

Waiting for God – Psalm 40:1-5 NASB

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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. How blessed is the man who has made the LORD His trust, and has not turned to the proud, nor to those who engage in falsehood. Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders which you 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.

The primary theme of the Book of Psalms is worship. But not worship in the sense as it has largely become thought of today. Today worship is mostly connected with emotion. In fact many churches promise a “worship experience”, dangling it as a carrot to entice people interested only in self-gratification. This experience is usually provided by the band – oh, excuse me – the “worship team”, enhanced by some dramatic or syrupy visual effects designed to stimulate the senses, not the intellect or conscience. Truth is subservient to feeling. The outcome of such “worship”, however, is nothing more than a sensual sugar rush that is gone a few hours after consumption. Everything from the music to the message is designed to illicit an emotional rather than intellectual and spiritual response. Entertainment has replaced exaltation, relevance has replaced reverence, performance has replaced purity, conversations have replaced sermons, decisions have replaced regeneration, cultural dogma has replaced biblical doctrine, hedonism has replaced holiness, personalities are more important than biblical proficiency, and style is preferred to substance. The great Puritan pastor Thomas Watson wrote,

The Greek word for ‘godly’ signifies a true worshipper of God. A godly man reverences divine institutions, and is more for the purity of worship than the pomp....A godly man dare not vary from the pattern which God has shown him in the Scripture. This is probably not the least reason why David was called ‘a man after God’s own heart’, because he kept the springs of God’s worship pure, and in matters sacred did not superinduce anything of his own devising....Those who will introduce into God’s worship that which he has not commanded, will be as ready to blot out that which he has commanded.¹

When a people decide style is preferable to substance, when emotion replaces truth, when it is more important to be relevant than reverent, when an experience is substituted for the experiential, then it can be said with confidence that such a people have convincingly staged a form of godliness but have denied its power. Mankind is prone to inventing his own forms of worship. True worship has been replaced by counterfeit. People have treated God’s precepts for His own worship as defective and attempted to correct God’s shortcomings by adding their own golden calves. What it calls worship is really idolatry, the idolatry of self and success. Wherever we find the most of man – his inventions, his methods, his ideas, his philosophies, his discoveries, his teachings, his preferences, his prejudices – we find the least of God.

¹ Thomas Watson, *The Godly Man’s Picture*, (Carlisle, PA, Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 35, 36.

The worship found in the Book of Psalms bears no resemblance to the contemporary narcissistic approach to worship. The psalms present worship as a *personal* response to God; a response that is the result of reflecting and meditating on God's Word, His promises, His attributes, and His nature, especially during times of personal and national trials. There is an ardent desire to see God's promises fulfilled and His name exalted and extolled. They are the expression of a real, experiential faith; a faith that is willing to venture all upon the truth God has revealed; a faith that has placed its entire trust in God, His power, and His word in spite of overwhelming circumstances to the contrary, and that has personally experienced the faithfulness of God to His word. Abraham looked at himself and Sarah "*now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb*" (Rm 4:19), then he looked at God's nature and was "*fully assured that what He had promised, He was also able to perform*" (Rm 4:21). He trusted that the God who could make the world could also make a barren womb give birth. Understanding and trusting the nature of God is what gives wings to waiting for God.

This is the worship David expresses in Psalm 40. It is a true worship that can only be offered by someone who knows what it is to have genuinely waited for God. The one who waits is the one who prays; who spends their time waiting in praying for God to fulfill His word, keep His promises, and energize His means with His Spirit.

The story of faith is the story of what God has done – of how He has fulfilled His promises – literally. Up till now in our study of waiting for God we have looked at many exhortations to wait, some attributes necessary for waiting, and promises for those who wait, but now in Psalm 40 David recounts what happened after he "*patiently*" waited for God.

Unlike our concept of patience, which usually involves a time element, the Hebrew verb translated "*patiently*" has more to do with a disposition than time. Even our expressions denote a time element to patience – "*I've waited long enough; I'm running short on patience; he is so impatient*" – all link patience with a period of time. So when David declares "*I waited patiently for the LORD,*" he is not saying he waited a long time, but rather he is stating the attitude with which he waited. The verb means to intently wait or look for with an eager expectation. However, the longer one waits the harder it becomes to maintain this attitude. The longer a person maintains this attitude the more they demonstrate their trust in God's word and nature. David waited with an eager expectation and confident assurance that God was faithful to His promises and would act decisively and unfailingly on his behalf. He had persistently and perseveringly cried out to God in prayer, humbly submitting himself to God's sovereignty. As a result God "*inclined to me, and heard my cry*".

The answer to David's prayer must have been a long time in coming. We can deduce this because of the word David used to describe his prayer; it was a "*cry*" (*shawa*). The noun is used only eleven times in the Old Testament, seven of these in the Psalms. It is a very intense word. It means a cry for help (cf. Ps 72:12; Lam 3:8; Hab 1:2). It describes the cry of anguish, despair, and of one who has reached the breaking point.

Sadly, most people have long since given up on God before they reach this point. They have abandoned His means and turned to other more promising solutions that offer speedier results. They have turned to the ideas and inventions of men, to pragmatic schemes, to methods that promise to generate the results they desire or to fix the problems they are facing. Like King Asa they rely on the might and cunning of man rather than the power of God (2 Chron 16:1-10).

David knew that answer to prayer is rarely immediate but required expectant perseverance, even when one's circumstances appear to be hopeless, and even when, like Job, God seems to be deaf to our cries, "*I cry out (shawa) to Thee for help, but Thou dost not answer me; I stand up, and Thou dost turn Thy attention against me*" (Job 30:20, cf. 19:7). The rebuke of the prophet Hanani to King Asa is still true today, "*the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His*" (2 Chron 16:9).

Spiritual work must employ spiritual means and rely on spiritual power. Let any service for God be undertaken by a proud, carnal heart and you will find that it will ruin the work by managing it for self, even prayer (Jm 4:3). Jesus told several parables to illustrate this principle of perseverance in prayer – a principle that needs to be reemphasized in a culture that has come to expect immediate gratification, and has even invented a theology, worship, and church growth strategies to accommodate its narcissism and idolatrous pursuit of success.

One such parable, the Parable of the Persistent Friend, Jesus told in response to a request by His disciples that He teach them to pray (Luke 11:5-10). Jesus makes it plain that it was because of this man's persistence his request was granted (11:8). Luke records another parable in chapter 18, the Parable of the Woman and Unjust Judge, and the reason given for Jesus' telling of this parable was "*to show that at all times they ought to pray and not lose heart*" (18:1). Three words in this statement deserve special attention, "*ought, pray, and lose heart*". There is a positive command and a negative command, and both are governed by the word *ought*. The first tells us what we *ought* to do and the second tells us what we *ought not* to do.

First, we *ought to pray*. The word "*ought*" translates the little Greek word *dei*, and it express the idea of compulsion and necessity, especially when the action is a command of God. We *ought* to pray in the way He commands us to pray and avoid praying in the ways He tells us to avoid because it is God who has commanded it so. To not pray, or to pray in a way Jesus has forbidden (cf. Mt 6:5-15) is direct disobedience to a command of God. Prayer is a divinely ordained necessity for the Christian. The true Christian can no more stop breathing than he/she can stop praying. An attitude of prayer is a constituent part of the new creature because the new creature is continually assimilating the likeness of Christ. Everyone who is in Christ has had their affections renewed by regeneration. Before the conscience was dead or full of guilt, now it is alive, cleansed, and tender; the understanding was dark, now it is light in the Lord (Ephesians 5:8); before fears were all centered in earthly things, now God is the object of fear and reverence; where once the will was inflexible and obstinate, now it delights in obedience to the will of God (1 John 5:3); before hope was derived from the things of this world, now it is centered in things above (Hebrews 6:19). And this prayer *ought* to be "*at all times*", that is, perseveringly and persistently.

Second, we *ought not to lose heart*. This again is a divinely ordained necessity. The word translated "*lose heart*" (*egkakeo*) means "to lose enthusiasm; become discouraged; weary; exhausted; utterly spiritless". It depicts a person who has come to the end of their rope, who has given up, thrown in the towel, who says "this isn't working, so why keep asking, seeking, knocking, crying". Why did Jesus add this command to His command to pray? The giving of the prohibition assumes an inclination to the action. Jesus would not have had to issue a command prohibiting what no one is inclined to do. Jesus knows that the human heart has a natural inclination to self and self-gratification. He knows we are swift to gravitate toward

that which requires the least amount of effort and promises the quickest results. He knows we are prone to discouragement and despair when suffering, or when things aren't going the way we had expected. But more importantly, Jesus knows the human heart loves to glorify itself in all that it does. People love to be able to take the credit for any success, even if only partially, and only grudgingly give all the glory to God. People want their own actions to at least partially account for their deliverance or accomplishments. But the principle reason Jesus issues His prohibition has to do with His question in Luke 18:8, "*However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?*"

Jesus does not ask this question as a matter of speculation, but for self-examination. Jesus is not speaking of faith in general, but a specific kind of faith; the faith illustrated by His parable. Undoubtedly Jesus will find all sorts of faith on the earth when He comes. He will find false faith; He will find faith in faith – that is, people who trust that what they believe is true despite having no foundation for their faith except their own imagination and wishful thinking. Jesus will find faith in self, faith in good works, faith in religious activity and rituals, faith in a decision, in the innate goodness of man, in the unlimited potential of man to solve his/her own problems.

But Jesus questions whether He will find *this kind* of faith on the earth, the kind that does not lose heart, that does not shrink back and give in (Hebrews 10:39), the kind that is willing to patiently wait on the Lord. But most importantly, it is this kind of faith which the author of Hebrews declares is a divine necessity if anyone is to be pleasing to God, "*for he who comes to God must (dei) believe that He is*" (Hb 11:6). Is what? Is the kind of God He has revealed Himself to be, "*a rewarder of those who seek Him*". The verb "*seek*" is present tense, that is, continuously, habitually, persistently, perseveringly *seek, ask, knock*. God is a rewarder of those with this kind of faith, the kind illustrated in Hebrews 11 by Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua and Rahab, the kind of faith that has no other foundation than the trustworthiness of God's nature and His ability to do what He has said. Will those who profess to be His disciples exhibit this kind of faith, or will they have grown tired of waiting and resorted to their own schemes and inventions? Sadly, there is little doubt as to the kind of faith that characterizes the vast majority of the professing church today. Whatever kind it is it is not this kind, the kind that pleases God.

It was precisely this kind of faith that sustained David's patient waiting and energized his cry to God. This was why when God in His sovereign time answered David's cry he could ascribe all the glory to God. It was God who "*brought me up out of the pit of destruction*"; it was God who delivered David "*out of the miry clay*"; it was God who "*set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm*". The language suggests David was experiencing a seemingly hopeless and severe crisis and intense suffering. He was in "*the pit of destruction*", he was beyond the point of all human help but that did not stop David's cry to God. Also it was God who "*put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God*". David's soul could erupt and overflow with praise and worship to God because He had personally experienced the faithfulness of God to His word. There was nothing else to which David could attribute his deliverance than to the faithfulness of God to His word.

When others see God's faithfulness, David declares, the result will be, "*Many will see and fear and will trust in the Lord*" (Ps 40:3). Some won't, but many will. It requires spiritual eyes to see spiritual work. This was why the Jewish leaders attributed the work of Jesus to Satan, because they were spiritually blind (Mt 15:14). But for those with eyes to see, the acts of God will inspire "*fear*", that is, a deep sense of awe and reverence. They will also be

inspired to trust as David trusted. So, why is there so little reverence for God and the things of God today? Why does irreverence rather than reverence characterize the vast majority of what passes for worship today? Why are so few, if any, being inspired to a greater trust in God? Multitudes are being told to trust in self, to follow their own heart, but where do we see the inspiration to trust in God? This scarcity of reverence and trust can only be the result of one of two reasons; either there is so little to see that would inspire a fear and trust of God, or most lack the eyes to see what God is doing. Both are because there is so little of the kind of faith that pleases God. Without the faith there is nothing to see nor are there the eyes with which to see it. Again, Jesus' question was a question for self-examination. Will he find this kind of faith on the earth? If the American church is any indication the answer would have to be precious little.

David experienced the faithfulness of God because he had *"made the LORD his trust"*. Sadly, for most the Lord is the last place they turn. Like Israel who only turned to God when all their idols and alliances had failed, people today only turn to God in a time of personal and national crisis. Why should God hear the cry of anyone who has never shown any inclination to obey the voice of God? Why should He hear the cry of those who have habitually *"turned to the proud"* and to *"those who lapse into falsehood"*? Why should God listen to the cries of those who go right back to their idols after the crisis has past? Those who have made the Lord their trust trust in the Lord. They have the kind of faith that pleases God, the kind of faith that takes God at His word, that persistently pleads His promises, and that patiently waits without doubting His character and nature, trusting His all wise and loving sovereignty. Those who have this kind of faith are able to say with David, *"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."* David could say this because he had the kind of faith that could see the wonders of God, so numerous he could not begin to count them. I wonder how many professing Christians could say the same today. Jesus' question applies to you and me. Will He find this kind of faith in our life should He come today?

God had made promises to David; promises to which David could appeal. God has made promises to us as well; promises to which we can appeal. God has promised to give wisdom (Jm 1:5); He has promised to give the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13); He has promised to meet all our needs (Phil 4:19); He has promised to sanctify us (Phil 1:6); He has promised to always be with us (Mt 28:20); He has promised to always work all things for our good (Rm 8:28); He has promised us tribulation (Jn 16:33); He has promised persecution (Jn 15:18-20; 2 Tm 3:12). He has not promised happiness, health, wealth, prosperity, popularity, success, or respectability. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us"* (1 Cor 1:20).

God's promises are worth waiting for. The waiting may be long, it may be arduous, it may be painful, it is always humbling, and it will always test your faith to see what kind it is. If it is the kind of faith that pleases God you too will be able to worship like David and say, *"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. How blessed is the man who has made the LORD His trust, and has not turned to the proud, nor to those who engage in falsehood. Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders which you 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” – Psalm 40:1-5.