

From the Pit to the Resurrection

Psalm 40

Michael Felkins

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

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This morning, we are going to examine the resurrection from Psalm 40. It is providential that Psalm 40 fell on Easter because I knew we could stay in our series and that you would be able to see the resurrection of Christ from a text you don't normally associate with it. Psalm 40 is a Messianic Psalm. It's about Jesus' defeat of death through His resurrection. But before we get into Psalm 40, I want to read the resurrection narrative to you from Matthew 28:1-10 because this is the event that Psalm 40 points to.

Often, in our contemporary culture, when we come to Scripture, we come looking for practical answers to presenting problems. Now, there is nothing wrong with studying the Bible and trying to figure out "what to do." The Bible is immensely practical, but probably not in the way you and I normally would think. Often, we want the Bible to tell us "what to do," but instead it tells us "who to behold." Truthfully, beholding Jesus in His word, worship, and prayer is the most practical thing we can do.

Most of the time, our real problem is that we are not beholding Jesus. When we are in the midst of problems, trials, and suffering, most of the time our eyes are fixed on the problem or fixed on our sin rather than on Jesus. We just see what is in front of us when what we need to do is look up to Him.

This morning, we will behold Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Friends, we especially need to behold Jesus in His resurrection because, in it, we see the power of God to renew our lives. The resurrection reminds us that nothing is too hard for God, for in the resurrection we are beholding a God who brings life out of death. The resurrection takes our eyes off ourselves and puts them on the risen Savior, and reminds us that He has won the victory.

So, let's get into Psalm 40 and see the resurrection through the eyes of King David. At one level, Psalm 40 is David's personal testimony. He opens the Psalm describing a terrifying situation: He is trapped in a pit of destruction, sinking in mud, helpless to escape, so he cries out for help. Then, God hears his cry, lifts him out, sets his feet on a rock, and puts a new song in his mouth.

The New Testament tells us something astonishing about Psalm 40. It is ultimately about Jesus Christ. The writer of the Hebrews quotes Psalm 40:6-8. He says these are the words of Christ when He came into the world. Listen to Hebrews 10:5-14:

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.'" 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. ¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

In other words, Psalm 40 is not primarily David's story. It is Jesus' story of rescue. I think Old Testament scholar Christopher Ash is correct when he says that the writer of Hebrews is not simply attributing the few verses of Psalm 40 to Jesus but that the whole Psalm is Jesus' testimony of dying on the cross for our sins and rising victoriously from the dead.

In the same manner, Puritan Andrew Bonar writes:

We cannot fail to recognize [the] Messiah [in Psalm 40] . . . Christ speaks throughout, so exclusively indeed, that the believer must here take up the words not as his own experience . . . but as the experience of the Captain of Salvation, in fighting that battle which has ended in everlasting triumph.¹

Psalm 40 tells us about Jesus' descent into the pit of death and His rescue from death. It tells us of His joyful, perfect obedience to God's will, proclamation of salvation, and our hope of deliverance through Him.

The bottom line is that when we read Psalm 40 in light of the gospel, we clearly see that it points to the future resurrection of Jesus Christ. This Psalm gives us a window into the heart of Jesus as He prays for His deliverance by suffering for our sins and rising from the dead.

Verses 1-3 function as a *Preface* to the whole Psalm. So, everything we need to know about Psalm 40 is in these first three verses. Then, as it moves out from the first three verses, it amplifies the person and work of Jesus as He rises from the dead. Let's get to work on Psalm 40. I have four points to guide our journey through it.

I. Jesus' Prays for Life in the Pit of Death (vv. 1-3, 11-17)

Look at v. 1. What we hear in v. 1 is Jesus' prayer as He goes through His suffering and death on Good Friday. It reminds us of Psalm 38 and its language of imputation:

*I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.*

Remember, David originally wrote this, and so we have his testimony as it points to Jesus. David begins with the language of waiting. The Hebrew phrase translated "*waited patiently*" is actually very emphatic. Literally, he says, "*waiting, I waited.*" It is the language of perseverance and endurance, which is the help we pray God will give us when we are going through suffering. This was not a casual prayer. It is the prayer of someone who has no other hope.

In this verse, we hear the voice of Jesus praying as He endured the wrath of God while He suffered for our sins. Whether David knew it or not, his prayer points us to the Suffering Servant who waited for the Lord to deliver Him.

Then vv. 11-15 amplify Jesus' prayer in v. 1. We need to think of the imputation of our sin to Jesus as He prays vv. 11-15. We see shadows of the cross in this prayer:

As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me!¹² For evils have encompassed me beyond number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me.¹³ Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me! O LORD, make haste to help me!¹⁴ Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether who seek to snatch away my life; let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who delight in my hurt!¹⁵ Let those be appalled because of their shame who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"

¹ Andrew Bonar, *Christ and His Church in the Book of Psalms*.

So, we hear our Savior pray as our sins are being imputed to Him. He feels the weight of our sins and the wrath of God upon Him as He paid our debt. Friends, the consequences of our sin began to break His body as He was scourged, beaten, mocked, and nailed to the cross. Yet, *waiting, He waited* on the Lord to rescue Him.

Perhaps you know what that kind of waiting feels like. Have you ever waited in a hospital hallway? Have you ever waited for the dreaded test results? Have you ever waited for the phone call you didn't want to receive? Have you ever waited for the pain to pass? Have you ever waited for the depression to end? Have you ever waited at the funeral home for the service you didn't want to have? Most of us have, and if you haven't, you will one day. Friends, waiting can be one of the hardest experiences in life, and our Savior knows what it feels like to wait on the Lord while enduring great suffering.

But David gives us hope in v. 1: God hears the cries of those who wait for Him. Look at what v. 1 says, "*He inclined to me.*" The picture is beautiful. It is the image of God bending down to listen. The God who rules the universe stoops down to hear the cries of His people. Most importantly, God bent down, and He heard the cry of Jesus as He suffered for our sins. Because Jesus knows what it is like to wait on the Lord, He is able to help us as we wait. We don't wait with a Savior who has never waited on the Lord. He has waited patiently, and He helps us to wait for rescue. He is able to sustain us, comfort us, and strengthen us as we wait.

How is Jesus able to comfort and wait with us? Look at v. 2 for here we see that Jesus rose from the pit of death:

*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.*

David says God rescued him from "*the pit of destruction.*" This Hebrew phrase suggests chaos, devastation, and death.

Then he adds another image: "*the miry clay.*" This phrase describes thick mud that traps a person so they cannot escape. It is like a miry bog. Think of foul-smelling, slimy mud in a filthy lake. The miry bog is the picture of distress, and the stench of death associated with sin, and the Lord Jesus entered this miry bog to save us because we were helpless to get out. All of our attempts to climb out only caused us to sink deeper. So, Jesus entered the miry bog to rescue us. He rescued us by dying in the miry bog of God's wrath for our sin.

And yet the last part of v. 2 tells us that God intervenes. Verse 2 says, "*He set my feet upon a rock.*" The rock is the opposite of the mud. The mud is unstable. The rock is secure. The mud traps. The rock establishes. The mud leads to death. The rock leads to life.

Brothers and sisters, while David's experience of deliverance was real for him. The imagery in v. 2 finds its fullest meaning in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ entered the deepest, mire-filled pit of sin in order to save sinners. He was betrayed, condemned, crucified, and buried. He entered the pit of the grave, the pit of death, and yet the Father did not leave Him there. In Acts 13:35-37, the Apostle Paul proclaimed:

Therefore he says also in another psalm, "You will not let your Holy One see corruption." ³⁶ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, ³⁷ but he whom God raised up did not see corruption."

After three days in the pit of death, Jesus rose from the dead. The Father lifted Him out and set His feet on the rock of resurrected life. Now, because Christ has been saved through His resurrection from the dead, He is able to save those who trust in Him.

Next, because Jesus is alive, v. 3 tells that God has given Jesus a new song:

*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.

In the Bible, a new song usually follows a great act of redemption. After the Red Sea, Moses sang. After some act of deliverance, Israel sang. In heaven, the redeemed will sing a new song. The resurrection created the greatest new song in history—the gospel song. The early church did not gather merely to remember a teacher. They gathered to worship a risen Savior and sing the new song of salvation in Jesus – the gospel song.

Friends, we gathered here this morning to sing the new song of salvation in Christ. It is the gospel song that all of us sing who have been saved out of the pit and miry mud of our sin and death by Jesus Christ. We were stuck in our sins and sentenced to death. We were helpless, and Jesus took our place on the cross. He was buried in the pit of death because of our sin. Yet, God raised Him to new life, and now He gives that resurrected life to all who call on His name for salvation. He puts a new song in their hearts. Can you sing the gospel song? Has God given you this song?

II. Jesus' Trusted in the LORD for His Resurrection (vv. 4-5)

In vv. 4-5, we see how Jesus trusted in the Father to raise Him from the dead.

Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust.

The Hebrew word for “*blessed*” means deep flourishing as a result of trusting in the Lord. True blessing is not found in power, success, or wealth. True blessing is found in trusting God.

The Hebrew word for “*man*” in v. 4 means “*strong man*.” The implication of this word shows us how we are tempted to trust in ourselves and our own ability. Instead, it is the person who humbles himself before the Lord and trusts in God’s ways by obeying Him that is blessed.

Verse 4 is the contrast between the two paths in Psalm 1. One path is the path of the righteous who trust the Lord. The other path is a lie. It is the proud person who walks the way of the wicked and trusts in themselves. But v. 4 calls us to trust in God just as Jesus did.

Then, in v. 5, David reflected on the many wondrous works that God accomplished because he trusted in Him:

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.

Verse 5 is the amplification of v. 3. He says *he will proclaim the wondrous deeds of God toward us*. David ultimately points us to the wondrous works of the *greater Son*, Jesus Christ. You see, the *wondrous deeds* of God reach their fulfillment in the sinless life of Jesus, His miracles, His substitutionary death on the cross for His people, and His victory over death by His resurrection.

Jesus' trust in God meant He yielded Himself completely, believing the Father would not abandon Him to death. This echoes Psalm 16:10:

You will not abandon my soul to Sheol... or let your Holy One see corruption.

Jesus didn't cling to His life; instead, He entrusted His life to God. And as a result, the resurrection is the Father's vindication of the Son's trust in God. Because Jesus trusted God, Acts 2:24 says, “*God raised him up.*” Likewise, in 1 Timothy 3:16, the Apostle Paul writes, “*He [Jesus] was vindicated by the [Holy] Spirit.*”

These passages teach us that the Father publicly vindicated Jesus' death on the cross by raising Him from the dead. *Listen carefully here: Jesus' trust in God is answered—not by preventing His death, but by going through it for us and defeating it, because He trusted God to raise Him from the dead.*

We are here this Easter morning to proclaim to the world the multiplication of Jesus' wondrous deeds. They are more than can be told, so every Sunday we gather to remember and proclaim that salvation is available for all who will trust in the risen Savior. *Are you trusting in Jesus today?*

Think about it this way: Imagine approaching a bridge that spans a deep canyon. You can admire the bridge. You can study the bridge. You can even talk about the bridge. But you do not truly trust the bridge until you walk across it. In the same way, many people admire Jesus. They respect His teaching. They appreciate His morality. But saving faith means trusting Him completely. It means trusting the One who trusted Himself completely to God by dying to pay for your sins, was buried, and then on the third day walked out of the grave to secure your salvation. *Are you trusting in Him? Are you, by faith, beholding the One who died for you and was raised?*

III. Jesus' Obedience to the LORD resulted in His Resurrection (vv. 6-8)

Look in v. 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.

Verse 6, as we looked at earlier, is quoted in Hebrews 10 and applied to Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews explains that animal sacrifices could never remove sin. They were shadows pointing forward to something greater. God desired perfect obedience. And that obedience came through Christ.

In the original Hebrew language, the phrase translated "*you have opened my ears*" literally means: "*You have dug ears for me.*" If you are reading the ESV, you should have a footnote explaining that at the bottom of the page. This phrase is the image of God forming a servant who listens.

The Greek translation used in the Book of Hebrews renders this phrase: "*A body you have prepared for me.*" This connects Psalm 40 to the incarnation of Christ. Here we have Christmas and Easter connected because we learn that God prepared a body for Christ so that He could fulfill perfect obedience to the law and covenants for His people and then die in their place for their sins.

Listen, here's something else we need to know about Jesus' obedience to the Father. Christ did not reluctantly come to earth to obey the Father. Verses 7-8 tell us that He delighted to do so. That obedience led Him to the cross. Listen to vv. 7-8:

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."

Now, let's go back to the book of Hebrews, and this time we will hear what is written in Hebrews 12:2,

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2 echoes the last part of v. 8, which says that Jesus delighted to do God's will, and it was His great joy from His *heart*. The very "*control center*" of Jesus' life was about joyfully obeying God even though it led to His death on the cross.

Philippians 2:8-9 shows the connection between Jesus' joyful obedience and His resurrection:

"He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death... therefore God has highly exalted him."

The word "*therefore*" in v. 9 matters because it tells us that Jesus' obedience flowed from His trust in God, which led to His exaltation. What Jesus did was not some kind of transaction in which God says, "*If you do this, then I will do this.*" Instead, it is the promised outcome of His perfect obedience. The resurrection is the Father's declaration that Christ's obedience was perfect and able to save all who trust in Him.

Do you know what the application of vv. 6-8 are? Well, Hebrews 10:22-25 helps us:

[Therefore] let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Did you catch the application? Here's the summary: *It is the worship of Jesus for the salvation He earned, for our endurance in our faith, for our encouraging others to endure, and for us to faithfully meet together for worship as a local church.*

One more point of application, and this is more of a litmus test to see if you belong to Jesus. Because Jesus delighted to obey the Father's will from the heart, when Jesus saves you, He creates the same heart in His followers. They desire to obey God from the heart. It is their new desire. This is what it means to be born again from the heart. So, is it your joy to obey God? Do you joyfully obey, or do you think you are earning salvation as you obey, or do you grudgingly obey, hoping you won't be punished?

IV. Jesus Proclaims the Good News of Salvation (vv. 3, 9-10)

Let's read vv. 3, 9-10 together:

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. . . . 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.*

Verses 9-10 are a further amplification of v. 3. They are proclaiming the glad news of deliverance. The Hebrew phrase "*I have told the glad news*" is the idea of preaching the gospel. The psalmist is announcing salvation publicly. This anticipates the mission of the risen Christ and His church.

In Ephesians 2:17, the Apostle Paul tells us that after Jesus was raised from the dead, Jesus preached the glad news and He continues to preach the glad news:

And he [Jesus] came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

The Apostle Paul's point is very clear. When the gospel is announced today, Jesus Himself is speaking. He sends preachers, evangelists, and Christians to announce the good news as His ambassadors. However, when the gospel is faithfully preached, it is Christ who is speaking. So, don't underestimate the power of our singing together, reading the word of God together, praying together, and listening to the preaching together. Through these proclamations, we are hearing the voice of Christ in the Spirit. Then, as we spread out in our community and share the good news, it is Christ who is speaking through us.

Conclusion: Let me close with vv. 16-17:

*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!*

Friends, vv. 16-17 call us to behold Jesus as we struggle through this life. As life beats us up and suffering inevitably comes, who do we behold? In whom do we trust? Who is our help? We need to be reminded the Captain of our Salvation has won the battle through His resurrection from the dead. Verses 16-17 drive home the application of Psalm 40. Let me illustrate it this way:

The late Tim Keller told a story of a lady in his church when he was a young pastor. This lady had been through a lifetime of trauma and abuse. She had people who had treated her very badly, and she had also endured many physical ailments. Keller says that when he would engage her at church, she always had a cheerful countenance and demeanor. She didn't pretend she didn't have struggles or problems, and yet she had a strong faith in the Lord.

Tim Keller said that one particular Sunday, he was talking to her, and he told her he was so sorry for the things that some people had done to her. She replied, *"Oh, it will be alright. The Lord knows what happened. On the last day, God will judge, and if they deserve something, God will judge. I don't have to worry about it."* Then he said, *"Well, I know you have suffered a lot."* To which she replied, *"You know God is going to take me to Himself, and He is going to make a new Heaven and a new earth."*

Keller went on to say that everything he said to her, she replied, *"Well, God is going to do this, and He is going to do that."* She would continually bring it back to the Lord.

As he thought about this lady and her faith in God, Keller said he formed an idea of what this Christian woman was like. He said, *"Imagine you are in a fort and the enemy is attacking you. They have invaded the fort, and they have you surrounded. It looks like the battle is over. But, what if you could climb up into the watch tower, you know, the highest point in the fort, and look out over the wall of the fort, and see that overwhelming reinforcements are on the way. When you see the reinforcements, you know the battle is won. However, if you look down inside the fort, it looks like you are going to lose, but you have the vantage point to see that the victory is won. There is no problem. The battle is won."*

He said when he was talking to her, it was kind of like he was down in the fort and all he could see was the battle in the fort, and he was trying to help her, but she was up in the tower saying, *"God's going to do this, and He's going to do that. She was marvelous at seeing life from that perspective."*

Keller goes on to say that the lady was sick, and she did get very sick later and was dying. Eventually, she had a collapse and was put in the ICU. She was on a respirator and seemingly unconscious. He said she must have been in pain, and she seemed so anxious because her brow was furrowed. So, he got down close to her and read John 14:1-3 to her:

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also.

He says she seemed to hear him. He said the furrows on her brow lightened up, and she gave a little nod. Then he said, *"You know what was happening? By reading that passage to her, reminding her of Jesus' words in John, it helped her get back up in the tower."*

Friends, on Good Friday, the disciples were down in the fort. They thought the battle was lost. What they needed to do was get into the tower and see what God was going to do. We serve a God who raises the dead. Where are you right now? Are you down in the fort where it seems like the battle is lost, or are you in the tower, beholding Jesus, the risen Savior? Friends, beholding the resurrection of Jesus gets you back up in the tower. The victory is won. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.