

Faith Persevering in Trial

Psalm 40

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The basic idea is Psalm 40 is kind of a unification to two thoughts:

- First there is the idea of what a good thing it is to “wait” on the Lord
- Secondly, there is the idea how faith can help us to persevere in the difficulties that afflict us during our lives.

We should note that a couple of these verses are pretty famous ones, well known for how well and directly they connect with believers and their living for Christ. The first three verses, in particular, speak to the blessings of “waiting” on the Lord:

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

¹ *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.*

Now, before we move forward in considering just what David has to say to us, let’s get in mind and then keep in mind that the over-arching idea here, that gives an underlying sense to all that follows this very first phrase is that we are talking about what can (and likely should be) that, as the children of God and as those who know and trust Him – we are those who wait and wait patiently on Him and on His actions in our lives. David wants us to be reassured that when we are willing to wait for the Lord, specifically, when we set ourselves to wait “patiently” for Him. Setting the stage for us, we’ll note that David, as he frequently does, started his message by telling us to whom he was writing and what it was intended as.

This can reassure us that God is not silent or inactive on our behalf when we are having difficulty. David speaks to us regarding a number of blessings that are ours when we wait patiently for the Lord. The first is that:

1) He Turns Toward Us (1)

*¹ I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me,
And heard my cry.*

We should note that he addressed the Psalm...

To the Chief Musician...

Most people recognize this term as it is present in many of the Psalms, seen 65 times all together. The KJV translates the Hebrew word as “Musician” 55 of those times, as “set forward” three times, as “overseers” three times, and as “excel” once, “oversee” once, “perpetual” once, and as “chief singer” once.

It essentially means to excel, to be bright, to be preeminent and/or perpetual. It can also refer to the one who lead the choir in being those very things and so to be the overseer, namely one is enduring and as leader causes the choir to endure (when used as a participle). In some forms it speaks of the act of being an overseer or superintendent or director or chief. It would, today, speak of the music or choir director; the one who controls and/or oversees the entire music program in a church setting. Now, some of these folks today also write songs and such. In David’s day, it was HE who did the writing of the Psalm (at least all of those who persisted) and were gathered into the Book we now hold in our hands known as the Book of Psalms.

This person would have received this Psalm from the Pen of his King and would have been responsible for seeing that it was used properly amongst the congregation. He would have wished to communicate David’s intention as he wrote the content of these first three verses. That intention seem to be tell his listeners of the great blessings that arise from the hand of God when one is willing to wait patiently on God. The Hebrew word translated “patiently” basically means to look forward expectantly. It carries the idea of an eager anticipation or of a “lying in wait” for what is the object of the statement. Thus David’s leading idea here is that the individual in view, because of his/her knowledge of the God in heaven, knows and understands at least some degree of how He interacts with His children. Being thus, when difficulty or unpleasantness arises, that one waits for the Lord’s action in response.

David further adds that this waiting, done by the one being spoken of, is “patient” waiting. The meaning of the verb speaks of the idea of waiting for a known coming event with ones’ focus looking expectantly for what is coming. In the form that it appears here it is intended to draw our attention to the ongoing action of the act of waiting. As such, it draws a wonderfully eloquent picture of one who, in the light of knowing Who God is and what He is like, is confident that He will respond and is looking forward expectantly to see what He will do once He is present!!

We’ve already mentioned the first of those seen in verse 1:

1) *He Turned Toward Me (1)*

As we wait for Him and pray and beseech His blessing, as the time of waiting passes, He will, in His own mind and timing, “turn Himself toward us”. It is interesting that the word “wait” actually means to “look forward to” and matter (or thing) with the implication that our desire for it is such that we are willing to hold ourselves in abeyance while the time passes until it is realized.

In this case, that “thing” is the action of God on our behalf. As we move along, thinking about what David has in mind, it seems that what he is holding before us is something that is a perceived unpleasant matter. We’ll see in a moment that God, in responding, removes from us from a distinctly unpleasant circumstance.

The first idea is that, it that which seems to be a passing of time, God will “incline Himself” or “turn Himself” toward us. Now, of course, we are not thinking here of any kind of physical event. With the exception of the Lord Jesus and His earthly body, God the Father and the Holy Spirit have no physical form and hence, cannot physically turn Himself in our direction. And so, we are speaking of some other sort of “turning”.

Nor do we mean to say that God is, in any real way, “turned away from” His people in the sense that His children have escaped his attention and are flailing around on their own. Rather, we should understand this to speak of this “turning toward” a believer as God seeking to invest His attention is a special way or degree.

We do know that God allows varying degrees of suffering and trial to take place in the lives of those who know Him. It is definitely NOT that He turns away from or ignores His people in such times. But, from what many, many of passages of Scripture make clear to us, there are any number those times where it SEEMS that Gods’ attention is elsewhere.

In times such as this (times we are all familiar with) the second blessing we see in Psalm 40 is a welcome one. David tells us that, when we wait patiently on the Lord:

2) *He Does Hear Me! (1b)*

*¹ I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me,
And heard my cry.*

“To Hear” speaks of the results of listening. Now, in human terms, we can be listening and yet not actually hear or perceive what is intended. That is surely NOT the case with the God of all men. Being One Who is Omniscient, that is “all-knowing” there is nothing that escapes His awareness unless that “not hearing” is a deliberate ignoring that can be spoken of as He did not hear them...” For instance, there are a number of times when, because of their disobedience and failure to honor the commands and holiness of God, He did not “hear” Israel’s cries for His intercession. It is clear, however, God did, fairly soon after, “incline Himself toward them and hear their prayers”.

This last idea is likely true of you and I as well. God is holy and Righteous and He is not an ATM machine Who is anxiously awaiting our cry to Him at which He pours out whatever it is we ask Him for. He is, however, very surely a faithful and compassionate Father Who waits for His children to perceive their need and then to cry out to Him to turn and meet their needs. But there are times when our cry needs to be made and the “waiting”, as we have said, needs to be accomplished in a patient fashion, look forward expectantly to His “inclining Himself toward we who are Him loved children! He will hear us and respond as a merciful and compassionate Father is wont to do!

That hearing results, very, very often in that:

3) He Brings Us Up Out of the “Horrible” Pit (40:2a)

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.*

The picture of the “horrible pit” (or merely the “pit”) is a fairly common one that speaks of an awful set of circumstances that one incurs that they often cannot escape either easily or individually. I suspect that many, if not all, of us have found ourselves in this type of circumstance. Now, I don’t to say that we are talking about a life changing or ending type of matter. But we do experience very difficult and unpleasant situation which solution is out of our ability to accomplish.

David’s point here, then, is particularly encouraging and uplifting!

Notice that he starts this idea with the word “also” which is a conjunction that is used to connect two related ideas in creating a continuing thought and a fuller idea. Where, just before, we saw that he communicated the idea that in the experience of the one who had cried out to God and had “patiently waited” for God to take action for him, God DID “incline” Himself to him as the one waiting patiently and He (God) “heard” that ones’ prayer. That prayer, btw, was apparently for aid and deliverance from the “horrible pit” now mentioned as the first action that God takes in response.

2 *He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,
Out of the miry clay,*

The idea of “bringing one ‘up’” is not speaking of release from some literal or physical hole. It’s speaking, as we said, of a nasty set of circumstances which complicating circumstance carry the great difficulty of escape, similar to those of a great and horrible physical pit. The fact that God had to take action in order to bring the person in view “up out” of this pit tells us that it surely a thing that was inescapable if God did not intercede and deliver him.

Then David goes and says further that not only was the pit itself horrible, but there was what he calls that:

4) He Brought Me Out of the Miry Clay (4b)

2 *He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,
Out of the miry clay,*

Clay is a very common OT word and can speak of basic wet ground, mud that surrounds a lake or river. It also speaks, at times, of the mud that is used by a potter to make dishes, statues and the like. It had a grasping quality that basically such and took hold on one who was caught in it. It was very difficult to move through and virtually impossible to simply move out of without some kind of outside aid.

But we are told here that our God, responding to our cry for aid and the patient waiting exercised as one is waiting for God take His action, takes us; not only from the horrible pit, but also out of this miry clay. Just to think through the picture drawn for us here, we should see that what is being portrayed for us is that there are times and situations in every person's life when the circumstances we find ourselves in are such that we are not capable, in and of ourselves, of doing what is needful to solve the issue. There are, given the circumstance, at least two reasons drawn by David's picture:

1. There are horrible and unclimbable walls that formed the pit we are in and we cannot scale them without help from outside the pit itself.
2. It seems that at the bottom of the pit, there is mud or clay, sufficiently deep so as to grip us and keep us from going anywhere that even approaches moving toward escape.

In a 5th matter David says that in conjunction with the prior 4:

5) He Set My Feet upon a Rock (2c)

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.*

We need to remember that God's purpose in lifting us from the pit and freeing us from the miry clay is twofold...we think of the first one here... The implication is that our being in the pit, grasped by the clay is not just a happenstance or an accident. God wants to extract us from them and put us in such a place as we will be able to avoid such places again in the future.

The picture of the "rock" in the Scripture draws on the idea of stability and solidity to speak to us what helps and that which will prevent falls and failures. Whatever it was, innocent or caused by our own failures, God does wish for us to avoid such in the future. Hence, when He brings us up from the horrible pit and out of the miry clay, He establishes our standing on the surety that will enable avoiding such falls in the future. It is surely a thing that we can depend upon to enable us to stand firm and solid, even in the face of the difficulties of life.

David takes the matter even further when, having spoken of the firm and sure place our God stand us, as a 6th thing he tells us that:

6) He Establishes Our Steps or “ways” (2d)

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.*

In conjunction with what we have already seen that God does on behalf of those who “wait patiently” on God – David points out that, once His people are established on the firm standing of the “rock”, God make clear what he calls here (and what is made more full elsewhere) the establishing of their “steps”. The word “established” here is a word used, elsewhere in the OT, to speak of making ready or building, of determining or making sure or clear. “Steps”, of course speaks of the individual walking one does and he/she moves along. It is, quite often, used, when plural, to speak of the path one walks as an entirety.

In this case, it applies to the spiritual way in which God establishes His people once they are redeemed. Many commentators see the reference to the “horrible pit” and the “Miry clay” to speak of the terrible bondage that sin exerts on the unredeemed. No one can escape it unless the God of all men reaches down and draws them up out of that horrible pit and the miry clay in which they are mired.

From all the rest of the Scriptures, we know that God, as a continuing of His salvation process redeems and the establishes His people on firm ground, a rock if you will that gives them safety, so to speak, from falling into the mire again. This is not to say that salvation can be lost, but we CAN find ourselves in the terrible muck and mire in which we embroiled ourselves before God did His saving work.

The “way” or steps that David speaks of tells us that God establishes and begins a path that is profitable to us and pleasing to Him. Step by step and slowly but surely, the believer finds his way along that path that lifts up the Name of Christ and glorifies our Lord and Master before all men. Again, this is not to say that we are perfect and completely successful, but we do move along that way as those who are His and who are anxious to be all that their Heavenly Father desires them to be!

7thly, David suggests:

7) He Put a New Song in My Mouth (3a)

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. (Psalm 40:3)*

I love the bit of a change in David's language here, from basically a past tense, saying what has been already done to what can be seen as looking at what we can call a present tense, something that has effect right now! There are basically 4 aspects to what David is telling us here:

1. This Song is a present and ongoing "song" or expression that emerges in a way discernable by all around us.
2. It is that which is glorifying and honoring to our God
3. It can be seen/heard by all and it leads them to "fear" the Lord
4. It leads many to trust, or come to believe in the Lord as Redeemer

We note that what is in view here is not simply a pleasant thing for singing and getting personal result and enjoyment from. That is not to say that we cannot enjoy it...but its' aim is the glorification of the God of all men.

A second goal/desire is to lead all of those around us to an accurate and more full understanding of just Who God is and what He is like, namely to "fear" Him. All of this is aimed at bringing those who hear, yet are not redeemed, to trust in Christ, namely to become children of God.

THIS is the "song" that God puts into our mouths. The fact of the matter is not so much a musically song, but it is the "song" our lives paint as we live and give testimony walking before all of those to whom God privileges us to live our lives.

And so, we can see that, as difficult and stressful as it is to "wait" on the Lord in those times when we would much rather see Him come and act on our behalf. When we wait, and especially when we wait "patiently", God sees and responds in a fashion that is wonderfully appropriate for His children, for those who know and seek to bring Him glory instead of wanting that which will serve or satisfy self.