

Exalting Christ out of the Pit (Psalm 40:1-10)

The Bible is by far the bestselling book of all time, the most published book and the most translated book, but who knows what #2 is on the list was for most of the last 300 years? The 2nd most sold, published and translated book in history is *Pilgrim's Progress*. It was written by John Bunyan in prison for preaching the gospel. He spent a 3rd of his adult life in jail in ups and downs of discouragement, away from his family and disabled daughter he loved so much, battling feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, waiting, waiting, waiting. I suspect he had a sinking feeling he'd always be stuck there but he kept going. In old English the word *sloh* or *slog* was a word for swamplands where you sink with each step, you're stuck, it's slow going, you slog it out. One dictionary gives #2 def.: 'a situation characterized by lack of progress'

In *Pilgrim's Progress* 1st stage Christian began his pilgrimage and he falls in one of those places called Despond, symbolic of the despondency, despair, or depression we can fall into on our Christian journey. '...being heedless,' it says he fell 'suddenly into the bog...wallowed for a time... and Christian, because of the burden that was on his back, began to sink in the mire...[he] could not get out because of the burden that was upon his back: but I beheld in my dream, that a man came to him, whose name was Help...Then, said he, "Give me thine hand:" so he gave him his hand, and he drew him out, and he set him upon sound ground... And he said... "This miry [swamp or pit, he explains] is such a place as cannot be mended: it is the descent whither the scum and filth that attends conviction for sin doth continually run, and therefore it is called...Despond [or Despair]; for still, as the sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there arise in his soul many fears and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in this place: and this is the reason of the badness of this ground.'¹

We sing 'guide me O Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this weary land. I am weak but Thou art mighty; Hold me with Thy powerful hand.' Any on the Christian pilgrimage know about sin's quicksand, some go down faster than others, but Ps 40 shows us the Help of the Lord to lift us from despair. Ps 40:17 says to God '*You are my help and my deliverer.*' God helps us who are sinking and sets us singing. He takes us from the mire to the choir: *TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID. 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. 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 in the great congregation; behold, I have not restrained my lips, 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.

I want to focus on v. 1-10 today but to see the context of this miry bog David was in, if you look at v. 12, it's not physical, it was a spiritual pit, he's swamped by sin and its effects and drowning in it.

[today we'll see how this applied to David, to Christ, then to us]

In all the chapters on the life of David in the books of Samuel or Chronicles David never fell in a literal swamp, but Ps 40 is how he probably often felt. In v. 14 there were people wanting to kill David or hurt him physically. In v. 15 some were hurting him emotionally with their mocking words, all that is part of the context of v. 2 I take as a poetical metaphorical picture of how his life was bogged down in sin's sludge, life in the pits. Steve Lawson says 'Maybe it was the pit of rejection that seemed to engulf him. King Saul's... ruthless manhunt [fits v. 14] and caused him to despair. Perhaps it was a pit of family problems. David certainly know trouble in his own household as his own son Absalom rebelled against him. Or possibly it was a pit of sin as David may have dug his own hole. Maybe it was a pit of loneliness as [he] often found himself alone. David may have allowed his problems...to be enlarged disproportionately in his own mind. Whatever the pit, it was real'²

Some of the more dynamic translations say 'a lonely pit' or 'pit of despair.' Think of sinking sand, quicksand, or a hole you can't get out of by yourself and as you try, you just sink deeper. You can't climb in this slime, the pit's walls make it dark so you can barely see light at the top of the hole. Listen to Psalm 69 in Eugene Peterson's paraphrase: '...God, save me! I'm in over my head, Quicksand under me, swamp water over me; I'm going down ... I'm hoarse from calling for help, Bleary-eyed from searching the sky for God...Rescue me from the swamp, Don't let me go under for good, Pull me out...This whirlpool is sucking me down. Don't let the swamp be my grave, the...hole swallow me...get me out of here. Rescue me from this deathtrap.'

Imagine when life feels like v. 2 having to wait like v. 1 says. The Hebrew text reads '*waiting, I waited,*' it's an intense idea. One translates it 'I waited and I waited and I waited.' A *Literal Translation of the Book of Psalms* says 'In hoping I hoped for the LORD.' Another says 'with steady hope I waited.' This waiting doesn't passively give up, it actively looks up in hope to God. This isn't complacency, v. 1 says he waited *patiently*, it's persevering trust in what we anticipate and await. Young's Literal Translation: '*I diligently expected...*' NET: '*I relied completely on the LORD.*' So David waits in faith reliant and expectant while being diligent. This waiting isn't sitting around doing nothing, it's standing on the promises you're waiting to see fulfilled.

David didn't 'let go and let God,' he grabbed hold of God's promises and he refused to let go of them, but he entrusted to God the timing and outcome. Ps 37 says '*wait patiently for him, fret not yourself ...wait for the LORD and keep his way*' (37:7, 34). So you know you're waiting biblically when you're not worrying and are actively believing and keeping His ways (study Ps 37). One writer says waiting biblically includes 'wrestling with your thoughts and emotions to believe that God knows what is happening, that God is wise, that God's plans for you are good, that God is in control of every minute. A duck may look like it is sitting still as it swims through the water. But beneath the surface its legs are paddling furiously. When God asks you to wait, he has important work for you to do below the surface of your life'³

Waiting is hard work and it's hard to do in our culture where we text friends and expect instant replies, or at least within minutes, certainly not hours or days. But with the Lord we have to wait patiently for an answer a long time at times. Waiting for an email about a job or waiting to hear from the doctor your test results may seem like an eternity. Maybe today you're waiting for a health situation or employment situation. Some are waiting for children or to be married or waiting for something significant in the future but it's not clear how it will all turn out. v. 1 of this psalm encourages patient waiting and praying, trusting that God will hear and respond to our cry for His help.

[we don't know what the future holds but we know Who holds it]

Maybe you're here today and you've dug yourself a hole financially and it's hard to see how you'll ever get out. Maybe you're drowning in sorrows or struggles. Maybe you're in a pit of sin you know is destructive, you feel stuck in this addictive vice and vicious cycle and it's like a car deep in the mud just spinning its wheels and sinking deeper. It's call for rescue time. Ps 40 begins with this vivid picture of God bending down to hear the cry for help out of the pits. He sent His Son down to earth's filth and sin to rescue.

Jesus came down and got dirty, the song says ‘He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire. He set my feet on a rock, giving a firm place to stand.’ ‘On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.’ A country preacher outlined v. 2-3: He brings us up, stands us up, tunes us up. He takes us from the mire to the choir, from sinking in v. 1-2 to singing in 3 *He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.* God took him from the pit to put him on the praise team. Waiting in v. 1 turns to worship in v. 3, and David sees it wasn’t just about him, God brought him through the trial for others: *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!* The application or lesson in the pit is don’t proudly trust self or listen to the lies of the world, flesh or the devil. Keep trusting when you’re in the hole and others will see and trust God, too

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.* It reminds me of Ps 139 where David says God’s knowledge and thought of Him is too wondrous for him, he says *How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand* (v. 17-18). Last Sunday night Bob Johnston gave a powerful message on that psalm you all need to listen to, one of the most moving messages from this pulpit ever and if you want to hear how to apply v. 5 further, I can’t say it better than he did

In v. 6 I think David thinks of what his mentor Samuel said to Saul: *'Has the LORD...delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, [or] in obeying the voice of the LORD?...to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen...'* (he said is better, 1 Sam 15:22). Ps 40:6 *'In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear.* [i.e., an ear that hear and heeds, that listens to obey God's voice] *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."*

David also learned from Samuel man looks at the outward but God looks at the heart. The sacrifice desired and required is a broken and contrite heart first, not empty ritual. He always wanted worshippers who want to be there, who come not for their own desires and pleasures, but who want to do what God desires and is pleased with. His law must be in the heart as we delight to do His will or the killing of animals does nothing. We must look to Jesus as the only sacrifice that truly pleased God or pardoned sin. Turn to Heb 10

v. 6 becomes clearer as we turn to the NT. In the New Covenant, Christ poured out His blood for many as a sin offering. He came to fulfill the law of God for His people and to write His law on their hearts. In the scroll of OT prophecy it was written of Messiah that He would do all of this in Ps 40.

[we saw Ps 40 applied to David, now see how the NT applies it to Christ]

Heb 10:4 *For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*⁵ *Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me;⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.⁷ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”* [that's Ps 40 from the Greek translation, so it's a little different wording but the NT says Christ said what Ps 40 said. The 'I/me' in that text is Christ and the 'you' is God the Father.]⁸ *When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law),⁹ then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second [the old is done away by the New Covenant in Christ]¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

Then v. 16 adds that the law would be put in the heart, also what Ps 40 says. One of the themes of the book of Hebrews is exalting Christ in the psalms. In Hebrews 1 to exalt the supremacy of Christ over angels he quotes from Ps 2, 45, 102, 110, psalms we've studied this summer. Then Heb 2 quotes 2 other psalms in our series, Ps 8 and Ps 22, on Christ being made lower than angels for a while to bring many sons to glory, so now He's highly exalted. Then Heb 3-4 give an extended exposition of Ps 95 applied to Christ, then the next 3 chapters in Hebrews a message on Ps 2 and 110 exalting Christ's work as priest forever. Later in Hebrews it quotes Ps 118, last weeks' study, and applies it to Christ as our helper, which ties in with Heb 10 and Ps 40, you can turn back there. Christ is able *'to sympathize with our weaknesses ...in every respect [Christ] has been tempted as we are yet without sin...that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need'* (Heb 4:14-16).

So when Ps 40:17 says *'As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help...'* we need to look beyond David to Christ who also became poor and in need of help from His Father while He was on earth. The Lord took on human weaknesses and was tempted as David was and as we are in every respect, so He can sympathize with our weaknesses and take thought of us knowing what we're going through so He can help us

What David wrote in Ps 40 is what Jesus said to the Father as He came into the world, according to Heb 10. Jesus more than David or any man could say v. 1, He always waited patiently for God. He was never impatient. Jesus could say God '*heard my cry*,' as Hebrews also says '*In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard ...*' (Heb 5:7). On the cross Luke says as He died He '*cried out with a loud voice...Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit*' (23:46 NKJV, quoting Ps 31:5 that goes on to say God delivered and set his feet in a good place, v. 8 a lot like 40:2).

The pit in the psalms often means death (30:3, 9) and the only other time in Scripture it mentions the phrase 'pit of destruction,' it clearly means death (55:23). What David might have felt spiritually in v. 2 of our text, Jesus was able to say physically literally, God '*drew me up from the pit of destruction.*' God raised Him on the 3rd day from the dead and made Him to stand again, and the first time He appears Mary '*saw Jesus standing*' (Jn 20:14). And like v. 3 says, Jesus sang, there was praise to God in His mouth, and many saw Him and feared. v. 4 says '*Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust ...*' In Heb 2 Jesus says '*I will sing your praise.*' And...'*I will put my trust in him*' (the Father). Peter says Jesus entrusted His soul to God (1 Pet 2:23).

v. 5b says of God's wonderful works '*...I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told.*' John's gospel ends saying the wondrous things Jesus did are more than could be told by all the books in the world. And in the end of v. 6, His open ear emphasizes always doing His Father's will, like in Isa 50:5-7: '*GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.*'

Messiah is speaking there, I believe, open ear emphasizing obedience to the point of death, even death on a cross. The Greek translation of Ps 40:6 cited in the NT takes an open ear as representing the whole body. Allan Ross says 'every capacity, every member, every function, is therefore to be dedicated to his service. The priests were reminded of this in their ordination, when Moses placed blood on the ear [first then] the thumb and the toe of each of them (Lev 8:23)...[i.e., all of them from head to toe] what they heard, what they handled, where they went, all had to be set apart to the LORD... [open ears is where it starts and] should remind believers of Jesus' exhortation to obedience: "*Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear*" (Matt. 11:15)...always listening, always ready to use everything God gave them to do his will.'⁴

Every time scripture is taught come with open ears to what God has for you.

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 in the great congregation* [that may speak of His resurrection appearance to 500 at one time, NKJV '*I proclaimed the good news of righteousness,*' that's the OT form of 'preach the gospel']...

In closing what does this mean for us? **We need to tell and hear the gospel**

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.*

[this applies beyond David and Christ to believers today]

Notice here and in v. 9 he didn't hold back the good news from the believers - the great congregation or assembly of God's people. He didn't restrain his lips from speaking of deliverance, salvation, righteousness, and v. 10 seems to say it started in his own heart first. That could mean he didn't keep it to himself, he preached it to others, or that within his heart he spoke it first. Ps 42 across the page illustrates speaking to yourself, preaching to your soul: **42:5** *Why are you cast down, O my soul* [speaking to his soul, NASB 'why are you in despair, O my soul?'], *and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you...*[repeats in v. 11]

Psalm 103 '*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity...who redeems your life from the pit...*' You need to preach those gospel benefits yourself, tell your soul to bless the Lord for reaching down to rescue you from your sins and redeem you from the pit. Ps 40 is a great visual of the gospel, like v. 2 we'd all be in the pit of hell but for the grace of God responding to our cry for help, lifting us out of the pit and destruction we deserve and setting us on solid ground and sure footing. Isa 51:1 says to believers '*Look...to the hole of the pit from which you were dug.*' We're to remember the pit we came from and would still be in *but God*

We need to tell other believers as well and unbelievers. If someone rescued your life from death this next week, wouldn't you tell someone? Of course you would! You'd tell it to believers and unbelievers alike. Well, if God has delivered you from the pit, tell people your story. If God has pulled you out of despair or discouragement or depression, if God has lifted you, then tell others and help others. In *Pilgrim's Progress* Christian shared with Hopeful the key of promise that opened castle doors to help escape Giant Despair.

Final application for today, main point: **We all need to trust Christ in all**

If you're not yet singing His praises as a believer, you're still sinking in the pit of sin, trust Christ today as your deliverer. Cry out to Christ as v. 1 says, if you're sick of the mire of sin and self, cry to and rely on Christ to rescue you from destruction, knowing you can't save yourself. Trust Christ alone, He'll do it all. It's all Him in v. 1-2, He inclines, He hears, He lifts us out of the mire, He gives a solid rock to stand on, He guides our steps, He puts the new song of salvation in our mouth to praise Him. I didn't climb part of the way out and He met me and helped with the rest or even most; He did it all. My part is in v. 3: to praise Him so others see, fear and trust the Lord Jesus.

⁴ *Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust...* Blessedness, happiness comes to the one who continually makes the Lord his all in all, the One he trusts in all things as His all-sufficient Savior and Sustainer. Don't turn to the proud or those who follow lies, v. 4 says, turn to the Lord who turns His favor towards those who follow His truth and He gives grace to the humble. v. 5 says He multiples wondrous things and thoughts toward us, the NT says to those in Christ *'mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you...'* Jude ends with *'able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand'* (Jude 2, 24, it sounds a lot like v. 2 of Ps 40, God gives us a place where we can stand and makes our steps secure so we don't stumble). Trust the Lord in every step.

v. 6-8 talks about sacrifices and what pleases God as we obey His will, the NT also applies that language beyond Christ to His followers. *'Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.'* (Rom 12:1-2 NIV). That's how to trust and obey, ears open, receive the word, renew the mind. Heb 13:15 *'let us offer a sacrifice of praise to God...Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.'* Then it says as we submit to leaders and pray for them, and He equips *'you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever...'*

By His grace and for His glory He enables us to please Him and do His will. It's not just Jesus who could say Ps 40, v. 7 it's written of Him in the book, Ps 139 says all our days are written in a book before there was one of them. Rom 7:22 *'In my inner being I delight in God's law,'* like v. 8 of our psalm.

Pastor Borgman wrote a month ago after his brain surgery: ‘God preserved me...from death when my heart stopped for a bit. As I lay in the ICU I was so overwhelmed that I had seen *‘the goodness of God IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING!’* (Psa. 27:13) ... I went into surgery with these verses: Ps 4:8 *In peace I will both lie down and sleep, For You alone, O LORD, make me to dwell in safety.* 3:5 *I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me.* 13:5 *I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me.*

And remember as you trust the Lord of Ps 40, the Lord experienced Ps 40 while on earth and so He can empathize when you’re in the pit of v. 2 and He can empower the patience and waiting of v. 1 as our example and our enablement. As you’re waiting in faith He’s making you more like Himself

When God wants to drill a man, And thrill a man, And skill a man
 When God wants to mold a man To play the noblest part... with all His heart
 ...That all the world shall be amazed, Watch His methods, watch His ways!
 How He ruthlessly perfects Whom He royally elects!
 How He hammers him and hurts him, And with mighty blows converts him
 Into trial shapes of clay which only God understands;
 While his tortured heart is crying And he lifts beseeching hands!
 How God bends but never breaks When his good He undertakes;
 How He uses whom He chooses, And which every purpose fuses him;
 By every act induces him To try His splendor out--God knows what He’s about.⁵

¹ John Bunyan, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Stage 1.

² Steve Lawson, *Psalms 1-75*, p. 211.

³ James Johnston, *The Psalms*, vol. 1, p. 409.

⁴ Allan P. Ross, *Psalms*, 1:864-65.

⁵ Anonymous, cited by Lawson.