

A sermon on Psalm 40 v. 1, 2: I waited patiently on the Lord, etc

At Carsphairn July 28th 1754

by A. Dick, a.m. & p.m.

‘I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me and heard my cry’, etc.

This psalm was composed by David; but the question is, of whom the Prophet here speaks; of himself or of some other man? The psalm may be expounded partly of David, and partly of Christ. Somethings in it agree to David and cannot apply to Christ. And some things in it agree to Christ, and cannot apply to David. And thus, an infallible interpreter, the apostle Paul, in the 10th of the Hebrews, expounds the 6, 7 & 8 verses of this psalm, wholly, and only of our Redeemer. But that I may not further detain you from what I have in view. In the word that I have now read to you the psalmist tells truly the goodness of God to him in the real deliverance he had wrought in his behalf. More particularly in these words you have these four things, which I’ll endeavour briefly to explain to you; and I’ll apply what may be said upon them as I go along – first, David’s trouble. Secondly, David’s exercise under his trouble. Thirdly, David’s outgate from his trouble. And fourthly and lastly the improvement makes both of his trouble and of his outgate.

First, David’s trouble; or the account he gives of the melancholy situation he had been in. He had been in a vile and horrible pit, a great sounding of it, a pit of noise as the margin has it; where his ears were filled and deafened with noise and clamour; the din of many waters; and the roaring of lions, and other beasts of prey – for perhaps there may be an allusion to all these. And but to be on the brink of such a pit, and to hear the noise of it, was frightful enough; but to be in the very bottom of the pit; and to have a multitude of waters covering him; to be in danger every moment of being destroyed and devoured; how exceedingly calamitous and distressing must we suppose it? David tells us moreover that he was sunk in miry clay. Tough strong clay; where his feet were so engaged and entangled. And he so wasted and weakened; and so spent and inebled by his trouble; the long continuance of his trouble; and his struggling under it, that he could not work himself out of it. But was this a real or only a figurative and metaphorical description David gives of his condition? Was David in a noisy noisome pit, in a literal and proper sense? If not, what’s the meaning of all this? And what does he intend by this very gloomy and mournful representation? By the pit and the clay; the horrible pit and the miry clay that he was in; and the noise, the roaring and the din of the waters, and beasts he says surrounded him; we are to understand the following particulars: namely first, that it was great. Secondly, and more especially, that it was of a complicated nature, and that it had many and different ingredients in it. Thirdly, that it was not only threatening and dangerous, but apparently hopeless and desperate. And not to multiply, that as he had very little, if any comfort under it, he had as little prospect of a deliverance from it.

Hence and by way of application we may infer first that the heaviest trials and afflictions are to all consistent with the love of God to his people. David was beloved of the Lord, and yet David was many times in the deepest distress – what need I speak of David? Christ himself had greater trials than all the saints put together – hence also secondly we may infer that the Lord’s people may not only have trouble but a great variety of trouble alone and the same time. Thus it was with David; and thus it was with the Redeemer himself. See that 69 ps. v.2 where says David, and he speaks also as a type of Jesus Christ; I sink in deep mire where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me. Tis very rare that the people of God have but one trouble at once. And once a breach is made upon them the waters spread far and broad. What then is thy hope, O believer? Only thou in outward trouble? And not thou in inward trouble at the same time? Once thou want the wanted light of thy Lord’s countenance? Art thou in great doubts and darkness? Have thou strong fears and dreadful temptations? Is the cloud growing darker and thicker, and little or no appearance of the breaking of the day? And art thou all the while plagued with the noise and din of hell and the cruel suggestions of unbelief, crying, and fearing that there’s no help even in God for thee? It was thus with David when he tells us that he was in a horrible pit and in the miry clay – deep calling unto deep, and all God’s waves and billows passing over him. And therefore be not discouraged; don’t conclude thy case singular and unprecedented; don’t quit your hopes. But say with David: trust in God – and depend upon it, that for all so low as you are, you shall not be ashamed if ye wait for Him. And this brings me to the second thing proposed, and that was to speak to

you of David's exercise under his trouble. What does David? And what course does he take under his sad affliction? He looks to the Lord even in his seemingly desperate situations. David had his fears, but he was not without hope either – and his faith gets the better of his fear; and his hope of his despondency – what's the effect of that? I waited for the Lord, says he. He takes the way of duty, he gets him up to his watchtower, to see what the Lord will say to him. And because he that believes will not make haste, and there was a hand of grace kept above David; therefore David will not be rash and forward to make conclusions against himself and the success of his endeavours – he resolves to wait on, and keep above the Lord's hand – and now upon a review of the matter he can say, I waited, and I waited patiently, for the Lord. In waiting, I waited – I determined that I would not give over waiting – here's your works, my friends, the works that's pointed out for you – whatever are your present troubles, and your present fears – unbelief is alwise for hasty works – and it makes us hand of it – But faith believes before the salvation of God. You must wait – How? You must wait diligently, you must wait earnestly; with care and with concern too – you must wait patiently, and in the lively exercise of hope; and you must wait perseveringly, and see God appear for your help. I say whatever the time is, and the manner of doing it in with respect to both which you must be absolutely submissive and resigned.

But secondly and 'tis more particularly expressive of David's way of waiting; the way he was resigned when he's waiting for the Lord. David he takes himself to prayer, that never failing mean of relief – David had found the benefit of prayer before now, and now he will again try what he can make of prayer – he prays and he cries. He prays with strong grief, and tears: I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined to me, and heard my cry. The Lord's people are not for a noisy kind of religion, and neither do they want that the world should know what passes between God and them in their secret retirements; and therefore and if they must speak out in prayer, they choose hard places for the duty, as they can't apprehend any danger of being overheard by the unrighteous. But modest as the believer is, and cautious as he is – and though for ordinary his voice is not heard, yet there are times when he's put to cry and make a noise – he must cry; he can't help it. And do you know the reasons of this, and the cause whence it proceeds? We need not cry in order that God may hear us; for he hears the voice of our breathing – our very thoughts, if I may speak so; all and every one of them he knows them afar off. But first, will a night of trouble, and the most grievous and acute pains of body make one cry? Will one cry out of an aching or dislocate or broken bone? There's no doubt he will cry, if he is able at all to cry – though sometimes also, as David says, the trouble is so great that the man can't speak – he's dead and stupid and senseless under it. But will he not cry? I was saying if he be able to cry. Yes surely – and will ye be surprised that a person should cry, that keep himself under a heavy load of guilt, and is therefore spiritually wounded; the arrows of God, the terrors and threatenings of the law of God, sticking deep and thick in the conscience and the poison thereof drinking up the very spirits.

Secondly, will not great danger make one cry – not only the prospect, but the feeling of danger; immediate and unavoidable danger. Will not one cry, that's engaged with deep waters, that are ready to overthrow him? Will not one cry that's fallen in a deep pit, or that's so involved in mire and clay, that he can't get out of it? In short will not one cry that's among lions and wolves and other ravenous beasts that have their mouths opened to devour him? And will not one cry that's in hazard of sudden death by the bloody sword, or the raging fire? You can't affirm that and can't wonder that a person should cry, that sees himself in imminent danger of death and hell; and the curse and wrath of God? Devouring fires and everlasting burnings – O sirs, I believe there's little or no sense of God among us – little or no sense of sin among us and of danger in the way of sin. If we believed in God; in heaven; in hell; and judgement and in wrath to come, O how we would humbled cry? Read Psalm 55 v.4,5,6 My heart is sore pained within me. Why? The terrors of death are fallen upon me; fearfulness and trembling is come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. What follows the foresaid - O that I had wings like a dove, etc.

Thirdly, will pain and danger make one cry. I'll tell you an other thing. Importunity will do it; And a sense of need. We see it in other cases. If one is fervent, in great earnest in a matter a thing especially, that deeply concerns himself. If he's importunate to obtain an answer and an alms; such fervour, such importunity will raise and elevate the voice; it will make him to cry.

Fourthly, and to say no more about it; many a poor believer cries, to drown the clamour and noise that's within him; the clamour of hell, and the evil heart. The noise of temptations; and vile noisy suggestions of atheism and unbelief. By reason of which the man is often that he can't hear himself. And this is especially intended when David says that he was in an horrible pit; a loud sounding and dinsome pit. And this not only made him to pray, but to pray with cries, afraid and with tears too. Are you, my friends, in any kind of distress? And need not after that. But what ever your distress is felt or feared. I'm afraid there may be heavier trials before us, than any here before. The Lord seems to be threatening to come out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth, and to make a great sacrifice. O go to him by prayer. And believe that the prayer of faith shall prevail. Earnest, fervent, importunate prayer – pray without ceasing and pray without fainting. Be instant in prayer and persevere therein - and watch unto prayer and wait in prayer. See if you can pray under the influence of the Spirit, who is a Spirit of intercession in the saints. Pray in Christ's name; and with a view to Christ's mediation. Plead the promises; plead your necessity and plead the glory of God's great name; the glory of his goodness and faithfulness and grace and mercy and love. And thus you'll be relieved and delivered. And thus at least you'll get your soul's for a pray. And neither the strife daily that may come; nor death itself shall part Christ and you. David prayed and he was helped; do ye as he did. And you'll be helped as he was. But for you that are prayerless folks; you that don't cry to God when he binds you; and you that in your affliction of one sort or other, don't seek God early and don't make your prayer and your moan to him. There's no encouragement to you. You're cursed in every lot and condition; cursed in prosperity and cursed in adversity; there's a curse in all you have and the curse of God follows you whithersoever you go – in the house, and in the field; at home, or abroad wherever you are – O cry to be put among the children, cry for a spirit of faith and prayer and of all grace. And then, and though you should be in trouble and long in trouble, you'll be delivered at last. And this introduces the third thing in the words. And I'm now to speak of David's outgate from his trouble – I waited patiently for the Lord, etc. A word here to two or three things – the author of the deliverance, the nature of the deliverance, and the preparation for the deliverance. First, the author of the deliverance. Who was it that saved David? and delivered David from his trouble? You heard that David could not work out his own deliverance, and as little could the creature do it for him – O, says David, I waited for the Lord. Blessed waiting! And he brought me out of the horrible pit, and the miry clay. He drew me out of many waters; many depths, many deaths, he delivered me from all my troubles, all my fears, all my dangers, all my enemies. I essayed it, but I could not come out till he brought me out? And he delivered me because he delighted in me. Let God have the praise of all he has done for us; and of all the appearances he has made in our behalf.

Secondly and as to the nature of the deliverance. It was a great salvation, it was a wonderful salvation; it was a most suitable salvation, every way calculated, and adapted to answer the case and its every exigency. It was a reasonable salvation – God interposed, when the distress was coming to the greatest highs and the trouble to an extremity. It was in some sense an unexpected though a much desired and longed for salvation; and in short a salvation that none but a God could accomplish. David celebrates it as what one might call a full and complete salvation. But wherein did it consist? In the first place, says David, he brought me out of a horrible pit and out of the miry clay. The Lord delivered him and out all the troubles, all the miseries, all the oppressions; all the doubts and despondency; all the fears and temptations, that had gone well nigh to crush and to overwhelm his spirit. And not only did the Lord deliver David from misery and bring him out of the deep mire where there was no standing – he moreover secondly set his feet upon a rock; he set him upon sure and firm ground – he put him again into a flourishing and prosperous condition – especially, he made him to be strong in the faith – he helped him to believe; and this he found a mean of safety and a mean of a full outgate - If we could believe all would be well. Alas, say ye don't find it so. Do ye really believe and yet not see the goodness of God in the land of the living? It cannot be. And therefore instead of affirming the Lord's word; I would rather have you to shape it yourselves and your faith. Or, if you really believe you should conclude that God designs some great good for you which he'll have ye wait patiently for or that your time of deliverance from your troubles is not yet come. But it will come at last.

Thirdly David tells us, that the Lord established his goings – that is, he helped him to his duty; he prepared him for his work; he enabled him to a close and faithful following of him; and he gave him a

solid, settled, unshaken and undisturbed composure of mind – he gave him prosperity, and confirmed him in his way – he gave him deliverance from all his enemies and from all his fears – O see the goodness of God to his people. None shall be left out, that wait for him. Did David's troubles abound; David's consolation does much more abound – David was in an horrible pit and he was sinking in the thick, wrought clay. God takes him out of the pit; he sets his feet upon a rock, and establishes his goings. Do but trust God and wait for God, and he'll bring it to pass - he'll compass you about with songs of deliverance. Thirdly and with respect to the preparation for the outgate David remarks with pleasure and joy; that his outgate came in the way of waiting; it was the return of prayer and the answer of prayer – and that gave it a peculiar relish to him. The outgate was sweet in any event. But this made it doubly for it was an evidence that as a prince he had power with God, and had prevailed. And, wis, if God works any deliverance, any salvation for any it will be in the way, and by the means of prayer – for in all events he will be enquired by the House of Israel. He will be sought so, even when he accomplishes the purposes of his heart and if he works for you without your asking him to do it – you can't have the comfort of the mercy – or if ye have any comfort, it is not what it would otherwise have been. On the contrary it will string your very soul, that ye had not sought to that God, that was yet notwithstanding so very gracious to you and waited patiently for the Lord and he inclined to me, he listened to my prayer, he did so all along when I did not believe it. And, at length, he heard my cry, he gave me an answer of heart; he heard me; he made me know to my comfort that he had heard me for he brought me out of a horrible pit, etc.

The fourth, and last thing in the words is the improvement David makes both of his trouble and the outgate from his trouble. What's the improvements, say you, David makes of the things? In the first place David registers and records them for his own help. And that he might have somewhat that might be helpful and encouraging to him in his after trials and difficulties. And indeed if we had a book of our experiences, both of our troubles and our deliverances from our troubles, it would be a rich treasure, and tending ?really to our advantage. Experience should work, and experience also does work hope, when without experience the person would almost sink below the stream.

Secondly David not only records these things for his own life, he means also that the public should reap the benefit of tem. And that they should be transmitted and handed down to posterity. To this purpose he composes this psalm and delivers it to the master of the musictry, to be read and sung in the service of God. And you see that in consequence of this it has been preserved to these very times – as it undoubtedly will be preserved as long as there is a church in the world. And what's the use of transmitting these matters to future generations? It serves firstly for our instruction and learning upon whom the ends of the world are come. And here, and which is for the honour of God, David would have us to know that the Being whose we are, and whom we ought to serve is the best of all Masters; that he's a Master who loves his people in distress and will provide effectually for their safety and deliverance. He had the experience of it and for this he celebrates and praises his master on this occasion – and in this he sets us an example that we ought carefully to imitate. Secondly it serves for caution; that we may not despond under a weight of trouble and affliction as if our case was without all precedent. Others have been helped that were as low as we can be supposed to be. In the way of waiting, and after long waiting, and much earnest wrestling, David says, the Lord inclined unto him and heard him – and we should be ready to tell others that God will surely avenge his children that cry to him day and night; whatever may be their plunges, and that he may bear long with them. And therefore they should despair under their affliction – even in an horrible pit.

Thirdly it serves for consolation; and by telling what God had done for his soul, David means to comfort others with the consolations wherewith he himself had been comforted of God. But I must not enlarge.

Fourthly, and lastly, it serves for direction, and accordingly by recording these things David directs and exhorts to the following very important and useful and necessary duties. In the first place he exhorts to the duty of praise and thanksgiving and gratitude to God. That like him, and as he did, we should be much in praise for our experiences of the divine goodness to us in our deep distress - that we should not only praise on our own account, but on account of others also. And here David invites and calls upon us to praise for his mercy – Extoll the Lord with me and let us exult his name together, is the very language of

this record he would have others to join him in the work of praise. Secondly, he exhorts to the duty of faith and hope, that at all times we should trust God and hope in his mercy; for that they that truly believe and hope shall never be ashamed. And of this we have a lively proof in his exercise, in his experience, and the way of God with and towards him. Thirdly he exhorts to the duty of prayer and supplication as a most proper improvement of the divine mercy to ourselves and others. That we should ever pour out our hearts before the Lord; for that prayer has a happy influence upon the saint's deliverance; as the deliverance is both an argument and an encouragement to prayer. And this use David makes of it in the subsequent part of the psalm where after extolling the mercy and tracing it up to its proper fountain, the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ and the love of God therein manifested to the sinners of our kind, he falls a praying for all future and necessary good things. And lastly he exhorts to the duty of waiting, the advantage whereof he had found in his experience. David had exemplified the duty and now he recommends the duty – I waited; would he say, Do ye the same after – I had fainted, if I had not believed to see the goodness, etc., says he, Psalm 27 v.13. And then he adds, v.14 Wait on the Lord and be of good courage, etc. the same way in the 130 Psalm, Out of the deeps have I cried, etc. But there is forgiveness with thee, etc. v.4. What more? I wait for God, etc. v.5. And then v.6. Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, etc.

And so much also for the improvement David makes of his experience and a most suitable and excellent improvement it was. He records it for his own life and he transmits it for posterity, for the honour of God and the benefit of others – that they might be instructed and cautioned, and comforted, and directed in their duty – the duty of praise and thanksgiving; the duty of faith and hope; the duty of prayer and supplication; and the duty of waiting. I have only to add that if you follow the method David points out to you then we may assure you - and the text is equivalent to a promise – that whatever may be your trials, you shall after all adopt David's own words and with him have occasion to say that as you have waited patiently for the Lord he has inclined to you, and heard your cry – he has brought you out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set your feet upon a rock, establishing your goings.

May the Lord bless what you have heard.

At Carsfairn July 28th 1754.