

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 8 October 2017

No. T1010

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New Things: A New Song

As we start our new series called, "New Things", we will consider a "New Song" from both Psalm 40:1-5 and Revelation 5:9-10.

Background

There are nine references to "new songs" in the Bible (Psalm 33:3; Psalm 40:3; Psalm 96:1; Psalm 98:1; Psalm 144:9; Psalm 149:1; Isaiah 42:10; Revelation 5:9; and Revelation 14:3) and they are all connected with the thought of rejoicing. Psalm 40, a psalm of David, can be considered in the following way:

- Psalm 40:1-5: Deliverance and thankfulness;
- Psalm 40:6-10: A Messianic reference to Christ replacing the Levitical sacrificial system; and
- Psalm 40:11-17: David's plea for God's kindness to remain with him and that he be preserved from his enemies.

Psalm 40, although intensely personal, is written, according to its title, "*to the Chief Musician.*" We can conclude, therefore, that it was intended to be sung in public as a song of praise and thanksgiving. We will only consider Psalm 40:1-5 in which we find this "New Song".

The New Song of Psalm 40

These opening verses of the Psalm are favourite verses of mine. Let us read the first five verses of this Psalm: "*I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth - praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the LORD. Blessed is that man who makes the LORD his trust, and does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. Many, O LORD my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered*" (Psalm 40:1-5).

I would like to consider Psalm 40:1-5 in two ways: first, in simple terms, the sinner's response to the Gospel message; and second, a 'God fearing' person who is trapped in a dreadful situation from which there seems no escape.

The Gospel brings deliverance

In Psalm 40:1-5, we have pictured the Gospel of a full and free salvation from a Saviour God and the thankfulness of a person who has been delivered from the depths of despair caused by the realisation of his or her sins. The reason for the Gospel is plainly stated in Romans 1:16-18: "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.' For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness*".

A Desperate Situation

Let us read again Psalm 40:1-2: "*I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps.*"

In Psalm 40:2 we have a person in a desperate situation - a horrible pit and miry clay, trapped and no possible way of escape, no toe or hand hold. As we consider these opening verses, it becomes obvious that there was no solution to the predicament and no one to help. This picture of the pit is like the realisation that comes when a person, for the first time, understands that they are a sinner and that God's righteousness demands the execution of a sentence of condemnation upon that person. Romans 3:23 states, "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" This is God's assessment of the whole human race since Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden because of their disobedience to God's clear instructions (see Genesis 2:16-3:24). This reminds me of the Philippian Jailor in Acts 16. Paul and Silas were in the city of Philippi (see Acts 16:12), and while there Paul released a slave girl, who

was possessed of a demon, by commanding it to come out of her in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 16:16-18). This resulted in the slave girl's owners dragging Paul and Silas to the magistrates because they had lost a very profitable source of income (Acts 16:19). The demon, through the girl, was used as a fortune-teller. The slave owners used a different story to the magistrates. They accused Paul and Silas of being Jews, trouble makers, and teaching unlawful anti-Roman customs (Acts 16:20-21). This resulted in Paul and Silas being placed in the city jail in what we would say today, was the high security section, but without all the modern comfortable conveniences of today's prisons (Acts 16:23-24).

Did this dampen the spirits of Paul and Silas? Not at all! At midnight, they were both singing praises and praying! (see Acts 16:25). Paul and Silas were confident that, if the Lord allowed them to be put in jail, then there would be a very good reason. I am sure that the hymns they sang had a good scriptural content. They had a captive congregation, as it states in Acts 16:25, the prisoners heard them. It was not long before the Lord directly intervened and an earthquake occurs (Acts 16:26). The prison is so violently shaken that doors open and shackles fall off (Acts 16:27). Freedom offered to all and yet not one prisoner moved! It had the opposite effect on the jailor. Dereliction of duty was an offence punishable by death and, therefore, he thought of committing suicide (Acts 16:27) - he was in a horrible situation. However, he is stopped when Paul shouted out that everyone was still in jail (Acts 16:28). What is the impact on the jailor? One moment he was in the pit of despair but now there seems hope, so he cries out, "*What must I do to be saved?*" (Acts 16:30) This is a question that every sinner should truly ask. The answer is immediate, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household*" (Acts 16:31). Acts 16:32-40 shows the joyous result; the jailor and all in his house believed! The change in this man is immediate and is illustrated by his tender care for both Paul and Silas.

Help for a believer in difficulty

Psalms 40 and the illustration of a pit of miry clay, a pit of despair, can also be considered as depicting a difficult situation in which Christians find themselves. As we read Psalm 40:1-2 it seems clear that there is no one who can help. I am sure we have all been in such situations whether of our own making or due to unforeseen circumstances.

It is when we realise our helplessness that we are brought to the Lord Jesus and to Him we cry for help. Psalm 40 opens with the simple statement, "*I waited patiently for the LORD*" (Psalm 40:1). How often do we pray about something, but don't wait for God's answer? Not so with the psalmist. He waits! Calmness is needed because the One who is in heaven is going to incline or stretch out towards His child who is in distress. What is the result? David the psalmist is delivered and more than delivered. He is placed on a rock. Now a rock in Scripture is symbolic of a good firm foundation. In Psalm 61 we find David in another difficult situation: "*Hear my cry, O God; attend to my prayer. From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings. Selah*" (Psalm 61:1-4).

Once David is placed on firm ground he is also put on the right road, going in the direction that God wants him to go. Trusting Christ as our Saviour, important as that is, is only the beginning. We need to know all about our Saviour and the responsibilities that go with being a Christian. We also need to know what God wants us to do. That was the first thing that Saul of Tarsus asked the risen Saviour on the Damascus road. Acts 9:6 states, "*Lord, what do You want me to do?*"

In addition to the above recovery we find that joy is put back in David's heart. Psalm 40:3 describes that joy as, "*He has put a new song in my mouth - praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the LORD.*"

This is the outflow of appreciation and David is putting into song both his praise and his appreciation for what the Lord has done. It is good to sing whether we are good singers or not. Do you like singing? I am not just thinking of our church fellowships. A good place to sing is in our homes. Sing while we do our jobs around the house. We have a neighbour who often sings while hanging out the washing! Singing good Christian songs that encapsulate the truths of Scripture is a witness and testimony to others and may well lead someone to trust in the Lord. Our joy can become infectious! Once we have been restored to the right road, Psalm 40:4 reminds us that we are not to turn back to our old ways, "*Blessed is that man who makes the LORD his trust, and does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.*"

In 1 Samuel 27-30 we have low points in the life of David. Read these chapters and see a possible reason for those opening verses of Psalm 40. The chapters have two low points in David's life. Notice his decision, without consulting the Lord, to go to the land of the Philistines and notice the start of recovery when he does pray. David was living a proud, deceitful and untruthful life. Delivered out of the first difficulty and no doubt God worked in the hearts of the Philistine kings. The second difficulty openly demonstrates the Lord's ability to bring David onto the right path which leads to his being crowned king.

Once recovered, David can now speak about the blessings of God. Psalm 40:5 states, *“Many, O LORD my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.”*

Do you remember the hymn that has the following chorus?

*Count your blessings, name them one by one.
Count your blessings, see what God has done.
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.*

Johnson Oatman Jr. (1856-1926)

Let us now consider Revelation 5 for our second ‘new song’. First, however, a reminder that Revelation from Revelation 4 takes us into heaven to see things that are both there in heaven now and see the prophetic unfolding of future events. Most of the activity is from heaven to earth and concerns the time after the Church has been raptured, that is when the Lord comes back for His church, see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. If this is not kept in mind then we will be confused about Revelation.

The New Song of Revelation 5

There are two references to “new songs” in the book of Revelation: Revelation 5:9 and Revelation 14:3. In Revelation 5:9-10 we have the words of the new song. Let us read the verses: *“And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.’”*

In Revelation 5, there is a group of people and angels before the throne of God. God has a scroll in His hand and the question is asked, *“Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?”* (Revelation 5:2) The answer is the *“Lamb of God”*, our Lord Jesus Christ (see Revelation 5:9-10). As the Lord takes the scroll there is a burst of praise from those surrounding the throne and they burst out in singing. The song is new and brief. At the end of Revelation 4 there is a kind of prelude to this song as similar words are spoken, *“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created”* (Revelation 4:11). This verse tells us that the Lord Jesus is worthy to receive glory, honour and power because He is both the Creator of all things and by His will the whole of creation is kept in existence.

Worthiness

The first phrase to consider is the worthiness of the one who is described as the Lamb of God. It is of course none other than the Lord Jesus Christ that the singers describe as “You are worthy” (Revelation 5:9). Why is He worthy? We read in Romans 1:4 that He is *“declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”* Also, in John 5:22 we are told that *“The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son.”* The scroll contains God’s judgments ready to be released on the earth. The only person in heaven or on earth who has the right to take the scroll and has the power and authority to break the seals, initiating the judgments, is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Authority

As the Son of God, He has authority *“to take the scroll, and to open its seals”* (Revelation 5:9). We read in Matthew 28:8, *“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’”* This was said just prior to the Lord returning to heaven after His resurrection. The word ‘authority’ in some Bible versions is translated “power”. It has this dual meaning stressing that the Lord Jesus is supreme in His ability and there is no one greater. The Lord alone can take the scroll and open the seals.

Death

An additional reason for the Lord’s worthiness is stated in Revelation 5:9, *“For you were slain.”* This reminds us of the Lord’s mighty sacrifice on the cross. This sacrifice enables blessing and the forgiveness of sins to all who come to the Lord Jesus in true repentance to accept Him as their Saviour and Lord. It is always right to remind ourselves that the slain One is the Person who is alive for evermore. The Lord Jesus Christ is the risen One and the Lord of life as we have dramatically stated in Revelation 1:18, *“I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.”*

Redemption

The Lord's sacrifice ushers in God's redeeming work, as stated in Revelation 5:9, "*And have redeemed us to God by Your blood.*" It was necessary for the Saviour's blood to be shed on the cross. "Without the blood being shed there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22). The shed blood is the evidence that a sacrifice has been made. As Peter in his first Epistle reminds those to whom he is writing, "*You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

People

The scope of the Gospel is next described for us in this new song: "*Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation*" (Revelation 5:9). No one is excluded from the Gospel. Every person can be saved. Whether people take up God's offer of salvation in Christ Jesus is another matter. The Gospel is Christ centred, what He has done and what He can do for you. A person's repentance must be Christ focused by faith and life changing. Salvation is intensely personal and cannot be achieved for you by anyone else.

Purpose and Reward

In Revelation 5:10 we have this amazing statement regarding this heavenly company: "*And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.*" From this statement, we see that there are two prime functions for this people. These are not titles without any real power or authority. This is intended to convey activity that will involve the heavenly people. The word "kings" needs to be linked with the word "reign" and this reign is with the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Timothy 2:12 states, "*If we endure, we shall also reign with him.*" Paul contrasts present day suffering because we live as Christians in an anti-Christian world, with a future day of reward, reigning with Christ, which will more than compensate for any hardship endured. This thought is referred to again towards the end of Revelation in Revelation 20:6, "*Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.*" This expands on the blessings of the redeemed who gather around the throne in heaven.

The first resurrection is for believers but the second resurrection is for the unbelieving followed by eternal punishment, known as "*the second death*" (see Revelation 20:14). The emphasis in this verse is again on being priests and reigning with Christ.

The second part of the statement, "*and priests to our God*". This is an entirely different function and probably what we would normally think about as our role in heaven the offering up of praise and worship to God and the Lord Jesus Christ. While this is so, it is important to appreciate that as priests now, we can offer that same praise and worship. The redeemed heavenly company, represented here as the twenty-four elders, are the ones who will fulfil the dual role of reigning with Christ on the earth and offering up worship to God.

I will close with the words of a hymn by John Bakewell (1721-1819)

*Paschal Lamb, by God appointed,
All our sins were on Thee laid;
By Almighty love anointed,
Thou hast full atonement made.
All Thy people are forgiven
Through the virtue of Thy blood;
Opened is the gate of heaven,
Peace is made for us with God.*

*Saviour, hail! Enthroned in glory,
There for ever to abide;
All the heavenly hosts adore Thee
Seated at Thy Father's side;
Worship, honour, power and blessing,
Thou art worthy to receive;
Loudest praises, without ceasing,
Meet it is for us to give.*

The Lord's blessing to you and thank you for listening.

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