

Psalm 40: A Christmas Psalm

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Date: 16 December 2018

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

- [0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help, and the Lord's leading, if we could turn back to that first portion of scripture that we read in the book of Psalms, in Psalm 40.
- Book of Psalms, Psalm 40. And if you read again from the beginning. Psalm 40 from the beginning.
- 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.
- Now, Psalm 40, it's a psalm that's very familiar to us. We've sang this psalm from our youth. We've probably learned the words.
- We probably memorized them in Sunday school or even in school when we were young. And for some of you, I'm sure, here this evening, I'm sure that Psalm 40, it's not only a familiar psalm, but it's also a favorite psalm.
- [1 : 3 3] And it's very easy to understand why Psalm 40 is your favorite psalm. Because Psalm 40, as we read even in those opening verses, Psalm 40 is so personal.
- And it's so beautiful as it describes the experience and the feelings and the emotions of the Christian. And Psalm 40, it's personal because it describes to us so vividly what Jesus does for the person who trusts in him.
- As David said, he hears their cry. He takes them. Jesus takes them from the fearful pit and from the miry clay. He puts a new song into their mouth.
- That's what Jesus does for everyone who makes that personal commitment to him. But, you know, the wonderful thing about Psalm 40 is that it's not only personal to you and to your experience.
- It's also a psalm that's personal to Jesus. And to his experience. And I say that because Psalm 40 is what I've titled this evening. It's a Christmas psalm.
- [2 : 4 0] Psalm 40 is a Christmas psalm. And Psalm 40, it speaks very clearly about the incarnation of Jesus Christ. And the word incarnation, it means the enfleshment.
- The enfleshment of God. When the Son of God, the eternal Son of God, became man by taking to himself our nature.
- He became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. It was the incarnation. It was the enfleshment of God. And, you know, it's good for us to think about the incarnation at this time of year.
- Because, as we said this morning, in the midst of all the busy chaos of Christmas, we tend to forget about what it's really about. We tend to forget that it's all about this person, Jesus Christ.
- But, you know, this well-known and much-loved psalm, Psalm 40, it reminds us that Christmas is all about the incarnate Christ. Therefore, we can say that Psalm 40 is not only personal to you.

[3 : 43] As someone who has committed their life to the Lord. Psalm 40 is also personal to Jesus. It's personal to Jesus. Because in this psalm, he reminds us that he has committed his life to you.

So, Psalm 40 is not only about your commitment to Jesus. Psalm 40 is also about Jesus' commitment to you. But more than that, Psalm 40 is the confession of the Christian.

And it's the confession of the Christ. But it's also the confession of the church. And that's what I want us to see in these opening ten verses that we read earlier.

I want us to see that Psalm 40 reveals to us the confession of the Christian. The confession of the Christ. And the confession of the church. Psalm 40 is the confession of the Christian.

The confession of the Christ. And the confession of the church. So, if we look, first of all, at the confession of the Christian. The confession of the Christian, verses 1 to 3.

[4 : 47] David says, And it's a personal testimony of how the Lord began to work in his life.

And you know, we can see that it's a personal confession of faith because David repeatedly uses the words I, my, and me. They're personal pronouns. They describe his personal experience.

He says, It's a personal psalm.

But what we have to see here is that David praises the Lord publicly. Because he has come to know the Lord personally. David praises the Lord publicly because he has come to know the Lord personally.

And you know, that's why so many of us love Psalm 40. Because we can see ourselves in this psalm. And we can see that David's personal confession as a Christian is also our personal confession as a Christian.

[6 : 27] This is our personal testimony. That we praise the Lord publicly because we have come to know the Lord personally. But you know, when David says that he waited patiently for the Lord.

Now those words we have to note. When David says that he waited patiently for the Lord. He doesn't mean that he was just waiting around for the Lord to save him. It wasn't that David just said to himself, If I'm going to be saved, I will be saved.

There's nothing I can do about it. David didn't just sit in church saying to himself, Well, I'm just going to wait patiently for the Lord to save me.

That's not what David is saying here. Because David knew that if he just waited for the Lord to save him, the Lord would never save him. No, David affirms to us that he had to earnestly cry to the Lord for mercy.

There was a responsibility put upon David. And so what we have to understand is that the word wait, it literally means to hope. He hoped for the Lord.

[7 : 37] It doesn't mean that he was sitting around doing nothing. It doesn't mean that he was sitting in church doing nothing, just waiting for salvation to drop into his lap. No, David is emphasizing here that he had to have this hope, this active confidence and commitment to the Lord.

He says, I waited for the Lord my God and patiently did bear. At length to me he did incline my voice and cry to hear. David is saying to us, I earnestly cried to the Lord in the hope and confidence that he would hear me and answer me.

David didn't sit back and wait for the Lord just to bring salvation to him. No, he earnestly cried to the Lord with the hope and the confidence and the commitment that when he cried to the Lord, the Lord would hear him and the Lord would answer him.

And you know, my unconverted friend, that's what you need to do. Because just sitting and waiting for the Lord to save you, just sitting and waiting for salvation to drop into your lap, it'll never happen.

The Lord is not going to save you unless you earnestly cry to him for mercy. And you know, when you do, when you earnestly cry to the Lord for mercy, he will do in you and for you what he does for every Christian, for every person who cries to the Lord for mercy.

[9 : 09] As it says in verse 2, David says, 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.

That's what the Lord promises to do for every person who cries to the Lord for mercy. And you know, in this verse, in verse 2, David gives to us this vivid imagery of where we are without Christ.

So, my unconverted friend, David is describing where you are tonight, without Christ. Because he says that without Christ, we are in a miry bog, it's a slimy pit, and it's a muddy swamp.

The imagery is of being stuck and bogged down in the filth of sin and immorality from this world. And you know, we can easily relate to this imagery that David is describing because we're surrounded by peat.

I'm sure most of us here have spent a day out in the moor cutting peats, or lifting them, or taking them home. We've all been out in the bogs.

[10 : 20] And you know, every time I read these opening words of Psalm 40, I'm always reminded of my childhood when I used to be out in the peats. And back then, as you know, it was a big family affair.

Everyone went out. Everyone was there helping, whether it was cutting, or whether it was lifting the peats, or whether it was taking the peats home. Everyone was there loading the tractor up.

But in my childhood, when we got fed up, which was quite often and very quickly, we would often go to the, to try and find the wettest and the dirtiest and the boggiest parts of the moor just to see if our wellies would get stuck.

And at first, well, we'd attempted all the shallow areas. You'd walk through them and we'd get through them safely. So, well, confidence was building. So you would try another one. You would go through a deeper and an even dirtier bog.

But you know, eventually we would get stuck. And when we got stuck, we realised, well, I realised, that I couldn't go forward. Couldn't go backwards. Couldn't go anywhere. The more I struggled, the more I sank.

[11 : 24] And the dirtier I got. And the only option I had was to cry for help. And when we cried for help, help came. A hand reached down, a hand leaned down to pull us out of the bog.

And, well, the hand had pulled us out and placed us on the hard ground of the peat road. And then they had to clean us all up. And, you know, that's something like the vivid imagery David is using here.

Because, when you're without Christ, you know, we want to live our own lives. We want to go our own way. We want to do our own thing. But with every bog that we get through, we try a deeper one.

We try a deeper one. And, of course, we think that every one of them will be fine. If the last one was fine, the next one will be fine. And we don't, what we don't see is that we're endangering ourselves and we're endangering our soul.

And we don't worry about those around us. We don't even worry about what we might be putting our husband through or what we might be putting our wife through or even what we might be putting our parents through by our actions.

[12 : 30] We never think about the consequences of our actions because we're living for ourselves. We're living for our own pleasure, our own wants, our own desires.

We're living without a thought towards eternity. And, you know, like the prodigal son, we will go from bog to bog to bog until we come to the end of ourselves and realise the mess that we're in and the bog that we've sunk into and the pit that we find ourselves in.

And it's until then, until we see that we have sunk so low that we can't go forwards and we can't go backwards, until then, until that point, it's then that we will cry to the Lord for mercy and for help.

And our only hope then is to seek the Lord with all our heart and to ask the Lord to rescue us from that fearful pit that we have found ourselves in. But, you know, David, he doesn't describe the pit like a bog of mud or peat.

He describes the pit like a grave. And what David is saying is that before he cried to the Lord, he was sinking deeper and deeper in sin.

[13 : 48] And the more he sank in sin, the more he came closer to death. Maybe not physical death, but certainly the prospect of an eternal death.

And, you know, that's how the Bible describes someone who is not a Christian. My friend, if you're unconverted tonight, this is how the Bible describes you. You're spiritually dead.

You're in the grave. You're in the grave. You're dead in your trespasses and sins. That's your testimony. That's your confession. You're in the grave with your sin and you're going headlong towards a lost eternity in hell.

But, you know, the wonder of the confession of the Christian, which can be your confession, is that when we cry to the Lord, when we cry to the Lord earnestly with our whole heart, the Lord pulls us out of the pit of destruction.

The Lord, he lifts us up out of the miry bog. The Lord then establishes our feet upon solid rock. The rock?

[14 : 55] Who else is the rock but Jesus Christ? My friend, the confession of the Christian is that we weren't saved because of anything in us but because we cried out to God for mercy and God graciously heard us and he graciously plucked us as brands from the burning.

And, you know, when we cried to God for mercy, we sought him with all our heart. And this is the thing. You need to seek the Lord with all your heart. All your heart.

And that's when the Lord will save you. And that's what's emphasized in these verses. It's all the Lord's doing when we cry to him for mercy. He heard me.

He inclined his ear to me. He pulled me out of the pit. He established my feet on solid rock. He gave me a new song in my mouth. He brought me from death.

He awakened my soul. He gave me new life. He rescued me from the grave. He saved me. And he did it all when I cried to him for mercy.

[16 : 05] He did it all when I cried to him for mercy. But you know, when David gives to us the confession of the Christian, he urges others to have the same confession.

confession. confession. confession. It's not enough just to have this as his personal confession. confession. He wants everyone else to have this as their personal confession. He says, down in verse 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.

You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts towards us. None can compare with you. I will proclaim and tell them, tell of them, yet they are more than can be told.

David says, the Christian is blessed. And everyone who trusts in the Lord is blessed. And they're blessed because they're not like the unconverted.

David describes the unconverted as those who are too proud to turn to the Lord. David describes the unconverted as those who are too proud to cry to the Lord for mercy.

[17 : 17] They're stubborn. They're unwilling. He says, the unconverted, they're consumed with the world and chasing after this lie. But for the Christian, he says, they're blessed.

Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust. The Christian is blessed and their confession and their confession is that the Lord's gracious thoughts and deeds towards them are far too many to be numbered.

You know, my unconverted friend, will you not make the confession of the Christian? Will you not make this personal testimony your personal testimony?

And if this is your personal testimony, then you must testify to what the Lord has done in your life. You should never be afraid to make known what the Lord has done in your life.

You shouldn't keep it to yourself. You should declare publicly what the Lord has made known to you personally. You shouldn't keep it to yourself. Make it known to others.

[18 : 25] You have to make the confession of the Christian. But as we said, Psalm 40 not only gives to us the confession of the Christian, if we continue in the Psalm, it also gives to us the confession of the Christ.

That's what we see secondly. The confession of the Christ. Look in verse 6. It says, 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. Then I said, Behold, I have come. In the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God.

Your law is within my heart. Now, Psalm 40 is a messianic psalm, which means that it speaks very clearly about the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

And how do we recognize a messianic psalm? Well, we recognize a messianic psalm if there's a reference to the Messiah, Messiah, in a psalm, and it's explained and applied to Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

[19 : 32] And that's what we see here in verses 6 to 8. Because these words in verses 6 to 8, they can't be applied to David. These verses, they can't be applied to us.

They can only be applied to Jesus. because, as we read in Hebrews chapter 10, we read that God prepared for Jesus a body of sacrifice when he entered into this world.

God prepared the body of Jesus to be offered up as a sacrifice for sin. Now, the letter to the Hebrews which we read earlier, it's a letter that was written to Jewish Christians who were on the verge of turning away from their Christianity.

They were on the verge of giving up because of persecution. But in order to prevent them from turning away, they were reminded that Jesus is better.

The writer to the Hebrews, he points us to Jesus and he says, Jesus is better. And he says, he's better than the prophets. He's better than the angels. Jesus is better than Moses.

[20 : 37] Jesus provides a better Sabbath rest. Jesus is better than Aaron as a high priest. He provides a better covenant. He gives to us a better sanctuary for worship.

But then we come to chapter 10 of the letter to the Hebrews and we're told that Jesus provided a better sacrifice than all the sacrifices that were before him. All the blood, he says, from the blood of the bulls and the goats that were offered during the Old Testament period.

The writer to the Hebrews says that the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was better, far better, than all the sacrifices that were ever offered at the temple and in the tabernacle.

And the reason for this, he says, is because all these sacrifices, all the bulls and the goats and the lambs and the blood, they were only types. They were only shadows of what was to come.

And the writer to the Hebrews says that it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away our sin. The blood of bulls and goats, he says, it can't deal with our sin.

[21 : 45] It can't deal with our problem of sin. They could never cover the heinousness and the awfulness of our sin before the sight of a holy God. But Hebrews says, when Christ came, do you love those words?

When Christ came, he said, this is what Jesus says, his confession is, quoting Psalm 40, sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me.

Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me. Now, as we can see here in Psalm 40, the words, a body you have prepared for me, they're not quoted here, but they're quoted in Hebrews 10.

And they're quoted in Hebrews 10 because they're words of explanation. They're words that interpret and explain what is being implied in Psalm 40.

They're explaining to us that Jesus, in Psalm 40, is giving us his personal confession about the incarnation. Jesus is telling us in Psalm 40 as to why he came into the world.

[23 : 04] Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me. In burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.

And you know, what we have to see from this messianic confession is that Jesus, God the Son, he's speaking here in verses 6 to 8, and he's speaking to his Father.

He's speaking to God the Father. And Jesus, God the Son, is speaking to God the Father. And what he's speaking about is that the blood of bulls and goats, they have never satisfied you.

That's what Jesus is saying to his Father. The blood of bulls and of goats, all the lambs in the Old Testament, they never really satisfied you. Because those sacrifices, he says, they had to be given daily.

The offerings, they had to be made continually. But they could never achieve a full atonement. They could never accomplish a full redemption. And so Jesus, he's actually speaking through the words of Psalm 40, and he's confessing his personal experience, a body you have prepared for me.

[24 : 19] And you know, my friend, the confession of the Christ is an amazing confession. Because Jesus is saying here that he became man. He was incarnated.

God was enfleshed. A body was prepared for him. All so that he could be a sacrifice for our sin.

My friend, the wonder and glory of the incarnation is that God became man in order to deal with our sin.

God humbled himself. As the Bible says he became lower than the angels. He took to himself our nature, our likeness. He became man.

Bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. Philippians chapter 2, Paul is talking about the humiliation of Jesus Christ. And he says about Jesus that he made himself of no reputation.

[25 : 22] He took upon the form of a servant. He was made in likeness of man. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

He went from glory to Golgotha to the grave, from the crown to the cradle to the cross. My friend, this is the wonder of the incarnation, that the Son of God, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and yet he humbled himself to become a servant.

Why? To be our sacrifice. The Son of God became a servant in order to be our sacrifice.

And this is what Jesus is confessing to us here in Psalm 40. He says in verse 6, You have given me an open ear. It says at the beginning, In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear.

You have pierced my ear. And what Jesus means by this is that he took upon himself the role of the suffering servant. Because the piercing of the ear, or the opening of the ear, it refers to the obedience of a slave.

[26 : 43] Exodus chapter 21, it talks about the obedience of slaves, and it says, If a slave plainly says, I love my master, I love my wife, I love my children, I will not go out free, then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door of the doorpost, and his master shall bore his ear through with a sharp tool, and he shall be his slave forever.

And that's the imagery that's being used here in Psalm 40. Jesus is confessing that he is the obedient slave. He's the willing slave. He's the submissive slave.

He's the sacrifice to atone for sin and satisfy God's justice. And Jesus, he's making the confession of the slave. He says, I love my master, I love my wife, I love my children, I will not go out free.

And that's the confession of Jesus. This suffering servant, he says, I love my father. He is my master. I love my wife, who is the church.

I love her. I love my people. My people. He says, I love them. I will not go out free. I have come, Jesus says, not to be served, but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many.

[28 : 09] I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly. I have come that they might be redeemed, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but by my precious blood.

What a confession. What a confession to make. This is the confession of the Christ that he was willing to die on our behalf. Willing to die in our place as the suffering servant.

But more than that, Jesus says in verse seven, he says, behold, then I said, behold, I have come in the scroll of the book.

It is written of me. It is written of me, he says, according to the scriptures. It's all in there for us, he says. It's written in the scriptures.

And you know, that's what Paul says about Jesus. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. Christ was buried according to the scriptures.

[29 : 18] Christ was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. In the scroll of the book, it is written of me. My friend, this is the confession of the Christ.

In the scroll of the book, it is written of me. It's there for you to read. I am there. In the scroll of the book, it is written of me.

But you know, the confession of the Christ, it's not only about himself. The confession of the Christ is also about his father. He says in verse eight, I delight to do your will, oh my God.

Your law is within my heart. And you know, reading this verse, I delight to do your will, it should always make us ask the question, how was there delight in doing the father's will?

Where was the delight in doing the father's will? Because when we see Jesus, we look at Jesus and he has opposition everywhere.

Christ is the head of the church. The Christian is the body of the church. And as one, as both head and body, the confession of the church is the same. And so when Christ speaks through these words, he's reminding the church that her confession is all about him. Jesus Christ is reminding the church that he must be proclaimed. You must proclaim Christ and him crucified. That's the message of the church. Christ is to be elevated. Christ is to be exalted. Christ is to be worshipped. Christ is to be praised. Christ is to receive all the glory, honour and adoration because Christ is the only one who speaks in his church. And you know, that's something we should never forget when we come to church.

When you come to church, it's not the minister who's speaking. Jesus Christ is speaking to you through his word. When the word of God is being read in church, Christ is speaking. When the Psalms are being sung in church, the Christ is speaking. When the preacher is preaching in church, whoever it is, Christ is speaking. And my friend, Christ is speaking to us personally. He's speaking to us personally.

[36 : 33] But you know, the confession of the church is not only that Christ is speaking, the Christian is also speaking because we're one. And the Christian is testifying to the saving grace of God. The Christian is confessing and even professing as part of the church of what Christ has done for them.

That he took them from a fearful pit. He established their feet on solid rock. He put a new song in their mouth. And it was all because Jesus Christ became man. He became the suffering servant who offered himself upon the cross as a sacrifice for sin. And because this news is such good news, the confession of the Christian and the confession of the Christ, the confession of the church, it must be, I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation. Behold, I have not restrained my lips as you know, Lord. 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.

It's all about making Jesus known. That's the confession of the church. What did Jesus say to his disciples? Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations.

Make known to them who baptize people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That's the role of the church. The confession of the church is to make Jesus known.

My friend, Psalm 40 reminds us that the confession of the Christian and the confession of the Christ is also the confession of the church. And you know, our confession as a church, it should always be, not unto us, Lord, not to us, but to thou glory take. Psalm 40, it's a wonderful psalm. It's not only familiar, but it's also a favorite. But more than that, Psalm 40 is, you could say, a Christmas psalm.

[38 : 51] It speaks very clearly about the incarnation of Jesus Christ and its clarity. Its clarity comes to us through the confession of the confession of the Christian, the confession of the Christ, and even the confession of the church. But you know, my unconverted friend here this evening, I just want to say to you in closing, if you love Psalm 40, which I'm sure you do, make the confession of the Christian. Make the confession of the Christian your confession.

Not by sitting, waiting for salvation to drop into your lap, but by doing as David did, by earnestly crying to the Lord for mercy. Make the confession of the Christian your confession.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for the wonder of the incarnation, that thou art the one who prepared for Jesus a body, and that that body would be offered up upon Calvary's tree, that he would be wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, that the chastisement of our peace would be upon him, and with his stripes we would be healed.

O we bless thee, O Lord, and we praise thee, that he speaks to us in his word, and we pray, Lord, that we would hear his voice, that we would be obedient to his voice, that we would come and commit ourselves to him, not only for the first time, but every day of our lives, that we would take up our cross daily, and follow after Jesus, this Jesus who loved us, and gave himself for us.

Bind us together, Lord, we pray. Keep us in the week that lies ahead. A week, Lord, that we're often reminded is unknown to us, but we thank thee and we praise thee, that we have begun it in the Lord's house, committing everything into thy care and keeping.

[41 : 08] O keep our going out and our coming in, from this time forth, and even forevermore, for we ask it in Jesus' name, and for his sake. Amen.

We shall bring our service to a conclusion by singing those words in Psalm 40. Psalm 40 from verse 8.

Psalm 40 from verse 8. Just picking up where we left off. And we're singing down to the end of the double verse, Mark 10. To do thy will I take delight, O thou my God that art, yea, that most holy love thine I have within my heart.

Within the congregation great I righteousness did preach. Lo, thou dost know, O Lord, that I refrain not my speech. But sing down to the end of the verse, Mark 10, of Psalm 40, to God's praise.

Let's sing.

[42 : 36] O Lord, that I have within my heart. Will the congregation great I righteousness did preach.

O Lord, that I refrain not my speech.

I never did within my heart conceal thy righteousness.

By thy salvation have declared and showed thy faithfulness.

Thy kindness which most loving is. Conceal it have no time.

[44 : 11] Nor from the congregation great. Nor from the congregation great.

Have good thy benity. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen.