

Sermon on Psalm 40 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Psalm 40:1-17

Honest hope will get us through.

One of the most dangerous phrases in the English language is this: “can I be honest with you?”

Usually, we want to respond to that question with, “how have you not been?!” But typically that phrase precedes something uncomfortable. Something harder to hear and accept.

I think the phrase, and our use of it, proves that a lot of life is fluff and puffery!

Honesty can have an edge. And I don't mean to empower the jerks that are just mean and say they were being honest. I mean often enough reality, truth, and honesty can be difficult.

This week as I have studied Psalm 40 - our last Psalm of the summer - I have been struck that it is honest. This psalm tells it like it is. This is exactly how life can feel.

Yet it is hopeful at the same time. Anchored in grace and expectant for more.

This psalm is summing up what we have seen in our summer series; pain, praise, petition, and the promise of a savior.

It's all here. This is what we want to take away from our study over these last two hot months. And I think it will serve us for a long time moving forward.

As a way of faith, it is different than we would expect.

Typical religious invitations call people to the dour keeping of a moral code (right living for a happier experience or getting ahead); or sacrifice to earn blessing (have enough “faith” and the blessing will flow); or a type of bliss that ignores life's struggles (nothing more than a psychedelics-like numbing of reality.)

None of that is in Psalm 40. Instead, we see that **honest hope will get us through.**

Context: This is a Psalm of David. The collection of David's songs recounting his need and his hope.

"Psalm 40 stands near the end of Book 1 and seems to mark the moment when David was at last delivered, signaling the end of the period in which David was persecuted by Saul and the beginning of his reign over Israel. This experience in David's life points forward to a similar moment when the seed promised to him would pass from suffering into glory" James Hamilton

You know the story - David was God's chosen King but the previous disobedient one, Saul, wouldn't leave and would try to hunt down and kill David. But he would be vindicated and saved.

Psalm 40 then represents a life anchored in rescue.

"I waited patiently for the Lord, and he turned to me and heard my cry for help.
2 He brought me up from a desolate pit, out of the muddy clay, and set my feet on a rock, making my steps secure.
3 He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and they will trust in the Lord." -- **Psalms 40:1-3** (CSB)

This Psalm has two parts, mercy received, and a new instance of need for mercy. For this help from the Lord. Gives us a pattern worth remembering.

How we want to take it is from honesty to hope. Jeered, Cheered, and Sealed.

Jeered

Life can be hard, even when anchored in deliverance from danger.

We are all familiar with the reality of this but it can still take us by surprise in other people.

Often when I meet with people for the first time I will ask for the “Behind the Music” story of their life. Do you remember the show? Was it VH1?! Appearances are happy, flush, and amazing but under the surface there is turmoil.

David knows this well.

“Lord, you do not withhold your compassion from me.
Your constant love and truth will always guard me.
12 For troubles without number have surrounded me;
my iniquities have overtaken me; I am unable to see.
They are more than the hairs of my head,
and my courage leaves me.” -- **Psalms 40:11-12** (CSB)

Troubles surround. Those things outside our control. Situations and circumstances that derail us. When others can't be relied upon. When the other car veers into our lane. When a pandemic closes the shop. When the sun beats down. That which drives up our anxiety.

Iniquities have overtaken. Those things within our control. Sin. Disregard for God's way, for truth. Letting greed have its way in us. Running after idols, things we think will satisfy us but the Lord warns against.

Cripples us. Unable to see clearly what is right and good. Sin drowning out courage for righteousness. Leads to ruin.

David knows this because he is playing off the comparison with Saul...

“Then Samuel said:

Does the Lord take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord?

Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and defiance is like wickedness and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king. 24 Saul answered Samuel, “I have sinned. I have transgressed the Lord's command and your words. Because I was afraid of the people, I obeyed them.” -- **1 Samuel 15:22-24** (CSB)

In the next chapter, David would be anointed as the new King. He would be hunted by the rebellious Saul.

This is the honesty of a life that is up against it.

There are those that intend to take your life. Those that wish you harm. Those that want to judge you for trusting God, “aha!” they say when things get tough. Enemies all.

In pain, praying for relief. Imprecatory prayers against the opposition, Asking God to turn their plans back upon them.

Driving through Needles in South Dakota in the RV. Too wide to fit. A picture of life. On holiday and you are met with impassible troubles, delays, shame.

Honest about life - bumpy roads, challenges, enemies, sin, grief, sorrow, trouble. Suffering expected and experienced. Need.

“I am oppressed and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my helper and my deliverer; my God, do not delay.” -- **Psalms 40:17** (CSB)

Maybe you find yourself here. Don't stop asking, crying out.

David teaches us that we can be honest because hope has us.

Cheered

The psalmist is expectant, patient, and hopeful because the God of steadfast love has proven himself before.

“How happy is anyone who has put his trust in the LORD...”

We have options, don't we? Trusting God and his way, or the schemes of the proud. The lies of the world.

Blessed is the person who trusts in the Lord.

For David, and for us, this is a trust formed in rescue. Up from the pit (a picture of sheol) - from death to life.

A trust that recounts the goodness of God in worship... a new song in my mouth a hymn of praise.

“Lord my God, you have done many things — your wondrous works and your plans for us; none can compare with you. If I were to report and speak of them, they are more than can be told.” -- **Psalms 40:5** (CSB)

Good beyond description. Like describing the exhilarating feeling of a roller coaster. Your words probably can't do it justice, it has to be experienced.

The difference between hope and despair in an honest life is not daily affirmations, it is not ruthlessly silencing the negative around you, it is not increasing the ratio of your happy thoughts. But a continual reminder of rescue.

“By God's putting a new song into his mouth he denotes the consummation of his deliverance. In whatever way God is pleased to support us, he asks nothing else from us in return but that we should be thankful for and remember it. As often, therefore, as he bestows benefits upon us, so often does he open our mouths to praise his name" John Calvin

He has delivered us, he has had compassion on us. He has inclined his ear to us and answered our need. And our souls are cheered when we are reminded of this.

This rescue is all grace.

“You do not delight in sacrifice and offering; you open my ears to listen. You do not ask for a whole burnt offering or a sin offering. 7 Then I said, “See, I have come; in the scroll it is written about me. 8 I delight to do your will, my God, and your instruction is deep within me.” -- **Psalms 40:6-8** (CSB)

Delight becomes devotion. Opposite Saul, obedience becomes not performative but natural as the Lord's way is written on our hearts. An open ear ready to listen to and obey God's words.

David is modeling for us a life kept above water by salvation. By preaching the gospel to ourselves.

The steady recounting of my need of rescue and his setting my feet on solid rock, making my steps secure in him. Some say the gospel is nice on occasion but we say the gospel is vital for all occasions. Because it is where we tap into the hope we need to honestly face life.

Then, cheered by rescue, we preach the gospel to others. David also models this for us.

“I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; see, I do not keep my mouth closed — as you know, Lord. 10 I did not hide your righteousness in my heart; I spoke about your faithfulness and salvation; I did not conceal your constant love and truth from the great assembly.” -- **Psalms 40:9-10** (CSB)

In the assembly. In the church, we go on about the Lord, his love, faithfulness, and salvation. An individual's experiences of God's mercy can lead to others rejoicing in God. And like the choir of God's people in Psalm 40, we want to amplify that.

We all play a vital part in the life of the church. Some days we come more jeered. Some we are more cheered. But either way, we serve each other by being present.

You don't come to church to receive some packaged goods. You come to proclaim righteousness, to speak salvation, to announce the honest hope we have in Jesus. And to hear it! To be reminded of his deliverance.

We are carried through life in redeemed community. Where it's okay to be honest. Where it is essential to hope.

The storms rage. The mud gets thick. The foes climb the wall. And this is what we need. The consistent reminder that we are not alone and the Lord hears and answers.

Honest hope gets us through.

But not because we are good at it - or have the right programs or strategy.
Because God is faithful.

Sealed

I wanted to us “seared” but thought it might be a bit harsh!

This is a messianic psalm. This is David’s prayer, and this is our prayer, because it was Jesus’ prayer.

He comes as the perfect sacrifice when our sacrifice and obedience remain incomplete.

“Therefore, as he was coming into the world, he said: You did not desire sacrifice and offering, but you prepared a body for me. 6 You did not delight in whole burnt offerings and sin offerings. 7 Then I said, “See — it is written about me in the scroll — I have come to do your will, God.”

8 After he says above, You did not desire or delight in sacrifices and offerings, whole burnt offerings and sin offerings (which are offered according to the law), 9 he then says, See, I have come to do your will. He takes away the first to establish the second. 10 By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time.

11 Every priest stands day after day ministering and offering the same sacrifices time after time, which can never take away sins. 12 But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.” -- **Hebrews 10:5-12** (CSB)

His obedience wins our deliverance. His sacrifice brings us up from the muck once and for all. It is finished.

Jesus did not fail to obey, and his sacrifice accomplished what those outlined in the Old Testament never could. As David replaces Saul, Jesus replaces the failed mediators and provisional sacrifices of a failed covenant. As David came in the line of promise traced all the way back to the seed of the woman, Jesus came as the longed-for culmination of that line of descent.

And in him, we find our hope. His finished work. His deliverance. His salvation. His way. In him, we find our cheer. Our joy.

In him, we are sealed, kept for all eternity.

We can endeavor to pray this prayer, Psalm 40 for ourselves, and we do so knowing that Jesus prayed it perfectly for us.

“If I were to read this psalm as referring to Christ and to Christ only, I would be correct in so doing, but still there is such a unity between Christ and those who compose his mystical body that what is true of the head is true of the members. What is true of the vine is true of the branches. What is true of Christ is true of those who are in him. Therefore, this psalm relates to David as well as to “great David’s greater Son,” and it also concerns everyone who is of the royal seed, every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Charles Spurgeon

This is our honest hope; salvation in Jesus, come what may, he has turned and heard our cry for help.

Can I be honest with you?!

Life will be hard, but there is a redeemer who lives; Jesus has you and will get you through. Trust him!

So Summer Psalms wraps with this honest hope that gets us through. Deliverance, life, community; a faithful Savior who cares and acts on our behalf. Who gives us the song to sing.

Be Rescued - If you are in the pit, trust in the Lord.

Be Cheered - Grace is enough. Jesus is enough. Hear it. Say it from a life anchored in the good news.

Keep Going - Keep asking. Ask with others. You don’t have to give up because Jesus will never give up on you.

My buddy asked some friends to give a one-sentence description of Psalm 40 after they had memorized it together. “One said “the Lord is near”. There’s a sweet simplicity to that. I couldn’t get my mind off of “the lord is close to the brokenhearted” and “nothing can separate us from the love of Christ”

Honest hope gets us through.

“Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;
let those who love your salvation continually say,
“The Lord is great! ” -- **Psalms 40:16** (CSB)