

A SONG OF DELIVERANCE

Songs Of The Savior---Our Messiah Revealed In The Psalms

by Doug Goins

I watched *A Hard Day's Night* on PBS last night. It was released thirty years ago as the Beatles' first feature film. As I sat there for 2 1/2 hours recalling my college days of thirty years ago, I realized how overwhelmingly times have changed. The message of *A Hard Day's Night* is amazingly naive and optimistic. The Beatles themselves were clean-cut, wholesome, happy, optimistic "lads." A theme in the movie is the indissoluble nature of friendship. And there is a good-natured thumbing of their noses at the conventions of society.

I remember being part of a generation in the sixties that really thought that we could make a difference in the world; we could turn things around. All we needed was a little "peace, love, and understanding." But nowadays when we look around at the world we live in, we see things getting worse and worse. Reading the front page of the *San Jose Mercury News* yesterday, I realized that the overwhelming effect it created was fear triggered by economic uncertainty---down-turns, recessions, job lay-offs, and so forth.

I was thinking as I got up early this morning of the contrast between the script of that Beatles film with its song lyrics, and the text before us, Psalm 40. There is nothing naive or sentimental about the words of the psalmist. He was very much in touch with the harsh realities, the difficulties and struggles of life. Psalm 40 doesn't sugar-coat anything. There is no optimism about human potential or the changes we can bring about if we can just get the right influences focused. Psalm 40 examines deep personal issues of faith and fear and how they get tangled up for us. It sets a wonderful tone of transparency in dealing with the joy and sorrow that coexist in life. It has themes of failure, sin, humiliation, and shame; and at the same time of redemption and salvation from that shame.

There is a superscription to the psalm that tells us two important things about it: It was written for the choir director, the person who carried responsibility for directing the community of faith in worship. And it is a psalm of David, king of Israel. This psalm was written to be sung in public worship. We're going to find in it amazing candor from King David in his own personal confession of faith and fear. This psalm is a cry to God for deliverance from terrible circumstances, but at the same time it expresses confident certainty that deliverance will come.

As we get into the heart of Psalm 40 together, we're going to discover that the Holy Spirit of God, speaking through David as he reflects on his own experiences, causes him to express truths that go far beyond his experience or even his understanding. David's language grows larger than the events that he is trying to describe. He ends up writing in anticipation of the fulfillment of these words in the life of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who would come a thousand years later. The New Testament writer of Hebrews places the words of this psalm in the mouth of the Messiah as he stood on the threshold of time about to step from heaven to earth, about to enter the manger as a baby in Bethlehem (10:5-7):

"Therefore, when [Christ] comes into the world, He says,
'Sacrifice and offering Thou hast not desired,
But a body Thou hast prepared for Me;
In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou has taken no pleasure.

Then I said, "Behold, I have come
(In the roll of the book it is written of Me)
To do Thy will, O God.""

So it is Jesus himself who is the singer in this psalm of deliverance or resurrection. He speaks with intensity, passion, and power; and like David, with candor about the struggle and fear in life.

This is the first of several messianic psalms we're going to examine in the weeks leading up to Easter, to prepare ourselves to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. Most of these psalms are presented in the first person, Jesus himself speaking. Taken together, they survey Christ's Passion: the arrest, the trial, the humiliation, the crucifixion, the burial, the resurrection, his ascension to heaven, and his glorification at the right hand of the Father. And they proclaim this good news that is preached to all the world.

There is an account in almost the very last words of Luke's gospel in which Jesus is talking with his disciples after the resurrection. Luke writes:

"Now he said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.'"

Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to see him in all these Old Testament passages. My prayer for us is that, starting right now, Christ would be at work through the Holy Spirit opening up our hearts and minds to see him in a way that we have never seen him before in Psalm 40.

A new song of resurrection life

Let's look at the text. The first ten verses of the psalm are a hymn. This is a strong, powerful confession of faith sung publicly in the great congregation, giving testimony to God's salvation and his greatness. Verses 1-3 talk about a new song---a song of rescue; in fact, resurrection:

I waited patiently for the LORD;
And He inclined to me, and heard my cry.
He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay;
And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm.
And He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God;
Many will see and fear,
And will trust in the LORD.

Hebrew lexicons amplify this idea of a pit of destruction as a pit of tumult, of terrible experience of desolation, despair, or even death. In that phrase Jesus is describing his own death, burial, and separation from his Father God. But these verses go on to describe resurrection.

There are two phrases in verse 1 that create a tension we need to understand about the life and ministry of Jesus. One is "waited patiently," the other "my cry [for deliverance]." Think about the waiting of Jesus. He did trust God's plan for him. Remember him in the temple at the age of twelve, saying, "I had to be in my Father's house [about my Father's business]" (Luke 2:49). There was a program to which God had called him, and he intended to wait on the Lord for it. Remember that over and over again to his disciples in his ministry he said, "My hour has not yet come." God was in charge of the timing.

Jesus also knew ahead of time that God's program would include humiliation and suffering and the agony of death. That is where the cry for deliverance comes in. We can identify with the horror of that Gethsemane experience when he cried out, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42). And the cry on Calvary: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). The writer of Hebrews examines that cry of despair from the Lord Jesus (5:7): "In the days of His flesh, when He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and [He] was heard because of his godly fear...."

We're going to see this cry explained in verses 11-17 of Psalm 40, but verse 2 makes it clear that God answered the cry. He saved Jesus from death and raised him to life. Paul says that Jesus was the firstborn of the dead, and now verse 2 tells us that the resurrected, glorified Jesus stands securely with his heavenly Father ministering on our behalf as our exalted Lord and Savior. And the result of God's salvation in verse 3 is a song of praise, worship, and thanksgiving from Jesus for what his Father has done for him.

I'm grateful for the music ministry in our church, for the gifted songwriters like Bill Connor and Grace Rhie and Margaret Moody and Glenn Pickett, who take experiences of life out of death, of God's power and goodness, and translate them into music that we can enter into and enjoy. That is the result of resurrection---new expressions, new creations of spiritual life and vitality. So our risen, glorious King Jesus sings a new song to celebrate a new kind of living---resurrection life. Verse 3 says that the effect of that will be amazing: Many people will see it and fear; their lives will be transformed as they respond to it. The story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the message of our gospel, exploded into the Roman world and traveled throughout civilization. Remember, Jesus promised the disciples in his post-resurrection appearance that repentance and forgiveness of sin should be preached in his name to all nations. That explosion is still continuing as many come into a relationship with the living God of the universe and learn what it means to fear God, to worship him, to see him high and lifted up.

The overwhelming greatness of God's activity
This song of resurrection continues in worship and praise in verses 4-5, focused on God's grace. The Lord Jesus sings,
How blessed is the man who has made the LORD his trust,
And has not turned to the proud, nor to those who lapse into falsehood.

Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders which Thou hast done,
And Thy thoughts toward us;
There is none to compare with Thee;
If I would declare and speak of them,
They would be too numerous to count.

There are two wonderful elements in this song of praise and worship that describe the kind of life that Jesus Christ offers us. Verse 4 talks about the secret of blessedness or happiness. He is saying, "Happy is the person who has learned to trust God for everything in life." That trust means they have made some choices: first, to reject the influence of anyone who encourages them to appeal to personal pride, self-confidence, independence, self-improvement, or natural ability. And second, to reject the influence of those who embrace the lie, or idolatry (these terms are interchangeable), of, say, materialism or education. They have rejected the worship of something other than God, expecting that to give them fulfillment and happiness. Instead, the happy person has learned to depend on God's activity in them and nothing else, including their own resources.

Verse 5 shows the overwhelming greatness of God's activity in and through us who choose to trust him and to learn more and more what that trust is about. The New Testament talks about that quality of trusting God. It is talking about real life, not just spiritual hyperbole or exaggeration. The apostle Paul says in Ephesians 3:20-21, "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us [the power of the resurrection], to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." That is what the Lord Jesus invites us to discover together when we actively trust God in worshipping, studying the Bible, praying, ministering together, and enjoying friendship together. There is a supernatural power that will explode in us and through us that God intends for us to experience and enjoy.

Jesus' submission to God's plan

In verse 6 there is a sudden change in the psalm. We have heard of the kind of life that resurrection offers us. Now the Singer steps out of time into eternity. He takes us to the courts of heaven and sings in anticipation of his incarnation the words quoted in Hebrews 10, which we read earlier. The song of deliverance continues

with a commitment to obedience, a desire to surrender his heart and will completely to his Father. Verses 6-8:

Sacrifice and meal offering Thou hast not desired;
My ears Thou hast opened;
Burnt offering and sin offering Thou hast not required.

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

Jesus understood the heart of God, our sinful human condition, and his own saving purpose in coming to earth as Messiah. Verse 6 speaks of the Jewish sacrificial system; of sacrifice, meal offering, burnt offering, and sin offering. It says that this was historical reality, but God never really wanted it. It says these sacrifices were "not required" and "not desired." The blood of lambs and bulls and goats was not what God was after. Jesus understood that God gave these sacrifices as an object lesson. Every time a worshiper took an innocent, unblemished lamb or goat or pigeon and offered it at the temple, slit its throat, and watched its life blood drain away on the altar of sacrifice, God was saying to them in very graphic terms that the sin-sickness that grips humanity, the awful power that twists and distorts and ruins us, cannot be dealt with lightly. We cannot get well with self-help solutions or religious activity or the therapeutic process, no matter how well-intentioned any of them might be. Our sickness is a lot deeper than that, and it took the death of an innocent Substitute, One who was himself part of the human race, to heal the diseased core of our sinful human condition.

We have talked a bit about the fear that grips people, the social problems that overwhelm us. There is a lot of awareness of these problems today. I was just talking with someone this week about the personal effect of the bigotry and racism that have gripped Boalt Law School at Berkeley, how the minority law students have responded to the racist hate letters in their mailbox. We're all captivated by the family violence of the O.J. Simpson murder case. There is a new phenomenon, the venom of right-wing hate radio, that is influencing our nation.

I had a struggle this week within my own soul in terms of domestic violence. One of my daughters accidentally messed up our family computer, and I blamed her for it. She went crying to her room because of my angry verbal violence toward her.

The analyses of all the TV talk shows are essentially correct. We desperately need to love one another. We do need tolerance and acceptance. We need to respect human worth and dignity. But the problem is that we can't solve these crises with repeated exhortations to do the right thing. It's one thing to know what to do, but it's something entirely different to do it; to have the resources to live the way we know we ought to live.

The good news is that the Lord Jesus understood my problem and yours. It could never be solved until the life of sin-sick humanity was poured out in death, and understanding that in this passage, Jesus proclaims his willingness to be the sacrifice for our sin. It is clear in the parenthetical phrase in verse 6, "My ears Thou hast opened," referring to his readiness to hear from his Father, his willingness to learn what God wanted from him. And we see it in verses 7 and 8, which speak of his submission, his obedient willingness to follow God's plan of salvation. The prophet Isaiah puts these words in the mouth of Jesus (50:4-6):

"The Lord God has given Me the tongue of disciples,
That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word.
He awakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.

The Lord God has opened My ear;
And I was not disobedient,
Nor did I turn my back.
I gave My back to those who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;

I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting."

All of that was to say that he was willing to suffer because God asked him to. Verses 7 and 8 also talk about the fact that it was planned, predicted ahead of time in the Old Testament Scriptures. And Jesus is saying here, "I am committed to nothing, Lord, but your will for me. I come to suffer and die, to give up my life so that men and women can be free from the awful disease of sin." And to this day there is no other solution to the problems that grip us. Jesus came to fulfill the Father's will for him. He said so plainly in John 4:32-34 after his encounter with the Samaritan woman. The disciples asked him if he was hungry, and Jesus said, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." His disciples were wondering where he had gotten food, and Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work."

Jesus came to make himself completely available to God, voluntarily without any external pressure. He freely chose his sacrificial death on the cross without any compulsion. There was no weirdness in his relationship with his Father that sent him to the cross. It happened because he had internalized God's Law---ultimate reality, the greatest good revealed in the Scriptures. It had been written on his heart, and it controlled everything he said and did.

Proclaiming the love of God

The next three verses summarize Jesus' preaching. This came out of his certain conviction of God's salvation of resurrection. In three years of public ministry this was his consistent message. Verses 9-10:

I have proclaimed glad tidings of righteousness in the great congregation;
Behold, I will not restrain my lips,
O LORD, Thou knowest.
I have not hidden Thy righteousness within my heart;
I have spoken of Thy faithfulness and Thy salvation;
I have not concealed Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth from the great congregation.

What is the most important theme in the glad tidings that Jesus proclaimed? It is the love of God. Jesus came to tell us that in spite of our evil, shame, and sin, the agony with which we live, God loves us anyway. And God is committed to doing something about this problem of sin. Salvation is the purpose of his love. His love is very focused, consistent, ruthlessly honest, faithful, and absolutely trustworthy. Jesus came to earth to constantly talk about that love of God that offers salvation to men and women.

He also came to demonstrate that love in the way he lived his life. I am reminded of John's prologue to his gospel in this regard: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." Grace and truth are intertwined throughout Psalm 40, and they were beautifully blended in the life of Jesus. Think about how graciously Jesus dealt with people in his relationships with them. At one point he brought a little child into the middle of the circle of disciples to help them understand what it meant to live openly, transparently, humbly, in dependence on the Father. Jesus was also incredibly gracious and compassionate to those caught in sinful activity. You can't find one time in the gospels when Jesus hammered someone caught in sin. Jesus never spoke harshly to sinners with whom he related. He was scathing with the hypocrites, the religious professionals who wouldn't admit their guilt and need; but not with sinners who understood their sin.

Jesus also told the truth, no matter what. He talked about God's character, about God's activity, about what human nature is really like, about our needs and problems. Jesus told the truth when it was unpopular and difficult. He told the truth even when it hurt, or when there was opposition to it. His message was hated. The religious leaders plotted to kill him because he told them the truth about themselves. But in spite of the price, he was always faithful. He always witnessed to the saving love of God, always speaking graciously and yet truthfully.

The last part of our psalm really amplifies the cry of the Savior that we saw in verse 1. In his extremity and distress, as he stands on the threshold of the grave, he cries out to his Father. This is a private confession of

how overwhelming life is.

Affirming God's character

He starts out in verse 11 with a wonderful affirmation of God's character:

Thou, O LORD, wilt not withhold Thy compassion from me;
Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth will continually preserve me.

What he believes about God now and for the future is based on his past history with God. Everything he has experienced of God's presence and power in his life, he knows he can count on now when things are overwhelming. He is confident that God will preserve him, guard him, and take him through the suffering, the public humiliation, and the death on the cross. He is convinced that God will extend to him compassionate care. God's faithful love, his *hesed*, will never waver toward him, even through terrible circumstances. And the final thing he says is that truth preserves him. Truth here is the prophetic promises of the Old Testament. He chooses to build his life on what the Bible says; that is what guards him and preserves him.

Jesus' cry for deliverance from sin

Jesus has confessed faith in verse 11, but now he also confesses fear. "Lord," he says, "I know you're good, but life is really horrible right now. Trouble doesn't go away. I'm surrounded by evil." So in verses 12-15 there is a passionate cry for deliverance from suffering because of sin and evil opposition from his opponents. Verse 12:

For evils beyond number have surrounded me;
My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to see;
They are more numerous than the hairs of my head;
And my heart has failed me.

Jesus was suffering because of sin, but a legitimate question is, if he was sinless, blameless and innocent, how can he talk about his iniquities or sins that overwhelm him? In his messianic identity, these words become the confession of sins that he himself was not a part of, but of which he voluntarily took on himself on the cross. And we're dealing here with a profound mystery. The prophet Isaiah in 53:5 says of the Savior,

"...He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed."

The apostle Paul explains the mystery in 2 Corinthians 5:21, speaking of Jesus: "[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." C.S. Lewis, in *Reflections on the Psalms*, writes of this mystery in commenting on Psalm 40,

"...This too is for us the voice of Christ, for we have been taught that he who is without sin became sin for our sakes, plumbed the depth of that worst suffering which comes to evil men who at last know their own evil."

The shame that results in forgiveness

Jesus has prayed for deliverance from the power of sin, and now he prays for his enemies, this violent opposition in verses 13-15:

Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me;
Make haste, O LORD, to help me.
Let those be ashamed and humiliated together

Who seek my life to destroy it;

Let those be turned back and dishonored
Who delight in my hurt.
Let those be appalled because of their shame
Who say to me, "Aha, aha!"

That takes us in our mind's eye to the cross. Remember the prayer of Jesus when he was being mocked and scorned by the Roman soldiers and the Jewish religious leaders: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). At first glance this prayer in Psalm 40 doesn't seem consistent with that prayer of forgiveness from the cross, because he is asking for his enemies to be ashamed, humiliated, brought to dishonor, and appalled at their own shameful behavior.

But think about it--what is necessary for us to experience forgiveness from other people or from God? We have to see that we have failed, that we have sinned against them. We have to admit that we need to be forgiven, or we can't experience forgiveness. And that is what the Lord Jesus is praying for. He is asking God to arrest his enemies in the progress of their evil, to stop them in their tracks. And he asks for shame and confusion so they won't go any farther. Then he asks for their eyes to be opened to the reality of what they are doing. To be ashamed means to understand that you're guilty and to be embarrassed about it, to be overwhelmed by the awfulness of your behavior. That is when God can extend the forgiveness that comes from the confession of a guilty heart.

That was the solution to my sin against my daughter this week that I mentioned a bit earlier. In shouting at her I was an enemy of the Savior, acting in opposition to what he did in love and grace and mercy on the cross. I went to sleep that night tired and angry and really blaming her, and actually the rest of the kids too. But I woke up the next morning feeling ashamed and guilty, blaming myself and not her because I saw the ugliness of the attitude of my heart toward her. Then I had the joy--and in our closing section he talks about the joy of those who seek the Lord--of asking this God of loving salvation to forgive me and heal me, and then the chagrined joy of going to my daughter and asking her forgiveness, telling her I was sorry for the hurt I had caused her.

Let God be glorified

Jesus' prayer for deliverance from present difficulties concludes now with a wonderful desire that God be glorified, be made visible, in his life. And he prays for all of us who choose to trust God with our lives. Verses 16-17:

Let all who seek Thee rejoice and be glad in Thee;
Let those who love Thy salvation say continually,

"The LORD be magnified!"

Since I am afflicted and needy,
Let the Lord be mindful of me;
Thou art my help and my deliverer;
Do not delay, O my God.

Jesus knew that the essence of help, of finding stability through painful, overwhelming circumstances, was to pray for the Lord to be magnified or glorified. Look again at what Jesus focuses on as he thinks about the cross. He speaks to a loving heavenly Father as one who seeks him: "I'm going to pursue you no matter what!" He makes a choice to rejoice and be glad in who God is and in what God is going to do in spite of the circumstances. He makes a choice to see God as a deliverer. That is a choice of faith. His eyes are lifted above circumstances to who God is and how God is going to intervene in his life.

This song of the Savior opens the infinite mystery of the incarnation. It is marvelous that these words that were sung originally by our Savior outside of space and time, then written down by King David a thousand years before our Lord ever came to earth, summarize so clearly and accurately the saving purpose he would follow

when he came. And today, two thousand years on this side of the cross, we're faced with the marvel of the infinite God's having become a finite man. The Word who was with God and was God became flesh and lived among us so that we could see what God was like. And the message of that revelation is unquestionably clear today. There is no other hope for humanity.

We talked about the fear and dread that we see around us. I think about the men and women of "Generation X," young people who are now moving from adolescence into adulthood. In the print media and on talk shows they are telling us that they don't have the ability, or even much interest in trying, to solve the problems they have inherited from the older generation. They speak with bitterness and boredom and emptiness and cynicism of the meaninglessness of life. The hopelessness we hear expressed by these men and women simply confirms that this psalm is telling us the truth. There isn't any other hope for the human race besides the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no other way out of the darkness, no other way to break the grip of this evil sickness that has seized our race. The gospel has no rivals in our day. It is the one and only way by which we can find out what God intended us to be and the incredible quality of life that he intended us to have.

Jesus sings, and we are invited to sing with him, this song of deliverance. Let's echo the intensity, the passion, the conviction, and the power of our Lord Jesus in Psalm 40. Let's worship our Savior and celebrate his resurrection. Let's rejoice in the good news of his salvation. And let's pray that many will continue to see and fear and put their trust in the God of deliverance.

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