

"HOW TO STAY AFLOAT WHEN THE BOAT IS SINKING"

Psalm 40:1-8

Do you know what it means to be physically in the pits? Just ask 9

Pennsylvania coal miners. Breaking through into an older mine, a powerful current of water was released, and the miners ran for their lives. Unable to outrun the rising water, they had to return to the original place where they had broken through into the other mine because it was the highest point.

Their noses and mouths slightly above water at times, they tied themselves together, wrote "goodbye notes", and waited for the inevitable. But as they cried out to God and encouraged one another, good things began to happen.

An air vent was created to give them fresh air. A drill team was brought in to make a way of escape. And a wonderful sense of humor buoyed their hopes. One of the guys even joked: "Boy, imagine the overtime pay we're going to get for this!" They were eventually rescued and we all rejoiced.

Now this is just one of the happy endings to what could have been a tragic situation. These 9 miners were some of the more fortunate ones who got out. As you are well aware, not all these stories have happy endings.

Having celebrated our country's independence from Great Britain on the 4th of July just two days ago, I was thinking about the difficulties our forefathers and foremothers must have suffered. As they considered and many decided to fight for freedom there was a cost to pay. The sacrifices they paid were tremendous and, I am sure, they, at times found themselves in the pits of life. Let me explain. Of the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence, 5 were captured by the British and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army. Another had two sons captured. Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the war. Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships sunk by the British navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts and died in

poverty. At the battle of Yorktown, the British General Cornwallis had taken over Thomas Nelson's home for his headquarters. Nelson quietly ordered General George Washington to open fire on the Nelson home. The home was destroyed and Nelson died bankrupt. John Hart was driven from his wife's side as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and mill were destroyed. For over a year, he lived in forests and caves, returning home only to find his wife dead and his children vanished. A few weeks later, he died from exhaustion.

The passage that we read from Psalm 40 is a similar story of being in the pit but there is a rescue, there is a restoration. One day I was on the phone with a dear person who had just experienced the worst week of their life. And my friend said something that went like this: "If I did not have the spiritual foundation that I have gained over the years, I don't know how I would have been able to weather the storm." Now this is a person who is in Sunday school and church every Sunday, unless they are sick.

This is a person who is engaged in small group Bible Study and prayer. The point is this- without a strong spiritual foundation, without the undergirding of God's Word and Jesus Christ in their life; without prayer, the Church and Christian friends, this person would not have gotten through. And so it causes me to ask- the person who doesn't have such a support system, the person who doesn't have the Lord and the Church, how do they make it? How do they weather the storms of life? Or does life seem like one big sinking boat that, every once-in-a-while makes its way back up to the surface for the person to get a gasp of air, to only be thrust down into the depths of their pain, or their issue or circumstance?

You see, smooth waters means smooth sailing- just ask the Roberts family who are big boaters or Bill and Ruth Bartilson. But ask them about rough waters- rough waters test what kind of skipper they are, rough waters test what they are made of and who will command the ship.

Sometimes the waves of life seem to overwhelm us. Sometimes, just like the Psalmist, as he says in verse 2 of our passage, we find ourselves in a pit, no, a desolate pit. So the questions are- will our faith hold us up above the waters of life? Will God's promises hold true? I would suggest to you that, like the friend who had the worst week of their life and came out of it, the way they weathered the storm was because there was a foundation that had been laid over the years. They had stored up important spiritual building blocks in better times to be able to meet, head on, the troubled times of life. And part of **our ability to answer these and other questions may come out of what we have experienced of God in the past.**

But each of us finds ourselves at different places on the spiritual journey. A person new to the Christian faith has the benefit of a fresh faith. The mature Christian has the benefit of an enduring faith. That is why, no matter where we are on this journey called faith, we need to begin or

continue to lay the foundation for the storms of life as well as the celebrations. Because when the blessings of God come our way we can also get caught up in them to the point that we begin to forget God, from whom all blessings flow, and we don't thank Him but take God and the blessings for granted. Do you know what I am saying?

Sometimes in life, we lose our joy. Sometimes in life we lose our song. The bills, the cost of gas, the pressures of life and family or illness, either illness that we are experiencing or a loved one or friend, causes us to lose our song. And we are so down and discouraged that we realize, "Oh my, it has been a long time since I have found myself singing." That is where the writer of our Psalm 40 finds himself. Let's take a look at our passage and see what we can glean from it.

First, **David, who is said to have written this Psalm, Confesses his past experience.** David says in verse 1, "I waited patiently for the Lord." I think there are two crucial words in the beginning of this verse-

waited and **patiently**. Just like his forefather before him, David, like Abraham, he waited patiently and his faith grew. His faith didn't grow and mature over night- it took time, it took years. The Apostle Paul, writing to the church at Rome, speaks of Abraham and those who are the true descendents of Abraham being those who have faith in Jesus Christ, says this, in Romans 4:20-21, "No distrust made him [Abraham] waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."

At times we feel like we have waited patiently but nothing has happened, nothing has changed. We have set our own time table and God is not cooperating. We pray, we fast, we ask- nothing. Even Jesus tells us in Luke 11:9, "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." Jesus tells us to keep on asking, to keep on seeking, and to keep on knocking, in present

imperatives. Friends, we will get an answer, just like David. The answer might not be the one that we would have selected or picked out. And that is where trust has to intercede and take over- to trust God when it make sense, and especially when it doesn't make sense. For as it says in Isaiah 55:8, "For my [meaning God] thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord." Don't give up and give in; wait patiently for the Lord.

Second, **God hears and responds**. "He inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure." David was rescued from, and this is the literal translation, "the pit of tumult" or "roaring." What this might be referring to are the roaring waters which suggests the chaos of death. You see, in the Psalms, the "pit" is often used as a metaphor for death. And so the "pit" and the "miry bog" or "miry clay" could also be representing the underworld of the dead.

The important thing to remember is that God has done something amazing for David in the past. God did not merely rescue David from death, God, in verse 2, "set [David's] feet upon a rock, making his steps secure." What God provided for David was refuge, stability and security. Think of it this way- for David, **salvation is not only to be saved from something, but to be saved for something.** God had a plan and purpose for David, and God has a plan and a purpose for each of us. Some of you might be clearer as to what that plan and purpose is than others. Nevertheless, God has a plan and purpose for us, we need to be an active player on His team and it will become clear or clearer. God will not leave us desolate and in the pit for His power can overcome anything.

We do not know what the context was, what "pit" David experienced that caused David to write this Psalm. Was it one of the times that King Saul turned on David and tried to kill him? Was it when Absalom, David's son tried to have his own father killed so that he could be king?

Was it the time surrounding his adultery with Bathsheba or the death of their illegitimate child? We don't know for sure. But this is a fact- God reached down and rescued him and set his feet upon a rock.

Friends, just as David was rescued from his plight, so Jesus Christ rescues us from sin, and He also rescues us for Himself. Because Christ has a plan and a purpose for us and He is true to His word- He will never leave us or forsake us.

And third, **God gives us a new song**. The song God gave David was not a re-run or a different version of the song he had sung before. It was new. Why? Because the work that God was doing in his life was new. Each situation, each experience where God intervenes has the mark of a new beginning and freshness. So David sings a new song because God is the author of new things, new beginnings, new opportunities, new chances. And so David bursts forth with a new song of "praise to our God" for rescuing him.

What "pit" do you need delivered from, what issue, what crisis, what gnawing problem do you need rescued from today? What do you need to turn over to God today and wait patiently for His intervention? Have you cried out to God with whatever it is that is troubling you, have you reached out to God so that He can take hold of your hand and pull you up out of the pit, out of the stormy waters of your life? And when He has ministered to you, have you gone to Him, praising Him with a new song which tells of His goodness, His grace and His mercy? And have you told others so that they too, can see and hear and put their trust in the Lord? We can stay afloat when the winds and waves and storms of life come rolling down on us-but we must be prepared. With Christ as the cornerstone; with the Word of God, with the Christian community and Christian friends as foundation stones we will be able to stay afloat when the storms of life come our way. And even if the boat sinks, we will not be destroyed. Amen.

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Introduction: Do you know what it means to be "physically" in the pits?

Our country's independence from Great Britain: the difficulties our forefathers and foremothers must have suffered- the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence...

Psalm 40 is a story of being in the pit but there is a rescue, a restoration

Sometimes the waves of life overwhelm us- will our faith hold us up above the waters of life? Will God's promises hold true?

Our ability to answer these and other questions may come out of what we have _____ of God in the past

A look at our passage

First, **David... _____ his past experience**

Vs. 1- two crucial words: _____ and _____

Second, **God hears and _____**

For David, **salvation is not only to be saved *from* something but to be saved _____ something**

The context of the "pit"

Third, **God gives us a new _____**

Conclusion: What "pit" do you need delivered from- what issue, crisis, gnawing problem do you need rescued from today? What do you need to turn over to God and wait patiently for His intervention?