

Psalm 40

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[0 : 0 0] Obedience is good, but is it delightful? Maybe speaking as a parent, if I'm being honest, I'll settle for any kind of obedience. To demand or expect delightful obedience is probably just too much of an ask. Now, last week, and really my thoughts for this week were molded by what we were thinking about last week. And last week, especially for the benefit of those who weren't here, we were giving thought to the following words of Jesus to his disciples that are recorded for us in John's Gospel, if you love me, my commands you will obey. If you love me, you will do my will.

Obedying God or doing God's will, we saw, was the means that God has graciously, lovingly established for us to demonstrate our love for God. This is the way that he says, well, you love me and you want to demonstrate, you want to express that love. Well, this is the way that you can do so, by obeying my commands. And we gave some thought to what that was about and what that involved. We also acknowledge that it's not easy, even when we have love as our motivation, even then it's not easy to obey. And we noticed how in the passage we were looking at how Jesus was very aware of that and how help is provided that God himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit combine to help us in our obedience. In the passage that we read, immediately after Jesus commends this to his disciples, if you love me, obey my commands, we then read that he says, and I will ask of my Father and he will send to you another counselor, another helper. So the Son, concerned to help us, asks the Father and the Father sends the Spirit to help us in so many ways, but also in this matter of helping us to obey God, to show our love in this manner. And I want to return to this theme of obedience or of doing God's will, but from another angle, a complementary angle, and that of obedience as a delightful thing. Obedience is not only good, it is delightful. And as I just mentioned a moment ago, as I was thinking about this, my mind was drawn to the words of the psalmist that we find in Psalm 40 that we read just a few moments ago, particularly there in verse 8. And that will be the focus of our attention, though as we think about it, we'll draw together other parts of the psalm, especially what goes before.

Therefore, I desire to do your will, O my God, or as it is often translated, I delight to do your will, O my God. The manner that we're going to think about this declaration, these words of testimony that are embedded here in the heart of this psalm, the manner in which we're going to consider them is by investigating who is speaking. Who is it that declares this? Now, you might say, well, that's a very simple investigation because at the very beginning of the psalm, we're given the answer to that question. But I think as we've discovered in the second reading in Hebrews, we find that the answer to the answer to that question is not one answer alone. We can answer that question, who is speaking, who is testifying, I would suggest in three ways. Or we can identify three characters who are speaking, whose words these are there in the psalm. I delight to do your will, O my God.

The question really is, who is I in that expression? I desire, or I delight to do your will. Who is I?

And there are, as I've just suggested, three answers to that question, or three characters that we can identify as the I of I delight to do your will.

[4 : 51] And I'll say who they are, and then we can think of each of them in turn. First of all, I is David. David is the one who testifies in this manner. So the I of I delight to do your will is the author of the psalm.

It's David. I is David. But secondly, we have every reason to also acknowledge that I is Jesus. We read in Hebrews, and we'll turn to that in due course when we think about this part of the sermon, how the author to the Hebrews attributes these words to Jesus. In fact, he does more than attribute them to Jesus. He actually states that Jesus said when he came into the world.

And he quotes from this psalm, particularly verses 6 and 7. But as we will see when we reach that point, we would have every reason to see the reality of this going beyond verses 6 and 7 through to what is said in verse 8. And particularly these words, I delight to do your will. So I is David, I is Jesus, but then finally, I is you. Now that sounds grammatically rather suspect. I is you. But hopefully in due course, I will explain what I mean by that. I am sure you can work it out yourselves. So three characters to whom these words can be attributed. I delight to do your will, oh my God. David, Jesus, and you. And for each character, we will consider this matter of delighting to do God's will by identifying four aspects of this delight. So if you do the math, that's 12 points really. Three characters and four aspects that we'll look at for each of them. So that's quite a lot of material. And because it is quite a lot of material, we'll not dwell on detail. But I hope that gives you a mental image of where we're going or what we're trying to cover. First of all then, I is David. I delight to do your will. The I there can be identified with the author of the psalm. And that seems so obvious indeed. It is obvious.

This is a psalm of personal testimony. David is declaring unequivocally and explicitly that he delights to do God's will. Well, let's explore this delight that David testifies to. The first thing I want to say, there's four things I want to say. The first thing is this, that David's delight is grounded in gratitude for God's salvation. We mentioned this already just very fleetingly as we were speaking with the children. David's delight is grounded in gratitude for God's salvation. The psalm begins with David testifying to God's salvation. We read there from verse 1, I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire. He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, and so it goes on. David testifies to this great act of rescue that he had been the object that God had rescued him from this dark place. We're not given the details of exactly what his predicament was, but it's clear that it was a place of great darkness and danger, and God rescued him.

And he testifies to this. He says, this is what God has done for me. And he is profoundly grateful to God for this rescue that he has experienced at the hands of God. Whatever his predicament was, it was a place where he could do nothing to save himself other than cry out for help. Cry out for help and wait on God. And it is God who does everything. Indeed, we find verb after verb in these three verses that speak of what God does. God hears David's cry. God turns to David's cry. He inclines his ear. He bent down to hear David crying out for help. God lifts him from that place. He sets his feet on a rock. He puts a new song in his mouth. This is everything that God does. And David is profoundly grateful to God. David is grateful to God for God's wonders in his life. When he speaks in the verses that follow in verses 4 and 5 of the wonders that God has done, certainly, no doubt, he's looking back to what God had done on behalf of his people through history, but he's also thinking about the wonders that he himself has experienced. And he is grateful. He is grateful to God. And this, gratitude is what lies behind his obedience. His obedience and no bare obedience, but delightful obedience is to be explained by his profound sense of indebtedness and gratitude to God.

[10 : 21] So we ask, why is it that David can testify in this way? I delight to do your will. Well, these words are to be understood. They're to be explained in this fashion, or at least in a measure.

David's delight is grounded in gratitude for God's salvation. There's a second aspect to this, and it is this, that David's delight reflects a God-given understanding of God's will. We're talking about David doing God's will. Well, it's a no-brainer that if we're going to do God's will, what we need is to know God's will. We can't do God's will if we don't know what that will is. We can't do God's will with delight or otherwise if we are ignorant of what his will is, of what his commands are upon us.

What does God demand of David? What is God's will for David's life? How can David know? Well, I think there are two elements to this that we find in the psalm. That is what we might call the objective revelation of God's will. And there's also in parallel the spiritual work of God in David's life, enabling him to hear and discern and understand God's will for his life.

So you have objective revelation, but then alongside this you have God working in David, helping him to understand that. Now, where do we find that? Or where do we find these elements in our text? Well, notice how in verse 7 David identifies where it is he can find God's revealed will for his life. Just before he declares that he delights to do God's will, there in verse 7 we read, Then I said, Here I am, I have come, it is written about me in the scroll.

David is talking about doing God's will, and he identifies that where he will discover, where he has discovered what God's will is, is in what he calls the scroll. And I think the most reasonable understanding of what David is referring to in speaking of the scroll is the law, the written law, the Torah, where there God revealed his will. He may be thinking particularly of God's commandments for a king. If David is writing here as a king, then we know there were instructions for him as a king.

[12 : 51] But I think we can expand that more generally to David saying, Well, here I have it. It's in the scroll. What God requires of me is to be found in God's revelation. To bring it to our day, we'd say, It's in the Bible. What is God's will for your life, for our lives? It's in the scroll. It's in the scriptures.

It's in God's word. But then there's also that other parallel aspect of God working in David to help him understand his revealed will.

The objective revelation of God's will contained in the scriptures is not enough. A spiritual work of God is needed in David's life. And it is to this that David refers when he speaks here in this same text of God having pierced his ears. Let's notice there in verse 6.

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced. Burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Focusing in on these rather strange words to our ears.

But my ears you have pierced. You'll have noticed that there's a footnote there in our Bibles that put as an alternative to pierced, opened. And I think that gives the sense of it.

[14 : 14] David acknowledges that his ears had been opened by God. What does that mean? Well, what it means is that God had so worked in David that he was able, enabled, to understand what God was saying.

It was in the scroll. You could read it. It's there. An objective revelation of God's will. But for David to receive that and to understand it and to apply it, it was necessary for God to open his ears and see what was being said in the scroll about himself, concerning himself and God's demands upon him. He has the scroll and he has the Spirit, the Spirit of God enabling him to hear and to understand. And the discernment afforded by the Spirit of God to the content of the scroll leads David to one conclusion. The very law or will of God that he is called to do is itself delightful.

It's not just the doing of God's will that's delightful, but God's will itself is a delightful thing. And David discovers that to be true. We find the language of a believer delighting in God's law so repeatedly in the Psalms, and very particularly in Psalm 119. Time and time again, this is the testimony of the psalmist that he delights in God's decrees. And having discovered what they are, having seen that they are about him and about what God is requiring of him, so in turn, he delights in doing God's will, in obeying God's commands. So that's the second aspect of this regarding David, delighting in God's will. But the third aspect that I want to suggest is this, that David's delight is expressed in sacrificial service. What kind of sacrifice is asked of David? Well, David is very clear in the passage on the sacrifices that are not required. Verse 6, sacrifice and offering you did not desire. And then at the end of that same verse, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.

Now the first response to that we might think is, well, hang on, I thought they were required. Indeed, in Hebrews, that's precisely the question that's posed, or the statement that's made, that yes, in a sense, they were required. God had required these sacrifices in the Old Testament. But the point that's being made here is that the mere offering of sacrifices alone was not sufficient. A greater sacrifice is asked of and required of and given by David. What is that greater sacrifice? Well, it is the sacrifice or offering of himself. Then in verse 7, having acknowledged that the sacrifices that God had established alone are not sufficient, that they need to be accompanied by something greater, what does he immediately go on? He immediately go on to say, then I said, here I am. Here I am. And what do these words speak of? Well, they speak of David's offering up of himself to the service of God. And yes, by all means, he will bring the sacrifices that have been appointed. But behind that willingness, there is this greater sacrifice, this offering up of himself. David's delight in doing God's will involves this offering up of his whole being to the service of God. And then the fourth aspect that we can notice is this, that David's delight is evidenced, or sorry, David's delight is evidence of a renewed heart. Now, we touched on this a moment ago when we recognized the need for a spiritual work of God opening at David's ears. But of course, his ears represent much more than a mere capacity to hear words. This is the language of spiritual discernment that comes with a renewed heart. And this renewed heart David speaks of and identifies as essential to delighting in doing God's will. Indeed, that is precisely what he says immediately following his declaration. I delight to do your will, O my God, your law is within my heart. God's law, God's will is not only written on a scroll or engraved on tablets of stone, it is written and engraved on David's heart. And of course, this language points forward to the blessings of the blessings of the new covenant. We'll come to that in a moment. But David is able to testify to this as his own experience. David's delight in doing God's will is evidence of a renewed heart.

But the words of the psalm are to be attributed or assigned not only to David, but prophetically and revealingly to Jesus also. The I of verse 8, I delight to do your will, is an I that also points to Jesus.

[19:37] Jesus is speaking. Now we've read the passage in Hebrews where the writer places on the lips of Jesus the words of this psalm, and very particularly verses 6 and 7. Now, for those of you who are paying careful attention, you might say, well, hang on a minute, in Hebrews verse 8, and very particularly this statement, I delight to do your will, isn't included in the text of Hebrews. And that is true. But I think it's entirely legitimate for us as we recognize the manner in which the writer to the Hebrews draws from the psalm verses 6 and 7 and says this is something that Jesus said when he came. Entirely reasonable for us to draw from that, that what follows, that is integral to the message of the psalm, these words, I delight to do your will, are also words that we can reasonably also attribute to Jesus. Can we for a moment doubt that the words and the sentiments of verse 8 cannot be rightly attributed to Jesus? In fact, it would be difficult to imagine words that would be less fitting or difficult to imagine words that would not be more fitting on the lips of Jesus than these words, I delight to do your will, O my Father. We're reminded of words that Jesus addressed to his disciples.

We find them recorded in John's gospel in chapter 4 and in verse 34, my foot is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Jesus echoes the words of David. Jesus also takes to himself these words, I delight to do your will. So let's explore Jesus speaking in this fashion. And we'll follow roughly the pattern that we've already established when we were thinking of David. The first thing we'd say about Jesus in regard to this is that Jesus' delight is grounded in gratitude for the work of salvation commended to him. Now here there is very clearly a contrast with David. Jesus, unlike David, has no reason to be grateful for being saved, for being rescued, but is grateful for the saving work the Father has no reason to be saved. Jesus came to do the Father's will. And his Father's will was nothing less than the salvation of sinners, our salvation, a salvation to be secured by Jesus' atoning death.

And Jesus is grateful for this high calling and his delight is in doing his Father's will. I'm reminded of what we're told of what Jesus did when he instituted the Lord's Supper on the very night that he was betrayed. What do we read there? He took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is for you. Jesus is grateful not only for his calling, but for the very body provided for him by the Father to fulfill his calling. And we'll return to that in a moment, because in the manner in which the writer to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 40, there is this curious difference in vocabulary where he introduces this idea of a body you have prepared for me and attributes those words to Jesus. Jesus is grateful for the task he's been given and the equipment, if you wish, his own body with which he can fulfill his mission. So Jesus delights in doing the Father's will also as an expression of gratitude.

But also Jesus' delight reflects his commitment to do the Father's will. In verse 7, the writer places on the lips of Jesus on the lips of Jesus the words, I have come to do your will. Then we've moved to Hebrews here where the writer is quoting from Psalm 40. And then in verse 7 of Hebrews 10, right at the end there, we have these words attributed to Jesus, I have come to do your will, O God.

And this will that he had come to do for Jesus was also to be found in the scroll. It is written about me in the scroll. If that was true in some measure, as I would contend it very much was of David, how much more was this true of Jesus? How much more could Jesus take these words and say, it is written of me in the scroll? For the scroll, the Torah, the Scriptures, full of Jesus.

[24 : 35] The scroll is full of prophetic announcement and foretelling of the coming and saving work of the promised Messiah. We know that to be true for so many reasons. If we just fix our minds on one occasion after the resurrection, we remember it well when we're told of Jesus that he came alongside these disconsolate disciples on the road to Emmaus. And we're told that as he spoke to them, this is what he did, that beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Here I am, it is written about me in the scroll.

Jesus' delight in doing God's will reflects his knowledge of and commitment to do the Father's will. But Jesus' delight is expressed in sacrificial service. And really here we come to the heart of the matter in regard to Jesus and in regard to the manner in which the words of the psalm are used by the writer to the Hebrews. In the passage there in chapter 10 of Hebrews, the inadequacies of the sacrifices instituted by God as part of the ceremonial law is also recognized as it is recognized in Psalm 40. The very words are repeated sacrifice, an offering you did not desire with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. So we find that message in the psalm, we find the message repeated here in Hebrews. But the question then is, well, what's the alternative? If these sacrifices are inadequate, what is the alternative? And the alternative is the once for all offering of Jesus.

Notice what the language of the psalm attributed explicitly to Jesus tells us about that whole life offering and what it involved. This offering of Jesus to the Father and to do the Father's will, what did it involve? Well, let me suggest two things. No doubt there are more, but two things that we can draw from the text. First of all, it involved Jesus coming. It involved his incarnation. In the psalm, and it's repeated in Hebrews, we have these words, here I am, I have come to do your will. Now, David could utter these words falteringly, knowing his own limitations, but he could honestly say that.

It was true of David. But Jesus, as the coming one, he could supremely say and did say, I have come.

Jesus was, in the words of Martha, when there was this dialogue between Jesus and Martha in the context of the resurrection of Lazarus, Martha was able to say of Jesus that he is the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world. And in the words of Jesus himself, also found in John's gospel, for I have come down from heaven, not to do my will, but the will of him who sent me.

[27 : 51] So this sacrificial service of Jesus that he delights in doing involves coming. It involves incarnation. But it also involves dying or sacrifice. It was not enough for Jesus to come.

It was not enough for Jesus to be at the entire disposition of the Father, commendable though that is. Jesus had to die. The inadequacy of the sacrifices of the Old Testament did not point to the inadequacy of sacrifice per se, but pointed to the need for a perfect sacrifice, a sacrifice that could take away sins in a manner that the blood of bulls and goats could not. And this is the sacrifice that Jesus offered of himself as he offered the body prepared for him. There in Hebrews in chapter 10 and verse 5, sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me. And it is this body prepared for Jesus that is offered up as the once and for all sacrifice. Now these words attributed to Jesus, a body you prepared for me. They are a little intriguing in that they differ from the corresponding words in Psalm 40. The corresponding words in the order of the quote in Psalm 40 would be, my ears you have pierced, or my ears you have opened. And it's as if that little phrase is replaced in the manner that it is employed here in Hebrews by this other expression, but a body you prepared for me. So that in itself is somewhat, let's call it intriguing. It might even be disturbing if we were a little bit worried about what is going on. Now we have to recognize that it's not uncommon for New

Testament writers to modify Old Testament quotations in a manner that suits their purposes. That's something we find quite often. They do this, of course, as they're directed by the Holy Spirit, and this is what happened on this occasion. But there is a further aspect to this, or a further twist, in that the language that we find here in Hebrews, but a body you prepared for me, is in fact the language that we find in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, that was translated before Jesus came, before the incarnation, before the events of His saving work. And so it's intriguing that in a translation that predates the coming of Jesus, there seems to be already an anticipation of the appropriateness of this particular expression, even though it does seem to differ so significantly from the psalm from where it is quoted.

Well, we could dwell longer on that, but there's probably not great profit in thinking too much more about those details. The important thing to acknowledge is the big picture is that God the Father provided His Son, provided His Son, provided Jesus with a body, not only that in the incarnation the Son of God might wholly identify with us, that He might take flesh, that He might become a man, but that supremely this body might be offered as a sacrifice for sin, for your sin and my sin. So Jesus' delight is expressed in sacrificial service. It involves His coming, and it involves His dying, His offering up of this body prepared for Him. And then the fourth aspect of this with regard to Jesus is that Jesus' delight secures for us renewed hearts. We said of David that His delight is born of a renewed heart. It flows from a renewed heart.

Well, Jesus' delightful service secures for us such renewed hearts. Now, we won't dwell on this. Suffice it to say that the renewed hearts that we've already identified in David as necessary for us to serve God with delight, they're secured for us by the saving work of Jesus. So the words of the psalm can be attributed to David, the author of the psalm. They can be attributed prophetically to Jesus, as the writer to the Hebrews does, but they can also be attributed to you. These are words that, as believers, we can take upon our own lips. And indeed, as David writes, I think it's reasonable to take the view that he has in mind that others would take these words on their own lips. In this matter, the reformer Calvin has something to say precisely about that, the passage there in Psalm 40, and these very words of David. And he says this,

[33 : 03] David did not speak in his own name only, but has shown in general what belongs to all the children of God. He then goes on, but when bringing into view the whole body of the church, it is necessary that he should refer us to the head itself. Indeed, in that one quote, he's identifying these three characters.

He's saying David is speaking. David is declaring, I delight to do your will. He's recognizing that the head of the church, Jesus, is also speaking. I delight to do your will. But he's also acknowledging that these are words for all believers. They're words for you to declare and to testify. I delight to do your will. And really just picking up on some of the themes we've already picked up on, we can think about this much more briefly because we're drawing on what we've already said. I is you. Your delight or your delightful obedience is, with David, grounded in gratitude. We too have been rescued from a deep pit and from miry clay, and it is out of a sense of our gratitude that we can delight in doing God's will. Before we move on, I need to ask you the question, is that true of you? Have you experienced God's rescue, God's salvation in your life? Because in the absence of that experience, then it will be impossible for you to delight in doing God's will. Delighting in doing God's will is born of and grounded in an experience of God's salvation. And in the absence of that, where would the gratitude be? And so for us to, in order that we might delight in doing God's will, it's necessary for us to have experience and to acknowledge and be grateful for God's saving work in our lives, rescuing us from our sin and forgiving our sin. Your delight, again with David, will reflect your understanding of God's will. With David, we have the revealed will of God objectively provided for us in the scroll, in the Bible. It's there for us to read and discover and understand. But also with David, we need our ears to be opened. We need God by his Spirit to open our ears that we would understand what it is that God reveals concerning himself and his will in the Bible. Your delight will be expressed in sacrificial service. Jesus serves as an example for us in this, but only in a measure. You see, there's no longer a need for us to offer an atoning sacrifice for sin. Such a sacrifice would be beyond our capacity to offer, but more importantly, it's no longer necessary. In the words of the hymn,

Jesus paid it all. His sacrifice is sufficient. We don't need to offer a sacrifice of that nature, but we are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice in view of God's mercy. In the neighborhood fellowships, we're going through the book of Romans, and on Thursday, it happened to be in the fellowship up north, Aberdeenshire North, and it happened to be in, I think it was chapter 4 of the the study guide, and that involved looking at Romans chapter 12. Of course, the beginning of that chapter really speaks of this so appropriately there in Romans chapter 12 and verse 1. We have this rationale given for our offering ourselves up as a living sacrifice, and the rationale is indeed one of gratitude. Romans chapter 12 and verse 1, therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, in view of God's mercy, in view of all that God has done mercifully for you to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual or reasonable act of worship.

Jesus was given a body. A body was prepared for him that he would offer it up as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Well, we too have been given a body, and this body that we have been given, we are to offer it up as a living sacrifice in service to God in view of his great mercy towards us.

And then to follow the pattern of what we've been seeing, we can end by saying that our delight, your delight, your delight in the service of God, in obeying God, flows from a renewed heart.

[37 : 52] David delighted in doing God's will, for God's law was, in his own words, within his heart. Jesus, by his saving work on the cross, has secured for us renewed hearts, hearts that delight in doing God's will. This is, of course, a central privilege of the new covenant as announced by God through Jeremiah and through Ezekiel. We think of the words of God through Ezekiel, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

This new heart, this renewed heart from which flows delightful obedience, an obedience that is, for us, that which we desire, that allows us to echo and make our own the words of the psalmist, I delight to do your will, O my God. Delightful obedience. That is what we are called to.

And it is possible as we acknowledge all that God has done for us, as we benefit from his saving work on our behalf, a renewed heart that we've been given, as we understand his will revealed to us, as it's opened up to us and illuminated for us by God's spirit. So we too can declare with David, I delight to do your will. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We do thank you for this objective revelation that we can pick up and open and read. We thank you for the Bible.

We thank you that there you reveal yourself and you make known what it is that you demand of us, what your will for us is. We can say of the Bible that within it we are spoken of. It is written there of me, of what God would have me do, of how God would have me serve him. We thank you for that. We thank you that by your spirit you can help us to understand and apply to our own lives what your call upon us involves and what your will for us is. Lord, we do pray that you would help us then to increasingly know something of the spirit and of the sentiment of the psalmist and indeed of Jesus himself that we would be able to honestly, perhaps tentatively, perhaps with a sense of trembling even in our lips, but that we would be able to declare, I delight to do your will, oh my God.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.