

PSALM 40

It should seem David penned this psalm upon occasion of his deliverance, by the power and goodness of God, from some great and pressing trouble, by which he was in danger of being overwhelmed; probably it was some trouble of mind arising from a sense of sin and of God's displeasure against him for it; whatever it was, the same Spirit that indited his praises for that deliverance was in him, at the same time, a Spirit of prophecy, testifying of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow; or, ere he was aware, he was led to speak of his undertaking, and the discharge of his undertaking, in words that must be applied to Christ only; and therefore how far the praises that here go before that illustrious prophecy, and the prayers that follow, may safely and profitably be applied to him it will be worth while to consider. In this psalm,

I. David records God's favour to him in delivering him out of his deep distress, with thankfulness to his praise (v. 1-5).

II. Thence he takes occasion to speak of the work of our redemption by Christ (v. 6-10).

III. That gives him encouragement to pray to God for mercy and grace both for himself and for his friends (v. 11-17). If, in singing this psalm, we mix faith with the prophecy of Christ, and join in sincerity with the praises and prayers here offered up, we make melody wit our hearts to the Lord.

PSALM 40:1-5

THE BENEFIT OF CONFIDENCE IN GOD

To the chief musician. A psalm of David.

In these verses we have,

I. The great distress and trouble that the psalmist had been in. He had been plunged into a horrible pit and into miry clay (v. 2), out of which he could not work himself, and in which he found himself sinking yet further. He says nothing here either of the sickness of his body or the insults of his

enemies, and therefore we have reason to think it was some inward disquiet and perplexity of spirit that was now his greatest grievance. Despondency of spirit under the sense of Gods withdrawings, and prevailing doubts and fears about the eternal state, are indeed a horrible pit and miry clay, and have been so to many a dear child of God.

II. His humble attendance upon God and his believing expectations from him in those depths: *I waited patiently for the Lord, v. 1. Waiting, I waited.* He expected relief from no other than from God; the same hand that tears must heal, that smites must bind up (~~306~~ Hosea 6:1), or it will never be done. From God he expected relief, and he was big with expectation, not doubting but it would come in due time. There is power enough in God to help the weakest, and grace enough in God to help the unworthiest, of all his people that trust in him. But he waited patiently, which intimates that the relief did not come quickly; yet he doubted not but it would come, and resolved to continue believing, and hoping, and praying, till it did come. Those whose expectation is from God may wait with assurance, but must wait with patience. Now this is very applicable to Christ. His agony, both in the garden and on the cross, was the same continued, and it was a horrible pit and miry clay. Then was his soul troubled and exceedingly sorrowful; but then he prayed, *Father, glorify thy name; Father, save me;* then he kept hold of his relation to his Father, “My God, my God,” and thus waited patiently for him.

III. His comfortable experience of God's goodness to him in his distress, which he records for the honour of God and his own and others' encouragement.

1. God answered his prayers: *He inclined unto me and heard my cry.* Those that wait patiently for God, though they may wait long, do not wait in vain. Our Lord Jesus was *heard in that he feared,* Hebrews v. 7. 5:7. Nay, he was sure that the Father heard him always.

2. He silenced his fears, and stilled the tumult of his spirits, and gave him a settled peace of conscience (v. 2): “*He brought me up out of that horrible pit of despondency and despair, scattered the clouds, and shone brightly upon my soul, with the assurances of his favour; and not only so, but set my feet upon a rock and established my goings.*” Those that have been under the prevalency of a religious melancholy, and by the grace of

God have been relieved, may apply this very feelingly to themselves; they are brought up out of a horrible pit.

(1.) The mercy is completed by the setting of their feet upon a rock, where they find firm footing, are as much elevated with the hopes of heaven as they were before cast down with the fears of hell. Christ is the rock on which a poor soul may stand fast, and on whose meditation alone between us and God we can build any solid hopes or satisfaction.

(2.) It is continued in the establishment of their goings. Where God has given a stedfast hope he expects there should be a steady regular conversation; and, if that be the blessed fruit of it, we have reason to acknowledge, with abundance of thankfulness, the riches and power of his grace.

3. He filled him with joy, as well as peace, in believing: "*He has put a new song in my mouth; he has given me cause to rejoice and a heart to rejoice.*" He was brought, as it were, into a new world, and that filled his mouth with a new song, *even praise to our God*; for to his praise and glory must all our songs be sung. Fresh mercies, especially such as we never before received, call for new songs. This is applicable to our Lord Jesus in his reception to paradise, his resurrection from the grave, and his exaltation to the joy and glory set before him; he was brought out of the horrible pit, set upon a rock, and had a new song put into his mouth.

IV. The good improvement that should be made of this instance of God's goodness to David.

1. David's experience would be an encouragement to many to hope in God, and, for that end, he leaves it here upon record: *Many shall see, and fear, and trust in the Lord.* They shall fear the Lord and his justice, which brought David, and the Son of David, into that horrible pit, and shall say, *If this be done to the green tree, what shall be done to the dry?* They shall fear the Lord and his goodness, in filling the mouth of David, and the Son of David, with new songs of joy and praise. There is a holy reverent fear of God, which is not only consistent with, but the foundation of, our hope in him. They shall not fear him and shun him, but fear him and trust in him in their greatest straits, not doubting but to find him as able and ready to help as David did in his distress. God's dealings with our Lord Jesus are our great encouragement to trust in God; when it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief for our sins, he demanded our debt from

him; and when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, he made it to appear that he had accepted the payment he made and was satisfied with it; and what greater encouragement can we have to fear and worship God and *to trust in him*?. See ^{<405>}Romans 4:25; v. 1, 2. The psalmist invites others to make God their hope, as he did, by pronouncing those happy that do so (v. 4): “*Blessed is the man that makes the Lord his trust, and him only (that has great and good thoughts of him, and is entirely devoted to him), and respects not the proud, does not do as those do that trust in themselves, nor depends upon those who proudly encourage others to trust in them; for both the one and the other turn aside to lies, as indeed all those do that turn aside from God.*” This is applicable, particularly, to our faith in Christ. Blessed are those that trust in him, and in his righteousness alone, and respect not the proud Pharisees, that set up their own righteousness in competition with that, that will not be governed by their dictates, nor turn aside to lies, with the unbelieving Jews, who *submit not to the righteousness of God*, ^{<408>}Romans 10:3. Blessed are those that escape this temptation.

2. The joyful sense he had of this mercy led him to observe, with thankfulness, the many other favours he had received from God, v. 5. When God puts new songs into our mouth we must not forget our former songs, but repeat them: “*Many, O Lord my God! are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, both for me and others; this is but one of many.*” Many are the benefits with which we are daily loaded both by the providence and by the grace of God.

(1.) They are his works, not only the gifts of his bounty, but the operations of his power. He works for us, he works in us, and thus he favours us with matter, not only for thanks, but for praise.

(2.) They are his wonderful works, the contrivance of them admirable, his condescension to us in bestowing them upon us admirable; eternity itself will be short enough to be spent in the admiration of them.

(3.) All his wonderful works are the product of his thoughts to us-ward. He does all *according to the counsel of his own will* (^{<401>}Ephesians 1:11), the purposes of his grace *which he purposed in himself*, ^{<401>}Ephesians 3:11. They are the projects of infinite wisdom, the designs of everlasting love (^{<407>}1 Corinthians 2:7, ^{<260>}Jeremiah 31:3), *thoughts of good and not of evil*, ^{<291>}Jeremiah 29:11. His gifts and callings will *therefore* be without

repentance, because they are not sudden resolves, but the result of his thoughts, his many thoughts, to us-ward.

(4.) They are innumerable; they cannot be methodized or *reckoned up in order*. There is an order in all God's works, but there are so many that present themselves to our view at once that we know not where to begin nor which to name next; the order of them, and their natural references and dependencies, and how the links of the golden chain are joined, are a mystery to us, and what we shall not be able to account for till the veil be rent and the mystery of God finished. Nor can they be counted, not the very heads of them. When we have said the most we can of the wonders of divine love to us we must conclude with an *et caetera* — *and such like*, and adore the depth, despairing to find the bottom.

PSALM 40:6-10

INSUFFICIENCY OF THE LEGAL SACRIFICES

The psalmist, being struck with amazement at the wonderful works that God had done for his people, is strangely carried out here to foretel that work of wonder which excels all the rest and is the foundation and fountain of all, that of our redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ. God's thoughts, which were to us-ward concerning that work, were the most curious, the most copious, the most gracious, and therefore to be most admired. This paragraph is quoted by the apostle (~~3005~~ Hebrews 10:5, etc.) and applied to Christ and his undertaking for us. As in the institutions, so in the devotions, of the Old Testament saints were aware of; and, when the apostle would show us the Redeemer's voluntary undertaking of his work, he does not fetch his account out of the book of God's secret counsels, which belong not to us, but from the things revealed. Observe,

I. The utter insufficiency of the legal sacrifices to atone for sin in order to our peace with God and our happiness in him: *Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire*; thou wouldst not have the Redeemer to offer them. Something he must have to offer, but not these (~~3003~~ Hebrews 8:3); therefore he must not be of the house of Aaron, ~~3074~~ Hebrews 7:14. Or, In the days of the Messiah burnt-offering and sin-offering will be no longer required, but all those ceremonial institutions will be abolished. But that is not all: even while the law concerning them was in full force it might be

said, God did not desire them, nor accept them, for their own sake. They could not take away the guilt of sin by satisfying God's justice. The life of a sheep, which is so much inferior in value to that of a man (^{<402>}Matthew 12:12), could not pretend to be an equivalent, much less an expedient to preserve the honour of God's government and laws and repair the injury done to that honour by the sin of man. They could not take away the terror of sin by pacifying the conscience, nor the power of sin by sanctifying the nature; it was impossible, ^{<309>}Hebrews 9:9; 10:1-4. What there was in them that was valuable resulted from their reference to Jesus Christ, of whom they were types — shadows indeed, but shadows of good things to come, and trials of the faith and obedience of God's people, of their obedience of God's people, of their obedience to the law and their faith in the gospel. But the substance must come, which is Christ, who must bring that glory to God and that grace to man which it was impossible those sacrifices should ever do.

II. The designation of our Lord Jesus to the work and office of Mediator: *My ears hast thou opened.* God the Father disposed him to the undertaking (^{<280>}Isaiah 50:5, 6) and then obliged him to go through with it. *My ear hast thou digged.* It is supposed to allude to the law and custom of binding servants to serve for ever by boring their ear to the doorpost; see ^{<221>}Exodus 21:6. Our Lord Jesus was so in love with his undertaking that he would not go out free from it, and therefore engaged to persevere for ever in it; and for this reason *he is able to save us to the uttermost*, because he has engaged to serve his Father to the uttermost, who upholds him in it, ^{<241>}Isaiah 42:1.

III. His own voluntary consent to this undertaking: “*Then said I, Lo, I come*; then, when sacrifice and offering would not do, rather than the work should be undone; I said, Lo, I come, to enter the lists with the powers of darkness, and to advance the interests of God's glory and kingdom.” This intimates three things: —

1. That he freely offered himself to this service, to which he was under no obligation at all prior to his own voluntary engagement. It was no sooner proposed to him than, with the greatest cheerfulness, he consented to it, and was wonderfully well pleased with the undertaking. Had he not been perfectly voluntary in it, he could not have been a surety, he could not have been a sacrifice; for it is by this will (this *animus offerentis* — *mind of the offerer*) that we are sanctified, ^{<300>}Hebrews 10:10.

2. That he firmly obliged himself to it: “I come; I promise to come in the fulness of time.” And therefore the apostle says, “It was when he came into the world that he had an actual regard to this promise, by which he had *engaged his heart to approach unto God.*” He thus entered into bonds, not only to show the greatness of his love, but because he was to have the honour of his undertaking before he had fully performed it. Though the price was not paid, it was secured to be paid, so that he was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

3. That he frankly owned himself engaged: He said, *Lo, I come*, said it all along to the Old Testament saints, who therefore knew him by the title of *ho erchomenos* — *He that should come.* This word was the foundation on which they built their faith and hope, and which they looked and longed for the accomplishment of.

IV. The reason why he came, in pursuance of his undertaking — because *in the volume of the book it was written of him,*

1. In the close rolls of the divine decree and counsel; there it was written that his ear was opened, and he said, *Lo, I come*; there the covenant of redemption was recorded, the counsel of redemption was recorded, the counsel of peace between the Father and the Son; and to that he had an eye in all he did, the commandment he received of his Father.

2. In the letters patent of the Old Testament. Moses and all the prophets testified of him; in all the volumes of that book something or other was written of him, which he had an eye to, that all might be accomplished, ~~GEN~~ John 19:28.

V. The pleasure he took in his undertaking. Having freely offered himself to it, he did not fail, nor was discouraged, but proceeded with all possible satisfaction to himself (v. 8. 9): *I delight to do thy will, O my God!* It was to Christ his meat and drink to go on with the work appointed to him (~~JOH~~ John 4:34); and the reason here given is, *Thy law is within my heart*; it is written there, it rules there. It is meant of the law concerning the work and office of the Mediator, what he was to do and suffer; this law was dear to him and had an influence upon him in his whole undertaking. Note, When the law of God is written in our hearts our duty will be our delight.

VI. The publication of the gospel to the children of men, even *in the great congregation*, v. 9, 10. The same that as a priest wrought out redemption

for us, as a prophet, by his own preaching first, then by his apostles, and still by his word and Spirit, makes it known to us. The *great salvation began to be spoken by the Lord*, ^{<816>}Hebrews 2:3. It is the gospel of Christ that is preached to all nations. Observe,

1. What it is that is preached: It is *righteousness* (v. 9), God's righteousness (v. 10), the everlasting righteousness which Christ has brought in (^{<270>}Daniel 9:24); compare ^{<816>}Romans 1:16, 17. It is God's *faithfulness* to his promise, and the salvation which had long been looked for. It is God's *lovingkindness* and his *truth*, his mercy according to his word. Note, In the work of our redemption we ought to take notice how brightly all the divine attributions shine, and give to God the praise of each of them.

2. To whom it is preached — *to the great congregation*, v. 9 and again v. 10. When Christ was here on earth he preached to multitudes, thousands at a time. The gospel was preached both to Jews and Gentiles, to great congregations of both. Solemn religious assemblies are a divine institution, and in them the glory of God, in the face of Christ, ought to be both praised to the glory of God and preached for the edification of men.

3. How it is preached — freely and openly: *I have not refrained my lips; I have not hid it; I have not concealed it*. This intimates that whoever undertook to preach the gospel of Christ would be in great temptation to hide it and conceal it, because it must be preached with great contention and in the face of great opposition; but Christ himself, and those whom he called to that work, set their faces *as a flint* (^{<280>}Isaiah 50:7) and were wonderfully carried on in it. It is well for us that they were so, for by this means our eyes come to see this joyful light and our ears to hear this joyful sound, which otherwise we might for ever have perished in ignorance of.

^{<801>}PSALM 40:11-17

ENCOURAGEMENT IN PRAYER

The psalmist, having meditated upon the work of redemption, and spoken of it in the person of the Messiah, now comes to make improvement of the doctrine of his mediation between us and God, and therefore speaks in his own person. Christ having done his Father's will, and finished his work,

and given orders for the preaching of the gospel to every creature, we are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace, for mercy and grace.

I. This may encourage us to pray for the mercy of God, and to put ourselves under the protection of that mercy, v. 11. “Lord, thou hast not spared thy Son, nor withheld him; *withhold not thou thy tender mercies* then, which thou hast laid up for us in him; for wilt thou not *with him also freely give us all things?* ^{<482>}Romans 8:32. *Let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.*” The best saints are in continual danger, and see themselves undone if they be not continually preserved by the grace of God; and the everlasting lovingkindness and truth of God are what we have to depend upon for our preservation to the heavenly kingdom, ^{<487>}Psalms 61:7.

II. This may encourage us in reference to the guilt of sin, that Jesus Christ has done that towards our discharge from it which sacrifice and offering could not do. See here,

1. The frightful sight he had of sin, v. 12. This was it that made the discovery he was now favoured with of a Redeemer very welcome to him. He saw his iniquities to be evils, the worst of evils; he saw that they *compassed him about*; in all the reviews of his life, and his reflections upon each step of it, still he discovered something amiss. The threatening consequences of his sin surrounded him. Look which way he would, he saw some mischief or other waiting for him, which he was conscious to himself his sins had deserved. He saw them taking hold of him, arresting him, as the bailiff does the poor debtor; he saw them to be innumerable and *more than the hairs of his head*. Convinced awakened consciences are apprehensive of danger from the numberless number of the sins of infirmity which seem small as hairs, but, being numerous, are very dangerous. *Who can understand his errors?* God numbers our hairs (^{<488>}Matthew 10:30), which yet we cannot number; so he keeps an account of our sins, which we keep no account of. The sight of sin so oppressed him that he could not hold up his head — *I am not able to look up*; much less could he keep up his heart — *therefore my heart fails me*. Note, The sight of our sins in their own colours would drive us to distraction, if we had not at the same time some sight of a Saviour.

2. The careful recourse he had to God under the sense of sin (v. 13); seeing himself brought by his sins to the very brink of ruin, eternal ruin, with

what a holy passion does he cry out, “*Be pleased, O Lord! to deliver me* (v. 13); O save me from the wrath to come, and the present terrors I am in through the apprehensions of that wrath! I am undone, I die, I perish, without speedy relief. In a case of this nature, where the bliss of an immortal soul is concerned, delays are dangerous; therefore, *O Lord! make haste to help me.*”

III. This may encourage us to hope for victory over our spiritual enemies that seek after our souls to destroy them (v. 14), the roaring lion that goes about continually seeking to devour. If Christ has triumphed over them, we through him, shall be more than conquerors. In the belief of this we may pray, with humble boldness, *Let them be ashamed and confounded together, and driven backward*, v. 14. *Let them be desolate*, v. 15. Both the conversion of a sinner and the glorification of a saint are great disappointments to Satan, who does his utmost, with all his power and subtlety, to hinder both. Now, our Lord Jesus having undertaken to bring about the salvation of all his chosen, we may in faith pray that, in both these ways, that great adversary may be confounded. When a child of God is brought into that horrible pit, and the miry clay, Satan cries *Aha! aha!* thinking he has gained his point; but he shall rage when he sees the brand plucked out of the fire, and shall be *desolate, for a reward of his shame. The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan! The accuser of the brethren is cast out.*

IV. This may encourage all that seek God, and love his salvation, to rejoice in him and to praise him, v. 16. See here,

1. The character of good people. Conformably to the laws of natural religion, they seek God, desire his favour, and in all their exigencies apply to him, as a people should seek unto their God; and conformably to the laws of revealed religion they *love his salvation*, that great salvation of which the prophets enquired and searched diligently, which the Redeemer undertook to work out when he said, *Lo, I come*. All that shall be saved love the salvation not only as a salvation from hell, but a salvation from sin.

2. The happiness secured to good people by this prophetic prayer. Those that seek God shall *rejoice and be glad in him*, and with good reason, for he will not only be found of them but will be their bountiful rewarder. Those that love his salvation shall be filled with the joy of his salvation,

and shall *say continually, The Lord be magnified;* and thus they shall have a heaven upon earth. Blessed are those that are thus still praising God.

V. This may encourage the saints, in distress and affliction, to trust in God and comfort themselves in him, v. 17. David himself was one of these: *I am poor and needy* (a king, perhaps now on the throne, and yet, being troubled in spirit, he calls himself *poor and needy*, in want and distress, lost and undone without a Saviour), *yet the Lord thinketh upon me* in and through the Mediator, by whom we are made accepted. Men forget the poor and needy, and seldom think of them; but God's thoughts, towards them (which he had spoken of v. 5) are their support and comfort. They may assure themselves that God is their help under their troubles, and will be, in due time, their deliverer out of their troubles, and will make no long tarrying; for *the vision is for an appointed time*, and therefore, *though it tarry*, we may *wait for it*, for it shall come; *it will come, it will not tarry.*