

My first two grandchildren just had their 5th and 3rd birthdays on the 17th and 20th of May. Norah's was first, which made Seth's three-day wait interminable. "My birthday is taking sooo long!" Waiting is hard. Apparently, the average human spends 6 months of their life waiting in line, and 43 days waiting on the phone listening to Muzak. Ugh! In our Story of Everything, Andrew left off last week with the anointing of King David in 1 Samuel 16. When he preaches next he will cover 2 Samuel 7 shortly after David takes the throne. In other words many challenging years go by before David actually becomes King and we, as readers, see these parallel lives of Israel's first kings: the fall of Saul, and the rise of David. Not surprisingly waiting is an important theme in many of David's psalms and we will look at one today – Psalm 40, from which we can learn how to wait purposefully and faithfully.

Sermon Text: Psalm 40

*1 I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
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.
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.
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!
5 You 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.
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.
7 Then I said, "Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:
8 I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart."
9 I have told the glad news of deliverance[b]
in the great congregation;
behold, I have not restrained my lips,*

Waiting in the Lord – Psalm 40
CBC Ilderton

Rev. G. S. Prickett
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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.
11 As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain
your mercy from me;
your steadfast love and your faithfulness will
ever preserve me!
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.
13 Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me!
O Lord, make haste to help me!
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!"
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!"
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!

1) Wait upon the Lord (vv1-3)

"I waited patiently". How many of us wait patiently? Actually, I am not sure David finds it easy either. This is a difficult Hebrew phrase to get just right. Literally, we would say, "In waiting, I waited." This doubling of the word emphasizes the waiting. But this is not a passive waiting. It is a waiting that requires diligence and perseverance. Waiting has been a theme in many of the psalms to this point, for example 25 and 27. Perhaps especially Psalm 37, which is followed by the painful exercise of waiting in Psalms 38 and 39. We come to Psalm 40 and the tone lifts. David waits for the Lord who, "*inclined to me and heard my cry.* (1b)" What a beautiful picture this is of the Lord as David senses the Lord leaning over him and listening to his cry. Do we not do this instinctively as parents? Yesterday, my recently turned three-year-old grandson had a bad fall and broke his arm. He was



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in shock and pain, and Hannah did what comes naturally to us parents: she leaned over and held him close. This also speaks to the nearness of the Lord. In the pit it is easy to forget his nearness.

What does the Lord do? David says,

“He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog.”

What is David referring to? Honestly, I don’t know. It is certainly serious. The words and imagery suggest near death: pit of destruction, miry bog. A deep, dark, slimy pit. It is not unusual for the bible to speak of a general situation rather than specific. Specific details can sometimes distance us from the intended application. We say, well that is not what I am going through. But all of us have felt overwhelmed, like we are in a slippery, dark, pit and try as we might we cannot get our footing – we cannot drag ourselves out. If you haven’t experienced this, let me encourage you, you just aren’t old enough yet! Paul does this for our benefit too. In 2 Corinthians 12 he speaks of a “thorn in the flesh”. Whatever it was it must have been serious. He pleaded with the Lord three times, and the Lord said, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* I cannot tell you how many times in my life I have been encouraged by these words knowing his grace is also sufficient for me. So, I think the Lord often leaves out the specific details such that we allow these general principles to minister to our specific needs.

David says, *“He drew me up.”* If we are to rescue someone from a slimy pit, we best not get into the pit with them. We keep ourselves on the firm ground and drop the hand or rope of deliverance to them.

“and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.” How significant is the Lord’s salvation! Down my feet sunk in the miry bog, but now my feet are set upon a rock and my steps are sure and secure. I was lost, now I am found. I was blind, now I can see. From the mire to the rock. This is the testimony of the Lord’s salvation. I love how quickly David turns our attention to the Lord. Do you find our testimonies and prayer requests can get stuck in the mire of the mire. We spend more time talking about the problem than trusting in the Lord. David doesn’t do this story is about what the Lord has done. The Lord inclined, the Lord heard, the Lord drew up, the Lord set, the Lord makes.

This beautiful picture of salvation, and its reality to David, immediately brings his testimony to praise:

“He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.” Perhaps literally a new song, or perhaps, a new understanding or appreciation for an old one. Either way, David praises his God and deliverer. And what happens?



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“Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.” We expect him to say hear wouldn’t we – that many would *hear* these songs of praise? But no, David says many will *see* and fear. Partly because there is Hebrew wordplay between see and fear that we cannot translate in the English, but also because it reflects that truth that God’s salvation is on display for others to see. What he has done in our lives, and our life of thanksgiving and praise, is a display for others to ‘see’ and ‘hear’. The blessings and graces experienced by the one are meant to be the blessings and graces of the many. In a significant way, what one member has, is shared by all. Can we be this kind of congregation, inside and outside these walls? The kind of congregation that rejoices with those who rejoice as well as sorrow with those who sorrow? To rejoice in someone else’s deliverance from the pit when we, perhaps, are still praying from our own takes deep trust. And therefore, David moves on to the importance of trust.

2) Thank him for the blessings of protection (vv4-5)

*“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 toward us;
none can compare with you!
I will proclaim and tell of them,
yet they are more than can be told.”*

There is a story about a traveler who fell into a deep pit and couldn’t get out. Several people came along and saw him struggling in the pit. The sensitive person said, “I feel for you down there.” The scientific person said, “it’s logical that someone would fall into the pit.” The aesthetic person said, “I can give you ideas on how to decorate your pit.” The judgmental person said, “only bad people fall into a pit.” The analytical person said, “help me measure the depth of your pit.” The curious person said, “tell me how you fell into the pit.” The perfectionist said, “I believe you deserve your pit.” The accountant said, “tell me, are you paying taxes on this pit.” The self-pitying person said, “you should have seen my pit.” The new-ager said, “just relax and don’t think about the pit.” The optimist said, “cheer up! things could be worse.” The pessimist said, “be prepared! things will get worse.”

When you are in a pit, who are you listening to?

“Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust.” This echoes Ps 1 and the description of the blessed man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor



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stands in the path of sinners, nor sits with the scornful – his delight in in the law of the Lord. In Ps 40 he now speaks of the multiplied wondrous deeds and thoughts for us. Do you ever consider this? The Lord has thoughts toward you. His thoughts toward you are wonderful because they're his thoughts! The same God who created and sustains the universe! And his thoughts toward you are wonderful because they can't be numbered. One gracious thought after another after another, faster than light streams from the sun. David cannot help but proclaim them even though they are more than can ever be told. This reminds me of John who finishes his gospel with: *"Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."* He couldn't possibly write of all Jesus did, but write of some of it he must: *"these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."* What a privilege we have to speak of what we can speak of, our testimony, the wondrous deeds and thoughts of the Lord for us! We do so that others would see and hear, and that they would believe and have life in his name. Do you rehearse the blessing of the Lord's protection in your life? We had a habit at bedtime with our children to encourage them to say for what they were thankful. It is a great exercise, and one I could stand to do more of myself!

Having waited upon the Lord and reflected upon the Lord's deeds and thoughts toward him he considers his own response. Look with me at verses 6 to 8.

3) Offer ourselves as living sacrifices. (vv6-8)

*In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted,
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 delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart."*

We might wonder didn't God ordain these sacrifices? David is not against these offerings per se, but it is like he is saying, how am I to respond to these innumerable blessings in my life? Am I to just leave an animal at the altar out of duty? No, he recognizes that the sacrificial system was never meant to be mere duty, but the outworking of a devoted heart. This was the condemnation of Saul, and perhaps the primary difference between Israel's first two kings. To Saul, Samuel said: *"Has the Lord a 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 Sam 15:22)"* Sadly, disobedience marked all of Saul's life. It is common today as well, a sort of tit-for-tat religion. Like we can negotiate with God: "If I do this, you must do that."

But hear David's heart: "you have given me an open ear", or "you have dug out my ears." Though an obvious contrast to Saul, David humbly acknowledges the Lord: it is he who opened his ears to hear and obey him. Devotion to the Lord means not just presenting a sacrifice but presenting himself: "Behold, I have come", like Isaiah saying to the Lord, "Here I am, send me. (Is 6:8)" In his devotion, he delights to conform his will to the Lord's: "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." Don't we know this to be true in our lives? What do we find easiest to do? That which we have a heart for!

These verses, 6-8, are picked up in the NT in Hebrews 10:5-7.

*"Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,
"Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body have you prepared for me;"*

This is how Paul approaches this as well when he says in Romans 12:1 to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice".

Zephaniah 3:17, "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness."

Psalms 147:11, "The Lord takes pleasure in those who hope in his steadfast love."

But David does more than treasure this in his heart for his own sake. Look at verses 9-10:

4) Speak of the Lord's deeds and perfections (vv9-10)

*"I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
behold, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O Lord.
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."*

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, and here is the evidence. David meditates upon the nature and deeds of the Lord, and look at what he proclaims to the congregation. He speaks of: deliverance, faithfulness, salvation, and steadfast love. What would our times of fellowship look like if we practiced this? If we shared the "glad news" of deliverance, and of the Lord's steadfast love and faithfulness. We need to hear each other's stories, the stories of the Lord's deliverance and to hear of the Lord's perfections.

All of this prepares him to go on. David starts the psalm with a note of triumph; the Lord has rescued him from the pit of destruction, and his many thanksgivings flow from this, until verse 11 when the prayer of thanksgiving becomes a prayer of need. What happened – didn't our psalmist get delivered from the pit? Isn't this a picture of life? The Christian life is not one of straight-line glory to ever increasing glory. There are trials along the way that require the devotion and perseverance the Lord has previously worked within us.

5) Prayer for the Lord's perfections (v11)

This imperfect man knows he needs the Lord's perfections: "*don't restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me!*"

Preserve him from what?

6) Dangers within – confession of sin (v12)

*"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."*

Perhaps you can relate to David and you find yourself in that pit of despair, when darkness surrounds, when sin overtakes. Note what he says: he speaks of two things that can't be numbered – the sins of v12, but also the wondrous deeds and blessed thoughts of the Lord toward us. Like the simple but profound chorus we sing: "My sins they are many, his mercies are more".

7) Dangers without – protection from enemies (vv13-16)

We trust in the Lord who protects (remember vv4-5). This is why we remember the Lord and his wondrous deeds and thoughts toward us. This is what forms for us a firm foundation to make our steps firm and secure.

8) The Need of Salvation (v17)

*"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!"*

As David closes, he comes back full circle to salvation. He starts the psalm with a note of triumph because the Lord has heard his cry and rescued him from the pit. He ends with the somber reality of his need of salvation. "I am poor and needy". This is King David, the mighty warrior king, the one who killed the lion and bear,



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the one who faced Goliath and lived to tell about it, the one whom the women of the land sang songs of – Saul slayed his thousands, David his 10's of thousands! What does it take for such a man to say, "I am poor and needy"? One who knows the Lord, who knows intimately of the Lord's greatness and majesty, but also of his tender mercies and care. When we know the Lord as he truly is, we see ourselves as we truly are. Again, he is found waiting: "do not delay, O my God." He knows he will face yet another trial, so he waits, but he waits with confident hope upon the Lord who delivers.

We wait upon the Lord, we root ourselves in his blessed goodness, we offer ourselves, and we speak of his deeds and goodness that many would see and hear.