

THE GOD WHO DELIVERS

PSALM 40

INTRODUCTION:

Many of you have read C.S. Lewis' famous *Chronicles of Narnia* fantasy series. Toward the end of the first book he wrote for that series, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, there is a wonderful scene after Aslan, the lion king of the whole wood, had risen from the dead. He invites Lucy and Susan to ride on his back as he sprints to the White Witch's castle, the evil force in Narnia who has enslaved the land. There they find the whole castle and its courtyard filled with statues of all kinds of creatures who had been turned to stone by the Witch. These were her ornaments of enslavement. One by one, Aslan breathes on each statue, and the girls watch in amazement as his life-giving breath turns each statue from stone back to flesh.

After these newly freed creatures (centaurs, giants, fauns, hounds, lions, etc.) see Aslan, they run after him, dancing around him in joy and thankfulness. After Aslan has breathed on all of them, rescuing them from their stone prisons, he calls them to immediately follow him into battle with the Witch who had enslaved them. And how do they respond? Every one of them joyfully and obediently answers the call and follows him, their king who had delivered them. It was the appropriate response.

Psalm 40 is the appropriate response of a man who has been delivered from despair by his king. It is a song that all who have been delivered can sing.

This is another psalm written by David. We don't know if he actually wrote it soon after he wrote Psalm 39, but the fact that it was placed after that psalm was certainly no mistake. If you remember, in Psalm 39, David was suffering intensely under God's chastening hand because of his sin. He despaired of life. Though His faith and hope in God remained intact, he felt like he couldn't bear much more. He ended the psalm saying to God, "*Turn Your gaze away from me, that I may smile again before I depart and am no more*" (Ps.39:13). He longed for the joy that he once had and now seemed a distant memory. He needed deliverance.

Psalm 40 answers the despair of Psalm 39 with a celebration of deliverance and a renewed commitment to God. God has answered David's prayer. He has delivered him. And David responds appropriately, and in so doing, he shows us how we should respond to God's deliverance.

Main idea: Those who know God's deliverance respond by giving Him their whole life.

Here we are shown four ways we are to respond to God's deliverance:

- A. Exuberant praise (vv.1-5)
- B. Joyful obedience (vv.6-8)
- C. Enthusiastic evangelism (vv.9-10)
- D. Continual prayer (vv.11-17)

EXPOSITION:

A. We should respond to God's deliverance with exuberant praise. (vv.1-5)

David frames his praise as both a personal testimony of deliverance and as an expression of corporate blessings.

1. Personal testimony (vv.1-3)

David says that he *"waited patiently for the LORD."* We have seen that "waiting for the Lord" is a common theme in the psalms. At its core, it means to quietly trust in God's sovereign will and timing. Our flesh does not like to wait patiently. We want things done now, in our timing. But David had come to recognize that God's ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts (Is.55:8-9). He had learned to submit to God's plan, and that allowed him to wait patiently.

And in God's perfect timing, David says that *"He inclined to me and heard my cry."* Though God felt distant or silent for a time, He heard the cry of His servant. His ears are always open to His children. Just as God heard the cries of the Hebrews as they were enslaved and oppressed in Egypt, so He inclines His ear to every single one of us who lift our voice and heart to Him in our distress.

And notice where David was when God heard him (v.2). He was in the *"pit of destruction"* and the *"mire of clay."* These are poetic ways of describing what David felt. He was in a situation from which he could not save himself. All he could do was cry to the Lord and wait patiently for Him.

And because the Lord loves his children, he heard David's cry and took action. What did God do?

- *"brought me up out of the pit of destruction"*
- *"set my feet upon a rock"*
- *"made my footsteps firm"*
- *"put a new song in my mouth"*

This is the personal testimony of David. God heard him, a lowly sinner who was stuck in a place he could not deliver himself from, lifted him out of that muck, and put him on firm ground. Thus, He gave David a new song to sing. A song of praise for his personal deliverance.

David then moves from a personal testimony of God's deliverance to a description of the corporate blessings that are given to those who trust in the Lord.

2. Corporate blessings (vv.4-5)

Those who trust in the Lord are those people who decide not to trust in man. Unlike the world, they do not turn to the proud or those who walk in falsehood (v.4). How blessed are those whose trust is in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord (Jer.17:7). These are those who can testify of God's wonders (v.5).

God has done countless wonders for those who trust Him. Who can we compare with God? Who else has provided the common graces of rain, sunshine, and the provision of food? Who else has protected you from a thousand dangers, toils, and snares? Who else has stepped down from heaven, into history, into our corrupt, selfish, sin-stained world to lift us up, wash us clean, and adopt us into His family? Only Yahweh; only God has done this.

Illustration: Several weeks ago, I had to go do some work up on the Navajo Nation. We were doing an archaeological survey along a stretch of road. Because the road was paved, our company rented us just a little sedan for the job. However, in order to do our job, we needed to park the car off in several places off the road—and there was no real shoulder to speak of. The first day, this worked fine. But on the second day, we pulled off to the side of the road where it looked like there was just a little windblown sand—bad decision. Turns out, it was deep windblown sand, and we got very stuck. We rocked the car, and it got more and more stuck. We gathered all kinds of debris—but only dug ourselves in deeper. Pushing was useless. Traffic was very light on that road, but even those vehicles that did come just passed on by. We were helpless and too proud to call AAA. Finally, after about 1.5 hours, an older man with a truck and chain kindly pulled us out of the miry sand and set our wheels on the asphalt.

We were truly thankful and told this man so numerous times. We could do little, however, but offer our genuine thanks.

Application: How much more praise should we give to God for His deliverance? How many of you can testify of God's deliverance the way David did? For those of you who have experienced salvation from sin, doesn't his testimony sound so familiar? The burden of sin weighed you down so that you could not get out—like mud or quicksand. You could not get a foothold, and you were sinking. But God, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ His Son and power of the Holy Spirit, lifted you up, raised you from the spiritual pit of destruction, and set your feet upon a rock. And you now have a new song in your mouth, don't you? A song of praise and thanksgiving to your Deliverer. Do you sing it? We should sing it, and sing it loud, and sing it often.

B. We should respond to God's deliverance with joyful obedience. (vv.6-8)

The first response to God's deliverance is exuberant praise. The second response is joyful obedience. After opening with praise for a past deliverance, David goes on to talk about responding to God's deliverance with a commitment of joyful obedience.

- ⁷ Then I said, "Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. ⁸ I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart."

These verses likely refer to David recognizing that he, as king, was bound to God with the responsibility of knowing and practicing God's Law.

- **Deuteronomy 17:18-20**—Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. ¹⁹ It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, ²⁰ that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he

may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.

The principle behind these words applies to all of God's people. Because God desires our obedience, we must know how to obey Him. We must know His Word, always be learning His Word, and always be practicing His Word.

But what does David mean when he says, *"Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired...Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required"* (v.6)? Didn't God clearly command all of these things in the Law? Of course, He did. David knew that God had commanded and required these sacrifices, and he wholeheartedly promoted their continuance in worship.

What David is saying is the same thing that Samuel said to King Saul after Saul disobeyed the Lord.

- **1 Samuel 15:22-23**—Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams."

In other words, ritual and sacrifice mean nothing if a commitment to obeying the Lord does not underly them. How could God ever be pleased with that kind of heart? In the same way, David knew that sacrifices were right and good but only when they are accompanied by love and wholehearted devotion to God. But they mean nothing if they do not flow out of a life of genuine devotion and obedience.

Application: In the same way, we can pat ourselves on the back and call ourselves good Christians by doing the things good Christians are supposed to do—in church every Sunday, singing boisterously, giving generously, serving faithfully, smiling brightly, praying fervently. But unless all of these things flow out of a genuine love, devotion, and commitment to God, they are meaningless, hypocritical, and displeasing to God.

If you truly are a Christian, then you have been bought with a price. You are not your own. You belong to Him who loved you and gave Himself up for you. His love and sacrifice should control us and motivate us to a sincere and pure devotion to Him.

The one who knows the deliverance of God delights to do God's will. God does not want rote obedience, half-hearted obedience, or obedience merely from fear or to meet someone else's expectations. He doesn't want reluctant obedience. He wants joyful obedience that only comes when His Law is in our hearts.

Example of Christ: This is the kind of obedience that Jesus Christ had.

- **John 4:34**—Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."
- **John 6:38**—I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

In fact, Hebrews 10:5-10 quotes and exposites Psalm 40:6-8.

David here is speaking of himself and his delight in obeying God. But, in a deeper, more ultimate sense, David typifies Jesus Christ. For David's ideal was to obey God in this way, but as a human with indwelling sin, he could never perfectly do it. But Jesus could, and Jesus did delight to do God's will always,

continually, perfectly, and consistently. Jesus was obedient and submissive to God's will even unto death on a cross.

Did Jesus really delight to do God's will, when God's will was for Him to give up His life on the cross? Was He showing delight in Gethsemane? No. Gethsemane was agony, and the cross was pure anguish and misery we cannot comprehend. But at the same time, we are told in Hebrews 12:2 that we are to *"fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of God."*

Jesus ultimately delighted to do the Father's will, despite the pain and misery, because of the joy that was set before Him—because of the glory that would follow and the salvation of His people. He knew His Father's will was perfect and good, and ultimately the best plan to accomplish the greatest thing.

We, too, are to delight in doing God's will, even when His will might lead to difficulties, pain, or suffering. How can we do that?

1. We must have God's Law within our hearts. (v.8b)

- **Jeremiah 31:33**—"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

This is the New Covenant that Jesus inaugurated. And we are made part of it when we place faith in Him alone for our salvation.

2. We must consider Jesus.

- **Hebrews 12:3**—For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

We look to Jesus, who took the penalty for our sins upon Himself on the cross—and in Him we find motivation and strength to trust God, believing that His will is best despite our circumstances.

C. We should respond to God's deliverance with enthusiastic evangelism. (vv.9-10)

The first response to God's deliverance is exuberant praise. The second response is joyful obedience. The third response is enthusiastic evangelism.

What a change from the vow of silence David made in Psalm 39—silent in his suffering is now replaced by open proclamation in his joy. Over and over again in these two verses, David writes of how God's deliverance spawned an evangelistic fervor in him.

- **Verse 9a**—I have proclaimed
- **Verse 9b**—Behold, I will not restrain my lips [i.e., I will let my lips flap]
- **Verse 10a**—I have not hidden [i.e., I have put the lamp on the lampstand, not under a basket (Cf. Matt5:15)]
- **Verse 10b**—I have spoken
- **Verse 10c**—I have not concealed

In other words, David could not contain himself. He had to speak, to testify, to bear witness to others. Of what? Of who God is and what He has done! Notice the plethora of words David uses in verse 10 to describe the attributes and work of God.

- **Verse 10**—Your righteousness; Your faithfulness; Your salvation; Your lovingkindness; Your truth

Application: Do you know that God expects all whom He has saved to have this same kind of enthusiastic evangelism? Do you remember when Jesus healed the Gerasene demoniac (*Mark 5:1-20*)? He went into Gentile territory and found a man living alone on the outskirts of the city, in the graveyard. He was wild and violent with anyone who came near because he was possessed by a legion of demons. He was in a totally helpless estate. But Jesus had compassion on him, and He cast those demons out of the man. And afterward, when the man wanted to get in the boat and travel with Jesus, what did Jesus say to him?

- **Mark 5:19**—Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.

Have you told anyone about the great things the Lord has done for you lately?

D. We should respond to God's deliverance with continual prayer. (vv.11-17)

The first response to God's deliverance is exuberant praise. The second response is joyful obedience. The third response is enthusiastic evangelism. The fourth response is continual prayer.

Wait. Wasn't the whole point of this psalm to praise God for having already answered David's prayer? True enough. But that doesn't mean prayer stops. When God answers prayers, it should stimulate us to keep praying. Our needs don't go away; therefore, our need to pray doesn't go away.

1. Our need to be delivered from sin (vv.11-12)

Although verse 11 is translated in the NASB and ESV as statements—"You, O LORD, will not withhold Your compassion from me; Your lovingkindness and Your truth will continually preserve me"—it is grammatically plausible to translate them as petitions (e.g., KJV, NIV, RSV)—"O LORD, do not withhold Your compassion from me; let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me."

But why these petitions? Why does David need the Lord's compassion? Why does he need the Lord's lovingkindness and truth to preserve him continually? Because of his own indwelling sin. David was just like us. He was down and out, despairing of the consequences and discipline for his sin (*Pss. 39*). Then he was up, rejoicing, because God answered His prayer and delivered him. He was on a spiritual high—praising the Lord, joyfully obeying the Lord, telling others about the greatness of the Lord. But then sin reared its ugly head again and drove him back to his knees.

And isn't this our experience, as well? Sometimes our Christian walk feels like a roller coaster. We're down, depressed, struggling with sin. Then God lifts us up, puts our feet on a rock, and we're rejoicing in Christ all day long. Then, temptation calls, our flesh perks up its ears, and we fail. But in His kindness, God leads us to confession, to prayer, and to repentance. He points us to the perfect righteousness of Christ, convincing us to trust solely in Him for forgiveness, and sets us back up on that rock.

2. Our need to be delivered from enemies (*vv.13-17*)

Our own sin is not the only thing that will cause us to persist in continual prayer. So will the presence of the enemies of God and his people. They want nothing to do with God, snicker at His commands, and make life difficult for His people through persecution/insults or through enticing us toward evil. This includes our spiritual enemy, the devil, as well as the human enemies of God all around us.

What this means is that we cannot let our guard down in this world. We dare not presume that we are strong enough to resist these enemies on our own. We must turn to our Protector and Deliverer, whose shield alone can deflect the arrows of the evil one, and whose wisdom and grace alone can keep us in the midst of the battle.

CONCLUSION:

Have you turned to this Protector and Deliverer? Have you experienced the deliverance of the Lord? Have you been freed from the bondage to sin and self? I am not asking if you go to church, listen to sermons, read your Bible, or are honest and kind with people. I'm asking if God has lifted you out of the miry clay, opened your ears to the Gospel of Jesus, opened your eyes to see His glory, put a song of praise in your heart, and made you a new creature?

If not, then call upon Christ today. Repent of your sin and call on Him to rescue you from your sin and His justice. Ask Him to clothe you in His own righteousness, because you have none of your own. Trust in Him and commit your whole life to Him—a life of sincere and pure devotion.

And if you do know the Deliverer through Christ. Renew your commitment and devotion to Him. Remind yourself of the Gospel—what He has delivered you from and what He has to delivered you to—and repent of any way you have held back from Him. Give yourself wholly to Him again—a vessel to be used according to His will.

- Offer Him the praise He deserves.
- Commit your life to Him in joyful obedience.
- Tell others that He is a God who delivers through His Son, Jesus Christ.
- Keep praying, for we can do nothing apart from Christ.

And if you are in a desperate place right now—distressed, depressed, hurting—remember that the God who delivered you from sin and eternal death can yet deliver you from your present distress according to His perfect will. And though our suffering may last a lifetime, He will ultimately and finally and fully deliver all His children when Christ comes again in glory.

Amen.

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