

## Introduction

- Ever noticed how different people like or feel a certain affinity for different bits of the Bible?
  - when I was in Motherwell, Derek and I used to often joke about it - he loved the Psalms, while I was naturally drawn to Romans...
  - the writer and preacher Don Carson reckoned, on the basis of his experience of pastoring a church, that the older folk loved the Psalms... whilst those with less life experience didn't get them at all!
  - Carson reckons that as folk got older, they'd accumulated experiences - experiences reflected in the diversity of the Psalms!
  - for the Psalms are Songs of Experience: love, hope, fear, doubt, disaster, laughter, anger, wrath.... a depth of experience in the Psalms that we take years to accumulate
  - but the flip side of that is if we allow ourselves to live with the Psalms, they can shape those experiences that we do all go through at different points in our lives
  - for example, if we think through how the biblical writers face doubt or despair, how they face "miry bogs" / slimy pits, and then find ourselves falling into such a pit, we will have to hand the resources to cling onto, the frames of reference, the ways of thinking about what is happening to us - given to us by God - so we will hold on, trusting him to carry us through.
- Sometimes we think of the Psalms as 150 discrete, individual units, quite separate from each other:
  - while there is some truth in that, many of the Psalms are also linked or grouped together with others
  - Psalm 37 emphasises the need to wait patiently on the Lord - see Psalm 37:7 for example; wait; wait....
  - then in Psalms 38 and 39 the application of this waiting is worked out in painful self-examination...
  - he is crushed and pained because of his sin... but Psalm 38:15 "I wait for you, O Lord"
  - similarly in Psalm 39
  - but into Psalm 40, the tone changes - here there is a triumphant outcome: David has waited on the Lord, and the Lord has helped him

## Joyful Praise to the God who Helps (vs.1-10)

- This is the tone that we see in the first big division of the Psalm, vs.1-10:
  - joyful praise to the God who helps
  - probably helpful to break this into 4 sub-parts
- *(We'll spend most of our time in this section!)*

### 1. Personal Testimony (vs.1-3)

- *I waited patiently for the Lord.... and so on*
- Note how personal it is - I, me, my...
  - patiently - more endured, toughed it out, waited and waited...
  - in due course he lifted me out of the slimy pit, a picture of floundering helplessness mixed with horror
  - but to what is David referring? We don't know - and that's probably good, since it allows us to apply it to whatever our own slimy pit, even if our pit is in detail different to what David went through
  - and if we live long enough, we will all fall into a slimy put at some point! - only alternative is not living long enough!
  - sooner or later we'll face disease, or difficulties in marriage, or horrible depression, or struggle with a sin that seems to control us, or people let us down, or lose our job, or lose our health, or whatever...
  - with that reality in mind, its important to hear the voice of David: I was there, I waited for God, and he heard me!
  - v2b. - set feet on rock, firm place to stand

- David doesn't wallow in his experience - God becomes the focus - nothing of the "my slimy pit is worse than yours!"
- he wants to talk about how the Lord has pulled him out, and how, as a result, there is a song in his mouth
- a song of praise to God
- Now we should remember that David here is telling one particular story:
  - on this occasion, God pulled him out of the mire, the muck
  - David knew, as we know from elsewhere, that there are times when God rather gifts us the grace to endure the situation we face
  - compare Paul in 2 Cor 12, his thorn, that he pleads to have removed - and it is not... "my grace is sufficient..."
- For sometimes that's the way the Lord helps us too - but David's testimony is that the Lord does help...
  - and to that he bears testimony

## 2. Public Principle (vs.4-5)

- As we move into vs.4-5, we move from personal testimony into public principle:
  - as if David wants to generalise the lessons he has learned to the broader truths
  - placing his experience in the larger perspective of all that God has done
- "What you've done for me Lord is part of what you are doing all the time:"
  - sustaining in life, every heart beat, forgiveness for sins, the Holy Spirit in us as the down-payment of our future hope, one day resurrection bodies, the good news of the gospel, friends, for some the gift of marriage, for others the gift of singleness... the list goes on!
- And again, as he reflects on what God has done he is caused to give thanks, to praise the Lord, to give expression to what the Lord has done
  - all things we have received by grace, without any input on our part

## 3. Personal self-dedication (vs.6-8)

- So, then, what should our response to this specific and general awareness of God's gracious work in our lives be?
  - David invites us to respond in personal self-dedication
- What is the only proper response to the deliverance David has received?
  - sacrifice a sheep, maybe? Offer up a bull?
  - *Sacrifice and offering you did not desire* (v.6)
  - such a view of God is distinctively pagan: you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours!
  - you give me a blessing, I'll give you a sheep; I'll give you some money, you give me good health....
  - and it has to be said many Christians go through life operating with that view of God!
  - "but I've tried so hard, and I've been to church for a long time, but I still got cancer.... it's not fair!"
- That's not David's stance!
  - rather, his stance is, "considering the grace that has been extended to me, the only reasonable response is self-abandonment to God, total dedication to him"
  - the expression David uses is a bit weird - *my ears you have pierced* (v.6)
  - literally "my ears you have dug out" !!
  - sense seems to have been that David has "dug out" his ears so he can listen clearly to God's commands, so he can give himself to God's way of living
  - Don Carson's mum used to say it to him when he was being naughty: "Dig out your ears" - and what she meant was, "listen, pay attention, do what you're told!"
  - see how v.7-8 then fits: "I desire to do your will"
- Striking how this language in v.7-8 is very reminiscent of passages from the Servant Songs in Isaiah which are very directly applicable to Jesus:
  - he is the one whose desire was most completely to do the Lord's will, he is the one who dedicate himself most completely to God, who awakens his ear to listen to God's command - in a sense, Jesus went to the Cross and obeyed his

heavenly Father precisely because he dug out his ears!"

- So here: dedication to God is the right response to his grace
  - certainly the OT sacrificial system called for sheep and bulls and so on, but it was always meant to be **emblematic**, a pointer to the deeper reality, not the ticket of entry into God's presence
  - no, the right response to God's grace is self-commitment to God, our desire to do his will, his law written on our hearts...

#### 4. Public Proclamation (vs.9-10)

- And then, in vs.9-10, we have public proclamation...
- David speaks out what God has done - does not keep it to himself!
  - there are some who will put down a cold that comes and then goes after a few days as a healing from the Lord - and we smile!
  - but the flip side of that, **which we are much more prone to**, is we don't make a fuss when God does act to help us!!
- Listen to David: **he's brimming over with thankfulness and won't shut up!**
  - those of us who have been through deep waters, who have seen God work, need to tell others of what God has done
  - it isn't only for our benefit, or even for God's benefit...
  - **but also for the benefit of our brothers and sisters!**
  - it shapes the whole next generation, it teaches us how to think about God, about how he works, about how to be thankful
  - it not only expresses our thankfulness to God, and puts him at the centre of our thinking, it puts him at the centre of our congregational thinking - the great assembly

#### Finally... (vs.11-17)

- Change of tone!
  - is trouble still around? (rather than thankfulness of vs.1-10)
- Possible to translate v.11 as a statement rather than a plea:
  - ***you will not withhold your mercy from me, O LORD; your love and your truth will always protect me.***
  - and then the subsequent verses are a list of areas where God's help works out...
  - v.12 - God helps out in the area of personal sin...; David can also give testimony
  - v.13-15 - God helps out in the area of bitter enemies... God will sort things out in the end, will vindicate his servant - here too God can be trusted.
  - v.16 - God helps all who seek him, who seek his glory
  - v.17 - God helps even me!
  - ***Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, do not delay.*** (v.17)
- And that is the baseline for all God's help - we need him, and need to know it
  - if we think we are basically fine, but just in this area or that area need a little shove, a little help, then we are deluded
  - David understands his utter dependence on God - for everything - for food, for his well-being, for fighting sin, getting on with other people, for making his way in the world...
  - he recognises himself to be a needy person dependent on the grace of God - and that is the condition on which we must approach God
- And as we approach God in this way we discover what David discovered:
  - **God helps....**
  - **and He helps even me!**