

April 27

Psalms 40, 49, 50, 73

You'll notice just ahead of Psalm 40, it's written: FOR THE DIRECTOR OF MUSIC. OF DAVID. A PSALM.

You would probably agree with me that with my role in the church, I had better look a bit closer at some of these Psalms! In the original versions of the Psalm manuscripts, there are blocks of information that precede the actual song in many of the manuscripts. This information is referred to as superscriptions,

**Def. superscription - text that precedes the main body of the song**

We find primarily technical, descriptive terms and phrases that relate to the work they are attached to. Similar to the header or title section information found on contemporary sheet music, this information includes such things as: song title, type of work, author/composer, dedication, performance directions, instrumentation, and purpose of manuscript. However, unlike the header information found on contemporary sheet music, the superscriptions function as a musical introduction to the main body of the song itself and was sung.

The superscriptions or introduction for Psalm 40, our first Psalm today, clearly identifies David as the author and while these superscriptions are, as I mentioned, not part of the inspired text, they are probably correct in their identifications of authorship and other information given. They probably meant to tell the choir director or worship leader which tune to use when singing this particular Psalm.

Psalm 40 opens with:

**1. He had been plunged into a horrible pit** and into miry (swampy, muddy) clay out of which he could not work himself, and in which he found himself sinking yet further. He says nothing specific as to whether his problem was physical or emotional or maybe insults from his enemies...but we know whatever the problems he was facing must have caused him great misery and even depression. For those who have faced depression, it's a fair comparison to feel as if you're in a deep pit of clay and no matter how hard you try you just can't climb out.

**2. He was full of faith and expectation from God**, never doubting help would come. God has the power to save even the weakest, and bring grace to rescue even the most unworthy He brings help to all who trust in Him.

**3. God answered David's prayers:** *He inclined unto me and heard my cry.*

And after being rescued, *"He put a new song in David's mouth"*. I'm sure many of you could share your own story of God pulling you out of the miry clay. I encourage you to share your story. Be of encouragement to someone today. I believe there is someone you'll run into today that needs to know God is faithful and He is mighty to save.

I'm not sure how old you are, but I remember "Testimony Nights" at church, usually on Sunday evenings. We'd sing some great hymns like, *Victory in Jesus* and *I Love to Tell the Story*. The biggest difference on these nights was NO preaching. Instead we would have some microphones in the aisles and worshipers would come up to the closest microphone and share a "word of testimony". One by one, first shy, then eagerly, they would tell their stories. And often you would hear "Amens" from the congregation.

There is something about testimony that even the best preaching cannot accomplish. You can argue theology, but you cannot argue with personal experience. Life is hard and many times discouraging. To hear someone stand and say, "God is faithful and He's done this for me!" is reassuring. It is heartening. It strengthens our faith. And for the community of believers, it is cause for rejoicing!

Psalm 49 really caught my attention. Most of us, I suppose have at least a little susceptibility to the craving of just a little more material wealth than we already have. Even though the Bible exhorts us to be content with what we have, but every once in a while I get "Tevye's disease". Do you remember Tevye, the milkman in "Fiddler on the Roof" who amuses himself in the midst of his work by singing "If I were a rich man, liddle-diddle-diddle-day ..."? Mark this Psalm down in your brain or your notebook because the next time you find yourself envying the wealthy family on the other side of town or daydreaming for long periods of time about why you and you alone deserve to be the Publisher's Clearing House's next ten million dollar winner, you will need to return to the 49th Psalm.

*<sup>10</sup> For all can see that the wise die, that the foolish and the senseless also perish, leaving their wealth to others. <sup>16</sup> Do not be overawed when others grow rich, when the splendor of their houses increases; <sup>17</sup> for they will take nothing with them when they die,*

This sounds a lot like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, but it is the 49th Psalm. The idea that God will deal justly with those who do not honor Him is one that ties Psalms 49 and 50 together. In the 50th Psalm God addresses two groups of people – the righteous – the consecrated ones, and the evildoers who pretend to give allegiance to God but who in fact are thieves, adulterers and slanderers. The second half of the Psalm in which the Lord addresses the hypocrites who recite His laws but cast His words behind them is straightforward and unmistakable— God says they cannot fool Him, that their actions have not gone unnoted and that His silence which they must take for ignorance, tolerance or weakness is only temporary. He will judge them!

The first portion of the chapter, however, demands a second glance because while He promises to deliver them and says He will not rebuke them, what follows sounds very much like a rebuke: *<sup>9</sup> I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, <sup>10</sup> for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. <sup>12</sup> If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. <sup>13</sup> Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?* If that is not a rebuke, then what is it?

The answer to that question is that it is a reminder. Israel was doing what God had commanded. They were bringing sacrifices to the Lord. But not for His benefit, for theirs.

That was what they sometimes misunderstood. They were doing what they were supposed to do. God was honored by that and He promises to honor them for their faithfulness. What He **does** want them to remember is that sacrifices were never intended to be the most important thing to God. In fact, they are not **for Him**. **They are for us**. Remember the words of the prophet Samuel to King Saul: "To obey is better than sacrifice." There it is again, another reminder of the importance of obedience above sacrifice.

As I told you a few days ago, I'm wrestling with what that means for my personal life. I encourage you to reread and ponder Psalm 50. And then follow that up with Samuel's words: "To obey is better than sacrifice".