

# Christ our Refuge: Loneliness. Rejoicing in the Pits Psalm 40, 70

Since Hurricane Katrina hit last Sunday—

- Millions of lives have been disrupted.
- Tens of thousands have lost everything.
- Tens of thousands are homeless.
- Thousands are out of touch with friends and family.
- Multiplied thousands are jobless.
- Many thousands are refugees.
- And all of them are unsure about the future.

Events like those of this past week are unforgettably imprinted upon our memories.

The fear, pain, hopelessness we saw reflected from the crowds waiting to be rescued from the devastation in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans—is a collective picture of what some individuals face every day.

We are seeing hundreds of thousands of people facing all at once, together, what David faced alone for months.

Remember where we are in God's Word—we are searching the Scriptures and finding the testimony of David that God was his refuge. We know as New Testament believers that we also are to flee to Christ as our Refuge.

Where is David when he wrote the 40<sup>th</sup> Psalm? He was remembering life at the bottom, life in the pits.

- David had lost everything.
- David was homeless.
- David was out of touch with his family and friends and did not know who survived and who hadn't.
- David had no sure supply of food or water.
- David had to find an escape route to flee the dangers he faced.
- David's life and emotions were flooded by a hurricane of troubles.

But David had a choice—sink into despair or flee to the Lord as his refuge. That is the same choice each of us this morning have each day of our lives.

He chose to flee to God and wrote down in this Psalm 40 the pathway out when you find yourself hitting bottom in life.

Believers in Christ aren't prevented from hard times and bottoming out in life—they just always have a way out. In fact, most of God's greatest servants have spent a great deal of time in what we could call the pits of life.

What can God do with our hard times, lonely times, dark times and fearful times? He can use them if we give ourselves to Him. In fact, we can even begin to rejoice in the Goodness of God even in the darkest of circumstances. That is what David does in Psalm 40 and that is what Paul tells us by the power of the Holy Spirit—we all can do in every circumstance we find ourselves in through all of life.

***1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.***

Let me illustrate that truth this morning from the life of a very well known person from history.

What is the most widely read, best selling book in the whole world next to the Bible? It is the work of a man who sat in a lonely prison cell for one third of his adult life. A man who lost his first wife to death, had handicapped children, faced constant hardship and loss for much of his adult life. His name—John Bunyan. His book—***Pilgrim's Progress***.

John Bunyan did just as David does in the Psalm we have been feeding upon these past few weeks. That attitude of fleeing to the Lord for refuge and going on in spite of trials and hardship produced an enduring legacy of praise to the Lord from both David's and John Bunyan's lives. And their testimonies about those hard times have become songs, hymns, and well know books.

Turn again with me to Psalm 40. As you go there, let me tell you about Bunyan's loneliness of the pits and what God produced in his life amidst the stench and filth of a 17<sup>th</sup> century English prison.

Although Bunyan authored 60 books, the most famous is ***Pilgrim's Progress***. Begun as a story to entertain his children on their visits to his jail cell, it has become one of the most famous and enduring works of Christian fiction.

Bunyan wrote most of the book during his second stay in jail on the brown paper covers his wife used as stoppers on the milk jugs she brought to him in prison. He seems to have been imprisoned at this time for six months, probably in the tiny one-room jail on

the bridge over the River Ouse. First published in 1678, *Pilgrim's Progress* sold more than 100,000 copies in its first year in print and remains a best-seller to this day<sup>1</sup>.

Bunyan describes his salvation and the hard pathway of life in this world as a believer. Perhaps better than anyone, John Bunyan expressed the quest for God that marks the Christian life. *Pilgrim's Progress* is the allegorical story of a man who, in a dream, meets a man named Evangelist who asks the despondent hero why he is crying. His answer is poignant:

Sir, I perceive by the Book in my hand, that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to Judgment; and I find that I am not willing to do the first, nor able to do the second.

The hero suffers from two problems. He is unwilling to die. He is also unable to stand before God. This is not the inability to appear at judgment—that is inevitable—but to *survive* the judgment of God. He verbalizes his fear by saying:

I fear that this Burden that is upon my back, will sink me lower than the grave.

The place “lower than the grave” is the abyss of hell. Like a fishing line with a small piece of lead attached at the end to make it sink to the depth of the lake, so the person weighted down by a massive burden of sin will sink into the depths of hell.

Christian, the hero of Bunyan’s story, flees from the wrath to come, and sets his face toward the shining Light and the Wicket Gate to seek an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and which fades not away<sup>2</sup>. That is his salvation experience.

His course toward glory is marked by obstacles, however. Friends named Obstinate and Pliable mock him and try to dissuade him from his mission. He encounters the slough of Despond early in his pilgrimage and falls into it. A man named Help rescues him from his plight and says:

This miry slough is such a place as cannot be mended: It is the descent whither the scum and filth that attends Conviction for Sin doth continually run, and therefore it is called the slough of Despond; for still as the Sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there ariseth in his soul many fears and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in this place: And this is the reason of the badness of this place.

What Christian has never visited the slough of Despond? Who has never tried to avoid it altogether? Our souls have all been assailed by doubts, fears, and discouragements. It is not by accident that the most frequent admonition from the lips of Jesus in the New Testament is the exhortation to “Fear not.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sword of the Lord. <http://www.swordofthelord.com/biographies/bunyan.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Sproul, R. C., *The Soul's Quest for God*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Sproul, R. C., *The Soul's Quest for God*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1992.

When we choose to obey. We flee to the Lord. And like David we find a place he could always reach for safety and security—in any situation. The Lord was his refuge; the Lord is our refuge also. Christ our refuge is the safest spot in the Universe. He is the place we go when life gets tough. He is our pathway out of the pits, so that we can rejoice anytime, anywhere we find ourselves in this life.

## The Pathway out of the Pits

Christ is our refuge we can flee to Him at any time and in any condition—and He will never turn anyone away. So how did David get rescued from the pits? How did God lead him out? Here is the simple pathway recorded in this confession of God's faithfulness he made from the pits.

Now, let's go back over this Psalm and learn from each step David took as the Lord led him out of the pits.

1. **LIKE DAVID--REMEMBER GOD'S WORK IN YOUR LIFE.** David first notes the five ways God had worked in his life. Here is God's grace directed towards David—*Psalm 40: 1-3 I waited patiently for the Lord; And **He inclined** to me, And **heard** my cry. 2 He also **brought me up** out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And **set my feet** upon a rock, And **established** my steps. 3 He has put a new song in my mouth— Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, And will trust in the Lord.*

The first step out of the pits is to remember God's work in our lives. David remembers God's work in his life. Think back over your salvation experience. Repeat it to yourself, mull it over in your heart. Then think of the last time you cried to the Lord and He responded. Go over that in your mind—that is what David was doing!

***Don't be surprised by troubles.*** For a moment think who this is—David the man after God's heart. David the one Jesus is names after "Son of David" – and he had such a difficult life. Come to think of it, so did Moses, and Elijah, and Paul, and Peter—in fact, they all seem to have a hard life. If we look to the end of this Psalm we find in the conclusion the real goal God has for us. Real victory in life is not evading and escaping the majority of troubles that head our way. No, it is to seek that God be exalted through my life what ever He chooses to do with me and all my hard times.

Like David, we need to remember God's work of grace in our lives.

2. **LIKE DAVID--REAFFIRM YOUR TRUST IN GOD.** *Psalm 40: 4-5 **Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust,** And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. 5 Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works Which You have done; And Your thoughts toward us Cannot be recounted to You in order; If I would declare and speak of them, They are more than can be numbered.*

David *verbally* says that he trusts God.

Sometimes we need to break the spiritual silence in our heart by *talking to God. Telling Him* what we know is true. *Preaching the Gospel* we believe—to ourselves! David reaffirmed his trust in God. Are you?

***Live with mysteries.*** We can't always know why God is allowing circumstances—but we do know we can trust Him to do all things well. Jesus said to His disciples in John 13:7, "*What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.*"

Like David, we need to reaffirm our trust in the Lord.

3. **LIKE DAVID—RENEW YOUR SUBMISSION TO GOD.** Psalm 40:6-8 *Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; **My ears You have opened.** Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. 7 Then I said, "Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. 8 I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart."*

Inviting God to open our ears is the key to submission with God. This is a dual analogy. Digging is a word for clearing away debris as well as deeply inscribing. These are the two steps to submission—clear out any hindrances that are in the way, and submit to the permanent marking of ownership.

What a beautiful way to look at hard times!

God is tunneling a well of water to refresh me; God is making room to bury into my life His greatest treasures. But that is not all that David shares with us from this time in the pits. There is another exciting picture for us of submission to God.

For us on this side of the cross--here is such a moving picture of what God wants from us. He invites us to become His Bondslaves, servants for life. If we are willing and so desire we declare that publicly like Paul does so often. "I want to serve the Lord all my days". Then we make some painful choices in life to limit our flesh, discipline our life, invest in the world to come instead of merely in this world. And when we make that offering of our lives that is reflected in Romans 12, it is a permanent service that goes through life and lasts forever. (Hymn # 372)

Living for Jesus through earth's little while,  
My dearest treasure, the light of His smile;  
Seeking the lost ones He died to redeem,  
Bringing the weary to find rest in Him.

O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee,  
For Thou, in Thy atonement, didst give Thyself for me.  
I own no other Master, my heart shall be Thy throne.  
My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.  
Like David, we need to renew our submission to the Lord.

**Accept your situation.** What is unchangeable must be accepted and lived through by God's grace. As Paul said, we must echo, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13)

Like David, we need to renew our submission to the Lord.

4. **LIKE DAVID--REPEAT TRUTHS ABOUT GOD**—He is Righteous. *Psalm 40: 9-12 I have proclaimed the good news of **righteousness** In the great assembly; Indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O Lord, You Yourself know. 10 I have not hidden **Your righteousness** within my heart; I have declared **Your faithfulness** and **Your salvation**; I have not concealed **Your loving kindness** and Your truth From the great assembly. 11 Do not withhold **Your tender mercies** from me, O Lord; Let **Your lovingkindness** and **Your truth** continually preserve me. 12 For innumerable evils have surrounded me; My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; They are more than the hairs of my head; Therefore my heart fails me.*

As David looked back over his life of loneliness, desperation, sorrow and fear—he saw one truth most clearly, God is Righteous. The key New Testament book on righteousness is Romans<sup>4</sup>—mentioned 66 times we see God's righteousness and our need of it.

So David's life testifies to God's righteousness. God is always faithful and what He does is right! So David says God is righteous.

- God is righteous in my: Perilous years when I was a fugitive;
- God is righteous in my: Prosperous years when I was victorious in every battle and sat upon the Throne;
- God is righteous in my: Punitive years when I sinned and God had to chasten me;
- God is righteous in my: Peaceful years when I gathered treasures to build the Temple.

Like David, we need to repeat truths about the Lord.

5. **LIKE DAVID--REJOICE IN GOD EVEN IN THE PITS.** *Psalm 40: 13-17 (=Psalm 70: 2-5) Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, **make haste to help me!** 14 Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion Who seek*

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<sup>4</sup> In Romans Paul declares that God is righteous in the four key areas that matter for eternity: God is righteous in declaring us as hopeless in our **sin (1-2)**; God is righteous in providing for our **salvation (3-5, 9-11)**; God is righteous in demanding our **sanctification (6-8)**; God is righteous in bestowing gifts **for our service (12-16)**.

*to destroy my life; Let them be driven backward and brought to dishonor Who wish me evil. 15 Let them be confounded because of their shame, Who say to me, "Aha, aha!" 16 Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; Let such as love Your salvation say continually, "The Lord be magnified!" 17 But I am poor and needy; Yet the Lord thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; Do not delay, O my God.*

**Psalm 70** is the final Psalm from this time in David's life. It is reflective as he looks back on this time and shares Lord!

Psalm 70:1-5 Make haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste to help me, O Lord! 2 Let them be ashamed and confounded Who seek my life; Let them be turned back and confused Who desire my hurt. 3 Let them be turned back because of their shame, Who say, "Aha, aha!" 4 **Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; And let those who love Your salvation say continually, "Let God be magnified!"** 5 But I am poor and needy; Make haste to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay.

**Cry to God when life is hollow.** Life was so bad at this time that David says four times in verses 1, 5—make haste, come now, don't wait, hasten. He says Lord I am not going to make it in this job, this marriage, this family, this sickness, this disaster. Quickly come, I am sinking and am going to perish.

The bottom line of life is—who do you want to please? There are only two possible choices at the deepest level. Either we please God or we in one way or another are seeking to please ourselves. David wanted God to be pleased. It started way back in his youth as we saw in Psalm 19.

*Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.*

David broke with the crowd, stopped getting and seeking approval from his peers and went straight to the top. He wanted God and God alone to be his goal. And that was still his desire.

One way or another we all get what we want in life. David wanted God. Do we? Really, down deep in your heart of hearts are you planning, figuring, calculating, scheming—how do give God more of your life? David was and did and look at him now—forever settled in Heaven as a man after God's own heart.

One final lesson--the message of Psalm 40 and 70 is summarized in one of Paul's most repeated exhortations, Philippians 4:6-7. If we could summarize these two verses they would say in the form of two imperatives: "**Worry about nothing; pray about everything!**"

David rejoiced in God. Are you?  
Troubles—yes; pessimism—no!

Poor and needy—always!

Like David, we need to rejoice in the Lord.

6. **LIKE DAVID--PRAY FOR OTHERS WHILE YOU GO THROUGH THE PITS.**  
Psalm 40:16-17 *Though we at times are desperate—God is not.* He knows what is coming before it ever starts. God is managing every detail. What does David do in verse 4? He prays for others who sought God. What does that say to us? When we are alone and struggling it is the perfect time to pray for others who may be going through what we are facing. Here is a simple plan we can remember:

- Are you sick? Then pray for others who are sick—you know what they are going through!
- Are you abused by co-workers, family members, or classmates? Then pray for others going through the same pains and hurts.
- Are you in a dead end job? Then pray for hope for others that also face the daily struggle of what to do to survive in the days ahead.
- Are you successful and tempted to be selfish? Then pray for others you know who are also experiencing prosperity and ask God to keep them from selfishness and pride.

Like David, we need to intercede for others.