

Psalm 40 • Making the Lord Your Trust

Introduction

One of the things that happens when crisis enters our life is that, as a test of character, we find out exactly what we trust in most. The degree to which we very quickly or reluctantly turn to God in such times reveals the truth about the quality of our spiritual walk even during those times of peace between each crisis. The fact is that no one is exempt from times of hardship and trial in the course of their life and those who pass such tests proving their abiding trust in Christ are far better off than the rest. In this Psalm David illustrates what it means to follow up one's stated faith with the proper actions from the heart.

¹I waited patiently for the LORD;
And He inclined to me and heard my cry.
²He brought me up out of the pit of
destruction, out of the miry clay,
And He set my feet upon a rock making
my footsteps firm.
³He put a new song in my mouth, a song
of praise to our God;
Many will see and fear
And will trust in the LORD.

[Read v.1-3]

Q: What is the historical context in which David is writing?

A: David is writing about a very personal and horrible experience which he likens to “*the pit of destruction*”, entrenched in “*the miry clay*”. It is David's way of expressing his predicament in a situation with little if any human hope of recovery or rescue.

Q: What did David do in this situation?

A: Obviously he cried out to God who heard him, but it is qualified that he first “*waited patiently for the LORD*”.

Application: A personal test of faith can be very similar to the feeling of being stuck in a pit with no way out. How often in such situations do we exercise **patience** in awaiting a response from God? How does David's initial action to wait patiently differ from our own behavior typically?

Q: What is the poetic contrast in v.2 where one's feet are concerned?

A: Whereas the worldly situation is likened to “*miry clay*”, God's ways are described as “*upon a rock*”. No longer stuck, it describes “*footsteps firm*”.

Q: What are the visible results of God's working in our life according to v.3?

A: “*A song of praise*” and a personal testimony (“*many will see and fear*”).

Application: Personal tests of faith aren't limited to just whether or not we personally respond according to God's ways, but are often used by God in order to publicly testify to others of His working and glory through us.

⁴How blessed is the man who has made
the LORD his trust,
And has not turned to the proud, nor to
those who lapse into falsehood.
⁵Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders
which You have done,
And Your thoughts toward us;
There is none to compare with You.
If I would declare and speak of them,
They would be too numerous to count.

[Read v.4-5]

Q: In v.4 we have a beatitude. What appears to be our options when it comes to where we place our trust?

A: The three options mentioned are “*the LORD*”, “*the proud*”, and “*those who lapse into falsehood*”.

Q: What is probably the defining characteristic which differentiates these three?

A: The truth. Whereas “*the LORD*” is the Author and Source of absolute truth, “*the proud*” describes someone who has substituted the truth with false notions about themselves, and the third group as those who have given themselves over completely to a lie. It's a picture of either being faithful, deceived, or unrepentant according to the standard of God's Word.

Q: How does v.5's declaration of God's thoughts and works contrast to the individual situations mentioned in v.4?

A: God's thoughts from eternity manifested His Word, spoken to result in "the wonders which You have done". To lack the whole truth either through deception or outright rejection of it is to live completely outside the Word of God both in His thoughts toward us and as it comes to fruition in the course of His plan for this world.

Application: The cause for the opening beatitude in v.4 is to make God our trust, knowing that only His thoughts and Word work on our behalf while all others are meant to distract us from the Truth.

⁶Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired;

My ears You have opened;

Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required.

⁷Then I said, "Behold, I 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."

[Read v.6-8]

Q: Why does David list various sacrifices?

A: He is actually describing all four categories associated with the sacrifices in the Law of Moses: burnt offerings, meal offerings, peace offerings, and sin offerings. David is very succinctly summing up the entire Law where sacrifices are concerned.

Q: If God has not desired sacrifices, what then DOES He desire?

A: According to v.5, it begins with a heart dedicated to His Word: "Your Law is within my heart". It's a teaching that ritual observance of the Law can never take precedence over sincere, personal faithfulness from the heart.

Application: What are some "things" which people might believe automatically include them in God's kingdom? (Hint: church attendance, membership, baptism, etc., etc.) What is the greater requirement?

⁹I have proclaimed glad tidings of righteousness in the great congregation;

Behold, I will not restrain my lips, O LORD, You know.

¹⁰I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart;

I have spoken of Your faithfulness and Your salvation;

I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great congregation.

[Read v.9-10]

Q: What are the things to which David testifies concerning God?

A: "Your righteousness", "Your faithfulness", "Your salvation", "Your lovingkindness", and "Your truth".

Q: How does David describe what he has personally done where the public testimony of these things are concerned?

A: "I have proclaimed", "I will not restrain", "I have not hidden", "I have spoken", "I have not concealed".

Application: What was expressed by God privately in v.6-8 beginning with His thoughts toward us, not only manifested themselves in the world but as a personal testimony through us proving where our trust resides.

¹¹You, O LORD, will not withhold Your compassion from me;

Your lovingkindness and Your truth will continually preserve me.

¹²For evils beyond number have surrounded me;

My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to see;

They are more numerous than the hairs of my head,

And my heart has failed me.

[Read v.11-12]

Q: According to v.11, how is God's compassion expressed towards us?

A: By being preserved by grace ("lovingkindness") and "truth".

Application: One of the reasons David may have been able to wait patiently on the Lord even while mired in his pit is because of the abundance of God's grace and truth. Impatient people would not recognize that even in the most dire circumstances God provides what is essential, not necessarily what we desire.

Q: What is indicated in v.12 which explains what David's pit was really made up of?

A: It was made up of "evils beyond number" and "my iniquities". It's a picture of sin attacking him from both within and without.

Q: What exactly is "iniquity"? Why is this word sometimes used instead of, say, "sin"?

A: Whereas the literal definition of "sin" is "to miss the mark", another way of translating "iniquity" is "lawlessness". It describes completely abandoning God's Law – His Truth – in favor of one's own word and ways. Those who perpetrate "evils beyond number" operate outside of God's Law just as equally as those committing iniquity. It's hard to blame the lawless when we ourselves act outside of the Law.

Application: David contrasts what happens when God's Word is adhered to versus its rejection. When in our own pit, the fact that we have chosen to do things our own way looms even larger before us to the point, as David describes, "more numerous than the hairs of my head, and my heart has failed me". Trusting His Word in times of peace and prosperity prepare us to trust in times of testing and need. Therefore the only cure for disobedience to God's Word is obedience.

[Read v.13-17]

¹³Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me;
Make haste, O LORD, to help me.

¹⁴Let those be ashamed and humiliated
together

Who seek my life to destroy it;
Let those be turned back and dishonored
Who delight in my hurt.

¹⁵Let those be appalled because of their
shame

Who say to me, "Aha, aha!"

¹⁶Let all who seek You rejoice and be
glad in You;

Let those who love Your salvation say
continually,

"The LORD be magnified!"

¹⁷Since I am afflicted and needy,
Let the LORD be mindful of me.

You are my help and my deliverer;
Do not delay, O my God.

Q: How has David's tone changed in these final verses from the rest of the Psalm?

A: Essentially this is a prayer summarizing the situation he has outlined to date. He is in need of being retrieved from his personal pit ("deliver me"), an example needs to be made of those attacking him ("let those be ashamed and humiliated together"), a testimony of God's working is desired to show that he himself has changed ("Let all who seek You rejoice"), and ultimately the glory belongs to God ("The LORD be magnified").

Q: How does the very last verse tie together with the very first?

A: Whereas David begins by stating "I waited patiently", this Psalm ends without having yet seen God's answer. His final request is "Do not delay", an indication that David's patience is still at work for all the reasons listed throughout the whole of Psalm 40.

Application: How often do we realize that the issue is not "IF" God will respond – for He has promised that He will – but **WHEN**. This is the essence of all tests of faith and quickly betrays whether or not we've made Christ and Christ alone our trust.

Observation: We have studied this Psalm using the normal tools of the Inductive Study Approach. If all we got from our study were the points of application pertinent to our walk in Christ, everything would be satisfactory. However, there is another layer of spiritual meaning to this Psalm, which is held to be a "Messianic Psalm" – something specifically written to teach us about the specific person of Christ. How do we know this to be true? Because this Psalm is quoted in the New Testament in order to teach about the Christ:

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to

be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says,

*“SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED,
BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME;
IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU HAVE
TAKEN NO PLEASURE.
THEN I SAID, ‘BEHOLD, I HAVE COME
(IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME)
TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.’ ”*

After saying above, “SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND 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.

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. And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying,

*“THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM
AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD:
I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART,
AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM,”*

He then says,

*“AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS
I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.”*

*Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.
Hebrews 10:1-18*

⁶Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired;
My ears You have opened;
Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required.
⁷Then I said, “Behold, I come;
In the scroll of the book it is written of me.

[Re-Read v.6-7]

Q: What is the basic teaching in the opening verses of Hebrews 10?

A: That through Christ God set aside all of the Old Testament sacrifices which were only a temporary measure that could never take away sins.

Q: But in order for Jesus to die and accomplish what the sacrifices could not, what did Jesus first have to do?

A: He had to come to earth as a man in a body of flesh. “Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book (the Old Testament prophecies) it is written of Me”.

Q: How does the Septuagint, which the writer of Hebrews is quoting the Old Testament from, translate the second line of v.6?

A: In Hebrews 10:5 "My ears You have opened" is translated as "But a body You have prepared for Me". It's a literal expression of the human form God prepared and which Jesus took.

Observation: God has four ways to make a body:

1. Out of clay, as with Adam.
2. Out of man, as with Eve.
3. Out of woman married to man, as in every normal human birth.
4. Out of woman without man, as with the birth of Christ.

Christ came in a body prepared by God which was not tainted by sin. Though He experienced all the weaknesses of the flesh (hunger, pain, weariness, death), He never participated in its sinful weaknesses so that, having a sinless nature, He could be the Savior of the world.

Q: But what is the meaning in and of itself of "My ears you have opened"?

A: According to Exodus 21:1-6 and Isaiah 50:5, Old Testament Jews pierced the ear of a servant who wished to remain with them forever. In and of itself it's a greater illustration of dedication, of the Messiah coming as the Suffering Servant.

Q: And what is the obvious meaning of "in the scroll of the book it is written of me"?

A: It refers to all the Messianic promises provided throughout Scripture beginning with the first (Gen. 3:15) and continuing forward including the announcement of the virgin birth (Is. 7:14) and His coming from Bethlehem. (Mic. 5:2)

Application: There is one Messiah, but two comings. He first had to come as the "Suffering Servant", the sacrifice to take away the sins of the world, before He could return the second time as the "Conquering King" to establish His reign on the throne of David.

⁸I delight to do Your will, O my God;
Your Law is within my heart."

⁹I have proclaimed glad tidings of
righteousness in the great
congregation;

Behold, I will not restrain my lips, O
LORD, You know.

¹⁰I have not hidden Your righteousness
within my heart;

I have spoken of Your faithfulness and
Your salvation;

I have not concealed Your
lovingkindness and Your truth from the
great congregation.

[Re-Read v.8-10]

Q: What chief aspect of Christ's ministry does this speak to?

A: The ministry of the Word. Christ loved the Word, Christ lived the Word, and Christ preached the Word.

Q: Why was Christ uniquely qualified above all others to speak, as mentioned in v.10, of God's righteousness, faithfulness, salvation and grace?

A: Because He was sinless and the visible embodiment of these things.

"Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?"

John 8:46

Observation: It's worth noting that it is recorded in Mt. 27:1-5 that even Judas admitted that Jesus was innocent: "I have sinned betraying innocent blood".

Q: How do we know that Christ personally delighted in the Word and will of God?

“And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”
John 8:29

Application: Just as David was a personal example that without a right heart the things of God are meaningless, so Christ is the ultimate embodiment of this teaching. No rituals, observances, or traditions can take the place of obedience to God’s Word and ways from the heart.

⁶Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired;
My ears You have opened;
Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required.

[Re-Read v.6]

Q: What are the different kinds of offering mentioned here and how were they fulfilled in Christ?

- A: All these offerings are pictures of the atoning work of Christ. (see Lev. 1-5)
1. Burnt offerings illustrate total dedication to God and provide a picture of Christ’s total surrender to God.
 2. Meal offerings illustrate His perfect nature and teach that we need to feed on Him to satisfy the soul.
 3. Peace offerings illustrate peace with God by way of peace between the sinner and the Savior of the cross.
 4. Sin offerings deal with our sinful nature and the need for atonement.
 5. Trespass offerings deal with acts of disobedience.

Application: Christ died for our sins, but He also condemned our old nature on the cross and thereby is able to provide us with victory over sin. (See Rom. 6-8) The important lesson here is that all of these offerings are fulfilled in Jesus by His one offering. What millions of lambs and goats could never do, Jesus accomplished once and for all on the cross.

¹I waited patiently for the LORD;
And He inclined to me and heard my cry.
²He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay,
And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm.
³He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God;
Many will see and fear
And will trust in the LORD.

[Re-Read v.1-3]

Q: Although these verses literally depict David’s deliverance from trouble, what do they also illustrate?

A: Christ’s resurrection. Having gone down into the pit of sin for us, He was made sin for us. (1 Pe. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21); but He did not stay in the pit because God raised Him from the dead.

In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.
Hebrews 5:7

Point: Today Christ is raised to die no more, His work finished and His feet planted on the rock. The new song is a song of victory and praise to God’s glory.

Observation: As a Messianic Psalm there are references to the whole of Christ’s life and work in His birth and coming as the Suffering Servant, His earthly ministry of God’s Word, His fulfillment of all the sacrifices on our behalf (the work of the cross), and His resurrection. This is an Old Testament example of how Christ, in the New Testament, is the entire fulfillment of all that God promised.