

Rescue!

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Date: 02 August 2015

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[0 : 0 0] One of the principles that guides our reading of the Psalms is that they are fundamentally about Christ. When David faces enemies in the Psalms, he points forward to Christ, who was rejected and faced his own enemies. When David trusts God in the Psalms, he speaks for Christ as Peter writes, who entrusted himself to him who judges justly. Tertullian, the second century North African theologian, said about David, he sings to us of Christ, and through his voice Christ indeed also sang concerning himself. In the Psalms, David points to Christ, almost like a movie trailer points towards the movie to come. That Christ-centred approach to the Psalms is confirmed particularly when we read Psalm 40. So bearing that in mind, and bearing in mind the passages that we've already sang and read together, let's read

Psalm 40 together as well. You'll find Psalm 40 on page 566 of your Pew Bible, and we'll read the whole Psalm together. Psalm 40 for the director of music of David, a Psalm.

I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and heard my cry. 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. He put a new song in my mouth. A hymn of praise to our God. May we'll see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside false gods. Many, O Lord, my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us. No one can recount to you where I to speak, tell of them. They would be too many to declare. Sacrifice an offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced. Burn offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then said I, here I am. I have come. It is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will. O my God, your law is within my heart. I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly. I do not seal my lips. As you know, O Lord, I do not hide your righteousness in my heart. I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and truth from the great assembly. Do not withhold your mercy from me, O Lord. May your love and your truth always protect me. For troubles without numbers 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. Be pleased, O Lord, to save me. O Lord, come quickly to help me. May all who seek to take my life be put to shame and confusion. May all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. May those who say to me, aha, aha, be appalled at their own shame.

May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. May those who love your salvation always say, the Lord be exalted. Yet I am poor and needy. May the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer. O my God, do not delay.

This is a psalm that fits David's own life so well, but it is actually more than just about David. David was a prophet who spoke for Christ. In Psalm 40 it is about how Jesus would lay down his life as a sacrifice for sin and about how he would be raised up again.

[4 : 25] When Christ came into the world, God's will for him was to be the final, perfect sacrifice that would be the one who would end the need for that regular, daily sacrifice. I say that as introduction to the psalm, so let's look at the psalm in a little more detail. It may be over the last year or so, you've had a time of unrival blessing. Metaphorically, you have not seen a single slimy pit at all. Nothing to fall into, nothing has gone wrong, it's all been kushty. If you haven't seen that, and that's been your life, sure as guns are pits coming along for you to fall into. We live in a fallen world, you will get kicked in the teeth, something will drag you down and it's important to reflect on how the Lord pulls us out of the pit when we do get dragged down. How should we respond to difficulty and tragedy and helplessness? The Lord is our helper and this psalm recounts David's personal experience about how the Lord helped him. The Lord is our rescuer. This is also a prophecy about Christ as well. There are lessons here for the Christian to focus on.

So if you're looking for a title for this sermon, it's rescue. And for individual headings, I'll say it now just in case you lose it and I've stretched the metaphor too much. R&Li; will look at rescue, new song, living sacrifices in Christ. R&Li; So let's look at the first of those in verses 1 to 3, rescue. Or another way of thinking about it is David's personal testimony. I waited for the Lord my God. He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit out of the mud and mire and set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. Patient is probably too weak a word to use here. Here the psalmist endured. He persevered. The Lord pulled me out of this bog that I was up to my neck in.

What's he referring to? So with so many of the Psalms, you can trace back to another part of the Old Testament to find precisely what David is writing about. Psalm 51 is the classic reference about David's failure and how he felt convicted and how the Lord brought him back. With Psalm 40, we have no idea what David's referring to here. No idea of what David is referring to. No specific set of circumstances, no particular set of situations or anything like that at all. It's one of those Psalms where we just have no idea what David's talking about. The fact that David has not told us what it relates to and the fact that we have no idea about that means that this Psalm has a universality. It can be applied to lots of different situations rather than thinking, of course, this Psalm applies to this particular situation. Not at all. This Psalm can be used in a number of challenging situations that you might find yourself in. Amongst us here, we may have people who face cancer or who have family who have cancer or terminal illness. We may have people who struggle with depression. We might have people who struggle in their marriages, who struggle with singleness. We might have people who struggle with childlessness, people who are difficult children or who are parents who are difficult to care for.

There might be all kinds of things that pile up on us and pile up on us and we can scarcely see our way out of it. We feel so overwhelmed and stuck in the pit that these things consume us and devour our emotional life. And the Lord says, wait. Now the waiting here is not like waiting for a bus or waiting in the dentist's surgery, a waiting room to be seen or in the doctor's surgery. The sense of waiting here is nearer to the position that the Allied troops faced on the beaches of Dunkirk in those seven days in 1940. With the enemy closing in, there was nowhere to go. They waited for deliverance. It's a sort of waiting that I know about personally, of waiting for years and years and years for the right person to come along to be my life partner. And waiting for years and years and years, sometimes almost losing hope for a child to come along as well. It's a lesson that I should have learned when I was younger. When I was about nine, I lived just at the west end of Edinburgh and I loved to go out and play. This would probably come as a bit of a revelation to my mother. She might not know this particular story. And I loved to go and play, particularly down by the Dean village. And not far along from the Dean village there's a bit of a waterfall, quite a fair size of a waterfall for a nine-year-old. And along from the waterfall is a little bridge where there's a hotel near there. And one of the things I quite fancy doing when I was nine was crossing the bridge. Not like normal people do on top of the bridge, underneath the bridge. This was a genius plan I thought, say the nine-year-old Neil McLeod. And so I went to the other side of the bridge and stood on the river bank ready to cross over. And as I was standing there, just readying myself to undertake this action man task, the ground started to give way and the bank started to collapse. And I started to slip and slide and I thought I'll be fine. I'll just grab some roots and branches and I'll be fine. And the ground gave way completely beneath me. And slowly started to sink up to the mud through my waist and up to my chest and almost up to my shoulders. And the power of the Dean river might not seem very much to us now, but for a nine-year-old up to your waist in it and up to your shoulders in it, it's a fairly powerful river. And the thought of the waterfall not far away, if

I was to be swept away, felt like I was up to my neck in trouble. Holding on, holding on. I needed a rescuer. I needed a deliverer. I needed someone to come and help me. And I waited and I waited and I waited. And that sense of waiting is here in this verse as well. Literally understand from the start of this verse, the grammar reads, waited, I waited. And that sense of waiting gives this emphasis in Hebrew of how long it was that the Samist is waiting here. And whatever he's been through, whatever he's been involved in, he's been dragged out by God. And he's grateful. But it's remarkable that in verse three, David doesn't focus upon how he got out of this and how his testimony is all about David and how he got out of this situation. His testimony is about God. About God has been his rescuer. He doesn't put himself at the centre of his testimony. He puts the

[12:14] Lord at the centre of his testimony. He gives praise to the Lord. And the Lord puts a new song in his mouth as a mark of the new round of blessing in David's life. Blessing often comes through waiting. Abraham was 75 years old before God called him and promised to bless him with children. Saint and Abram waited a further 20 years before they were blessed with a son, Isaac. Joshua waited till he was 80 before being called to lead the children of Israel. And David, who was anointed as a young man, had to wait until he was 30 before he took his throne. And yet the best example, the very best example of waiting is what we read about in Matthew, about the gruelling process of trusting God that the Lord Jesus went through, pleading with him. He had been tempted and tested in every single conceivable way. And yet with patience he endured. And yet David is the first to acknowledge that sometimes God doesn't necessarily pull us out of the pit. Sometimes God doesn't necessarily put us straight on the rock and give us a new song. Sometimes he leaves us in the pit to give us more grace. Paul understood that in 2 Corinthians 12 and 8. He writes, three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Paul set aside time, asking God to take this thorn and his flesh away from him. Not a quick word of prayer, not a half murmured petition to the Lord as he slips his coffee and runs out the door to work. He set aside time for diligent, intercessory prayer for God to take away this thorn and his side. And God's answer to Paul, my grace is sufficient for you. So Paul says, therefore I will rejoice. The answer that God gives is sometimes to give more grace. Now second point, a new song or another way of saying the public application of that testimony. You'll see in verses 3 and 4, there's a hook word that's there. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. And verse 4, blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust. When you're up to your neck in slime and mud and quicksand, you have a sense of helplessness, of despair, of you cannot do this for yourself. You need grace to come into your life. You stop looking to your own resources to get you out of this situation and you start looking for another. And at that moment you start to have new realisations of what God has done. The sad thing about being up to your shoulders in slime and mud is that it devours your horizons. You don't see the great landscapes anymore or anything else. Your perception of reality is shrunk to that very moment that you're in. And now that David has come out of it, he sees that wide scape that God has given him. David sees God's purposes for what God has done here.

Do you not see that in your own life as well? Things that you're going through, rich experiences that you've been through can be put into perspective. Verse 5, many a little Lord, my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you have planned for us. No one can recount to you where I could speak of them or tell of them. There would be too many to declare. Look back on what God has done for you and through you and in you and remember what Christians in other parts of the world are going through. Christians in the southern Sudan or in Burma, in Syria or Iran. Many thoughts of God are what you have given us. Not just abstract thoughts but God has actually purposely considered you. He has reached out and rescued you, given you grace in the situation that you face, perhaps taken you out and given you a new song in that situation and he has blessed you incredibly. And then when we put those gospel blessings into a wider framework, we have been made by God and made for God and been redeemed by God. Yes, my father died of a brain tumour. Yes, he is buried six feet under the ground in Agnes Ceremony but one day with a loud voice the Lord will proclaim, Kenneth MacLeod, come out of your grave and arise. Many of the things our God has done and because of what was done and across 2000 years ago, my father will come out and proclaim the Lord as God and bless him. Put into the things of God frame reference and you cannot see what even the muck has been about because you will be obsessed with Christ. There are lots in the Psalms at point to the largeness, the bigness of God and how God has had plans for us from since even our womb, Psalm 139, for I created you in my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you.

When I was made in a secret place, I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God. How vast is the sum of them were I to count them. They would outnumber the grains of the sand. When I awake, I am still with you. Blessed be the name of our God. God is good.

To our third point, living sacrifices or our testimony as a response. So from that deliverance, from being delivered out of the quick sand, out of the slime, out of the pit, what is our response? What is David's response? What is an Old Testament response? Make a sacrifice.

A sacrifice of sheep. Some doves. Sacrifice you didn't desire, says the Samist. Such a sacrifice would be simply a mechanistic response to God and would be just woefully inadequate. The only proper response is to offer yourself your gods by creation and your gods by redemption. You are doubly his. The only proper response is to offer yourself, which is exactly what Paul says in Romans 12. Therefore, brothers, I urge you, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your true and proper worship. What are we to understand by what's referred to in verse 6? Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced. Should we understand that as being a reference to the pierced ear ceremony of Exodus 21? We didn't read that together, but let me just tell you about the pierced ear ceremony. In

[20 : 35] Old Testament times, there were a number of ways that people could become slaves. You could become a slave through war and conquest. Equally, you could become a slave through because there was no bankruptcy laws in ancient Israel. There was no sequestration as we would have here today. If you became a slave that way and you had borrowed from somebody and your business had gone belly up, you might sell yourself to your creditor. Under Israelite law, which wasn't always observed, but under Israelite law, it was a bit like indentured service. At the end of seven years, you were meant to be freed. But if the economy was still bad and your master is really, really good, and he's good for giving you clothing and shelter and food and it's great, and I really like this person that I work for, maybe I'm better to stay with this master rather than to move to somebody new. Take my chances on the open market. Through the right of the pierced ear ceremony, you would have your ear and an all a bit like a little screwdriver would be placed against your ear and it would be marked in your ear, a little hole created as a symbol to show that you belong to this particular master's household. Is that the symbolism that's been referred to here in verse six? But my ear is you have pierced. In the ceremony, only one ear was pierced.

Here it refers to two ears being pierced. My ear is you have pierced. So the suggestion is that it's not necessarily referring to the pierced ears ceremony. One commentator suggests instead that there should be a different analysis. The words here can also be referred to as dug or to dig out your ears. Now, a charge of digging out your ears is not a sense that your ears are dirty and too full of wax, but rather that you're not listening. If I can give you a somewhat disgusting example from my own life. Many years ago I played rugby. I was a captain for a team and I used to protect my ears. I would get an electrical tape and wind it around my head to keep my ears in place so they weren't pulled off.

And then I would put Vaseline across my ears as well to make them slidey. So when I went into a scrum, my head just slid in and slid out and it was easy. The trouble with that is that when the ref wants to talk to you, it's very difficult to hear him because you have all this Vaseline in your ear. And you have to dig your ear out a little bit so you can hear the command that's been given to you of what's gone wrong and why the referee has blown the whistle. You cannot obey the referee unless your ears are clean. And that's a similar kind of idea that's been referred to here. Our ears are not to have a spoon or a spade taken to them to be dug out. It means that we're not listening, that you are not being obedient. And this same idea shows up in Isaiah chapter 50 as well. Let me read that to you. Isaiah chapter 50 and verse 4. The southern Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen to one being instructed. The southern Lord has opened my ears, he's dug them out. I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away. I offered my back to those who beat me, to my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard. I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. The psalmist says that sacrifice and offering are not required. You've given me a listening heart, Lord, so that I will do your will.

I will be obedient to you. Your word is in my heart. That verse is quoted again and we read it together in the New Testament. Hebrews 10 chapter 5. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said, sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me. With burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, here am I. It is written about me in the scroll I have come to do your will. So it's applied here in Hebrews to Christ being obedient and suffering unto death. Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me. The keen observers among you will notice that the words have changed. No longer is my ears you have pierced or my ears you have dug out, but a body you have prepared for me. Why has the translator done that? Why has it changed in that way? The writer quotes the Greek Old Testament. But why does he change the wording? My ears you have dug out for me is not going to make any sense to a Greek speaking audience. So he puts them into an idiom, into a way of speaking that can be understood to the reader and the hearer. My ears dug out in Hebrew means you listen.

You listen and so your whole life, your body, your being belongs to God. You are obedient. If David's life foretells his greater son to come and if David abandons his great father, then how much more does David's greater son abandoning himself to his heavenly father matter?

[26 : 38] Coming to offer his whole body as a response to God's word, a response to God himself which is finally seen in the incarnation and ultimately in the atonement in Christ dying and rising in our place. So David constitutes here a picture which foretells the coming of Christ.

I am put it very well here, but let me put it in the way that America's greatest theologian after our own quarry of course, Jonathan Edwards, describes it. What sacrifice here means?

Though many things have been done in the affair of redemption, though millions of sacrifices have been offered, yet nothing was done to purchase redemption before Christ's incarnation.

No part of the purchase was made, no part of the price was offered until now. But as soon as Christ was incarnate, the purchase began. The whole of the time of Christ's humiliation till the morning that he rose from the dead was taken up in this purchase.

Then the purchase was entirely and completely finished as nothing was done before Christ's incarnation. So nothing was done after his resurrection to purchase redemption. There will be, nor will there be anything done anymore in all of eternity. This is a whole sacrifice for the whole man, for God, and that is why we are required to be living sacrifices for God. Lastly, in that acrostic that I gave you, RNLI, in Christ, in Christ, or public proclamation. Now, there is different cultural expectations about how one would give one's life to another. Testimony is not just about how God has dealt with you, how you became a Christian, but how God is working in your life currently as well. Now, over the last number of days I have had a really bad cold. Really bad cold. So bad I went home from work on Friday. I rarely go home feeling ill Friday. I could not do anything. And in some cultural expressions I might stand before the congregation of believers and say, I have been healed. I have been healed. Hallelujah. I have been healed of my cold and I stand here before you. It's a miracle, I tell you. Alternatively, coming from a Highland tradition, I might not want to highlight myself in quite the same way. And so perhaps if someone asked me how I am,

[29 : 19] I might simply respond, surviving. I might say, if they are really pressing me, not bad. Or if I am really under the caution and people are really inquisitive, I might even utter, fine. I am fine. This is not what David's attitude here is though. David's attitude here is not being withdrawn about what God has done for him. I do not seal my lips. David feels obligated to articulate what God has done for him. It shows people who are in their bogs currently how they can be lifted out, people who are struggling in mighty clay that they can be lifted out by God's grace. Or if you have been in a pit and you have been given more grace of how God blessed you with that and how you responded with more grace as well. And by failing to testify to that, by failing to teach a new generation of believers of how we handle our pits and how we handle the mighty clay, we are not teaching them on how to deal with that as well. The responsibility believer, the responsibility Christian is yours to show one another how we handle our difficulties and our challenges. Our time is almost gone and I want to tell you and give you an example of one person I met who gives this example.

It's that chap I met in Turkey and some of you might know this story. I do not think I have mentioned this fellow for a number of years. Given that this is available on a podcast or on the web, I am going to change some of the names. Let's call my friend Hassan and we will call his wife Mariam. Hassan and Mariam were unusual Iranian things. They were Christians.

Being a Christian in Iran is quite a challenging thing. Mariam's story is of how in a remarkable way she met the Lord Jesus even as a little girl and that was further confirmed to her in different ways. Through the mystery of Providence she came by arranged marriage to Mariah Hassan. They were both not Christians at that point. In time and through sustaining one another they eventually came to faith in the Lord Jesus. Hassan qualified as a graduate in a technical profession and was a relatively high earner in Iran as well.

Yet he could not keep his need to tell people about Jesus quiet. He had to tell people about Jesus. In the factory where he worked he was very forthright about telling about Jesus, testifying to Jesus. One day to Mariam's surprise Hassan did not come home. One day he turned into two days and two days into three. By that time Mariam was getting quite concerned and she goes to the hospitals. There's no sign of Hassan in any of the hospitals.

And then she starts visiting the prisons. Now in Tehran there are eight prisons. Some of these prisons can hold up to 20,000 people. Mariam went round every single prison several times looking for Hassan. Eventually after a long number of months she found him. And that's when the negotiation started to try and have him freed. And eventually with a bribe that was equal to the value of their house that they had to sell she was able to bribe the prison in order to get Hassan out. And with that and with all that they had that they were able to put into carrier bags they made their way to the border with Turkey. When I met Hassan he told me about what had happened to him in prison. It doesn't tell that story very often. But when in prison he had been tied up, not as we might expect like that but hog tied, so your hands are behind your back, your feet are tied up and your hands are suspended with your belly to the ground. He was then beaten and beaten and beaten over a long number of days. Days turned into weeks before Hassan was eventually unultimately released. When he moved to Turkey this highly qualified technician, graduate quality technician having been highly paid in Iran and valued for his technical skill because he was a

[34 : 24] Christian wasn't valued and he ended up being a janitor, despised and looked down on as somebody who tied him up other people's rubbish and mess. And yet when you speak to Hassan, when you speak to him the first time that you see him, in fact almost every time that you speak to him the first words that he says to you are, Jesus is Lord, he greets you, Jesus is Lord. His testimony is about the goodness of God to him, the goodness of God of how God looked after him when he was with his family, how God looked after him when he was in prison, the goodness of how God was able to rescue him from the prison, the goodness of how he was able to escape from Tehran, the goodness of how he was able to get into Turkey, the goodness of how he was able to get a job in Turkey and find a church in Turkey, the goodness of God, how eventually God blessed them and took them to a different part of the world. For the Christian, that is the normal response. It's not focusing on the negative or the down or the pit, it's focusing on Jesus, the goodness of God. I will not conceal your righteousness from the assembly. I will not hide my heart. I will speak of your faithfulness. Bold thanks to God for he is holy. So when you look at this verse, when you look at this passage, remember this is a Psalm about rescue, about R and

L.I. of rescue, of a new song, of being a living sacrifice and of being found in Christ. Let's pray. Our gracious Lord, we bless you that you are God and that you are in control.

We bless you Lord for where you place us and the experiences that you give us and the testimony that you provide for us and the promise that you give to us that you will never leave us nor forsake us, the promise Lord that you are with us and that your grace is sufficient for us and that if it is your will that you will lift us out of the pit.

But the pit is an experienced Lord that we can testify and help others with as well, that we can be signposts that point to Jesus, that Jesus is Lord regardless of the situation, regardless of the trauma, regardless of the hardship, that in any situation we look to the beginner and completer of our faith, Jesus Christ. And we bless you Lord for that. Amen.