

There May Be Trouble Ahead

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 August 2025

Preacher: David Court

[0 : 00] So let's hear and read together from God's Word. Psalm 40 to the choir master, and it's a psalm of David. And it's a psalm of David.

I waited patiently for the Lord. He inclined to me and heard my cry. 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.

He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. 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 of them, yet they are more than can be told.

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.

[1 : 19] 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. I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation.

Behold, I have not restrained my lips as you know, O 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. As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me.

Your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me. For evils have encompassed me beyond number. My iniquities have overtaken me and I cannot see.

They are more than the hairs of my head. My heart fails me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me. O Lord, make haste to help me. Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether who seek to snatch away my life.

[2 : 23] Let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who delight in my heart. Let those be appalled because of their shame who say to me, Aha! Aha!

But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. May those who love your salvation say continually, Great is the Lord. As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me.

You are my help and my deliverer. Do not delay, O my God. This is God's Word, and to His name be the praise and the glory.

If you have a Bible, please open it at Psalm 40. There may be trouble ahead.

But while there's music and moonlight and love and romance, let's face the music and dance. Well, the composer, songwriter Irving Berlin had perhaps a slightly unorthodox approach to impending trouble.

[3 : 34] Facing the music and dancing may well work if you're Fred Astaire in an old Hollywood musical. But in the real world, most of us recognize that a little more is needed if we're going to survive.

After all, life is not always a bed of roses. As believers, we are no stranger to troubles of one kind or another. Family problems, bereavement and loss, health issues, workplace stress, relationship difficulties, spiritual opposition are all among the kinds of trouble we will inevitably face in this life.

And here in Psalm 40, we discover that it's David who is facing a time of trouble. We're not told what that is or what precisely occasioned the composition of this psalm.

He certainly doesn't mention music and dancing. Instead, he speaks about reflecting on God's goodness and grace towards him. In all his troubles, he resolves to look to Yahweh, to look to the Lord, and to call on his name.

His response to trouble is profoundly God-centered. It's an intriguing psalm. Preachers often focus on the opening verses.

[4 : 56] Frequently, the second half of the psalm is ignored. But if the psalm is a singular composition, as I believe it is, we need to deal with it as a whole.

Indeed, it's only as we do that that we come to see and understand just how David in the psalm is trying to help us face our own trials and troubles in this life.

And the psalm, I think, breaks down into three sections. And we begin with verses 1 through 5, and we're going to call this a past deliverance, a past deliverance.

Look at the opening verses. I waited patiently for the Lord. He inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the mighty bog, and set my feet on a rock, making my steps secure.

He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. And many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. So, David immediately launches into an account of some past deliverance.

[6 : 00] Again, we're not told what that was. Clearly, it was a significant matter. He's remembering an occasion when he knew God's presence and power in an unmistakable fashion.

He was in deep trouble. He was in dire circumstances, and the Lord delivered them, delivered him from them. In His great mercy, the Lord drew near and transformed, turned around that whole situation.

And you'll notice that the emphasis here is all upon what the Lord has done. David's contribution was only to wait.

Literally, he says here, waiting. I waited on Yahweh. That repetition stresses the waiting. He waited on the Lord.

Now, what does that mean? Is David saying he simply sat back, he relaxed, he chilled out while he waited for God to appear and do His stuff? I don't think so. You'll notice that this waiting also involved him crying out to God.

[7 : 04] He heard my cry. So, this waiting involved David calling out to God for help. It involved prayer. He's recalling this experience of deliverance, and he remembers how he had to wait while he called upon God.

The answer and the deliverance were clearly not immediate. Things were not turned around in an instant. He had to wait. And sometimes we need to remember that, don't we?

God's timing is not the same as ours. Often He calls upon His people to wait. That can be an uncomfortable experience. The heavens are as brass.

Our prayers appear futile. The great temptation, isn't it, to throw in the towel. What's the point? Why doesn't God do something? David tells us here, I waited patiently for the Lord, and He heard my cry.

Sometimes, even in difficult situations, we can feel less than inclined to pray. But we must always go to the throne of grace and call on His name.

[8 : 16] We must continually beat a path to our Father's door, knowing that He will never cast us away. We must not be silent. J.C. Ryle says this, The only way to be really happy in such a world as this is to be ever casting all our cares upon God.

But while David waits and prays, the real emphasis here is on what Yahweh does. It's God's action that is highlighted and underscored.

This past deliverance involved Yahweh doing at least five things here. For David, you'll see them in the text. The first one, He inclined to me. Literally, He turned to me.

He looked towards me. He took notice of me. He turned His attention to me. That's a wonderful thought. Yahweh looked my way.

And we must surely be left with a sense of wonder at this reality. The great God of heaven deigns to look our way and to take notice of us in all our troubles.

[9 : 28] And then He heard my cry. He didn't just look David's way. He heard his cry. He listened. He inclined both his eyes and his ears to his servant. Again, that's a staggering statement.

He heard my cry. If we truly believed that, wouldn't we be more often in the place of prayer? And then He drew me up out of the miry bog, the muck and the mire that had so engulfed Him and held Him, that He couldn't extricate Himself.

Despite all His best efforts, this was a circumstance from which He could not get free on His own strength. Strength. He was stuck. He could not move. He could not escape.

But yet the Lord reached down and pulled Him up. He lifted Him up out of danger. What He was powerless to do, the Lord was able to accomplish.

And fourthly, He set my feet on a rock. Yahweh placed His feet on solid ground, gave Him a firm place to stand. No longer did David find himself floundering in the mire, unable to keep upright.

[10 : 37] Now His feet have been set on the rock. Where before there was uncertainty, now there is stability and security. And He put, fifthly, a new song in my mouth.

Before there was anxiety and fear, now there is this new song of praise. There's delight. There's joy. And this new song is itself a gift from the Lord.

David simply cannot keep the news of this deliverance to himself. He has to declare the praises of Him who called Him from darkness and uncertainty.

The darkness and uncertainty of the slimy pit to the stability and light of the solid rock. And you'll notice how this new song of deliverance has an impact on others.

Verse 3, many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. The effect of this deliverance is to encourage others to put their faith in Yahweh. As this new song is sung, so many will come to lean on the Lord and discover for themselves His mercy and grace.

[11 : 45] Never forget that singing God's praises from the heart is a powerful testimony and witness. It brings blessing to all those who make the Lord their trust.

It's one of the great blessings, isn't it? Gathering Lord's Day by Lord's Day, morning and evening, in that we are strengthened and encouraged by others, by their presence, by their singing, to put our trust in the Lord.

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 of them, yet they are more than can be told. David delights to sing and proclaim God's wondrous deeds.

And while he does that, he also recognizes that there are too many to recount. The testimony of God's people down through the ages is one of deliverance after deliverance after deliverance.

[13 : 00] I love the story of the 19th century Cornish tin miner, Billy Bray. He was a notorious drunkard and blasphemer.

He had a brush with death in a mining accident, and from that moment on, he was brought under conviction of sin. And one night, in fear for his soul, he called on the Lord for mercy.

He was wonderfully brought to faith, and he became a most passionate and exuberant preacher of the gospel. In fact, so deeply and profoundly did the new song of the gospel fill his heart and mouth that some people would complain about his enthusiastic singing and shouting everywhere he went.

He caused a stir. And one of his favorite responses to those who criticized the volume of his praise was when he would say, If they were to put me in a barrel, I would shout glory out through the bung hole.

Praise the Lord. As one old preacher puts it, it's out of the mire and into the choir. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog.

[14 : 07] He set my feet on a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. And you see, David's testimony here in this psalm is a repeatable one.

It doesn't languish simply in the pages of Scripture. It isn't just for those who lived long ago back in Bible times. These verses are the experience of so many of us as God's people.

We find ourselves sinking in some kind of trouble, perhaps caused by the malice of others. Maybe it was our own waywardness and sin. But we found we could not extricate ourselves.

We could do nothing. And we called out to God. And He heard our cry. And He lifted us up. And He gave us a firm place to stand. And He put that new song in our mouths.

And indeed, have there not been times when our testimony has been that we were not looking. And we were not waiting.

[15 : 13] And we were not praying. And we weren't crying out to God. And yet, still in His grace and mercy, He thrust His arms deep down into the mud and the mire and pulled us out to safety.

Praise the Lord for a past deliverance. And then secondly here, we have a personal declaration in verses 6 through 10.

How do we respond to this marvelous deliverance? How does God want us to react to the mercy and the grace that He shows us? Well, as David remembers what God did for him, he has moved to make a joyful declaration of his commitment to God.

In sacrifice and offering, you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear, burnt offering, sin offering, you have not required, verse 6. David realizes that what the Lord delights in is not the sacrifices and offerings that He's made to him, but rather in His open ear.

Literally, the Hebrew says, the ears you have dug for me. Strange expression. What's he getting at? I think that David is driving at here is that the Lord delights those who listen to Him.

[16 : 24] This is what is of importance, a submissive receiving of God's Word. Sacrifice and offerings can sometimes be viewed as a means of trying to win God's favor.

But what God is really looking for are those who are attuned to listening for His voice. He's looking for a heart of humble submission. Open ears are what is important for this attitude that God gives to His servants.

He gives us ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Here is the heart that says, Master, speak. Your servant hears. And then we have these enigmatic words, verses 7 and 8.

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. What is all this about a scroll? Well, again, it's good to remember that David is God's anointed king.

And in Deuteronomy 17, verses 14 through 20, there was a regulation laid down for Israel's kings. And David understands that this scroll that was written was for him.

[17 : 36] The royal job description in God's law is for him. In that passage in Deuteronomy, there are two things indicated that should mark out any future Israelite king.

They were to be distinctive. They were to stand out from others. They were to be different. The usual perks of Near Eastern kingship were not to capture his heart and drive his way of life.

He was to march to the beat of a different drum. And secondly, he was to be submissive to Yahweh's covenant law. That's why in Deuteronomy 17, 18 through 20, it says that the king was to write out his own copy of the law, read it regularly.

Why was that? It was that God's law would penetrate the king's own heart and shape his life and his rule. So we have David's words here.

I delight to do your will. Oh my God, your law is within my heart. And this is David's response, you see. He's going all out for God. He's going to be someone who listens to and obeys God's Word, who allows it to shape his life.

[18 : 45] He delights to do the Lord's will. And I think there are echoes here, are they not? Those great words of commitment and consecration. We find at the opening of Romans chapter 12, J.B. Phillips famously translated them, with eyes wide open to the mercies of God.

I think this is David here. His eyes are wide open to the mercies of God. And so he gives himself wholeheartedly in the Lord's service, presenting his body as a sacrifice of worship, living, holy, pleasing to God.

He doesn't bring a dead sacrifice. He presents himself as a living sacrifice. He desires to hold nothing back from God. I wonder if this evening, if our eyes are wide open to the mercies of God, and what is the kind of response that we are making to them.

And such is David's commitment to and love for God, he cannot keep it to himself. This personal declaration is also a public declaration. He shouts it from the rooftops.

He tells others. It's as if God's loving kindness and faithful love simply overwhelms him. He's engulfed in the favor of God. He's awash in the mercy of God.

[20 : 04] He says in verse 9, I've told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation. I've not restrained my lips. I've not hidden your deliverance away in my heart.

I've spoken of your faithfulness and salvation. I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.

There's a reminder here that living faith is always personal. It's not private either. It's always personal.

It's never private. The reality of the divine deliverance is not a secret to be hidden. It's good news to be declared. And David here is literally telling out the gospel.

The glad news of deliverance. Hadn't been hidden away. Hadn't concealed it. Openly declared it. God's faithfulness and salvation. And this is, of course, the root and foundation of all living faith.

[21 : 01] Commitment and consecration to God arises out of what God has done for us. It begins with God, not with us. It begins with God's gracious deliverance. It all begins with the gospel.

Commitment rooted in anything else will simply not last. Jerry Bridges, in I think it's his book, Transforming Grace, writes this, An all-out, unreserved, nothing-held-back commitment to the pursuit of holiness may be exhausting, but it will not be oppressive if it is grounded in grace.

But to be grounded in grace, it must be continually referred back to the gospel. And friends, that's why the Lord gave us, that's why we have the Lord's Supper.

He wants us to constantly remember what He has done for us and to never forget it. He wants us to have our eyes wide open to His mercies so that we can never stop speaking of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

A past deliverance, a personal declaration, and then thirdly here, a present difficulty in the final verses of the psalm.

[22 : 23] The third section begins with a statement of David's confidence in God. As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me. Your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me.

He's convinced that Yahweh will not hold back His compassions from Him. He's confident that the Lord's steadfast love and faithfulness will continue to keep Him. Why does David need to make this affirmation?

Well, the reason is because circumstances have changed. Things are different. Verse 12, we read of these troubles. Evils have encompassed me beyond number.

My iniquities have overtaken me. I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head. My heart fails me. Notice that these troubles that he mentions are both internal and external.

Internally, he speaks of his iniquities overcoming him. His own sin and guilt appear to have brought distress to his soul, his folly. His sin has blinded him.

[23 : 29] It's affected his judgment. And yet, this present difficulty also has this external dimension. The danger posed by external enemies, a common theme.

Many of the Psalms. The same here. David feels overwhelmed by these evils. His enemies are out to get him. He's become an object of derision. He's looking to the Lord to intervene, to come to his aid.

Verse 13, be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me. Make haste to help me. Let those who be put to shame and disappointed who seek to snatch away my life. Let those be appalled because of their shame who say to me, aha, aha.

And you see, what's happening is this remembrance of his own past deliverance is a spur to prayer as David contends with his present difficulties.

Yes, the Lord delivered him wonderfully in days past, but that does not mean an absence of future troubles. Alexander McLaren writes, are there any deliverances in this perilous and incomplete life so entire and permanent that they leave no room for future perils?

[24 : 45] Dale Ralph Davis puts it rather more succinctly. To be lifted out of the muck doesn't mean there won't be more muck. And the life of the believer is often one in which troubles come one after the other.

No sooner we through one difficulty, another presents itself. It's a reminder that this world is not our home. In this life, we are never completely free of the muck and the mire.

And so we need to be always looking to the Lord and to calling on His great name. You see how David concludes here, may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you that those who love your salvation say continually, great is the Lord.

As for me, I'm poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer. Do not delay, O my God. And so David asks that others might come to know the greatness of this God and delight in Him.

He himself is poor and needy, even with all his present difficulties and with all the muck of this life clinging to him, with all his troubles. He's still looking to God, the one who is always and ever His help and deliverer.

[26 : 01] And friends, we need to be clear, the deliverances of this life are always partial. They're always temporary. They're always incomplete.

They do not last. Melinda Carlisle got it wrong. Heaven is not a place on earth. And we will never find perfect peace and rest in this mucky world.

There will always be trouble ahead. You see, to find lasting peace and rest, we need to be looking elsewhere. We need to be looking beyond this life.

And that brings me really to a key element of this psalm that we haven't touched on yet. And it's the fact that this psalm is not only David's story and testimony.

It is also the story and testimony of David's greater son, Jesus Christ. Psalm 40 is profoundly messianic. It points us to Jesus because Jesus was the one who descended into the ultimate pit of judgment and death bearing the weight of our sins.

[27 : 11] He was the one who was lifted up in resurrection power and set on that rock of victory. He is the one who now leads His people in a glorious song of redemption.

And indeed, in the New Testament, the author of Hebrews recognizes that in these verses of the Psalm 6, 7, and 8, we have the very words of Jesus Himself.

This is what we read in Hebrews 10, verse 5, Consequently, when Christ came into the world, He said, Sacrifice 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. Then I said, Behold, I have come. This is Jesus speaking. I have come to do your will. When He said above, You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings.

Then He, these are offered according to the law. Then He added, Behold, I have come to do your will. The thrust of the argument in Hebrews 10 is that the endlessly repeated sacrifices of the old covenant were but a reminder of sin.

[28 : 24] They didn't actually remove it. The old covenant had built into it the sense of futility and incompleteness. The priests in the temple were always standing.

They were always offering the same sacrifices day in and day out. There was no end to it. These sacrifices could never ever take away sin. Isaac Watts wrote, Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away our stain.

But now you see there's a king in the line of David, David's greater son, with David's very words on his lips and he has come offering himself as a once for all sacrifice for sin.

Watts continues, But Christ, the heavenly Lamb, takes all our sins away, a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they.

Jesus Christ came not to offer endless sacrifices. He came to be the perfect sacrifice. He wasn't dragged to the cross, kicking and screaming.

[29 : 33] He journeyed there willingly with a heart of love for sinners. He delighted to do the will of his Father, for the joy set before him, he endured the cross.

He gave himself willingly to the cross of Calvary and made himself of no reputation. One commentator on Hebrews writes of these verses, It is as if our author overhears the Son, addressing the Father on the occasion of his entry into the world.

Sometimes referred to as the covenant of redemption. Not a covenant between people or between God and human beings. A covenant between the persons of the Godhead.

Ostensibly between the Father and the Son. Covenanting, making a sacred agreement to redeem a people. and the willing obedience of Jesus was fundamental to that work of redemption.

Jesus' obedience, an indispensable aspect of his life and work. He did what no other person could ever do. Sometimes theologians make a distinction between what they call the active and passive obedience of Christ.

[30 : 50] And very simply put, is active obedience this perfect fulfillment of the law and the righteousness required there. Jesus lived a life we could never live. He fulfilled all righteousness.

He did it for us. There is no hope in our own righteousness. There's no hope in our own morality. There's no hope in our own good works. There's no hope in ourselves. As he lay dying, J. Gresham Machen, the American Presbyterian theologian, is said to have sent a final telegram to his friend John Murray containing the words, I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ.

No hope without it. And indeed there's not. Jesus' passive obedience, a reference to him taking the weight of God's judgment against sin, led like a lamb to the slaughter, like a sheep before its shearers is silence, so he opened not his mouth.

And Jesus fulfills the law of God in every part. He offers himself as a sacrifice without spot or blemish. Jesus, the priest of the new covenant, obedient to death, even death on a cross.

And that point is made so often in the letter to the Hebrews. Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people. We've been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

[32 : 17] When this priest offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Jesus delighted to do his Father's will.

And afterwards, he sat down because that work was finished. Nothing more to do. Jesus' sacrifice cannot be improved upon. It can't be added to. It can't be repeated.

And Jesus' death on the cross was not something partial and incomplete. It was perfect in every way. And you see, it points us away from this old, broken world with all its troubles and suffering and sin and guilt, and it points us forward to that glorious new world, that new creation, that new reality that God is bringing to pass.

And so, yes, in this world, there will always be trouble ahead. But in that world to come, there will be no more troubles, and every tear shall be wiped from our eyes.

So how do we become part of this new creation? We look to a crucified Savior. Futile religious rituals, good works, sacrifices, they can never take us there.

[33 : 38] Only faith in Jesus Christ. can bring us that complete deliverance that we all so desperately need and deep down so desperately long for.

Maybe you're in the pit this evening. Maybe you feel the weight of your sin. Look to Jesus. He's been there.

He's been deeper than you will ever go, and He has emerged triumphant. Whoever you are, whatever you may have done, whatever mess you find yourself in, there is a hope and a future for you in Jesus Christ.

So come to Him tonight and call on His name and experience for yourself His wonderful deliverance. Receive His new song, a song of praise that will never ever be silenced.

Let's pray together. Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, You know us and our circumstances. You know what we are dealing with in our own lives.

[34 : 54] You see all things. Our lives are as an open book before You. And so, our God, we pray that by Your Holy Spirit You would turn our attention and our focus away from ourselves to look to You and to look to You to the Son, to look to the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who delivers us from death and sin and guilt.

Lord, may He be our hope and our strength and our salvation. As we ask all of this, in Jesus' name, Amen.