

New Year Day Service

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[0 : 01] Turn with me to the psalm that we've read in Psalm 40, and I want to think briefly this morning of the first three verses of the psalm.

Very familiar to us, a psalm that we often sing, and indeed we'll close our service this morning by singing the first verses of the psalm.

And I want to draw your attention to words that we find in the second half of verse 3. We read there, many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.

And I wonder if we could take these words of the psalmist as an expression of our own desire for this year that has begun, that many would see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.

Is this your desire as you begin this year, that in the course of this year we would witness such a thing, that many would see and fear and put their trust in the Lord?

[1 : 15] And indeed, let's not think of that solely as something that could describe others, but that it would be true of us, that we who are Christians would learn what it is to trust in a greater and in a deeper way in the Lord, that we too would see and fear the work of God and put our trust in the Lord.

Indeed, as we think of the congregation we form a part of, and we think of those, and we know that only God knows the heart. But those who, as yet, have not put their trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, that in this year that has begun, many would see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. We think of those whom we love, maybe far from us, maybe living elsewhere, but who as yet do not trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Could these words reflect our heartfelt desire? Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. We think of the neighborhood where God has placed us, the city of Aberdeen where God has placed us to be a witness for Him, that in this neighborhood, among those whom we live, among those whom we work, those who surround us in the different activities of life, with whom we have the opportunity to engage in social interaction and friendship and work together.

Is this the desire of our heart? Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. Well, I hope it is.

[3 : 05] And if it is, then listen carefully to what we want to share this morning. And as we consider how we would answer the question, what is required?

What is required that such would put their trust in the Lord? What is required that we ourselves would place greater trust in the Lord? What is required that others who as yet have not put their trust in Jesus would do so?

What is required? Well, the words that we've been focusing in on give us in great measure the answer to that question. We read, many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.

For them to put their trust in the Lord, there is this need for them to see and having seen, to fear. And note the verb that the psalmist used.

Many will see and fear. He doesn't say many will hear and fear. We might think, yes, if only they would hear the good news of the gospel. If only we could find ways of reaching folk and telling people about Jesus and who He is and what He has done.

[4 : 13] And if only they could hear the message. Then as they hear by the work of the Spirit, they will be persuaded and convicted and put their trust in Jesus. And of course, it is necessary for others to hear.

Indeed, the psalm itself is a psalm where the psalmist recognizes the importance of that. In verse 9, he says, I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly.

I do not seal my lips as you know, O Lord. We're not in any way suggesting that the verbal communication of the truth isn't of great importance that people would hear.

But it's interesting that in this part of the psalm that we're focusing in on, the psalmist does not speak of hearing. He speaks of seeing. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. Which rather begs the question, what must they see? What must they see that would bring them to put their trust in the Lord? Well, what they see is what the psalmist describes for us in the first two verses.

[5 : 17] And what he describes to us in the first two verses is, we might describe it or summarize it in this way, the work of God in the believer. This is what others must see.

And as they see, so they will fear, so they will respect God and trust in God. So let's consider what we have in the first two verses of the psalm.

I think we can divide it in the following way. First of all, what the believer must do. What you must do as a believer in Jesus Christ. And then notice what God does in response.

And then finally, what the believer then does, enabled by God. There's a process, if you wish. What we do, how God responds to what we do, and what we then do, enabled by God.

Let's just think of these things briefly this morning. What must the believer do? Well, to begin with, the first two verses make it very clear that we must recognize our great need of God's help.

[6 : 24] Now, this is graphically illustrated in verse 2. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire. And here, in very graphic, poetic, vivid terms, the psalmist speaks of the great problems that he endured and confronted in his life, problems that he himself could not give a solution to.

And he had to recognize that he was in need of help. Maybe as you consider the year that is concluded. I imagine if you are like most, it has been a year that has had its fair share of problems and difficulties, and maybe many causes, maybe bad decisions that you have taken, maybe sin in your own life, maybe the sin of others that you have been affected by, maybe stubbornness on your part, just stuff that happens that it's difficult to explain why.

People can cause us all kinds of difficulties, as we no doubt cause problems and difficulties for others. But I suppose the question that we want to pose here is, what did you do when you were surrounded by problems, when you found yourself in difficult situations, to whom did you turn for help?

And the answer to that question leads us on to the second thing that the believer must do. not only recognize his need, but cry out for help. I waited patiently for the Lord.

He turned to me and heard my cry. He heard my cry. To cry out for help is not the formality of gathering at a religious ritual and praying, because that's what we do.

[8 : 14] A crying out for help is a heartfelt cry to God for his immediate and urgent help. The verb that the psalmist uses is an intense one, of one who, conscious, deeply conscious of his inability to solve his own problems, cries out to God for help.

This is what we must do. This is what you must do this year. Remember that this is all part of what we must do in order that others would see and put their trust in the Lord.

So we cry out for help. And there's a third thing that we must do that we notice here in the psalm. At the beginning we read, I waited patiently for the Lord.

Again, the idea that is expressed by this word, this verb used by the psalmist is of urgent expectation. As we read it, it can sound somewhat passive.

I waited patiently. But the idea is not in any way a passive thing, but rather an eager expectation of God answering. This is what the psalmist does having cried.

[9 : 26] Or indeed, as he continues to cry, and concurrently, he cries out to God and waits eagerly, expectantly, for the Lord's reply.

And there is a combination here that I think we would do well just for a moment to ask ourselves, honestly, is this true of us? As we would approach God, as we would pray to our God, is there this intensity that we find here in the psalmist who cries out to God?

And is that intensity combined with, concurrent with, a persistence in waiting upon Him? Not passively, but continuing to cry out.

So, this combination of intensity, of urgency, and of persistence and expectancy. This is what we find here. And this is what we are challenged with this morning, that as we speak to our God, as we relate to Him, as we, in conscious recognition of our needs, seek His help, that we would do so in this fashion.

This is what we must do. This is what you must do. If indeed, as we began this morning with the question, is it your desire that many would see and fear and put their trust in the Lord?

[10:55] Well, this is where it begins, that we, God's people, would relate to our God with intensity and passion and urgency and with persistence, crying out to Him, waiting for Him to respond to us.

Will you begin this year in that fashion? But what does God do in response? Secondly, as we follow, in a way, the flow of what we have here in the first two verses of Psalm 40, what does God do in response?

Well, there are several verbs that we can only really mention very briefly in the passing. First of all, He hears. I waited patiently for the Lord.

He turned to me and heard my cry. He heard my cry. Rest assured that the God whom we serve is not a distant God.

He is not indifferent to our condition and to our need. He is not a God who sits aloof in heaven. No, He is intensely and minutely interested in us and concerned for us.

[12:05] He hears our cry. But we're told also He turns or He inclines His ear. And the picture is one of divine condescension that He kneels down that He would hear more carefully what it is we sing.

Often in the midst of great trouble, the prayers that we will bring to God will be seemingly very incoherent and fumbling. But our God inclines His ear that He would listen carefully.

Hence, when we see the order of the verbs used, He turned to me and heard my cry. We might say, well, surely He's got to hear first in order to turn. No, but the idea is that yes, He hears that we're kind.

And then He inclines His ear to listen carefully. That He would hear just what it is. Indeed, that He would discover better than we ourselves what our condition is.

If you were to analyze the words we use, we might say, well, there's not enough information there for Him to go on. But of course, as He inclines His ear, so He discovers what our condition is in a much better way than even we ourselves.

[13:14] No. This is what God does. He hears. He turns. He inclines. He kneels down to listen to us. And then He acts. Verse 2, He lifted me out of the slimy pit.

We are helpless. We cannot extricate ourselves from our predicament, but He lifts us up. He reaches into the pit and lifts us out.

And not content with rescuing us, He then sets our feet on a firm place. He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand, a place of security to stand and look ahead with vision and with confidence.

But He does more. He then, we are told in verse 3, He puts a new song in our mouth. His work is a work that produces joy in the believer.

He gives us the song to sing, a new song to sing. This is what God does. And it is a great work that He does. But He does so in response to our crying out intensely and persistently for help.

[14:27] This is His response to us. And then that leads us on to just note what the believer then does enabled by God.

Here we have the believer in great difficulties in the miry pit, in the slimy pit, and he cries out to God for help intensely and persistently.

God hears and responds and lifts him out of the pit, sets his feet on a rock, establishing his way. What then does the believer do? Well, he does two things.

One that is stated explicitly and one that is implied. First of all, we can say he walks. This rock and firm place that he is placed on is not a rock to stand still on.

He is lifted from the pit, from the mire, and placed on a rock that he might walk forward. Not that he would simply stand there and say, oh, well, this is a much more pleasant place than that horrible pit I've been in.

[15:29] No, this is a place from which I can walk forward, no longer held back by the mire and the obstacles that were in my way.

I'm rather reminded of the occasions a few years ago now when we would walk into the jungle in Peru to visit some distant tribal villages.

It's not something I did much in the latter years of my time in Peru, but in the first few years. And sometimes the paths were really, especially if it had been raining torrentially, they were just mud paths to the point that sometimes you would be literally trapped in the mud.

And then somebody would come, one of your fellow travelers, and maybe one or two would pull you out and find a more solid path. And of course you were very grateful for having been rescued from the mud, but of course you didn't just say, well, that's it, I'm just going to sit down and wait for the day to while away.

No, now was the time to continue on your journey, to reach your destination. And so this is what we must do. Yes, God graciously and powerfully rescues us and takes us out of the pit and out of the mire, but now He sets us on solid ground and He says, now walk, continue on to the destination that you have set before you.

[16:57] the believer walks, and the believer walks with a song in his mouth. The believer also sings, He put a new song in my mouth.

It's really quite remarkable the lens to which God does to enable us. Here I'm talking about what the believer does enabled by God. And in this matter of singing, notice how generous God is.

He even puts the song in our mouth, but we have to sing it. He puts the song in our mouth, but you have to sing it. We're not going to ask Him to sing it also, surely.

He places the song in our mouth. He gives us the joy, but we are the ones who must sing. We are the ones who must sing this song as we walk forward confidently and trusting in Him, singing a new song to our God.

This is what you must do, and as we begin this year, let us so do. Let us recognize our great need. Let us recognize the rescue that God grants us, and let us walk and sing.

[18:07] So, the three stages, if you wish, describe. But I ask you this question, taking us back to how we began by noticing this exciting prospect.

Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. And as you think of those words, and as you think of what we've just described, I ask you this, which of the stages described is visible?

You see, what the psalmist says is many will see and fear. What of what we have described is visible? Is our heartfelt cry to God visible ordinarily?

It is not. Maybe the difficulties we are facing can be visible to others. Maybe, maybe not. But our heartfelt cry, is that visible? No.

Is our persistent prayer, is that visible? No, that's not visible. People can't see that. Is God's work in our soul visible? No, that's not visible. Even His giving us new joy is not a visible thing necessarily.

[19:13] But the final stage, you're walking and you're singing. That must be visible. The walk that you walk, the life that you live, the song that you sing, that is visible.

This is what others see. Of course, there will not be the walk and there will not be the song if there is not that invisible part of recognizing your need, of crying out to God, of receiving from God His gracious rescue.

All this is necessary, but having gone through all of this, this walk and this song must be visible.

This is what others will see. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.

The psalmist speaks of many seeing. And who will see you in this year that we have begun? Who will see that different walk?

Who will appreciate that godly walk? Who will hear the dulcet tones of that new song that you sing?

Who will be challenged and enthused by hearing that song that you sing?

[20:27] Who will see? Your wife should see, your husband should see, your children should see, those you live with must see, your colleagues must see this walk that you walk and hear this song that you sing.

They must see. And as they see, the psalmist assures us, many will see and fear. What does that mean? What it means is that they will recognize that God is at work.

This isn't the product, this walk that you walk, this song that you sing, isn't the product of some self-help program, of some fancy book on psychology that you've read that has turned around your life.

No, they'll say, God is at work here. Here there is something that I can't explain. This is something that speaks of God. And they will fear. They will say, yes, God exists.

God is at work. And this is a God whom I must deal with also. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. They will say, I too want to walk this walk.

[21:32] I too want to sing this song. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. Will God grant that it would be so?

And so let us begin this year recognizing our great and absolute need of God, crying out to Him for help intensely and persistently with the sure confidence that He will hear, He will incline His ear, He will listen, He will lift us up, He will place our feet upon a rock, He will place a new song in our mouth, and then it is for us to walk the walk and to sing the song.
And as we do, so let us assuredly expect that many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.
Let us pray.