

Pitfalls

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: 23 July 2023

Preacher: Jack Gamble-Smith

[0 : 00] Well, this evening we're going to be continuing with our series on the Psalms this summer. And you may have noticed when I was reading Psalm 40 that this Psalm, how the Psalmist book ends the Psalm, how he starts and how he ends the Psalm if you have your Bibles open and look at it.

The first and last verse are about waiting. If you look at the first and last verse, the first verse reads, I waited patiently for the Lord.

And the last line is a prayer, almost a cry. It says, do not delay, oh my God. And even in the middle, in verse 13, the Psalmist cries out, deliver me and make haste to help me.

And if you look in the middle of the Psalm, you'll see why the Psalmist is crying out, why he's so urgently waiting. And it's because he's sinking. If you look at the language that's used, he uses the language of being encompassed, of being overtaken, of not being able to see, of even his heart failing him as he's waiting.

And these are the cries not just of a sinking man, but of a drowning man is the language that he's using. And the question is why, why is he drowning here? Why does he feel like he's drowning in this Psalm?

[1 : 18] And the answer is in verse 12, if you look at verse 12, it says, my iniquities, my iniquities have overtaken me. He's drowning because of sin.

His sins are catching up with him, overtaking him to the point where he feels like he's drowning. And when he feels like he can't see a way out, when he's confused and perplexed and his heart is failing him, what does he do?

What do we do? What does he do when we get to that place? Because we've all been there before. He says to his own heart, I've been here before. He says, I've been here.

I've been in this place. I've had this feeling before. And if you look back in verse one, look at the past tense verbs that he's using there. If verse 12 is where he is, if he is drowning in verse 12, then verse one is him reminding himself of what happened last time he was here.

Last time he had this same feeling of guilt. When he's sinking, he says, you know, I've been here before. I know this pit well. I've been in this place before.

[2 : 24] And he says, remember what you did last time you found yourself in this pit. And that's the first heading is last time for this sermon. And verse one, he tells himself the story again at the last time that he was here.

And he says, I've been in this pit before. I know this pit. And if you think about it, if you just stop, the Bible is actually filled with pits. Ropes brothers and Genesis cast him into one and the prophet Jeremiah was lowered into one by ropes.

And it says in Jeremiah chapter 38, it says, Jeremiah sank down into the mud of the cistern, left to die of hunger, or to drown in the mud in the water.

But unlike these, David's pit wasn't a physical pit. I think we all know that when we read this. But it's a feeling. It's a feeling of the pit. It's a feeling of sinking. It's a feeling of being trapped, of dirtiness, of mud, of mire, of being alone, of a loss of hope.

And the best way he could describe where he found himself was the pit. There's this sort of ironic reality in biblical scholarship that seems to happen where commentators and writers obsess over figuring out all the little things that the Bible doesn't tell you.

[3 : 45] The most concerned about it seems sometimes. For example, Paul's thorn in the flesh. The number of pages that have been written over what exactly Paul's thorn in the flesh is just unbelievable.

It's shocking. And the beautiful reality is, is that the letter of Corinthians won't ever, ever tell a single one of them. History has locked that mystery away forever.

And the answers won't ever get better or more sophisticated than we are not sure. But the text tells you what it wants you to know.

The Bible tells you what you need to know about a certain thing. It's the thorn was a thing. Paul's thorn was a thing that nod at him, that he wanted to go away and that just wouldn't leave him alone. And it was a thing that God said, no, no, I know you're praying for this to go away, but this is staying because it's actually keeping you humble. And so when we come to a verse like that, we can actually all say, I have that thorn too.

[4 : 46] I know that feeling. I know that thorn. It's in my life too. Because if it got more specific, it would actually lose some of its power in our lives. And in the same way, we can come to this and try to figure out what sin put David in this pit.

What was it that he exactly did that left him in this pit, but we'll never know. It's locked away. You'll never know. He just tells you how he feels, encompassed, overtaken, brokenhearted.

And I think we can all, as the gathering of God's people together, say together, we've been there too. We know that feeling. My guess is that hopefully you have never fallen into a cistern or a well or had your siblings throw you into one, but my guess is your sin has lowered you into one somewhere in your life.

You found yourself at one time or another like we all have, distressed, perplexed, burdened, afraid, alone, and sinking, stuck. Your feet can't seem to move forward out of the mire that you found yourself in because of sin.

And the beautiful reality is that God isn't surprised that this is our anthem as the corporate people of God. Actually, it's quite the opposite.

[6 : 07] He said, here's a song for you, my people, to sing when you feel that way. Sing this together when you're sinking, when you have that feeling. He's not surprised.

The only thing probably worse than being in a pit is having to wait stuck in a pit for a long period of time. And David says, if you look at the first verse, he says, I waited patiently in the myery bog. And the word patiently there is probably a little bit too reserved, a little bit too mellow for how he was feeling at the time. It's literally waiting, I waited.

In other words, even as I waited, I waited. And when I got tired of waiting, I was still waiting. And to take a break from waiting, I waited. As one commentator put it, I did nothing but wait.

That's all I did to get out of this pit. And he was waiting because he knew there was only one way out of this pit that he had found himself in. And it had nothing that he could do.

[7 : 06] Look at the Psalm again. He was waiting for someone. Look at verse one. He bent down to me. He heard my cry. Look at verse two.

He drew me up. He set my feet upon a rock. God is the subject of all of those verbs. You see, for Jeremiah to get out of a cistern, 30 men had to come and get him out of the cistern that he fell into. And for Joseph to get out, his brothers had to drag him out of the pit that they had put him in. And for David, he writes, he inclined to me. He drew me up.

And the word inclined is probably more like reached down, bent low, got on hands and knees to bring him out of the pit. The pit of sin is too deep and too myery, too sticky for any human to get out. You need Yahweh himself to come down and get you out of this pit. But it's all very nice and poetic to speak of pits and sinking and sending down ropes this evening.

[8 : 13] But what does that actually mean to us as we sit here? There are people here who because I can say for certain because of this broken world who are struggling with sin, with depression, who are perplexed, brokenhearted, wondering about God himself.

Is he good? Is there a God here? And just can't see straight how to move forward, how to move out. And whenever we find ourselves in that pit, one way or another, usually the last thing we think we need is theology.

But actually theology is what we need when we're in the pit. That's what the psalmist would say. We need to ask, what does it actually mean for God to come and get me out of where I've put myself? And with questions like that, always... Oh. All right, put hands in the pockets from now on. With questions like that, it's always helpful to ask, did anyone around Jesus have the same problem that I'm having right now?

And how did Jesus respond to them in that situation? Well, I can think of two people who fell into the pit right next to Jesus. One fell in because of a simple sin, really.

[9 : 30] It wasn't premeditated, it wasn't birth in a callous, festering heart. It was the crumble, the indecision of a moment that made him sin.

The other was much deeper. It was a slow, methodical process. It was planned, calculated, hardened, even almost insidious. And the two men, after they sinned, they were broken by the reality of what they were capable of.

They felt guilty, condemned, afraid. They cried. In short, they both found themselves in this pit. Y'all know who I'm talking about, Peter and Judas.

Two men right next to Jesus on the same night, both in the pit. And if you would have run into Peter or Judas on that night, you would have seen two men who both could have truly sung the words, evils have encompassed me beyond number.

My iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see. My heart fails me. And yet one got out of the pit, and one didn't.

[10 : 35] One will forever be labeled as the one who betrayed Jesus. And one went on to be a crucial figure in the church and is assuredly sitting with Jesus now.

Why? What was the difference between these two men? And Jesus actually tells us. Jesus tells you why Peter got out. Do you remember what he said?

He said, Peter, I prayed for you. He said, he told him, Peter, I prayed for your faith that it wouldn't fail.

And he said to him, when you have turned again or when you have repented, strengthen your brothers. It's almost exactly the conversation he has with them after. What was the difference? Jesus prayed for Peter. He bent down on his hands and his knees, and he let down his rope. And he said, grab onto my hand out of that pit.

[11 : 31] I'm praying for you. What do you, I just wonder what you think, what do I think when we find ourselves in the pits of life? Do we say, do I say, if I have enough faith, then I'll get out of this?

If I start reading my Bible plan again, if I catch up, I'll do three a day until I get right back on track, then I'll get out of this. That'll sort it all out.

If I start to say no to more things. I'll read a self-health book, cut some things out of my life, then right out of the pit, ramp we go. And all of those are probably good things, but none of them will get you out of the pit.

The psalmist would say, you cannot get out that way. The mud is too deep. The walls are too high. The only way out is if someone comes and lowers a rope and gets you out of there.

What if instead when we find ourselves in there, what if I, what if you say to yourself, say to your heart, Jesus is praying for me right now.

[12 : 33] Would that change the way you lived? If when you struggled, you said, not what can I do, but Jesus is praying for me right now. What if I wait for him?

He came last time. I've been here before. I'll remember how he came last time. He'll come again. So as David finds himself sinking yet again in this psalm, he says to himself, I've been here before. Remember how he came last time. He'll come again. I think if you were to put the cry of David into one sentence in this sermon, it might be God, you saved me before.

Don't abandon me now. But the question we have to ask is how do you know if Jesus is praying for you? How do you know that Jesus is praying for you? How would Peter and Judas have known if Jesus, if Jesus was praying for them?

Were their signs? And I've heard many people say that would compare themselves most to Peter. If they think of like a biblical figure that say, I'm the most like Peter, because Peter always puts his foot in his mouth.

[13 : 38] He always says the wrong thing. He's always wrong. And there might be some truth to that. He wasn't always right. But say whatever you want about what Peter said, about how many questions he got wrong.

Peter couldn't stop talking to Jesus. It's like every page of the gospel, Peter is talking to Jesus in some way. And I'd really like to ask those people who compare themselves most to Peter, are you always talking to Jesus?

Can you just not get enough of talking to Jesus? Peter wasn't defined by saying silly things. He was defined by a life spent talking to Jesus.

On the other hand, the only time that I can find Judas talking to Jesus is one time where he challenges Jesus about the grace that he's showing to a sinful woman. Other than that, as far as I can see, Judas doesn't say a word to Jesus. How do you know if Jesus is praying for you in heaven? Well, do I talk to Jesus?

[14 : 34] Am I always talking to Jesus? And if your life is spent always talking to him, no matter how silly your prayers might be, no matter how repetitive, no matter how wrong some of the things you might get, you can rest assured that Jesus is talking to the Father about you.

After all, what does it mean for Jesus to intercede? It means that he's holding your faith fast before the Father. And isn't that what the psalmist says? What does Jesus do to the one who he draws from the pit?

Verse three, if you look again at the psalm, it says he puts a song in his mouth. And that song, as verse three says, is to God. He puts a song to God in his mouth.

And the word there for song is just the word in your Bible that you have titled over this book, psalm. It's the very title of this book, of this series. It describes all of these songwriters who cried out to God when they were trapped in sin and alone and happy and victorious and suffering loss and angry.

That's what they did. They sang these psalms to God. It's a book of talking to Jesus about all of the details and worries and victories of life. So what's the mark that he's come for you?

[15 : 47] That he won't let you stay in the pit that he's praying for you? It's that you talk the ear off of Jesus, that you're always seeking communion with them, that you always want to talk to him and sing to him, and he's put a song in your mouth.

So the next heading would be the song. What is this new song of the delivered? It's, if you look at verse four, it's first, a song to yourself.

When you found your way out of the pit, you remind yourself, blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust. That's what you sing to yourself. And blessed, it's just the idea that's in the first chapter of the Psalms, blessed is the man.

It's the idea of deep soul peace, of deep soul happiness that you found. It is the exact opposite of the pit.

And you sing to yourself, the truly peaceful man does two things. This is what you remind yourself. He one, he makes the Lord his trust, and two, he refuses to turn to the proud.

[16 : 55] He makes the Lord his trust, and he refuses to turn to the proud. And the word there for proud is actually the word that's used as a slang for the Egyptians all throughout the Bible.

In the Bible, Israel has always been enticed by Egypt. Israel was always drawn to Egypt's wealth and luxury and power and safety. Moses, according to the book of Hebrews, had to fight to choose the riches of Christ over Egypt's fleeting and ticing pleasures.

The Israelites dreamed of the pleasures of Egypt from the desert. And what does this Psalm call all that Egypt offered them? All that was offered to them.

Verse four, it calls it a lie. It's just chasing after a lie. And instead, verse five, you say, the Lord is thinking of me.

The Lord hasn't forgotten. His thoughts of me are multiplying day after day. He's thinking of me. And in verse 17, David says, when I am poor and needy, the Lord takes thought of me.

[18 : 02] In this song that David sings, there are a lot of different notes, but the melody for David is that God thinks of him. Is that the melody of your life?

Is that the melody of your thoughts, of how you think about God? Do you preach to yourself that God takes thought over you? How would that change? The way you lived, if you actually thought, Jesus is praying for me and God takes thought over my life.

If when I was dating Whitney, I thought her thoughts of me were multiplying from one a week to maybe two, that would have changed the way I lived my life. I would have lived like a confident, much more confident man.

Jesus thinks of you. His thoughts are multiplying toward you. Jesus prayed for you in the pit, and he's thinking of you even now. It's not that Jesus saves you from the pit and then he leaves you alone.

To figure it out until next time you fall on the pit like a truck that comes and pulls you back out. His prayers hoist you out, and then his prayers set your feet upon the rock, and then his prayers teach your heart to not go back to Egypt, to not want Egypt anymore, and then his thoughts and prayers teach you what it truly means to be peaceful and content, to be blessed.

[19 : 23] And then that's the reality we have to teach ourselves, that I will be more peaceful and more content in ways that I could ever imagine if I actually just don't chase Egypt anymore.

If I don't chase the lies anymore, I'll be more peaceful and content than I could ever imagine. If I make the Lord, as he says, my trust.

And the psalmist says, you can trust the Lord because he's thought through your life, and he knows what's best for you. And when you know, and this next heading would be the sacrifice, this next heading would be the sacrifice, and when you know that God thinks of you and holds you up, then you begin to love him so much that you ask him, God, what do you want from me?

What do you actually delight in, Lord? What can I give you that you would delight in? And verses six through eight make it clear that it was never about animal sacrifices if you read your Old Testament. It was never about animal sacrifices. And this at first probably seems strange because God commanded animal sacrifices, so why would he not delight in animal sacrifices if that's what he told them to do?

[20 : 36] And if you actually were to go back into Leviticus and Numbers for pleasure reading sometime, you would notice that not all sins could be absolutely atoned for by sacrifices.

Actually it was more specific, unintentional sins that could be atoned for, but deeper, higher-handed sins resulted in being cut off, separated from the people of God and from God himself, even death. Plenty of sins in the Old Testament were left with no prescribed sacrifice, sins of thought and words of pride and self-promotion. What do you do with those things? What do you do with those sins? So you have the true Israelites, not ever fully content with the sacrificial system because they feel how inadequate it is to deal with their guilt.

And so they reach behind the altar and they reach for the mercy of God saying, be merciful to me because I have sins that this lamb never will fully deal with.

[21 : 37] And they pleaded with the character of God himself to do more than that lamb could. And as verse six says, God gave them open ears.

The picture is that he like chiseled a hole in their ear, he dug a hole in their hardened ears. And he said, what this all about is, what this whole system is about is that I want to be your God and I want you to be my people.

I want you and I want my words to be within you. And it's always been about the God wants a heart that says my delight is to please you.

I've internalized your words into my soul, into my guts as the Hebrew word would say. I still remember the very place I stood when Whitney agreed to go out in our first date with me.

I remember the first text message I received from her. Those things are ingrained into my mind. They've been pushed down into my guts because they matter to me. And in verse eight, when it says your law is within my heart, it means guts.

[22 : 44] It's found its way all the way down within you, deep, deep down. And it only gets the guts because you can feel his words. You need them to get you out of the pit.

And you can only feel them because you've decided that you love them more than anything else. You've been more than all the Egypt has to offer you.

And the New Testament will tell you a crazy reality about verses six through eight. You probably know. It says that these are the words of Jesus himself.

Hebrews 10 tells you that shocking reality. It says that Jesus sang these words to himself. In other words, there was a moment when Jesus's heart failed him and he felt encompassed by evils all around him.

When people were pursuing him, when he became sin itself and felt it to the very core of his being. And in that moment, he said, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[23 : 48] But deep down, he also knew this psalm. Somewhere deep down, his soul sang the words, I'm waiting for the Lord because I know that he listens to me. I know he's coming for me.

I know he won't leave me in the pit. And when Satan tempted him to trust in lies, he said, no, no, the Lord is my trust. I trust in the Lord.

I've internalized his word into me. I would never go against the Lord. And as he grew up and learned the Old Testament, God gave him ears to hear that the temple was only a shadow of himself, that the Lamb was a shadow of himself.

Because it says, the entire scroll of the book was written of me. And we can only think maybe he sang to himself on the way to the cross.

As all the lambs were slaughtered on that same day, that's not what truly pleases you, Lord. So maybe he sang quietly, behold, I have come.

[24 : 49] I am fulfilling the law to the deepest parts of me, with the deepest parts of me. And we see the reality that this ultimately is Jesus' song.

And so what? Is this just a cool wow moment of turning the Psalm on its head? What do we do with that? How does that help us? How does this help you that Jesus sang this song?

Well, this is a song about guilt. This is a song about sinking, about drowning. And if you're in the pit here this evening, however you got there, wherever you are, you need to realize that for thousands of years, the people of God collectively sang verse one, we waited patiently for the Lord.

And then just like God did for the Israelites when they were in Egypt, God, as verse one, says, he heard their cry. And God stooped down, got in his hands and his knees and entered into a manger. And he said, behold, I have come. And what you've been reaching out for behind the sacrificial system, what this sacrificial system couldn't solve in you, the very mercy of God to every corner of your being, that's what I've come to accomplish.

[26 : 06] So that very thing that the sacrificial system couldn't resolve the guilt of so many sins and thoughts, of the sins that you committed willingly and knowingly and subtly, Jesus said, verse 11, the Lord will not restrain his mercy from any corner of your life or your mind or your heart or your being.

And that means, the reason that's important is it means that you need to feel the weight of the life and death of Christ on your conscience as you read this. Paul says in Romans six, he says, you died with Christ on the cross.

That's just, if we just dwelt on that. In other words, you've been so united to Christ that what is true of him is now true of you.

When he obeyed, it's as if you obeyed in him. When he died to sin, so did you. So you have to, when you find yourself in the pit, you have to tell your guilty conscience.

When I think of my past, instead of thinking about what I did last week or last year, think of the life of Christ. And let your conscience begin to feel that righteousness has now been accomplished for you and imputed to you and it's yours.

[27 : 22] And again, how would you do that? Practically, how do you do that in your life? There's a helpful technique I heard recently on handling sin in your life.

Whatever the sin is plaguing you, you give it a name. I heard this from Sinclair Ferguson, give it a name. And it doesn't mean name your sin Timothy or Jack, don't name it that.

I mean, call it what it is, name it lust, anger, gossip, etc. Give it a name and then write that name down and look at it and actually write it down and look at it.

But you don't stop there. That's where we too often stop with sin is we identify it and then just like scratching and itch. Scratch and scratch and scratch and it never actually gets better, it only gets worse.

Then go from there, then write down what the polar biblical opposite of that sin is. If you wrote down lust, write down thankfulness right next to it. If you wrote down greed, write down generosity next to it.

[28 : 29] And then you begin to pray more for the positive than you do for the negative. And that's where that technique ends most of the time. But I think this Psalm would nudge us one step further.

It would push us to go one step further. If you wrote down lust and the opposite you wrote down is thankfulness, this Psalm would say look at how Jesus was thankful in your stead for you.

Look how Jesus accomplished that for you already. And you can see it right here in this Psalm, verse 16, he loves the way of righteousness and sings about how greatly the Lord deals with him.

And if you wrote down fear and next to it you wrote down trust, instead of just, I'm just going to trust more. Look at Jesus say, I've put all my trust in the Lord's plan for you.

I've done it in your stead. And then the reality of how united you are to Christ, that you're already dead to sin because you are in Christ, should begin to hit you and should begin to hit the way you view your sins and the way you view your days.

[29 : 32] Jesus sang and lived this song for you. So that means when you find yourself in the pit, Jesus doesn't just pray for you, but he put himself in the pit for you.

He screamed, my God, why have you forsaken me? So you would never have to say that. In conclusion, many of you probably have seen that eerie scene from the movie Titanic or at least

heard of it, where the ship is going down and the band of violinists or the group of violinists is on the deck.

And as the ship is sinking into the icy water, they continue playing their violins. And it's actually well-attested to by survivors that that actually happened.

And survivors even remembered what the band played that night. They played the 19th century hymn near my God to the, that's what they played.

That was their sinking song. Do you have a sinking song? Jesus did, Psalm 40, this was it. And so in the most beautiful way, Jesus tells us, sing my words from the pit.

[30 : 41] I've given you these. I sang these myself because this was my song. Let me pray for us. Lord, thank you that you don't leave us.

Lord, you haven't left us, but that you pray for us. Lord, you come and you get us. And I pray for all of us here this evening, those who are perplexed and distressed and guilt ridden.

Lord, that they would look up, that they would look to you, that they would realize there's no way out of the pit on their own. That someone needs to come and get them, that you need to come and get them.

I pray that they would realize that you care for them, that you think of them, that you've gotten your hands and knees and entered a manger for them. You pulled them up, that you pray for them, that you set their feet on steady ground, Lord.

And you came yourself and you walked out those steps in front of us. I pray that those realities would sink in, that it would change the way we view sin. Lord, the change the way we view ourselves and the world around us.

[31 : 51] Lord, and for any here who are wondering about if God even exists or is God good, I pray that those realities would draw them.

They would realize that they can't find their way out of the pit on their own. We love you, Lord, and pray this all in Christ's name. Amen.