

Summer in the Psalms: The Pit
 Psalm 40
 ABC 8/7/22

There are portions of Scripture that need long introductions & others that need very little. Ps 40 is in the 2nd category. It tells of David who was stuck in a pit but then was rescued by God, who set his feet on a rock & gave him a firm place to stand. David was the beloved king of Israel, who reigned powerfully & well for 40 years. He was anointed, installed, blessed, & approved by God, who called him **a man after His own heart** (1 Sam 13:14). David had a close relationship with God & wrote almost ½ the psalms. & yet even he experienced being mired down in a pit from which he was unable to escape when God rescues him he sings God's praise for doing so. But he didn't then live happily ever after. It's evident he's in another pit, crying out to the Lord to deliver him (11-17). Because David waited intently on the Lord to rescue him from the 1st pit, he knew how to wait on the Lord to get him out of the next one. If you've ever been in the pits, & we all have, this is a psalm for you.

1. Looking Backward¹ 1-2

David begins by giving a joyful report of his past experience of God's deliverance. He reflected upon a time when he **waited patiently for the Lord** in great distress. He was trapped & couldn't escape. Perhaps it was a pit of personal **sin** (12; 2 Sam 11), adversity (1 Sam 18:10-17; 23:15-29), family difficulty (2 Sam 15-18), emotional distress (2 Sam 18:19-33), or even a literal pit dug by an enemy (Ps 7:15).² He looks back to it & tells us what he learned. It's always good to look back & recall the goodness of the Lord. David remembered how long he'd waited before the Lord delivered him but the day came when God inclined His ear, heard his cries, & lifted him up from the pit. Imagine being in a literal pit. In Jer 38 there's a time when Jeremiah is thrown into a cistern because of his unpopular prophecies about the fall of Jerusalem. It's a grim story. The cistern was empty of water but the bottom was filled with the accumulated mud of centuries so that Jeremiah sank down into the muck. He would have died there if a foreigner hadn't interceded for him with

¹ Outline taken from Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms 1-72*, p 142

² Steven Lawson, *Psalms 1-75*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 11, Holman Old Testament Commentary, p211

the king, who told him to take 30 men & draw Jeremiah out of the well with ropes (Jer 38:1–13). Jeremiah was in the mud & mire of a pit quite literally, but there's no reason to think of David's **pit** as anything more than a metaphor of a time in his life in which circumstances had trapped him. His life was in the pits. It's probably good we don't know the actual event that caused this because we can more easily picture our own pit here. David's in the pit & what does he do? He **waited patiently for the Lord**. Waiting on the Lord is a common theme in Scripture. For example, Ps 37:7 says, **Rest in the Lord & wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers...** Vs 9 continues, **For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land.** & then vs 34 adds, **Wait for the Lord & keep His way, & He will exalt you to inherit the land...** David didn't *let go & let God*. No, he grabbed hold of God's promises & refused to let go of them. He entrusted to God the timing & outcome. You know you're biblically waiting when you're not fretting & are actively believing & keeping His ways. Literally, it says here, *Waiting, I waited*. It's been translated, **I waited, waited for the Lord** (NEB). The doubling of the word notes that he waited diligently, intensely, & patiently until God answers him. It's not a passive, ho-hum kind of waiting, like you do at the doctor's office when you thumb through old magazines to pass the time. This is an intently active time when your situation in the pit tunes your heart to the Lord in ways you wouldn't normally experience. It means to wait expectantly for God's promises to be fulfilled on your behalf. The more intense your situation, the more intently you wait upon the Lord. David wrote about an experience similar to this one in Ps 69:1-3, saying,

Save me, O God, For the waters have threatened my life. I have sunk in deep mire, & there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, & a flood overflows me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched; My eyes fail while I wait for my God.

Ever been there? That's where David was. He was trapped & unable to free himself. Your pit could be your own sinfulness, poor health, the loss of your job, friends that turn against you, an unfaithful mate, rebellious children, or any other overwhelming problem. Anything that causes a sense of helplessness or desperation & threatens to ruin your life or take it away, that is like David's pit. You may be responsible for being in your pit or you may be a victim of the sins of others. Whatever the pit, God graciously intervened, rescuing David, raising him & placing his **feet on a rock**. This

gave him **a firm place to stand**. From the sinking sand & silt of the pit, David was placed by the Lord on solid stone.³ David looks back at this experience & encourages patient waiting & praying, trusting that God will hear & respond to our cry for His help. Maybe you're here today & you've dug yourself a hole financially & it's hard to see how you'll ever get out. Maybe you're drowning in sorrows or struggles. Maybe you're in a pit of sin you know is destructive. It's time to call upon the Lord. Ps 40 begins with this vivid picture of God bending down to hear the cry for help out of the pits. When we wait patiently on God, He takes us from the mire to the choir, from sinking to singing. Vs 3 says, **He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God**. Waiting turns to worship & David sees it wasn't just about him. **Many will see & fear & will trust in the Lord**. God brought him through this trial for others as well. David's testimony of his own difficult & seemingly hopeless circumstances is that God heard him, turned to him, noticed his plight, heard his cry, lifted him out of the pit, set his feet on a rock, giving him a firm place to stand, & God placed a new song of praise in his mouth.⁴

2. Looking Upward Next, David looks up. **4**

When you're in a pit, it's very easy, even if you profess to trust God, to grab onto any seeming way of escape, even if it means compromising your faith. You look at your circumstances & not at your God. King Asa is an example of a good man who fell into this trap. He was a good king who instituted many reforms in Judah. When a million-man army invaded Judah, Asa called out to God & affirmed his trust in God alone to deliver them (2 Chron 14:2-12). But many years later, after a long reign that God blessed, when the king of Israel came up against him, Asa called upon the king of Syria & enlisted his help against Israel. His plan worked. The king of Israel had to abandon his invasion of Judah to defend his northern flank. However, a prophet rebuked Asa for relying on the king of Syria instead of relying on the Lord (2 Chron 16:7-9). Asa wasn't looking upward & his final days were plagued with painful foot disease. But 2 Chron 16:12 reports, **yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians**. It's not that it's wrong to go to doctors, but it is wrong

³ Steven Lawson, *Psalms 1-75*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 11, Holman Old Testament Commentary, p 211

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1-41: An Expository Commentary*, pp 349-350

to trust in doctors if your primary trust is not in the Lord. The point here isn't that doctors are bad, but that it's bad to make a doctor your God, to think that healing is from the doctor alone. Whatever benefit comes through physicians comes from the Lord & therefore His help is to be sought. Ps 118:8-9 says, **It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to take trust in princes.** Or as Ps 146 puts it:

Do not trust in princes, in mortal man, in whom there is no salvation. His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. How blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is the Lord his God (3–5).

When you're in the pit, don't just cry out to anybody, look up & cry out to God. If you think, *Oh no, God has abandoned me! I'm doomed!* you'll either panic or turn to the world for help. But if you turn to & think about God's many wonders & how He's worked in the past to deliver His people, you'll wait with expectant hope in Him. As David waits on the Lord, he thinks about who God is & what He has done. He says, **5**.

I'm sure his thoughts included the many wonderful acts of God delivering His people from trouble. He brought them out of Egypt. He preserved them in the wilderness. He enabled them to conquer the Canaanite nations & occupy the Land. On a personal level, David had seen God deliver him from the bear & the lion, not to mention from Goliath & from Saul's repeated attempts to kill him. As David considered his past, he concluded, **many, O Lord my God, are the wonders which you have done.** If you've known the Lord for any length of time, you can think back to many times when you were in a pit & God delivered you. So as you wait on Him now in whatever pit you may be in, recount His many wonders & His kind thoughts toward you. Truly, there is none to compare with Him! When will He answer & rescue? In His time which is the right time. That's all we can know & that is enough.

3. Looking Inward In vss 6-8 David looks inward. **6-8**

In context, the thought is, *My heart is full of Your abundant goodness towards me. How can I express it? In times past, I might have thought that an offering was the proper thing to do. But now I realize that what You really desire is an obedient heart that delights to do Your will.*⁵ David

⁵ JJS Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, p 335

is affirming what Samuel told King Saul in 1 Sam 15:22. **Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings & sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, & to heed than the fat of rams.** The words **behold, I come** (7) have been taken to indicate that David is offering himself as a sacrifice in place of an animal, but it's more likely David is placing himself at God's disposal (Is 6:8). Instead of animal sacrifices, God wants servants who will listen to Him & surrender to Him as a willing slave surrenders to his master (Rom 12:1-2). The Hebrew text of Ps 40:6 is literally, *My ears You have dug*. The idea is that God opened David's ears so he'd be obedient to His Word, which was in David's heart. Whatever the Word of God required, David pledged to do it. Thus he wrote, **I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart** (8). In other words, David pledged to obey God's **law** with a willing heart. To obey God was his delight. Ps 42 illustrates looking inward & speaking to yourself, preaching to your soul: **Why are you in despair, O my soul? & why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence** (5). Again in Ps 103:2-4, **Bless the Lord, O my soul, & forget none of His benefits, who pardons all your iniquities... who redeems your life from the pit....** You need to preach those truths to yourself. Tell your soul to bless the Lord for reaching down to rescue you from your sins & redeem you from the pit. The application for us is that when we're in a pit, we must focus on continuing to obey the Lord, even if He doesn't deliver us quickly. The devil will tempt us to give up trusting God & to seek fulfillment in other ways. He'll whisper, *God isn't meeting your needs. Try it my way instead*. Instead, look inward & keep obeying God's Word as you wait for God to answer. Can you truly say **vs 8**?

4. Looking Outward (9-11) David didn't keep the goodness of God to himself but looked outward as well. **9-10**

He didn't hold back the good news from other believers. He didn't restrain his lips from speaking of deliverance, salvation, righteousness, & vs 10 seems to say it started 1st in his own heart. He didn't keep it to himself but proclaimed it to others. We need to tell other believers as well as unbelievers. If someone rescued you from death this week, you'd tell everyone. If God has

delivered you from the pit, tell people your story. If God has pulled you out of despair, discouragement, or depression, then tell others about it & about Who rescued you. **11**

Though David praised God for past & present deliverance, he wouldn't presume upon the future. He kept himself in humble prayer before God, asking for a constant supply of His tender mercies.

5. Looking Around Corresponding to the look upward to God, David now looks around at his enemies. **12-15**

Just as the blessings of God were too many to declare (5), here it's the troubles that are without number. David had been in a situation so hopeless that he could only describe it as being in a slimy, muddy pit. He had waited for God, & God had delivered him. Yet now, even though he's been delivered from great trouble, as stated in vss 1-3, he still continues to have trouble & needs further help.⁶ David needs deliverance again. He found himself in another miry pit & again called out to the Lord. The difference now was that the present trial was at least partially of David's own making. My **sins have overtaken me**, he acknowledged. He was suffering **troubles without number** as the direct result of his own iniquity. In fact, his **troubles** were **more than the hairs** of his **head**. This admission showed that David had a proper view of God's **righteousness** (10) & was now able to see his own sinfulness. Not only is he faced with his own sins, there are also those who seek to kill him. They wish him evil & taunt him. So David calls upon God to go into battle on his behalf. He asks that his enemies be **turned back & dishonored** (14). **Let them be ashamed.... Let them be appalled because of their shame**. With urgency He cried out, **O Lord, come quickly to help me**. God was his only source of **salvation**. Although David waited patiently on the Lord (1), he found himself asking the Lord to **make haste**. David didn't seek to bring his own vengeance upon his enemies. Instead, he waited on the Lord to judge those who sought to take his life.

6. Looking Forward 16-17

Those who **seek** the Lord will **rejoice & be glad** in Him. This was an effect produced by God's answer to David's prayer. He knew he had no help but God. In this context, seeking the Lord is a synonym for crying out to Him in expectant prayer. If you're seeking the Lord & not just deliverance from

⁶ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1-41: An Expository Commentary*, p 352

your pit, you won't forget about God after He delivers you. Sadly, many think of God like a genie in a bottle. When they're in a pit, they reach out to Him & then put Him back on the shelf when they get what they want. But here, the reason David waits on the Lord & seeks Him is so that God will **be magnified**. If David turned to some human scheme for deliverance, then David & his ingenuity would get the credit. By seeking the Lord alone, when the Lord answers, The Lord gets the credit. Those who love the rescue, deliverance, & salvation of God have a God-appointed mission: they are to say continually, **The Lord be magnified!** *Magnify* is an ambiguous word. You can magnify with microscopes & you can magnify with telescopes. If you magnify with a microscope, you make something small look large. But if you magnify with a telescope, you make something large stop looking small & look more like it really is. The wonders of the night sky don't appear as they really are. They seem small & not very bright. So we must magnify them. That's what a telescope is for. Not to make them look bigger than they are. But to help us, in our weakness, to stop thinking of them as small & show us how great they really are. Without a telescope, people either ignore the stars or maybe look up & think, *Twinkle, twinkle little star. Little star?* With a telescope, we know that many of those stars are anything but little. They dwarf our own sun, making it look like a speck of dust by comparison. We're to make God look as He really is & help people see what He's really like. We exist to say continually, to live continually, to show continually, **The Lord be magnified**. This is to be done **continually**. Make this the theme of your life. Make it the melody of your songs. Make it the banner over all your activity. Make it the rallying cry of your gatherings. Make it the meaning of your homes, the aim of your parenting, the design of your marriage, & the goal of your vocation. Say continually, **The Lord be magnified**. If your mission is to magnify the Lord then you rejoice in Him. He is magnified in you when you are satisfied in Him. That's our message. That's our life.⁷

No doubt, David was rejoicing & glad about his deliverance when it came, but he makes the point here to rejoice & be glad in the Lord in the midst of it. The joy isn't just in the deliverance, but in the Lord who delivers. It means finding God as our eternal treasure, so that we rejoice in all that

⁷ John Piper, desiringgod.org/messages/let-all-who-seek-thee-rejoice-and-be-glad-in-thee-let-those-who-love-thy-salvation-say-continually-the-lord-be-magnified

He is, as well as in all that He does for us. He ended the psalm by restating the urgency of this prayer: **Do not delay, O my God** (17).

Verse 13 begins with an urgent plea which finds its counterpart in the closing vs of the psalm. The God with whom the psalmist pleads to **make haste ... to help me** (13) is the God who in vs 17 is described as **You are my help**. The words **to deliver me** (13) are picked up in the description of God in vs 17 as **my deliverer**. The psalm ends where it began, in personal experience, with the psalmist in his human frailty & need, **I am afflicted & needy**, reaching out to the One whom he has good reason to know as **my God**.⁸

When you're in the pit, wait patiently on the Lord. Don't turn to the world for answers. Turn to the Lord. Waiting on Him means crying out to Him; trusting Him; recounting His many wonders; obeying Him; seeking Him; & rejoicing in Him. If you haven't yet realized it, life is one long trouble. Should we be surprised at this? Hardly! Ours is a sinful, evil world. Jesus said, **In the world you have tribulation. But, He added, take courage; I have overcome the world** (Jn 16:33). That's worth remembering, isn't it? Troubles, yes. Pessimism, no. There can be no pessimism for us, because Jesus has overcome the world & we're now destined to be more than conquerors in Him. I think that's exactly what David felt as he got to the end of this psalm. He's asking God for help, but he isn't discouraged. The tone is optimistic because of his former deliverance by God. & the ending ties in with the beginning in another way too. At the start he's waiting patiently for God. Here at the end he is still waiting, knowing that future deliverances will come. Troubled, needy, & in a pit? Yes, but we know that the Lord is our help. We confess it: **You are my help & my deliverer**. We ask, **Do not delay, O my God** (17).⁹

When the Lord rescues you from the pit, proclaim His goodness. David hammers this theme throughout this psalm. In vs 3 he says, **He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; many will see & fear & will trust in the Lord**. In vs 4, David testifies to the blessing that is on the man who makes the Lord his trust. In vs 5, he extols God for His many wonders & His thoughts

⁸ Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, International Theological Commentary, p 136

⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1–41: An Expository Commentary*, pp 352–353

towards us. He does the same in vss 9-10. Why does David repeat himself so frequently & assuredly? Because he knew that if he didn't repeatedly make it plain that the Lord had done great things for him, others would chalk it up to David's good fortune or to his natural abilities. But David wants everyone to know that he was helpless in a **pit of destruction**, sinking in the miry mud. He never could have rescued himself. All he did was cry out to God & wait expectedly for God to deliver him. & when God did rescue him, David made sure that God got all the praise. No Christian is exempt from the pits of life. In fact, it was even true of the sinless Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. It's been said that God had only one Son without sin, but He has no sons without sorrow. God sent His Son to offer Himself obediently on the cross on our behalf, as Ps 40:6-8 predicts, which we'll get to shortly. Since He's delivered us, we're to be like telescopes. We're to magnify the Lord & His great salvation to a world that shrugs Him off, while they waste their lives pursuing pleasure or running after riches that will perish at their deaths. We should also tell others about how the Lord rescued us from our trials, so they'll join us in saying continually, **The Lord be magnified!** PRAY

The author of Hebrews applies Ps 40:6-8 to Jesus (Heb 10:5-7) & quotes the LXX, which translates the 2nd line of vs 6, **my ears You have opened, as a body You have prepared for Me**. This was apparently an interpretive paraphrase, where they used a part, the **ears**, & expanded it to the whole body.¹⁰ Interestingly, these vss appear to be a conversation between the 1st & 2nd members of the **Godhead**. The Son, Jesus Christ, is speaking to the Father, God, & is submitting to the Father's will. He's agreeing to come to the earth & die as a **sacrifice** for many. **Behold I come** (Ps 40:7) implies the idea of a submissive willingness on the part of the Son to the Father's will which is to enter the world in a human body & act as a **sin**-bearer on behalf of all who would believe. When Jesus was ready to be incarnated, standing at the edge of heaven talking to His Father, He acknowledged that His own body was to be the sacrifice that would please God. Jesus' supreme mission on earth was to do His Father's will.

¹⁰ FF Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p 232

In Ps 40:6, **sacrifice** means any animal whose blood was offered at the altar, followed by a communal meal. **Meal offering** was one that accompanied the sacrifices. The **burnt offering** symbolized total dedication to the Lord. & the **sin offering** was given to cover specific offenses & bring reconciliation between the offender & God. All of these were fulfilled in Jesus whose sacrifice on the cross satisfied the justice of God once & for all (Lev 1–7; Heb 10:1–17).¹¹ David wrote, **In the scroll of the book it is written of me** (7). David could say this of himself because his ascension to the throne of Israel was prophesied long before it took place. Yet any fulfillment of this in David is a pale shadow to its amazing & perfect fulfillment in David's greater Son, Jesus the Messiah. David went on to say, **I delight to do Your will, O my God** (8). Again, in a lesser sense this was true of David, the man after God's heart. Yet any fulfillment of this in David is a pale shadow of its amazing & perfect fulfillment in David's greater Son, Jesus the Messiah. Jesus said that doing God's will was to Him as necessary & delightful as food (Jn 4:34). There is a sense in which Jesus could never say, **My iniquities have overtaken Me** (12). He was & is the spotless Lamb of God, without any sin or defect. Yet in another sense those words are perfect in their description of Jesus, because in His sufferings & death He consciously & perfectly identified with His people, taking on their sins as His own. For Jesus, they were **My iniquities**, not because He committed the sins, but because out of love He chose to bear our sins & the wrath they deserved.

While vss 6 & 8 seem clear, what is the meaning of vs 7? **Then I said, 'Behold I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me.'** What would be written of David in some scroll that would determine his coming? While we may puzzle over this vs, it's clear to the author of Hebrews what it means. 1st, in its context the full intent of David's words of the sacrifices is that they aren't adequate to obtain eternal salvation for us. **For it is impossible for the blood of bulls & goats to take away sins** (Heb 10:4). 2nd, these vss become prophetic. It's Jesus who is written of **in the scroll of the book** & it's He who comes to do the will of God (8). In offering Himself for sin, once for all, He simultaneously fulfills & abolishes the OT sacrificial system. Thus vs 7, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, speaks of Jesus & pours ultimate meaning into vss 6–8. God does desire sacrifice,

¹¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Worshipful*, 1st ed., "Be" Commentary Series, p 154

except that it must be sacrifice from the heart. Yet all sacrifices are limited, & God therefore fulfills His own desire & demand by giving His Son as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. This is promised in the OT, in **the scroll of the book**, & fulfilled in Christ who delighted to do the Father's will & who had His law perfectly written on His heart.¹²

Heb 10:18 says, **Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer *any* offering for sin.** The work of sacrifice is done. There will be no more. Forgiveness is already provided for those who trust in this One perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ. That's what we remember as we come to communion. PRAY PASS

After saying above, **"SACRIFICES & OFFERINGS & WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS & *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE *in them*"** (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, **"BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL."** He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb 10:8-10).

We eat of the bread remembering **we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, **SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD**, waiting from that time onward **UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET.** For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (Heb 10:11-12, 14).

We drink of the cup remembering the **one sacrifice** Jesus made, His death in our place & thank Him for it.

¹² Donald Williams & Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Psalms 1–72*, vol. 13, The Preacher's Commentary Series, p 321