

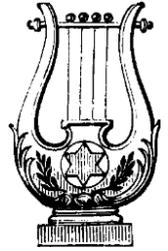


Meeting God in the Psalms

Summer 2017

Psalm 40 Responding to Rescue

(sermons: July 23)



Introduction

The **titles of the psalms**, which are in italics in our Bibles, go back to before Jesus' time; the title for Psalm 40 is: *For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.* There is no indication of a particular occasion in King David's life (around 1000 BC) when he experienced rescue: it could have been physical or mental illness, or temptation, or an attack by personal or national enemies – so we can link it to a wide variety of distressing circumstances that we may experience personally, as a church, or as a community. A '*psalm*' was a song with a musical accompaniment, and the '*director of music*' supervised the choir of the temple in Jerusalem, built by David's son, Solomon. So this psalm that came out of David's personal experience was sung to encourage others to trust God, especially in times of difficulty.

Psalm 40:1-3 Experience of Rescue

- v.1 *I waited patiently – persevered & kept going in urgent prayer ('cry'), rather than passive acceptance*
- v.2 *set my feet on a rock – 'a firm place' and one from which he could see his situation in perspective*
- v.3 *a new song – we are often encouraged to 'sing a new song' in the psalms: not necessarily new words but a song that is 'renewed', or made real, by our experience of God's love and power.*
- v.3 *many will see and fear – not so much the cringing fear that makes people turn away from God but awe and reverence that make them turn towards God in trust and obedience*

1. Have we ever felt that we have been in a '*slimy pit*', in '*mud and mire*'? Did the experience make us turn to God in prayer, or away from him? Did we have to wait a long time for rescue? How did we eventually get out of this situation? Did we see God at work in what happened?
2. Looking back, have there been times when God has '*put a new song*' in our hearts? Has our experience enabled us to help others who are going through a tough time?

Psalm 40:4-10 The Response God Seeks

- v.6 *sacrifice and offering you did not desire – there was a daily round of sacrifices and offerings in the temple (and its predecessor, the tabernacle); but this verse says that God is more concerned about the dedication of our hearts and lives than formal religious observance.*
- v.6 *my ears you have pierced – A slave's ears were sometimes pierced as a sign that he belonged to his master for ever. Or the idea may be of ears being cleaned out so that we hear and obey God's voice. Another version of this phrase is 'a body you have prepared for me'; this is used in the Greek translation of the OT used by the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews (10:5-10), who saw Jesus as the One whose life of total obedience led to his sacrifice on the Cross that fulfilled the OT sacrifices.*
- v.7 *it is written about me in the scroll – probably the scroll of the Old Testament Law (first 5 books of the Bible); David the king is promising to obey it; Jesus came to fulfil it in a deeper way.*
- v.9 *in the great assembly – on a public occasion, or festival, when the king spoke to the people*

3. In *verses 4 & 5* the psalmist encourages us to put our trust in God. Where else do people today look for help or security? Are we ever tempted to ‘*turn aside to false gods*’?
How can we be more confident in God’s plans for us?
4. How did Jesus perfectly fulfil *verses 6 to 8*? (*see Hebrews 10:5-10 below*)
Can we echo any of *verses 6 to 8* for ourselves?
Are there religious practices that we can get out of proportion? (*forms of worship or prayer?....*)
How can we use them as means of dedication of our whole lives rather than as ends in themselves?
5. In *verses 9 & 10* King David is promising to acknowledge God’s help in public and to use his Law as a guide to public policy. Do we pray for our rulers to do this?
When might *we* be tempted to ‘*conceal God’s love and truth*’ in our dealings with other people?

Psalm 40:11-17 Facing New Challenges

- v.11 Do not withhold your mercy from me – rather than a request, this may be an expression of faith: ‘You will not withhold your mercy from me’; the ‘You’ is emphasized.*
- v.12 my sins have overtaken me – he sees himself as responsible for his present troubles*
- v.15 those who say to me: Aha! Aha!” – those who gloat and jeer at his misfortune*
- v.16 “The Lord be exalted!” – David is not only concerned about being rescued but about God’s reputation: that those around him will see how loving and trustworthy God is*
6. What are the challenges that we face at the moment, personally, as a church, or as a community?
Are they due to outside circumstances, or to our own weakness, or both?
Do the ways David describes his problems echo the way that we feel?
How can our experience of how God has helped us in the past give us more confidence to trust him for the future?
 7. Can we use words from this psalm in our own prayers, to meet God here and now?

Hebrews 10: 5-10

⁵ Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:
“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me;
⁶ with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.
⁷ Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—
I have come to do your will, my God.’”
⁸ First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them”—though they were offered in accordance with the law. ⁹ Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.”
He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.