i. I Waited Patiently for the LORD (v1)**

*40 I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.*

It’s hard to wait.
It’s even harder to wait *patiently*.
It’s even *harder* to wait patiently when you are suffering.

The picture in Psalm 40 is of an old man who has suffered for many years alone –
enduring patiently the miseries of this life.
The picture in Psalm 40 is of a faithful Christian in Iraq or Syria or Egypt –
who has lived her whole life under the fear of oppression and persecution –
and now it’s a hundred times worse!

The picture in Psalm 40 is of the *Christ* who endured the cross –
patiently trusting that God would raise him from the dead!

After all the *rescue* in verse 2 is from the Pit!

ii. He Rescued Me (v2)

² *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.*

The ‘pit of destruction’ is a really good translation.

It literally reads ‘the pit of noise’ –

but most commentators agree that the “noise” here

is the noise of the abyss – the chaotic depths of the mighty waters.

We are not talking about some ordinary pit.

We are talking about the pit of destruction – the abysmal depths of the cosmic sea.

As one early commentator on this Psalm put it:

“Just as mud in a lake is foul-smelling and oppressive,
so the sins of people are slimy,

for they smell foul and drown us with their weight.” (Cassiodorus, 314)

That’s a good way of saying it!

Our sins are slimy – like a miry bog!

But as we sank in the Slough of Despond,

our Lord Jesus drew us up and set our feet upon a rock.

And he did this because he himself was the one who descended into the pit of destruction for us.

He willingly entered the miry bog – trusting that his Father would rescue him.

And so Jesus sings this song first!

iii. My Praise Results in Many Trusting in the LORD (v3)

³ *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.*

Notice where this new song comes from!

The song is not an expression of my heart.

The song is not *my gift* to God.

The song is a gift from God to *us*.

One commentator says:

The New Song “is the Spirit-driven message developed by Yahweh.

Again and again the individual song of thanksgiving tends to become a testimony, a message, and teaching for others.” (Kraus, 425)

Because Jesus has sung the new song – the victory song – the song of triumph – therefore many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

If you do not fear God, then you are not wise.

There is a tendency nowadays to think of God as my heavenly buddy.

Such an attitude is foolishness.

When the apostle John saw the exalted Christ he fell on the ground as one dead.

Now this was the disciple whom Jesus loved –
the person who was closest to Jesus *ever*.

And he *feared* Jesus.

If you do not fear Jesus, then you are claiming to be greater than the apostles.

The fear of the LORD is good.

Yes, perfect love casts out fear – undoubtedly –

but those words were written by the man who fell as one dead before Jesus!

Perfect love simply describes where ‘the fear of the LORD’ brings you.

In verses 4-5 we hear how

b. God Does Wondrous Deeds for the King and His People (v4-5)

i. Blessed Is the One Who Trusts the LORD (v4)

*⁴ 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!*

Verse 4 reminds us that salvation is all of grace.

“Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust.”

“The proud” in verse 4 is the word ‘rahab’ –

which is one of the words used to refer to the sea monsters in Canaanite mythology.

A few weeks ago we looked at how Psalm 29 shows how the LORD the true God of thunder – not Baal.

The Psalms frequently engage with the Canaanite culture around them – repudiating the idolatry of Canaan.

Psalm 40 is doing the same thing.

Verse four is contrasting those who trust in the LORD

with those who turn to the Rahavim – the sea monster gods of Canaan – those who go astray after a lie (after false idols).

Why should we care about the sea monster gods of Canaan?
Because the sea monster gods of Canaan are still with us –
only in a different form!

The sea monster gods of Canaan were invoked to explain natural phenomena –
storms, winds, various troubles.

The modern world has replaced the sea monster gods with science and economics.
Capitalism puts its trust in the “invisible hand” of the free market,
guided by the priestly class of economists.
Socialism puts its trust in the wise benevolence of the all-powerful state.

And what is the result?

We do not fear God – neither do we trust in him.
Rather, we trust in lies – we have turned to the sea monster gods –
the invisible forces that guide our world –
manipulated by the economist-priests, and scientist-priests of our modern religion.

And there is always a temptation to conform the church to the world.
Much of modern Christianity has turned worship into entertainment –
and imitated consumer culture in the framing of worship.

The historic Christian liturgy did not do this.

It did not borrow its liturgical forms from the culture.

They followed the pattern set forth in scripture.

Every biblical worship service follows the same basic pattern:

Entering worship through the sacrifice –
hearing the word of God –
responding with prayer and praise –
partaking of the covenant meal.

Every biblical worship service was designed to draw worshipers into the presence of God
by reciting the mighty deeds of God
and celebrating his saving acts.

The only alternative to this is idolatry –

turning to the proud – to the sea monster gods of our day.

[And I will just say here that I am *not* talking about “music style.”

Many fine churches use a more contemporary music style

who *also* follow exactly the same liturgical pattern that we do!

I have *no problem* with them!

My problem is with treating the worship service as a consumer product.]

The proper focus of worship is on God’s mighty deeds in history.

And you hear David reflect on this in verse 5:

ii. Because of God’s Wondrous Deeds (v5a)

⁵ *You have multiplied, O LORD my God,*

*your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you!*

Notice that verse 5 broadens the reference to “us.”

David is not just speaking of God’s wondrous deeds toward himself –
but to all his people.

God’s wondrous deeds in the Exodus from Egypt –
the Conquest of the Promised Land through Joshua –
and all God wondrous deeds and thoughts toward his people.

In Christ we celebrate God’s mighty deeds throughout all of history –
and especially his wondrous deeds in the incarnation and in the resurrection of Jesus.

And therefore,

iii. Therefore I Will Proclaim Them (v5b)

*I will proclaim and tell of them,
yet they are more than can be told.*

No matter how much we may proclaim the mighty deeds of God –
they are more than can be told!

In verse 6, we come to the passage that Hebrews quotes:

c. God Delights in the Obedience of the King (v6-10)

i. Sacrifice and Offering Is Not What God Delights In (v6)

⁶*In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted,
but you have given me an open ear.^[a]*

*Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.*

The Psalms were used in the temple.

So the king is singing this in the temple as a part of the sacrificial liturgy!
The point is *not* that God is *against* sacrifice and offering!

Rather, the point is that the thing that God delights in is *not* the offering *per se*.
What God delights in is when the king delights to do his will!
(And in the OT, his will included bringing offerings and sacrifices)/

In the ancient world, there were many who thought that the gods delighted in offerings.
If you just went through the outward rituals, then the gods would be pleased with you.
They would say that your *heart* doesn’t matter.

We live in a culture that has reversed this.
Your heart is *all* that matters!

A person can be wicked and despicable,
but many will say, “Oh, but his heart is in the right place.”

Psalm 40 rejects both the formalism of the ritualist
and the touchy-feelyism of the postmodernist.

Yes, there is a biblical pattern for the liturgy.
But there are plenty of churches that just go through the motions.
And that is *not* what God desires.

God delights in his Son the King – the one who does his will!

ii. Rather, I Delight to Do Your Will (v7-8)

⁷ *Then I said, “Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:*

What does he mean “in the scroll of the book it is written of me”?
It likely refers to the book of the Law –
the Pentateuch – the basic scripture of his day.
But there is another connection that many have seen.

Verse 4 had just said, “Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust.”

The Psalter opens with the phrase:
“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly...
for his delight is in the law of the LORD.”

The blessed man of Psalm 40 is the blessed man of Psalm 1.
God not only inspired the *text*, he also inspired the *book* of Psalms.
In the book of Psalms that *God inspired* –
Psalm 40 (here at the end of book One)
is referring back to Psalm 1 (at the beginning of book One)
in order to put in the mouth of David, “I am the blessed Man.”

[read v8]

⁸ *I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart.”*

Psalm 1 said that the blessed man delights in the law of the LORD
(and Deuteronomy 30 had said that the law is in your heart).

What does God delight in?
God does not delight in offering and sacrifice –
just going through the motions of religious observance.
God delights in people who delight to do his will –

people who have his law within their hearts.

In other words, God delights in people who do the right things for the right reasons.
If your heart *is* in the right place, then you *will* do the right thing.

And this is especially important because this is the *King* speaking.
And Hebrews 10 tells us that this is *Jesus* speaking.
Hebrews says that Christ said this “when he came into the world.”

After all, when Christ came into the world,
he came as the one who would finally accomplish what God had promised to David.
In Jesus there would finally be a Son of David who would succeed where Israel had failed –
who would succeed where the house of David had failed –
who would succeed where Adam had failed.

And in so doing, he would offer the once-for-all sacrifice with which God *would* be pleased!
You could say that Hebrews 10 almost reverses the point of Psalm 40.
In Psalm 40 the point was that sacrifice (by itself) cannot please God,
so you need to obey him!
In Hebrews 10, we finally have the one succeeded at obeying God –
thereby rendering him capable of offering that *final* sacrifice
which would satisfy divine justice!

All those sacrifices in the OT were *not* pleasing to God.
Why do we know this?
Because they had to be repeated over and over again.
They never fully and finally dealt with sin.

But when the Christ came into the world,
the Father said “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.”
The Father delighted in the Son – and accepted *his* offering of himself once for all.

(read Hebrews 10:11-14)

And thus Christ says “I delight to do your will.”
As Ambrose said in the fourth century,
“For my sake he took on himself the combat, so that he might conquer me.
Though Christ’s flesh was strong and not liable to sin,
he nevertheless took on my sins.
He took on my weakness and infirmities,
though he himself was without infirmity...
He who is all pure took on our flesh to make it all pure.
He, the immortal one, took on our flesh to make us immortal.” (317)

iii. I Have Declared Your Steadfast Love to the Great Congregation (v9-

10)

⁹ *I have told the glad news of deliverance^[b]
in the great congregation;*

*behold, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O LORD.*

¹⁰ *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 great congregation.*

And so the King declares the glad news of salvation.

The great congregation refers to the whole people of Israel (probably gathered at a feast).
Jesus declares the glad news of salvation to you – and the whole church –
as we gather before him this day (with all the saints in all times and places).

What is the point of this declaration?

Notice that David says “I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart.”
In other words, God’s salvation is not just for the King.
God’s faithfulness and salvation is for *all* God’s people.
All those who trust in him may come and pour out our hearts to God.

But David gives us the pattern.

In verses 1-10 he has laid out his thankfulness for God’s great salvation –
his mighty deeds in history.
Now, in verses 11-17, he will turn to our miseries.

Because God has been faithful in the past –

because God has been faithful in past generations,
therefore future generations may have the same confidence.

How does this Psalm speak to us?

If all we think about is “David” – we’ll miss what Psalm 40 is doing!
After all, from David to the Exile is around 400 years.
During that time there are only a handful of ‘wondrous deeds.’
Psalm 40 is teaching Israel how to sing
in a day when we do not see God’s wondrous deeds.

God does not promise that *you* – during your lifetime –
will see great and wondrous deeds.

You may see only small and ordinary deeds.

Think of the saints who have lived in Muslim lands for the last thousand years.

They have not seen “great and wondrous deeds.”

They have watched as a place that once sent forth the gospel to the ends of the earth
falls under a barren darkness that destroys everything.

But God is faithful.
Even in the midst of ‘evils beyond number’
God’s steadfast love endures.

2. The King’s Lament and Appeal for Deliverance (v11-17)

a. The King’s Confidence in the Midst of Trouble (v11-12)

i. Your Steadfast Love Will Preserve Me (v11)

¹¹ *As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain
your mercy from me;
your steadfast love and your faithfulness will
ever preserve me!*

As one early Christian commentator put it:

“The steadfast love lay in rescuing human nature,
which was wounded through the sin of transgression,
by means of the holy incarnation;
the faithfulness lies in his sitting at the father’s right hand
through the blessing of the promised resurrection,
and from there he will come to judge the living and the dead” (Cassiodorus, 318).

And in verse 12 David says that he is overwhelmed by evils and iniquities:

ii. Confession of Sin and Misery (v12)

¹² *For 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.*

At first it may sound strange to think of Jesus saying this –
but he who knew no sin *became* sin for us.
Not only did he endure the miseries of this life,
but on the cross, he *became* sin.
He never *sinned* – but when all our sin was placed on him, he became sin –
and so in that way he could say with David,
“my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me.”

So, therefore, when you feel that evils have encompassed you beyond number –
that iniquities have overtaken you –
so that your heart fails –
remember that your Lord Jesus came in the flesh for this very reason!

The only way to glory *is* the way of the cross.

Left to myself, I am ruined!

And so I cry out:

b. The King's Plea in the Midst of Trouble (v13-15)

i. O LORD, Make Haste to Help Me (v13)

¹³ *Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me!*

O LORD, make haste to help me!

These last five verses were apparently so popular in ancient Israel,
that when it came time to finish up Book Two of the Psalter,
they took these last five verses from Psalm 40
and set them into a stand alone Psalm 70.

One of the desert fathers rightly said that Psalm 70 was the universal Christian prayer.

In every situation in life you can sing,

“Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me!

O LORD, make haste to help me!”

And here in Psalm 40,

we have a clear backdrop of remembering God's mighty deeds toward us.

ii. Turn Back My Foes (v14-15)

¹⁴ *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 delight in my hurt!

¹⁵ *Let those be appalled because of their shame*

who say to me, “Aha, Aha!”

And particularly, we have this theme of delight returning.

God does not *delight* in offering and sacrifice.

Rather, he *delights* in the one who *delights* to do his will.

The problem is that there are those who *delight* in my hurt.

And so, because I delight in doing God's will,

I ask God to turn them back and bring them to dishonor –

because I love God and neighbor.

c. The King's Prayer in the Midst of Trouble (v16-17)

i. May Those Who Seek You Rejoice (v16)

¹⁶ *But may all who seek you*

rejoice and be glad in you;

may those who love your salvation

say continually, “Great is the LORD!”

But Jesus also prays that all who seek the LORD will rejoice and be glad.
This is what Jesus asks for you – and for me.
That we would celebrate the LORD’s great salvation.

And in closing, he speaks of himself and says:

ii. You Are My Help (v17)

*17 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!*

Jesus became all that we are by nature, so that we might become all that he is by grace.
God joined himself to our humanity,
so that he might join us to his divinity.

As Augustine wisely says:

“There is nothing of my own in me that deserves praise.
May he tear off my sackcloth and clothe me in his own robe,
for it is not I who live now, but Christ lives in me.
If Christ lives in you, and all the good you have belongs to Christ,
and all the good you ever will have belongs to Christ,
what are you of yourself? ‘I am poor and needy.’” (318)

And it is because we are poor and needy that we declare “You are my help and my deliverer.”
As we keep seeing in the Psalms,
God is called “our help” over and over again.
The helper is *not* an “assistant” who does what we don’t feel like doing.
The helper is one who does for us what we could not possibly do by ourselves.

If God does not help us – we are doomed!

But he has helped us!

And so when you are distressed – when you are afflicted –
cry out to him!
The Lord takes thought for *you*!
He is the help and deliverer of all those who call out to him!