Waiting, I Waited

Psalm 40

2014 Summer in Psalms Series

Pastor Bryan Clark

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.
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.

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 You have done,
And Your thoughts toward us;
There is none to compare with You.
If I would declare and speak of them,
They would be too numerous to count.

Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired;
My ears You have opened;
Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required.
Then I said, "Behold, I come;
In the scroll of the book it is written of me.
I delight to do Your will, O my God;
Your Law is within my heart."

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

You, O LORD, will not withhold Your compassion from me;
Your lovingkindness and Your truth will continually preserve me.
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.

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!"
Let all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You;
Let those who love Your salvation say continually,
"The LORD be magnified!"
Since I am afflicted and needy,
Let the Lord be mindful of me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
Do not delay, O my God. (*NASB, Psalm 40)

I think there are very few things in life that are as difficult as waiting—waiting for answers, waiting for change, waiting for a miracle, waiting for healing, waiting for something to make sense, waiting for some evidence that God is still there and He cares. I don't wait well. It's not my nature. I'm a fixer by nature. I'm a "roll up my sleeves and let's get the job done". Let's take the hill! I'm a man of action. I don't like waiting.

But sometimes, the only option left on the table is that we wait. David uses the imagery of sinking into the mud. And the more we struggle, the more we sink, and there's simply nothing he can do but wait for God to deliver him. I would suggest that all of us will do our time in the mud. So what do you do when you find yourself in that season of life? Well, if you have a Bible, turn with us to Psalm 40.

It's a Psalm of David. The writing also makes a notation for the choir director that I think is worth noting, in that it reminds us that ultimately the psalms were not written to be read alone on the side of a mountain somewhere. Not that that's wrong, but the psalms were about community; it's about the journey together. It was a reminder that we are in this together and how do we get through this together as the people of God. That's the heartbeat of the psalms. He starts in verse 1:

I waited patiently for the LORD;

That's one of my favorite opening lines of all the psalms, only I don't think the English version captures it well at all. It gives you the idea that David is just patiently waiting for God. That's not the Hebrew at all. As a matter of fact, the literal translation would be *Waiting, I waited*. It carries more the idea *of despair, of frustration, of waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting*. When is God ever going to show up? Waiting, I waited.

And He inclined to me and heard my cry. (Vs. 1b)

The imagery there really carries the idea that God finally turns and looks at him, to do something about his circumstance. Now I don't think David's saying theologically God doesn't hear and God doesn't care. But He's saying how this has felt as he has waited and waited and waited. It's as if God isn't there; and if He's there, He doesn't care. And finally he feels like God turns and listens and responds. Verse 2:

He brought me up out of the pit of destruction…

Literally, the Hebrew is *the pit of voices*, *the pit of noise*. When we are in the mud and we are sinking, it seems like one of the dynamics is that you just have all this noise, all these voices, and it just makes it harder and more confusing. And David is calling it the pit of noise, the pit of destruction.

…out of the miry clay, (Vs. 2b)

It's the imagery that he's just sinking deeper and deeper into the clay but God has reached in and pulled him out.

And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. (Vs. 2c)

So you get the contrast between the sinking mud and this feeling that I'm going under, to being rescued and having my feet on solid ground. And finally the ground under my feet isn't giving away, and I feel like maybe there's hope I can walk; I can run; I can dance again. Verse 3:

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.

This idea of **a new song** is an idea that comes up over and over and over again in the psalms. It's worth stopping and thinking about. The basic idea is that every generation has their experience with God. It isn't just a case where God did something in the past and we somehow vicariously try to connect with that. It's that God is very much real and alive in our generation today. And each generation captures that and puts into song, "This is our experience with God. He is real and He's true and He's faithful and this is what He did for me today." That's the idea.

The reason that's important to comprehend is that there are churches and individuals that seem to be under the impression that there's a problem with contemporary music. They have this idea that somehow music from the past is *sacred* but music in the present is somehow different than that. It's *less than* that. I don't care for the term sacred. I understand it as it relates to a genre of music. But a lot of people take that, that somehow music from the past was more spiritual than music today, that there's something that God found more favorable about *that* music than *this* music. It just goes contrary to the idea of **a new song**. It's helpful to remember that every single piece of music out there at one time was a *new song*. The lyrics were contemporary; the style was contemporary; the tune was contemporary, and almost every age of music like that had controversy and people that objected to it. And then enough time passes. Suddenly God likes it, and it's sacred. (laughter)

The fact of the matter is we all have personal preferences. You have a personal preference; I have a personal preference. There's nothing wrong with that. That's the way it's going to be. But here's where the problem is: When you start to think your personal preference is more spiritual than somebody else's personal preference, that somehow God is happier with your style of music than somebody else's style of music, that's just ridiculous! At the end of the day, God actually invites every generation to celebrate their experience with God in a new song, to lead the congregation to say, "God is still real; He's still alive, and He can still be trusted." That's the idea of **a new song**.

He says, **many will see and fear**—very interesting choice of language—not *hear* and fear, but *see* and fear. It's a reminder that these new songs are not made up from people that just sit down and say, "You know I've got a deadline. I have a new CD coming out; I've got to come up with a

song." But it is the idea that worship as the congregation comes together and remembers who God is and why we can trust Him when we are sinking in the mud, has to do with stories of God's faithfulness. It comes out of life. It comes out of experience. It comes out of the depth of my soul. You might say it flows out of my gut and my experience with God. And it's my way of saying, "This is where I was, and this is where God met me, and this is the outflow of that." It's almost like these songs write themselves and have the power to bring people together to say God is real, and He's powerful and we can trust Him.

So the idea of seeing rather than hearing is the congregation saying, "We see this. David was in the mud; David was going down; he was in trouble. God showed up. God delivered him. The circumstances have changed. His feet are on a rock, and now we celebrate that together. The lyrics have credibility because we have seen the story." That's the idea here. Therefore, they too fear God and remember that God will be there in their moment. Verse 4:

> **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.**

That word **blessed** is the same word we saw last week in Psalm 119 and Psalm 1. It's the Hebrew word *to be happy*, *to be deeply happy*, *a soul satisfying happiness*. It comes to those who trust God because the alternative is disaster, and he spells that out in the text. Option 1 is **to turn to the proud**. It's basically the idea of just turning to the belief system or the value system of the culture. The culture is defined by those people who have determined *themselves* to be *God* and, "I'll call my own shots; I'll run my own life; I'll go my own way." So here's what happens: I find myself in the mud and I'm going down, and God seems nowhere to be found. So I conclude that God isn't faithful—that we kind of had this deal—and if I was a good boy or girl and I followed the rules and I did my checklist, that everything's supposed to work out. That was the deal. But I've been a good boy or girl, and now God is not doing His part. I'm going down and if that's the way God's going to be, count me out. I'm going to go my own way.

The second option is to turn to other gods—**nor to those who lapse into falsehood**. It's a phrase that basically means into idolatry, saying, "God, if this is the way you are going to be, and if this is the way you are going to play ball, I really don't think I want that anymore. So I'm going to see if maybe there's another god, another belief system that will work better for me."

Over the years as a pastor, I could not possibly count the number of people I've had conversations with and this is their story. At one time they believed, and they were trying to be a good boy or girl and follow the rules and do religion and do the right things. And then life collapses, and they just started sinking into the mud, and they feel like God has let me down. God was nowhere to be found. God didn't keep His end of the deal. And if that's the way God's going to be, count me out. I am walking away.

Over the years, I have had countless conversations with people who would self-identify as either atheist or agnostic. And it's interesting how often those people don't even understand the implications of their own worldview. I find so often I'm the one explaining the implications of their worldview because, at the end of the day, in so many situations, it's not intellectually driven. They haven't thought it through at all and determine this is true. It flows out of hurt. It flows out of pain. Usually, if you track people back, at one point there was some point of religion, some point of belief, but somewhere along the way life got really painful. Disaster happened; something happened that deeply, deeply wounded them, and they became so angry and bitter at God that the

only way they can think of to get even with God is to say, "God, You don't even exist…and I'm walking away!"

It's helpful to remember the way back for people that walk that path is not intellectual. You can't argue them back. Jesus has to connect with that pain and begin to slowly bring healing to whatever that is. He says how *happy is the man that trusts God* when life doesn't make sense, that trusts God when there doesn't seem to be answers, that trusts God when I feel like, for some reason, I'm sinking into the mud, and God seems nowhere to be found. There are days when the goodness of God seems so abundantly clear. But there are seasons of life when the only basis by which you cling to the goodness of God is by faith. And you hang on, and you trust that God is indeed good.

> **Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders which You have done,**
> **And Your thoughts toward us;**
> **There is none to compare with You.**
> **If I would declare and speak of them,**
> **They would be too numerous to count.** (Vs. 5)

What David is saying is happy is the man or woman who trusts in God when life falls apart because God, at the end of the day, is the only hope. There is a practical reality to the fact that if, in my hour of need, I say to God, "I've had it up to here; I'm walking away," we are walking away from the only hope we have. How does that make the pain go away? How does that suddenly solve the problem? Trust me, I have been there. I've been at that fork in the road, but I'm commonsense oriented enough to know if you walk away from God, how has that fixed anything? And you are walking away from the only source of hope you have. That's what David is saying. Verse 6:

> **Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired;**
> **My ears You have opened;**
> **Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required.**

It's likely that David was thinking back to when King Saul disobeyed and offered sacrifice, instead of waiting for Samuel. Basically Saul was king; they were headed to war. Samuel had given him strict orders to wait until Samuel got there. As the priest, Samuel would offer the sacrifice and then they would go to war. But Saul got tired of waiting. Samuel was nowhere to be found. He feared that the enemy was moving in, so he took it upon himself to offer the sacrifice himself, to go through the ritual, and about that time Samuel shows up and says, "Saul, what are you doing?" And then he offers his classic line, "To obey is better than sacrifice." This isn't some ritual that God wants you to go through; this isn't some formula. God wants you to trust Him. God wants your heart—and you have disobeyed Him. That's what God wants. Likely, David as king is reflecting back on that and he's remembering God's not into religion. He's not asking for a bunch of religious activity. What he wants is for us to trust Him when it makes sense and when it doesn't make sense. Verse 7:

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

So David is saying, as king he actually wants to do the right thing. It's captured by this idea of **the scroll of the book**. You'll find it if you go back to Deuteronomy. There's a section of

Deuteronomy that instructs the king. "This is what I ask of you. As a king, I ask you to walk uprightly and to trust Me and to lead the people in righteousness." And what David is saying is: That's the desire of his heart. It isn't some sort of a magic formula. He's not making deals with God that if I do that, that in return, everything's supposed to work out. He just desires to obey. The idea was that the king would carry *the scroll of the book* everywhere he went. And daily he would go back through it, and he would remind himself: this is what God wants from me. This is how I'm supposed to lead the people in order to walk as a righteous king.

Interestingly enough, Hebrews 10 actually quotes these verses from Psalm 40 and identifies that Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of **the scroll of the book**. Jesus was the perfect King. Jesus came and perfectly fulfilled the Law. Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise of God.

It does remind us that as much as David had to remind himself that God is indeed good and faithful, we have far more. David was looking *forward* to the day when God would fulfill His promise of a perfect king that would be the Savior of the world. We live in the reality of the fulfillment of that promise. We look *back*: that God indeed did become flesh; God fulfilled His promise perfectly, that God did become man, was crucified on a cross, was buried, rose again, and offers salvation and a hope of eternity freely as a gift.

I understand that when life doesn't make sense, there may be confusion; there may be questions; we may wonder why does it have to be this way? But the one thing we cannot doubt is the love of God. The love of God is not religious theory. At a point in history God demonstrated His love. This is not some game to God. He is so committed to you and to your eternal welfare, He actually gave up the life of His own Son to die for you, to make a way back, to give you a hope and a future. So at least we can hang on to our belief that even though things don't make sense and I don't understand why it has to be this way, God did demonstrate His love and in my hour of need, I will cling to that, and I will choose to trust Him.

> **I have proclaimed glad tidings of righteousness in the great congregation;**
> **Behold, I will not restrain my lips,**
> **O LORD, You know.**
> **I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart;**
> **I have spoken of Your faithfulness and Your salvation;**
> **I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great congregation.**
> (Vs. 9-10)

In other words, David is saying that he actually gathered the people and he told his story. This is where I was. I was going down, but God showed up and God is faithful and He pulled me out of the clay, and He set my feet on the rock and that's what he's saying there is, "God, I told people that; I proclaimed the truth. I reminded them that You are faithful."

It's a good reminder that this is what we are about as the people of God. When we gather together, it's not a concert; it's not just some form of entertainment. The stakes are very high. We gather together and we are reminding one another that God is good and God is faithful and God has delivered in the past and He will deliver in the future.

For you this morning, life may be great. I'm happy for you. But for others here this morning, they may be going down, stuck, sinking in the mud, and they are hanging on to a thread of faith for all they are worth. And what they need in this moment is for us to gather to say, "God is real; God is

faithful, and God has delivered us. He'll deliver you. I've been there and God proved Himself faithful. You've just got to hang on, and you are going to be okay." Verse 11:

You, O LORD, will not withhold Your compassion from me;
Your lovingkindness and Your truth will continually preserve me.
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… (Vs. 11-12a)

Now one of the things I would like to point out in verse 12 is the text seems abundantly clear that the number of your iniquities is equal to the number of hairs on your head (laughter). Now I don't write this stuff, I just misinterpreted it (laughter). But all you people with lovely hair, thinking you are so special, *(laughter)* I'm just saying…

But more to the point, starting with verse 11 the psalm takes a very unexpected turn. He says that God is compassionate and He's loving and kind, and His truth will preserve me. Why? Because verse 12, he's going down again. We now realize that the previous ten verses were past tense. He's been in the mud before, and God delivered him. And God was faithful and He declared that, but now he has blown it again. There's no question what he's saying is that he has sinned, and the effect of the stockpile of the sins has now landed him in the mud again—and he is going down. The idea of being overwhelmed is actually imagery of the waves of the sea—that he is in the ocean; he's drowning; the waves keep coming, and he is going down. Basically he's in trouble unless God rescues him. So once again he's crying out for the compassion of God, for the lovingkindness of God, for the truth of God. He ends that in verse 12 and says:

My heart has failed me.

…basically meaning he's blown it. He's emotionally shot; he's spiritually shot; he has nothing left, and the only chance he has is that God will once again rescue him. Verse 13:

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!"
Let all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You;
Let those who love Your salvation say continually,
"The LORD be magnified!" (Vs. 13-16)

Whatever exactly is going on, David has blown it. He's suffering the consequences. He's sinking in the mud, and there are a whole bunch of people taking great delight in his demise. They are saying, "Aha! Mr. Big Talker! You thought you were this big self-righteous almighty king—and look at what your God has done for you now." There is a reality that if you are a Christian of influence and people where you work, people in your neighborhood, people in your school, people in your community know that, they will take great delight when you crash and burn. They will say, "Aha! You thought you were so special. You thought you were so spiritual. You thought you had

it all figured out." And for some reason, people feel better about their own story when they can delight in the crash and burn of somebody else's story. But David is saying, "God, I'm asking You to shut them down because there will also be those people in that hour of need that will say, 'Hey, I get it. You blew it. We all blow it—but we are in this together. And God will be good and God will be faithful and God will be compassionate and we want to remind you of that. And we are here for you and we are in this together and we are going to get you to the finish line.'" And David is saying, "God, let those voices be heard—and let the critics be silent!" Verse 17:

> **Since I am afflicted and needy** *(present tense)***,**
> **Let the Lord be mindful of me.**
> **You are my help and my deliverer;**
> **Do not delay, O my God.**

David is saying, "I'm in the mud again, and I'm going down. Once again I need God to rescue me or I have no hope." The psalm opens with the line: Waiting, I waited," and closes with the line, **Do not delay**…**do not delay** because I'm going down fast.

There are very few things in life as difficult as waiting—waiting for something to change, waiting for answers, waiting for something to make sense, waiting for healing, waiting for a miracle, waiting for God just to show up and in some way say, "I'm still there." Sometimes all we can do in our hour of need is, by faith, hang on and believe God will be faithful again.

One of the things that we offer as a church is a lot of resources to those who are struggling. This morning we want to highlight some of those. Out on the 100 level, at the spotlight booth, is our *Counseling Resource Ministry*. We could offer you a *spiritual caregiver*, someone who would listen to you and walk with you and care about you through a difficult season of life, or maybe a *support group*, maybe a *recovery group*. One of the new ministries we are offering is called *cancer care*. What do you do when the doctor says, "It's cancer"? Suddenly it's confusing; suddenly there are all these questions. What if you had a retired oncologist who would function, not as your doctor, but as a counselor, as a friend, to answer your questions, to walk with you through the journey, to just help you better understand the journey that you are on. All of that is offered, free of charge. We just want to help. If you are going through a difficult season, I'd invite you to stop at the table and ask questions.

In a lot of ways, I really wish it was as simple as "God, give me the checklist; give me the rules. Just tell me what You ask of me. I'll roll up my sleeves; I'll get it done. In exchange, God, You keep Your end of the deal." In some ways, I wish it was like that. But then I'm not really seeking God; I'm just wanting to use God for my own personal comfort. The fact of the matter is, it just isn't like that. Over and over the Scriptures remind us there's no deal here—"I'm just asking you to trust Me when life is good and when life gets really hard."

What do you do when you chase your dreams? You are trying to do everything right; you are trying to live God's way, and it just seems like nothing goes right and no matter what you do, you end up with no option on the table except to wait and wait and wait some more? That's Dylan's story:

(Video):

Basketball always has been a big part of my life. My first word was ball, my memory, just playing on little tykes' teams, playing against my dad. I remember fifth grade. It's really when it hit me, watching my brother play high school ball, and I just almost couldn't wait for that moment, the moment when that would be me. My ultimate dream was to play Division I basketball, specifically at the University of Nebraska. I just kept envisioning myself playing in front of my hometown, in front of my family.

I grew up with Christian parents. I always knew who God was. I knew that He loved me. I knew that He died on the cross for my sins. But there was never really an intimate relationship. As I grew up, late middle school years and early high school, I saw that there's something different about this life that's lived with Jesus, and I think I just started to gradually want that more.

My freshmen year basketball I started on the varsity team. And that summer I started getting a lot of attention from some Division I schools. Junior year came along and I was playing my best basketball I'd ever played, better than I thought I ever could.

I started feeling this pain that I have no idea how to describe. It just kept growing, until one night I was stretching after a game and it just popped. And the next morning I couldn't walk. Yeah, that was rough. I just felt like, God, I'm trying to play for you. I felt like I'm a kid who's trying to do things right, yet the thing I love most in this life has been taken away from me. I remember leaving from a game, state championship game that year, in my car, I just sort of broke down, like, "God, that could have been me. Why did those guys get to experience that when it could have been like, me and my team?"

Nothing was helping until we got word from this guy in Omaha who finally diagnosed it correctly. I had the surgery. I was out about eight, nine weeks with that, trying to get myself ready for the upcoming senior year. The season started. A couple of weeks in, I started feeling exactly the same pain on the other side. Right then I remember, it's like, "You have got to be kidding me." I remember coming home and telling my dad and we just had no idea what to do. When I'd done everything the doctor said plus more, why is this not leaving my story? Why can't I get past this?"

About a week later, my dad called this surgeon in, of all places, Germany. It was the only place where we could get the surgery done where the recovery time was about maximum two weeks. I made the decision; my dad was on board with it, which is amazing. About three hours after we landed, I was in the surgery room. About ten days after that I was actually playing back with my high school team.

I got a call from Nebraska saying, "Hey, we're going to have you come to try out. We want to see what you have left, and hopefully we can find a spot." So at that time I still wasn't completely healthy. I tried ramping up the activity and getting ready to go for that. It's like, "Man, this is my redemption story now. This is going to be what I've been working towards. This is the reason why I had to go through such pain, so this ending can come. This is going to be the ending to this struggle story." So I went through the tryout and got a call the next day saying, "We don't have room for you." Basically, that was rough. That was a night I will

never forget, just because, "Man, I'm done; there's nothing left for me. I've given my dream everything I can."

In this last year I've realized how much of an identity I put on myself with basketball. That's not what it should be. I'm a basketball player; that's not who I am. I'm a child of God; that's my identity completely. I've been working out and trying to give basketball one last go here. This was a couple of weeks ago, and I got a call again after Nebraska's season. "Hey, Dylan, we are going to give you another look here." I was happy with how I played, but I got the call again, "Hey, we are not going to have you."

It's definitely difficult again, but I have the sense from God saying, "Dylan, I'm going to use you in some way that will even be more fulfilling than basketball ever was in your life. I'm going to use you in some other way. I know you don't have any ideas what that is, but there's just something else in the plans I have for you." That was the first time I actually felt God speaking to me. There had been multiple times where I've felt His presence, but I've never really felt like a sense of direction until that moment. I just felt Him saying, "Dylan, let go of it," which was extremely hard for me to do, let go of the dream I had for six years. But I sort of felt at the time, "Dylan, it's time to just let go."

Throughout the last couple of years, there have definitely been moments where I haven't been patient, where I've wanted answers now. I wanted the end to come. In the midst of the struggle, in the pain and the hurt, the thing that's been encouraging is I know the story isn't done. I know the redemptive part of the story has yet to come. I know God's not just going to be done with me. I know my story continues, and He's going to use all these pains, injuries and the emotions. He's going to use all that just to create this beautiful story, I have no idea what that story is, but it's exciting to me to know that one is coming, and that the story is going to be a beautiful one.

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