



Psalm 40 - Thanksgiving for Deliverance and Prayer for Help

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

Introduction

This psalm combines two parts: first, it gives thanks for the many past mercies the singer has received from God, and then it presents a fresh instance of need for God's help. Both parts recognise that an individual's experiences of God's mercy can lead to others rejoicing in God.

Psalm 40:1-10 - Many Past Mercies to Be Thankful For

The singer reflects on previous situations of need in which he called on God for help: <<*he inclined to me and heard my cry*>> (v.1). These situations have reinforced the lesson: <<*happy are those who make the Lord their trust, who do not turn to the proud*>>, so as to depend on them and to become like them (v.4). The song also shapes its singers to share their experiences with the faithful in worship (v.3 and vv.9-10): one's reception of God's help is not complete until he gives public thanks. These deliverances express God's steadfast love and faithfulness: <<*The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness*>> (Exodus 34:6).

- 1 I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
- 2 He drew me up from the desolate pit,
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.

Psalm 40:1-3

I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. The idea of David waiting on or for the Lord has been common, especially in the last few psalms. In Psalm 39:7 David waited upon the Lord without immediate answer. Here, the answer is stated: he inclined to me, and heard my cry. The word inclined has the sense of God bending down to David in his affliction, removing any perceived distance between the Lord and his servant. When David knew God heard his cry he was confident of a favourable answer.

He drew me up from the desolate pit, and set my feet upon a rock. These were further benefits to David as he waited patiently for the Lord. God delivered him from his present crisis, which was like a miry bog, and set him in a much better and more secure place, making my steps secure. David's prayer for deliverance was answered.

Jesus spoke of the need to base life on a solid foundation: <<That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built>> (Luke 6:48). By cementing a relationship with God, a person is better able to withstand the storms of life.

He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. This is another benefit to David in waiting on the Lord. His deliverance brought forth spontaneous praise, a new song that came from God himself. God will inspire songs and words of praise. This almost sounds selfish or self-serving, but when it is understood just how good and right it is for the creature to praise the Creator, the redeemed to praise the Redeemer, the delivered to praise the Deliverer, then it makes sense. Christians are grateful that God gives them the ability to praise him.

It is not always necessary to consider that a new song refers to a newly composed song that has never been sung to God before. Sometimes it can refer to a change of heart in the singer of a song of praise to God.

Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord. This is one more benefit from David's patient waiting for the Lord. The deliverance and the praise that

came from it was an effective testimony to others. They were inspired to fear the Lord and to trust in him.

4 Happy are those who make
the Lord their trust,
who do not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after false gods.

5 You have multiplied, O Lord my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts towards us;
none can compare with you.
Were I to proclaim and tell of them,
they would be more than can be counted.

Psalm 40:4-5

Happy are those who make the Lord their trust. This is a natural and appropriate thought flowing from what David just experienced. He knew by experience that trust, as shown by waiting patiently for the Lord, is happy and blessed.

Who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods. David connected trusting God with moral conduct, in this case, the ability to discern and judge the character of others and act appropriately to them: <<*In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'*>> (1 Peter 5:5). Perhaps David's crisis came from refusing to respect the proud or those who turn aside to lies, i.e. those who look to false gods for their comfort and salvation.

You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts towards us. David praised God as the worker of many wonderful works and for his thoughts toward his people. David knew that God thought about him and his people, and thought about them favourably, otherwise there would be no blessing in those thoughts.

In Psalm 8:4 David wondered: <<*what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?*>>. He considered the greatness of the universe and was amazed that God would think about man at all. Here he took that idea much further and is amazed at how much God thinks about his people. By

implication he is also amazed that God thinks such loving, gracious thoughts toward his people, and so many that they are more than can be counted.

⁶ Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,

but you have given me an open ear.

Burnt-offering and sin-offering

you have not required.

⁷ Then I said, 'Here I am;

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.'

Psalm 40:6-8

These verses are part of the OT corrective to any who think that the sacrificial system worked automatically, apart from expressing faith, repentance, and obedience, as confirmed by Psalms 50:8-15 and 51:16-19, Proverbs 14:9 and Isaiah 1:11-17. This is probably why Hebrews 10:5-10 uses these verses, from the LXX, because its audience was tempted to abandon their specifically Jewish Christianity and revert to 'ordinary' Judaism with its sacrifices, thinking they would still be pleasing to God. They must see the sacrifices as a means of furthering God's larger purposes, not as producing effects on their own.

Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. David understood that in a relative sense God did not want animal sacrifices. God wanted surrendered, willing servants, as also indicated by: <<*For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings*>> (Hosea 6:6).

An open ear is one ready to listen to and obey God's words. David's surrender to God was wonderful and an impressive example. Yet he only foreshadowed the ultimate submission to God carried out by the Messiah, Jesus Christ. As noted above, Hebrews 10:5-10 quotes the Septuagint translation of vv.6-8. This is a wonderful and remarkable prophecy of the work of Jesus:

- It shows God's ultimate dissatisfaction in animal sacrifices, looking forward to a perfect sacrifice, i.e. sacrifice and offering you do not desire).
- It shows that God the Son came in a prepared body. The Septuagint reads: <<*But a body you have prepared for me*>> (Hebrews 10:5).

- It shows the public, open coming of the Messiah. It was as if Jesus said, “Behold, here I am, I am the one.” There is a comparison with what the prophet proclaimed when called by God: <<*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’*>> (Isaiah 6:8).
- It shows the Messiah as the great theme of the Hebrew Scriptures, i.e. In the scroll of the book it is written of me.
- It shows the dedication of the Messiah to the will of God with I delight to do your will.
- It shows the Messiah’s love for and obedience to the Word of God because your law is within my heart.

In Psalm v.6 four kinds of offering are mentioned:

- **Sacrifice:-** offerings made with blood.
- **Offering:-** offerings made without blood.
- **Burnt-offering:-** offerings of total consecration.
- **Sin-offering:-** offerings to atone for sin.

What did God desire instead of sacrifice? Obedience. This was true for David’s predecessor Saul. King Saul offered sacrifices according to the law; what he did not do was obey God: <<*And Samuel said, ‘Has the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obedience to the voice of the Lord? Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is no less a sin than divination, and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king’*>> (1 Samuel 15:22-23). Ultimately this was fulfilled by the Son of David. Jesus came and was perfectly obedient, and his obedience is counted to those who choose to follow his example: <<*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done*>> (Luke 22:42), and: <<*I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me*>> (John 5:30).

In the scroll of the book it is written of me. In a far lesser sense David could say this of himself, because his ascension to the throne of Israel was prophesied long before it took place. Yet any fulfilment of this in David is a pale shadow to its amazing and perfect fulfilment in David’s greater Son, Jesus the Messiah.

I delight to do your will, O my God. Again, in a far lesser sense this was true of David, the man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). Yet any fulfilment of this in David is a pale shadow to its amazing and perfect fulfilment in David’s greater Son, Jesus the Messiah. Jesus said that doing God’s will was to him as necessary and delightful as food: <<*Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work’*>> (John 4:34).

- 9 I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
see, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O Lord.
- 10 I have not hidden your saving help 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.

Psalm 40:9-10

I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation. David said this to assure God and himself that he had glorified God among his people. This was part of the new song and praise that came from his deliverance. David would not restrain his lips in offering this praise. It is also true of Jesus in eternity come. Of Jesus it is true: <<*in the midst of the congregation I will praise you*>> (Hebrews 2:12), as a fulfilment of Psalm 22:22. It is a remarkable thing to think of Jesus leading the assembly of God's people in praise to God the Father: <<*I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, for ever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations*>> (Psalm 89:1).

I have not hidden your saving help within my heart. The righteousness of God was evident in both David's words and actions. It was not set in a secret place that had no connection with how he actually lived his life.

Psalm 40:11-17 - I Am Again in Need.

Verse 11 continues the allusion to Exodus 34:6 from v.10, saying that the previous experiences provide assurance that, in the current distress, i.e. 'evils,' 'without number' and 'my iniquities' (v.12), God will likewise make haste to help the singer (v.13). As is often the case in the psalms, the distress comes at the hands of people eager to hurt and to gloat over the faithful (vv.14-15).

To pray for deliverance from the schemes of such people, i.e. to ask that they be put to shame, disappointed, turned back, and brought to dishonour (v.14), should not be considered vindictive. In contrast, the faithful, that is, all who seek the Lord, will rejoice and be glad (v.16) when the singer tells the 'glad news' in the 'great congregation' (v.9).

11 Do not, O Lord, withhold
your mercy from me;
let your steadfast love and your faithfulness
keep me safe for ever.

12 For evils have encompassed me
without number;
my iniquities have overtaken me,
until I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head,
and my heart fails me.

Psalm 40:11-12

Do not, O Lord, withhold your mercy from me. Although David praised God for past and present deliverance, he would not presume upon the future. He kept himself in humble prayer before God, asking for a constant supply of his tender mercies: <<*For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you*>> (Psalm 26:3). It is not difficult to see this as a prayer of Jesus, the Son of David. As he lived upon this earth he did so as a man in constant reliance upon his fellowship and perfect communion with God the Father. This can be seen as a prayer of Jesus, perhaps especially in his sufferings on the Cross: do not, O Lord, withhold your mercy from me; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe for ever. Truly it was on the Cross that Jesus could say: for evils have encompassed me without number.

My iniquities have overtaken me. David needed this constant supply of the mercy, steadfast love, and truth of God because he knew his own sins. He asked God to not leave him to his many sins, i.e. more than the hairs of my head, but to deliver him in mercy. There is a sense in which Jesus could never say my iniquities have overtaken me. He was and 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 life and especially his sufferings he consciously and perfectly identified with his people, in a sense making their sins his own. For Jesus, they were my iniquities, not because he committed the sins but because, out of love, he chose to bear them and, indeed, all the wrath humanity deserved: <<*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*>> (2 Corinthians 5:21).

13 Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me;

O Lord, make haste to help me.

14 Let all those be put to shame and confusion

who seek to snatch away my life;

let those be turned back and brought to dishonour

who desire my hurt.

15 Let those be appalled because of their shame

who say to me, 'Aha, Aha!'

Psalm 40:13-15

Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me. Despite his many iniquities David could and did rely upon the Lord for deliverance. He skilfully phrased the request, not only asking God to deliver him, but asking God to take pleasure in his deliverance. He could ask boldly because he believed it to be consistent with God's pleasure.

Christians might take this principle and apply it to many of their requests:

- Be pleased, O Lord, to forgive me.
- Be pleased, O Lord, to correct me.
- Be pleased, O Lord, to provide for me.
- Be pleased, O Lord, to heal me.
- Be pleased, O Lord, to guide me.
- Be pleased, O Lord, to bless me.

O Lord, make haste to help me. Although David made his request with skill, it was also made with urgency. David understood that help delayed too long was the same as help denied.

Let all those be put to shame and confusion who seek to snatch away my life.

This was the help that David sought. God had graciously delivered him (vv.1-3), but the threat remained. David prayed that God would dishonour his enemies and cause them to be confounded. As in many of his psalms, David is in trouble. Yet one would not know this from the first part of the psalm. Yes, David needed God's protection and help and would ask for it, but he could not forget or neglect the wonderful deliverance God had given up to that point, and make an appropriately surrendered response.

Haman sought the destruction of the Jewish nation but they were miraculously rescued due to divine intervention through Mordecai and Queen Esther: <<Now

in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day, when the king's command and edict were about to be executed, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain power over them, but which had been changed to a day when the Jews would gain power over their foes, the Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who had sought their ruin; and no one could withstand them, because the fear of them had fallen upon all peoples>> (Esther 9:1-2)

Let those be appalled because of their shame who say to me, 'Aha, Aha!' If such a person ever reads this passage, beware of persecuting Christ and his people, for God will surely avenge his own elect. Your 'ahas' will cost you dear: <<*It hurts you to kick against the goads*>> (Acts 26:14b).

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.

Psalm 40:16-17

But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. David called the people of God, at least those who seek him, to be happy in him, and to say continually, 'Great is the Lord!' David thought praising God was to magnify him, that is, to make him larger in one's perception. Magnification does not actually make an object bigger, and no person can ever make God bigger. However, to magnify something or someone is to perceive it or them as being bigger, and that is something that should be done regarding the Lord God.

As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. David could combine his sense of great joy in God with a realistic appraisal of his present need. Secure in the truth that God cared for and thought about him, David again appealed to God to be his help and deliverer, and he needed God to do this without delay, just as David promised to do in return: <<*I hurry and do not delay to keep your commandments*>> (Psalm 119:60)