

Summer Psalms

*Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2 ESV)*

You Are My Help And My Deliverer

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Psalm 40

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Introduction:

Good morning! I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 40.

As you turn there, I'd like to make something of a confession.

I confess that I view runners with what is probably an unhealthy degree of reverence. I don't understand them. I am baffled by those people who willingly do something to their bodies that – at least in my estimation – is so terribly unpleasant. And that they do it for hours at a time! Running requires discipline – but more than that, it requires *endurance*. For this reason, the New Testament authors often use it as an illustration for the Christian life. The author to the Hebrews, for example, urged:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, **and let us run with endurance** the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1 ESV)

The Christian life is joy-filled, but it is also simultaneously heart-breaking, isn't it? It is glorious and exhausting – exhilarating and debilitating. It is up and down and everything in between.

Nevertheless, if you are a Christian then, by the grace of God, you will continue to put one foot in front of the next. Because, according to Jesus:

the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 24:13 ESV)

If you've been a Christian for any length of time, then you have shared the sad experience of watching someone that you love – someone who once worshipped beside you – abandon their faith. Life got hard. Sin looked easy. And they were gone.

The narrow road is frequently abandoned.

The cross that is taken up one day is laid down the next.

The seed that sprouts and even shoots up for a season is choked out by the surrounding vines.

But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Endurance matters, and in our text for this morning, we will catch a glimpse of the kind of faith that endures. To that end, look with me to Psalm 40. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
²He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
³He 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.
⁴Blessed is the man who makes
the Lord his trust,
who does not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after a lie!
⁵You have multiplied, O Lord my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you!
I will proclaim and tell of them,
yet they are more than can be told.
⁶In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted,
but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.

⁷Then I said, “Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:
⁸I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart.”
⁹I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
behold, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O Lord.
¹⁰I 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.
¹¹As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain
your mercy from me;
your steadfast love and your faithfulness will
ever preserve me!
¹²For 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.
¹³Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me!
O Lord, make haste to help me!
¹⁴Let 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!
¹⁵Let those be appalled because of their shame
who say to me, “Aha, Aha!”
¹⁶But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, “Great is the Lord!”
¹⁷As 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! (Psalm 40:1-17 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Life consists of a series of ups and downs – a series of hills and valleys. Psalm 40 is a prayer that was written *from* and written *for* those “down days.” David is in the valley as he writes this Psalm. However, he has CONFIDENCE that the bright days will return because he’s *been through this*

cycle before. He's been up, and down, and back up, and now he's back down but he knows what comes next.

That's a general survey of what we find in this prayer: David is looking back with gratitude and those memories are filling him with the faith to look forward with great expectation!

As we consider this Psalm, I want to share with you something that Martin Luther once said:

We must not simply read or sing the Psalms, as if they did not concern us; but we must read and sing them for this purpose, that we may be improved by them, may have our faith strengthened, and our hearts comforted amid all sorts of necessities. For the Psalter is nothing else than a school and exercise for our heart and mind, to the end, that we may have our thoughts and inclinations turned into the same channel. ¹

Let that be our approach this morning. As we study through this passage – as we enroll ourselves in the school of Psalm 40 – we should expect to be improved. And, in particular this morning, we should expect to develop the kind of faith that endures.

Faith That Endures

My dad is a wise man, and he always said, “Life is hard, and then you die.” Now, he doesn't write hallmark cards, but he tells the truth. Life IS hard. Some seasons more so than others. Therefore, if that IS our lot in this broken world, then what can we do *now* to bolster ourselves for the storms that will inevitably come?

Now, I know that ultimately it is God who keeps me. “He will hold me fast.” We sing that. I know that. But I also know that there are an awful lot of people who thought that they were saved – who thought that their faith was real – who were then swept away at the first sign of hardship. I want a faith that endures, but what does that look like? First, faith that endures:

1. Remembers all that God has done

Look with me again at verses 1-3:

¹ Martin Luther as quoted by W.S. Plumer, *Psalms* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2016), 25.

I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
²He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
³He 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. (Psalm 40:1-3 ESV)

Now, I want you to notice that David is not describing his *present* circumstances in these opening verses. The verbs are all in the past tense. “I waited.” “He inclined.” David is *remembering*.

But remembering what? The inscription above this Psalm teaches us nothing about the circumstances that David is referring to here. And I would argue that this was intentional. As one commentator notes:

The psalms are purposefully vague in reference to historical events so that they can be used in a variety of situations. ²

So, in Psalm 40, David is in some sort of *unspecified trouble*. It would be easy for him to succumb to hopelessness, but David’s not going to do that, because he remembers that he’s been here before. He’s been in the bottom of the pit. He had to wait – he remembers that. He was sinking into the mire of his circumstances and the waiting felt like it would never end.

And yet, at just the right time, God inclined – the word has the sense of leaning in – and He heard David’s cry! He was lifted out of his dark and hopeless circumstances and his feet were set on a firm foundation! He was safe! He was secure! He learned how to sing again! It was such an amazing deliverance that the people who saw it couldn’t help but fear the Lord who had so powerfully worked! In these opening verses, David is living in that memory!

² Tremper Longman III, *How To Read The Psalms*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 27.

But, as we will see later on in the text, David is back in the pit again. Life is hard again. The season of waiting is upon him again. His faith is being tested, and the first thing that David does is he looks BACK at God's powerful intervention in the past!

And there's something instructional in that. If you want to be a person who endures, then you need to grow to become a person who remembers. When you're not sure how God is going to see you through to tomorrow, it helps to remember how He delivered you through yesterday.

When is the last time that you really stopped to reflect on the person that you were without Christ? Do you remember the pit? Do you remember that sinking feeling? Do you remember the hopelessness? The loneliness? The face that you put on for the world? The people that you hurt? The addiction that enslaved you? The guilt that isolated you?

Do you remember crying out for God? Lying in bed at night? Lying on that bathroom floor? Kneeling at that altar?

And He didn't leave you there, did He? You cried out, and you waited patiently, and He answered!

He pulled you up out of that pit – you thought it was all but impossible, but He did it! He put your feet on the rock! He broke the chains of that addiction, and He gave you a new heart! He taught you a new song! Suddenly, your life was for Him! He became your delight! He became your joy!

Everything changed!

Do you remember?

It's important that you do.

Faith that endures is faith that remembers. That's why God instituted the annual Passover for the Israelites. It was a time to remember the way that they had been delivered out of slavery in Egypt. It's why Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper for the church. It's a time to remember that Jesus lived the perfect life that we could not live and that he died on the cross as a substitute for our sins so that we could have everlasting life! Left to our own carelessness, we would forget. We're so often immersed in the now or fretting about the future.

But wisdom remembers to look back.

Remember the pit. Remember the deliverance. God hasn't changed, and He is still holding you. Faith that endures remembers all that God has done. Second, faith that endures:

2. Responds with gratitude and worship

This sincere, public response of gratitude is what we find in verses 9-10. Look there again:

⁹I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
behold, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O Lord.
¹⁰I 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. (Psalm 40:9-10 ESV)

When God pulled David out of that pit, David exploded with praise! He didn't hide it. He told the whole congregation!

Real faith is thankful faith! Gratitude is good for the soul, and it stirs up faith for the future. And it doesn't just stir up your faith, by the way. As you respond in obedience and worship – as you share with your friends and bear testimony to the church about what God has done – you bolster EVERYONE'S faith for the storms ahead.

I hope and pray that we will see even more of that in our midst. In our corporate gatherings and in our fellowship throughout the week, let's be more intentional about celebrating the amazing things that God has done! Let the couple in crisis hear about the marriage that has been delivered! Let the infertile couple hear from the couple whose prayers were finally answered! Let the young man who's bound in addiction hear about the brother who's been clean for five years!

Let us rejoice with those who rejoice! Gratitude builds and bolsters faith for the whole congregation!

And I want you to notice something important in verses 6-8. Look there with me:

⁶In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted,
but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.
⁷Then I said, “Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:
⁸I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart.” (Psalm 40:6-8 ESV)

No sacrifice was required, but it would have been appropriate – if not expected – for King David to offer one on an occasion like this. Yet, that’s not what he did, and he draws our attention to that fact. He wants us to see that he offered MORE than a sacrifice, because he knows that God deserves more than a sacrifice. David offered obedience! He offered a heart that delighted to obey God’s law!

David remembered how his predecessor Saul had gotten it all wrong. If you are an RMM reader, then you read this story over this past week. God had commanded Saul to wipe out the Amalekites, but Saul spared the king and the best of the livestock and brought them back with him to camp. When he was confronted by Samuel about what he had done, he had a “righteous” excuse. He said: “The people spared the best of the sheep to sacrifice to the LORD your God!” But God saw right through Saul’s charade, and He spoke through the prophet Samuel and said:

Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the Lord?
Behold, **to obey is better than sacrifice,**
and **to listen than the fat of rams.** (1 Samuel 15:22 ESV)

David understood this. David was living under the Old Covenant, but he understood that God was never only after a mere sacrifice. A right response to God requires a transformed heart – a heart that DELIGHTS to do God’s will.

This Psalm is quoted in Hebrews 10 to make exactly that argument. There, the Apostle explains that the sacrificial system was not an end in and of itself. The blood of bulls and goats couldn’t *actually* do anything about the sins of God’s people. The sacrificial system was a shadow of that which it pointed forward to: Jesus Christ – the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Now, we could dedicate an entire sermon to that – in fact we did when we preached through Leviticus – but this morning I want us to see the thrust of what David is saying here. He’s saying that God’s deliverance was SO great, and it filled him with SO much gratitude that no mere sacrifice would do! David is saying, “Forget the goat offering, I am putting myself on the altar! My life – my obedience – my love – it is ALL yours!” That’s what David is saying here, and it sounds an awful lot like something else we read this week, doesn’t it? In Romans 12, after the Apostle Paul has been reminding us of the glory of the gospel, he charges us:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Romans 12:1 ESV)

THAT is the kind of faith that endures! Enduring faith responds with gratitude and worship. And finally, faith that endures:

3. Resolves to trust God – even in the valley

As I mentioned off the top, David is writing this Psalm while in the valley. The deliverance was *past tense*. That was yesterday. But today, David is in need once again. And we learn a bit about David’s present need in verse 12. Look there with me now:

¹²For 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. (Psalm 40:12 ESV)

What we learn here is that, whatever these present troubles are that David is facing, they are in some part the result of David’s sin. As Bible scholar Derek Kidner notes here:

Whatever had been the ‘miry bog’ of verse 2, the present troubles are largely of David’s own making, which are catching up with him now ³

So, David is sitting in the valley again, and in many ways, he knows that he brought this upon himself. We don’t know for sure when he wrote this Psalm, but there’s a very good chance that he

³ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 160.

wrote it while he was fleeing from his son, Absalom. I told you this story just a few months ago, but to be brief, David had been chased off of the throne and out of the capital city of his kingdom by his own son. It was a painful mutiny. But that mutiny was set in motion by David's own sin. He had failed as a father, and his failure eventually caught up with him. Now, I won't retell that story because we just heard it a few months ago and because we don't know for certain that this Psalm was written in that period. But what we do know is that this Psalm was written in a situation *like* that.

David is suffering, and that suffering is a consequence of past sin. Not all of our suffering can be traced back to sin, but an awful lot of it can.

Words spoken long ago in the heat of the moment have been confessed and forgiven, but they still play on repeat in your spouse's mind.

Years of hypocrisy and putting God third or fourth in the home have been confessed and forgiven, but the children departed from the faith and mom and dad can't shake the feeling that they share the blame.

The years of pornography addiction have been confessed and forgiven, but the rewiring of the brain and the insecurity in your spouse still spoil some of the sweetness of the marriage bed.

The years of alcoholism have long been confessed and forgiven, but the doctor says that the damage you've done to your liver will rob you of years with your grandchildren.

Now, I'll say it again because I want to be clear: Not all suffering is the result of our sin. But some of it is. Sin is easy, but it is never cheap. Here, in Psalm 40, David is living in that reality – enduring a season of suffering that was largely his fault.

Worse than that, there were people in David's life who were thrilled to see him in the pit. We find them in verses 13-15. They were delighting in his downfall and laughing about his circumstances.

But here's what we need to see this morning: Even though he was in the pit again – even though his suffering was largely his fault this time – even though he felt as if he was surrounded by

accusers who were happy to see his downfall – David had hope! David resolved to trust God – no matter what. Look again at verse 11:

As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain
your mercy from me;
your steadfast love and your faithfulness will
ever preserve me! (Psalm 40:11 ESV)

David is saying: “This pit won’t be the end of me! You won’t leave me here! These troubles won’t have the final word! Those enemies won’t laugh forever! You have preserved me in the past, and you will see me through this storm once again!”

Therefore, even though he was in the valley once again, David could end this Psalm with these words of confidence:

¹⁷As 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! (Psalm 40:17 ESV)

Maybe you’re here, and – like David – you are once again in a pit of your own making. Let the word of God speak to you this morning: The Lord takes thought for you.

This isn’t the first time you’ve been in such a pit. That’s where we all started! We were all dead in our sin!

But he rescued us! He set our feet on the rock!

But, now you’re in the pit again. The consequences have billowed over you like a wave. But if the Lord is your Help – if He is your Deliverer – then you need to remember that there is no pit too deep!

Confess your sin. Lament your circumstances. Cry out to Him! And then, wait patiently for the Lord. As one old puritan reminds us:

Patient waiting is a very difficult duty, but it is essential to Christian character and comfort⁴

Redeemer, there are stormy days ahead. There are valleys and even pits. I would be lying to you if I said otherwise.

But I would also be lying if I didn't tell you that there is glory on the other side of that adversity! If the Lord is your shepherd – if you have surrendered your life to Jesus Christ – then there is everlasting life at the end of this dark tunnel! Therefore, RESOLVE to trust! RESOLVE to stand firm! RESOLVE to endure! Because, as Jesus said:

the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 24:13 ESV)

I'm going to close this morning with a reading from Lamentations 3. If you're using the reading plan, we read this on Friday. The Israelites were in captivity in Babylon. They were suffering the consequences of their sin. They were waiting. And from that place, these words were written:

Remember my affliction and my wanderings,
the wormwood and the gall!

²⁰My soul continually remembers it
and is bowed down within me.

²¹But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:

²²The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;

²³they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

²⁴“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”

²⁵The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul who seeks him.

²⁶**It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.** (Lamentations 3:19-26 ESV)

It is good. Painful? Yes. Difficult? There are no words to describe how difficult it can be at times. Nevertheless, it is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. Let's pray together.

⁴ William S. Plumer, *Psalms* (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 2016), 483.