



Daily Devotions in the Psalms

Psalm 40-44

Monday 25th May - Psalm 40

I waited patiently for the Lord;
he turned to me and heard my cry.
2 He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.
3 He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the Lord
and put their trust in him.
4 Blessed is the one
who trusts in the Lord,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.
5 Many, Lord my God,
are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.
None can compare with you;
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,
they would be too many to declare.
6 Sacrifice and offering you did not desire—
but my ears you have opened—
burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.
7 Then I said, "Here I am, I have come—
it is written about me in the scroll.
8 I desire to do your will, my God;
your law is within my heart."
9 I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly;

I do not seal my lips, Lord,
as you know.
10 I do not hide your righteousness in my heart;
I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help.
I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness
from the great assembly.
11 Do not withhold your mercy from me, Lord;
may your love and faithfulness always protect me.
12 For troubles without number surround me;
my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see.
They are more than the hairs of my head,
and my heart fails within me.
13 Be pleased to save me, Lord;
come quickly, Lord, to help me.
14 May all who want to take my life
be put to shame and confusion;
may all who desire my ruin
be turned back in disgrace.
15 May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!"
be appalled at their own shame.
16 But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who long for your saving help always say,
"The Lord is great!"
17 But as for me, I am poor and needy;
may the Lord think of me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
you are my God, do not delay.

Here are 6 things that I hope you'll see in this Psalm. Read over it and meditate on it and let it move you to pray it!

1. As I began reading this Psalm I was struck by how joyous David was as he remembered God's salvation. And yet, surprisingly, it ends with a plea for salvation from a man who is overwhelmed by his own sin and the desire of enemies to overtake him. Remembering God's past faithfulness helps us to trust God in present suffering or uncertainty. If you're struggling to trust God, preach Christ crucified and risen to your heart.
2. 'New songs' (v. 3) in the Bible are sung after great moments of victory and salvation. There's a new song on the far bank of the Red Sea in Exodus 15 and after Deborah and Barak lead Israel to victory over Sisera in Judges 5. In Revelation 5, there is a new song that reflects on the victory of Christ. Our song of victory is so much better. So sing!
3. David reminds us that trusting in God is better than trusting in any other thing or person because none can compare with God or save like Him. Where are you looking for salvation apart from Jesus? Let this Psalm remind you to repent of idolatry.
4. David reminds us that God is more interested in why we do what we do than what we do. God is not after heartless sacrifice (v. 6), but obedience that comes from the heart (v. 8) and marked by joyful proclamation (v. 9)
5. Psalm 40 teaches us that even the so-called 'heroes' of the faith struggled and needed to repent and persist in prayer. (v. 11-17) Why should our lives be any different?
6. God's word is so good! Be reminded that even an ancient song written by an Israeli shepherd-turned-warrior-king can speak into the experiences of life 3000 years later. God's word is so good; thank Him for it and revel in it.

Tuesday 26th May - Psalm 41

Blessed are those who have regard for the weak;
the Lord delivers them in times of trouble.

2 The Lord protects and preserves them—
they are counted among the blessed in the land
— he does not give them over to the desire of
their foes.

3 The Lord sustains them on their sickbed
and restores them from their bed of illness.

4 I said, "Have mercy on me, Lord;
heal me, for I have sinned against you."

5 My enemies say of me in malice,
"When will he die and his name perish?"

6 When one of them comes to see me,
he speaks falsely, while his heart gathers
slander;
then he goes out and spreads it around.

7 All my enemies whisper together against me;
they imagine the worst for me, saying,

8 "A vile disease has afflicted him;
he will never get up from the place where he
lies."

9 Even my close friend,
someone I trusted,
one who shared my bread,
has turned against me.

10 But may you have mercy on me, Lord;
raise me up, that I may repay them.

11 I know that you are pleased with me,
for my enemy does not triumph over me.

12 Because of my integrity you uphold me
and set me in your presence forever.

13 Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
Amen and Amen.

David is struggling, as his enemies attack and deceitfully malign him. Sometimes in our struggles we buy into the idea that God will not allow us to go through difficulty if we are doing the right things. This is foolish thinking. Any person used greatly by God will have to persevere through intense situations. Even Jesus, the only perfect person, died for the very fact that He was perfect.

This psalm isn't so much about experiencing difficulty but the fact that God doesn't let that difficulty define us. He walks with us through it, redeems it and uses it for His own ends and purposes in our lives. This Psalm forces us to ask ourselves questions like: How should we respond to betrayal? Do I use my words to belittle others or honour God? How do we regard those who are weak? Who is God calling us to be in the midst of our struggles?

Being merciful (v. 1) means far more than donating to charity, but sustained care for those who are impoverished. Since we have received radical generosity, we can be radically generous to others. Jesus applied verse 9 to himself as he was giving Judas every chance to repent. Like the disciples that night we as Christians are seated at the Lord's table with him, yet we often let him down as well, but he still forgives us! So, we should forgive those who betray us.

Lord, I thank you that you are merciful towards the weak. We become more aware of our own weaknesses in the middle of our own struggles. Thank you for your mercy towards us through Jesus. Despite our difficulties we ask that your costly grace to us would change our hearts, so we are able to give freely to others as you have given to us. Amen.

Martin

Wednesday 27th May - Psalm 42

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?
3 My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"
4 These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One[d]
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.
5 Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Saviour and my God.
6 My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you

from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.
7 Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.
8 By day the Lord directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.
9 I say to God my Rock,
"Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?"
10 My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"
11 Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Saviour and my God.

Cliff was an older man I got to know back in the 1980's. As a Vietnam Vet, he had fought as an infantry soldier and knew what it was to face death and know the stress of patrol whilst under fire. But for him the worse experience was heights. Cliff had fallen out of a helicopter three times while being under fire. The worst was when his helicopter was banking and when he fell around 30m. That experience of free falling and landing in rice paddies would often come back to haunt him, that and the physical pain in his back.

These experiences often cast a long shadow over his family life as well as his work. The most notable was his fears he had for heights. Step ladders were particularly bad, and being an electrician he was often overcome by the waves of emotion that came from that experience. I asked him what he did to overcome these fears. 'Breathe, hold on tight to something and remember where I am.... And don't fall'

Psalm 42 is a song that the people of Israel sang as they were overcome. This song spoke of David's struggle with fear, distance from God and His people being overwhelmed in the face of an enemy that was unrelenting. As it was for David so it was for His people. In this psalm we have David's answer, like Cliff's, to breathe, hold on tight, remember where you are and not to fall. Why? Because there is a great hope tied to this song.

As you read this psalm see how David describes his experience in these ways. But there is something else to see: consider how Jesus lived in light of this psalm. In the beginning when He was born, he became an exile away from Glory, the true temple, where He dwelt. In the face of his human weakness and difficulties he knew what would ultimately satisfy Him. In the face of great enemies he knew what it was to act in love and answer the hardness of heart of the Pharisees and religious leaders, of the crowds, and even his own family and disciples. It is no wonder that Jesus' practise was to retreat on mountain tops to pray and be restored. But see in the face of death, where Jesus' hope came from (42:11b).

Phil

Thursday 28th May - Psalm 43

Vindicate me, my God,
and plead my cause
against an unfaithful nation.
Rescue me from those who are
deceitful and wicked.
2 You are God my stronghold.
Why have you rejected me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?
3 Send me your light and your faithful care,
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy mountain,
to the place where you dwell.
4 Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God, my joy and my delight.
I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.
5 Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Saviour and my God.

I don't always find it easy to be completely honest about my pain, especially when I am feeling overwhelmed and struggling to cope. If you were to ask me on a bad day how I am getting on, I may be tempted to go into auto-pilot and say: Fine, how are you?

Notice how the psalmist responds to his painful experience.

First, there is the shocking realisation that something bad has happened. He comes to realise that he has been wronged and deceived. He communicates the pain of unfair treatment (43:1). He talks about his experience of oppression. He shares about plummeting into the emotional depths (43:5). He expresses the sense that God has let go of him (43:2)

When you are depressed it is not easy to get motivated. I admire the raw courage of the psalmist. He is really struggling, but he anticipates the answer to his prayer.

God is able to:

1. Send out his light and truth, and guide him 43:3
2. Lift him up spiritually, and fill his heart with joy 43:4
3. Give him the desire to pick up his musical instrument and praise God 43:4 (I was reminded of the wonderful truth from Ephesians when reading 43:3)

God has "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" Ephesians 2:6. This psalm puts in our mouth words that we can pray when we are feeling depressed:

5 Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my Saviour and my God. 43:5

John

Friday 29th May - Psalm 44

We have heard it with our ears, O God;
our ancestors have told us
what you did in their days,
in days long ago.
2 With your hand you drove out the nations
and planted our ancestors;
you crushed the peoples
and made our ancestors flourish.
3 It was not by their sword that they won the land,
nor did their arm bring them victory;
it was your right hand, your arm,
and the light of your face, for you loved them.
4 You are my King and my God,
who decrees[c] victories for Jacob.
5 Through you we push back our enemies;
through your name we trample our foes.
6 I put no trust in my bow,
my sword does not bring me victory;
7 but you give us victory over our enemies,
you put our adversaries to shame.
8 In God we make our boast all day long,
and we will praise your name forever.[d]
9 But now you have rejected and humbled us;
you no longer go out with our armies.
10 You made us retreat before the enemy,
and our adversaries have plundered us.
11 You gave us up to be devoured like sheep
and have scattered us among the nations.
12 You sold your people for a pittance,
gaining nothing from their sale.

13 You have made us a reproach to our neighbours,
the scorn and derision of those around us.
14 You have made us a byword among the nations;
the peoples shake their heads at us.
15 I live in disgrace all day long,
and my face is covered with shame
16 at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me,
because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge.
17 All this came upon us,
though we had not forgotten you;
we had not been false to your covenant.
18 Our hearts had not turned back;
our feet had not strayed from your path.
19 But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals;
you covered us over with deep darkness.
20 If we had forgotten the name of our God
or spread out our hands to a foreign god,
21 would not God have discovered it,
since he knows the secrets of the heart?
22 Yet for your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.
23 Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep?
Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.
24 Why do you hide your face
and forget our misery and oppression?
25 We are brought down to the dust;
our bodies cling to the ground.
26 Rise up and help us;
rescue us because of your unfailing love.

When times are difficult, how we cope with those times will depend on what, or who, we put our trust in to get us through the last difficult moment in life. In V1-8, David invokes the memory of God's repeated delivery of Israel from its enemies, the strength of God's right arm in defending them and winning victories for them and he concludes with the anthem

"In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever."

He is reminding himself, and it appears he is reminding God, of these things because from V9-16 he writes that the enemies of Israel are now turning the tide. Israel is now in retreat, they are being plundered, they are being sold for a pittance and mighty Israel is now a byword among the nations.

And for David, Israel's national troubles are a deeply personal assault because his days are filled with face covering disgrace and shame. The enemies he has are bent on revenge and he feels exposed at God's apparent absence.

Yet, David says that the predicament of Israel in Psalm 44 cannot be tied to their unfaithfulness. This time, at least, Israel has not forgotten God, not been false to the covenant, not turned back, not worshipped foreign God's. David says to God – you know this to be true (v. 20-21). While it is clear that at times Israel's terrible predicaments can be linked directly to their deliberate disobedience against God, David says to God, this is not one of those times. In fact, David says, it is because they are God's people they face death all day long (v. 22).

So what to do make of this?

Firstly, wilful, sustained and deliberate disobedience to God will lead to rejection from the safety of God's kingdom. Nothing in Psalm 44 suggests that the punishment of Israel for their past transgressions was unjustified.

Secondly, not all difficult circumstances are related to disobedience. We only need to read the book of Job to understand that truth. David in this Psalm dispels the lazy theology of cause and effect. This is prosperity gospel thinking and David points it out as nonsense.

Thirdly, difficult circumstances should humble us (v. 9) and cause us to call out to God for his mercy and help. We can do this because God is a God of unfailing love (v. 26).

Fourthly, we don't know from this Psalm if Israel was delivered, it ends before God answers David. Sometimes, like Job and David, we just don't get answers.

About 1000 years after David wrote this Psalm, after Israel lost its place as a world superpower, was decimated, exiled and now living under the control of the Roman empire, the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Rome, a sequel, if you like, to Psalm 44. Paul has witnessed first-hand what it is like to be conquered by the risen, living Jesus and he has tasted the victory even greater than that which David longed for in his Psalm and concludes that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (go and read more in Romans 8:31-39).

David in his Psalm longed for deliverance from difficult circumstances. This is something that we all do from time to time. With the benefit of several thousand years God's faithfulness to his people culminating in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul adds a perspective to difficulty that we must heed in this moment of time. A vaccine might restore a level of normality to our earthly existence, but a Saviour has come and he offers eternal safety if only we would turn and follow him. For those who have followed Jesus, Romans 8 tells us that we have been rescued by God's unfailing love.

Pray that God would convince his people every day that nothing in this life, or indeed all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Pray for boldness to talk to our neighbours and friends about a saviour far greater than a vaccine.

Matt