

The Believer's New Song

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, we're looking this morning at Psalm 40 and especially verse 3 of the Psalm where David, the psalmist, speaks of the new song that the Lord has put in his mouth.

And as we ponder the word this morning, there are three groups of people I have particularly in mind as we speak from the psalm on the marks of genuine Christian experience.

These groups are, first of all, those of us who've been Christians for a long time. At the beginning of a year, the first month, it's always good to, in some ways, conduct a spiritual health check.

And I want us to ask ourselves the question, does that new song ring out with as much joy and vitality as it once did as we begin 2021?

And then there are others who may be listening to the service this morning who are exploring the Christian faith. And you, very rightly, are asking the question, what is it like?

[1 : 12] What is the Christian faith like experientially? And this psalm, I think, will furnish you with many of the answers you are looking for. It's a psalm of the experience of the believer.

And perhaps you're listening, thirdly, as someone who has recently come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we trust that as we look at some of the marks of the believer in the psalm, that you'll be encouraged in your heart and that you'll be recognising some of these notes, that you'll be saying, yes, that's true of the way that I feel.

That represents exactly my experience in these early days. Well, perhaps for many of us, the mere mention of a song is something which is painful when we've been prevented from singing in the church.

But a song is how we respond to important events in our lives. When something great happens to people, they don't sit down and write a recipe or compose a proverb, but they do typically break into song.

Think of the exuberance of the Scottish national football team when they qualified for the Euros. Yes, sir, I can boogie was the new anthem.

[2 : 35] Fans sing their song when a goal is scored. We sing in the shower. We've got all kinds of songs which reflect the mood that we're in. And whether or not we're good singers, whether we make a racket when we sing, singing is how we typically express our feelings.

When the saviour of the world was born, angels split the skies with their songs. Song is how we express experience.

Now, the Psalms are holy scripture and therefore they are God's revelation of himself to us. And many of the Psalms, of course, point to Jesus as the Messiah.

And indeed, this Psalm, Psalm 40, is one of these. The letter to the Hebrews in chapter 10 and verses 5 to 7 attributes the words of verses 6 to 8 to the Lord Jesus.

So it's speaking of Jesus as our prototype, if you like, of experience. The Psalm book is also a hymn book given to the church, showing us what we ought to be saying and how we should be saying these things.

[3 : 51] They are a template, therefore, for Christian experience rooted, as they are, both in the experience of the psalmist and the direction of the Holy Spirit.

So let's look at the believer's new song. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him.

This verse, in a sense, acts like a prism refracting the different elements of the believer's experience.

And we see the various components of the new song elsewhere in the psalm. There is a song of deliverance expressed clearly in verse 3.

There is also a song of commitment in other parts of the psalm. And there's a song of proclamation or testimony. The believer has a new song of deliverance, a new song of commitment, a new song of proclamation.

[5 : 00] So let's look at these in turn, beginning with a song of deliverance. If you were to go through your Bibles and were to track the places where the term new song is mentioned, you'd find something interesting.

Typically, a new song is sung at the time of a national deliverance. After a great military victory, for example.

Or, most notably, after the deliverance of Israel in the Exodus at the Red Sea. You remember when the Egyptians pursued Israel and the Lord opened the Red Sea for Israel to pass through.

The waters engulfed the Egyptian army. And Moses and Miriam sang at the bank of the Red Sea in Exodus 15, 1 and 2. I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted, both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.

So when the psalms and other parts of scripture exhort us to sing a new song, they are exhorting us to reflect on God's deliverance in our lives and to acclaim him.

[6 : 17] And David here is describing a time when he was in a desperate situation. He describes it in verse 12 as this, For troubles without number surround me, my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see.

So here is David in deep distress, and he recognises that his distress has been brought about by his sin. He is in what he describes as a slimy pit.

Literally, it's a pit of destruction and a miry pit. There's a powerful image for us to summon up for a moment.

All around you is cold, slimy mud. You're slipping and sliding, and there's nothing to hold on to. Neither is there support for your feet.

Everything is just giving away underneath you. Now perhaps you've actually been in that situation in real life. Perhaps if you're a keen hill walker, you've been on the hills sometime, and you have wandered into a bog, and it's a dangerous thing to wander into a bog or a quicksand, and there's nothing to support your feet, and there's nothing to hang on to to pull yourself out.

[7 : 45] We were walking along the Monkland Canal just the other day in this very cold and bracing weather that we have. Everything was covered with snow, and there was quite deep ice on the surface of the canal.

But there are notices all along the canal warning people not to walk on the ice in conditions like this. And supposing someone was to ignore the warning and was to walk on to that ice, and to find when they had got to the middle of the canal that the water had, the ice had given way, that it was too deep, and there was no bottom to stand on to, and the ice around them was fracturing, and they were unable to get themselves out.

It would be a terrifying situation. And David says that is just what the Lord has delivered him from. He was floundering to his death, and the Lord heard his cry, reached out to him, and lifted him from that miry pit and put his feet on a solid rock.

And what joy David must have felt in the experience of moving from that one of inescapable destruction to the solid rock.

At last, he has a place on which to stand, to know that he was safe. God had delivered him. Now, David's situation is both a description of a particular event, and also a description of the movement from the time before conversion to conversion, post-conversion to the life of the Christian.

[9 : 37] We were rescued by Jesus. And it's not so much that we were obviously way out immoral people, junkies, notoriously immoral, or whatever.

These things can certainly destroy our lives and land us in deep trouble. But for us to limit the miry pit to a life car crash would be to miss the point.

All of us, before coming to Christ, were in a place that would lead to our death, and from which there was no hope of escape other than from God's intervention.

There were no resources within us to deliver us. Now, before they become Christians, most people have a very superficial view of sin.

They don't see it like that. What we tend to do is we tend to compare ourselves to others. And while we're willing to admit that we're not perfect, who's perfect we say, we're not as bad as so-and-so.

[10 : 44] And we kind of think that we will be acceptable enough in God's sight. And in the end, it's only the Holy Spirit that will open our eyes to see just how provoking our sin was, how impossible was the situation in which our sin had landed us.

Once, Paul writes, you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. Colossians 1, 21.

And comparing ourselves to other people? Well, in Romans 1, Paul points out that we're condemned even by the standards with which we judge other people. You therefore have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else.

For at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself. Because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.

So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same thing, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realising that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

[12 : 18] And so whether or not our life had been a car crash, our condition was desperate without Jesus. We were in a slimy pit from which we could not, by our own efforts, escape.

And then we heard the gospel. And then the Holy Spirit enabled us to understand the gospel. And for the first time, we realised that not only could we not escape by our own efforts, we must not try to escape by our own efforts.

That just drives us even deeper. Instead, we needed to look to Jesus to lift us out of the slimy pit.

And not only did we understand for the first time, but we believed that it was true.

We gave assent to this truth. And the Holy Spirit then enabled us to put that into practice, enabled us to place our trust in that truth.

[13 : 26] It was as though we saw a hand reach down to us, the hand of Jesus, and a voice say to us, let go and let me hold you.

And that terrified us. The idea of letting go. All the things on which we were placing our confidence was deeply unsettling. But amazing grace enabled us to let go and to know the grip of the Lord Jesus Christ on us.

The Lord pulled us to himself. The Lord broke down every last remnant of our defences. The stockades of our self-will were breached.

We realised the folly of finding any security in the murky wall of our pit. We give in to Jesus. And in our surrender, we discovered victory. We realised that our sin had been swept away.

Our guilt had been removed. We were no longer alienated, but we were now befriended. The world was different because of Jesus and his cross.

[14 : 43] And we found, like the psalmist, we found a solid place on which to stand. The world had seemed a perplexing place. And we lacked any sense of purpose in being in it.

But now, in Christ and in his word, we have a place to take our stand. We have learned true humility. We are not our own saviour. We never can be.

We learned why Bethlehem and Calvary were necessary. We need Bethlehem because within the scope of humanity, there is no salvation.

God must enter into our humanity for us to be saved. And I need Calvary because my sin is desperately serious.

It's not something that can be dismissed, brushed under the carpet. It is something which is deeply grievous to God and to his holy standards. It requires justice.

[15 : 45] And only Jesus, the sinless son of God, is price sufficient for my sin. And so now I am acquitted.

I am not guilty. And more than that, I have the perfect record of Jesus' goodness given to me. This is the believer's song. This is the sweet sound of salvation.

This is amazing grace that saved a wretch like me. So we have, as Christians, we have a new song of deliverance.

But secondly, we have a song of commitment. Now again, there are parallels in everyday life. In lots of different spheres, we sing songs of commitment, don't we?

Whether that's the song from the football terraces again, you know, you'll never walk alone. Or whether it's singing the national anthem, God save our gracious Queen.

[16 : 43] We sing a song of commitment. And typically no one is coerced into singing a song of commitment. We do it because we want to. Our singing is an expression of our allegiance, of our devotion.

We're delighted to do that. And so it is with the Christian. We want to respond to grace by obedience.

Now, note carefully that we don't obey, we don't commit in order to be accepted. But rather, because we are accepted by grace, we want to commit.

We want to obey. I can't stress how important that order is. Because if we mess up with the order, if we try to commit in order to be accepted, we end up in a dead end.

We end up with self-righteousness. We end up with legalism. But the song of commitment is very different. It's the response of a person who has first of all sung the song of deliverance.

[17 : 58] And so with David. And so with David. Sacrifice and offering you did not desire. But my ears you have opened. But my ears you have opened. Burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.

Then I said, Here I am. I have come. It is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, my God.

Your law is written within my heart. And when David says, Sacrifice and offering you did not desire. He's possibly echoing God's words through the prophet Samuel to his predecessor, King Saul. Saul had disobeyed God's command that he should destroy everything belonging to the Amalekites. And when he was confronted by Samuel, he excused his disobedience by claiming that he had set aside some of the best of the livestock for sacrifice.

To which God says, To obey is better than sacrifice. And to heed than the fat of rams. Now that of course might sound like music to the ears of those who say they have no time for institutionalized religion.

[19 : 21] See, they say God's not interested in that either. He's not interested in religious ritual or sacrifice. Now that's true up to a point. God is not concerned with tick box religion.

He's not concerned with the things that we can do as performance. The things which are outwardly observable. Coming simply to church. Or giving. Or appearing religious.

That's what David is speaking of here. Instead, he is looking for hearts that are intent on pleasing him.

And that is what David now has to offer. He speaks of his ears being opened by God. To what are his ears open? Well, they're open to God's word.

He listens attentively to God's voice in the scriptures because he wants to find out what pleases the Lord. And this song of commitment finds itself expressed in practical Christianity.

[20 : 26] It doesn't evaporate in sentiment or emotionalism. It takes shape in the form of a new patience towards how to get on with people at work.

It takes shape in the form of deeds of kindness to elderly neighbors. Or in returning kindness to the hurts that others may show us.

And this song of commitment comes from deep within the heart. I desire to do your will, my God.

Your law is written within my heart.

Now, every true Christian has an inner desire to please God. With Paul we say, I have been crucified with Christ.

And I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

[21 : 28] So the song of deliverance looks back to the time when Jesus drew me out of the pit of sin. The song of commitment begins every morning when I rise seeking to please my Savior and my God.

This is the impulse of true Christianity. This is religion that God approves. Religion in James' word that God our Father accepts is pure and faultless is this.

To look after orphans and widows in their distress. And to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

So the new song of the believer is first a song of deliverance. Second, a song of commitment. And third and briefly, it's a song of proclamation. We want others to know what God has done for us in Jesus.

David cannot keep this good news to himself. I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly. I do not seal my lips, Lord, as you know.

[22 : 39] I do not hide your righteousness in my heart. I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help. I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness from the great assembly.

Genuine Christian experience always results in our tongues being loosened. So we want to speak about Jesus. Someone said, God has no dumb children.

Now, if somebody says to me, you know, Ivor, my faith is a private thing. I don't like to talk about it. I am immediately nervous about that person.

It's the same kind of person who will at some point say, I don't need to go to church because I can worship on my own wherever I am.

Now, you might be able to pursue an interest in Persian tapestries or Greek cooking or astrophysics on your own and without telling other people about it.

[23 : 45] But that is totally alien to Christianity. God has no private followers, no secret agents, no dumb children.

It would be like falling in love and not telling your best friend about it. It would be like discovering that you had been given an all clear from the illness that had so clouded your thinking and not saying a word about that to anyone.

When we come to faith in Jesus, the most natural thing in the world is to speak about what God has done for us.

Why does God call us to testify in that way? Why does he want us to be open and vocal about our faith? Well, it's so that others may come to faith in the one who has saved us.

God's purposes don't stop with me when I have trusted in Jesus. God wants us to be channels of blessing to others. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.

[24 : 57] Many will see it and fear the Lord and put their trust in him. Now, you don't need to be, by temperament, a wild extrovert to tell of what God has done for you.

You don't need to stand in street corners to preach. You're called simply to be real and natural.

When people talk, when they talk in the office or in the common room, they talk about the things that matter most to them.

Things that they really want others to hear about. And God simply asks us to do the same about the thing which is most important to us, which is most real to us.

For the real Christian not to speak about these things would be strange. And so, let's tell people in the coming week how good Sunday was and what God's doing in our lives.

It might be that they'll look at us askance and ask us what's going on and what an opportunity then to tell them about God's grace. That, after all, is the purpose of singing the new song that others might see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.

[26 : 29] This is the song that God has given believers. This is how his kingdom grows. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for the way that you change lives. We thank you for the desires that you give to us to speak to others of what you are doing in our lives.

We thank you for the joy that you give to us in coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, would you set your people afire again. May we be the letters that are read by those around us.

May the reality of our experience, the vitality of our lives, the sincerity of our words, may they count, Lord, that others might see and fear and trust.

For we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.