

Waiting patiently

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. It's great to be with you this morning. It's great to be with the privilege! of bringing our last psalm of the summer to you this morning. I want to start with a fairly well-known quote that some of you will go, oh yes, this rings true in my life. That is only by looking back do we understand our life. It's only when we look back do we understand our life.

A guy called Soren Kierkegaard from the 19th century Danish philosopher, he said that and it rings true doesn't it that when we look at our life we can't really make sense of it when we look back. And now I said to you where have you seen God in action you would come up with some things from your past because it's impossible to say where I'm going to see God in action and it's really hard also to see God in action in that singular moment of our lives. And so we often understand our faith in reverse by looking back at how we have seen God in action. For me when I want to talk about how I've seen God most clearly when he's been most present and explaining life and I see him in control I look back to when I was in my late teens and I was down in Cornwall and it was a Methodist Association of Youth Clubs weekend and I was there with our youth group and it was the first weekend that I had met Samantha my now wife. In that weekend I met Samantha and I thought she was brilliant and I set about spending my whole time trying to convince her that I wasn't dull and boring and that I was interesting and that maybe she might be interested in me. That became a bit of a mission.

But also in that weekend I read the call of Jeremiah out to over 2,000 other young Christians and whilst I was reading that call I became aware that that was a call for me. That I would at some point be a preacher. That even though I thought I was very little and didn't have a lot going for me at some point I would be doing this. That weekend was just great. We ate pasties. We stepped on church floors and I didn't really think that much about it. It's only when I look back I see that God not only told me what he wanted me to do in the future he also told me who I was going to do it with. And I'm sure if I got you to have a chat you would say yeah I have those moments in my life where I understand God in action both in the good times and the bad times where he starts leading me, where he directs me, where he supported me and upholds me. That's how we understand it. Our psalm today, Psalm of David, he helps us understand how he sees life.

I was really tempted to go through this verse by verse because it's great but there's 17 verses and Dave said to me that I couldn't take my normal 25 to 30 minutes so we're going to go quick.

The first three verses are David talking about how he has seen God act in the past. I waited patiently for the Lord and he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and the mire and he set my feet on a rock. David remembers the past. He remembers when God has acted and do you see in verse 3 he rejoices for that action.

[3 : 5 2] When has God lifted you out of a slimy pit? I presume that when David talked he wasn't actually talking about a literal slimy pit. He might have been talking about a point in his life where life was hard. And so we see that rescue in the past. And then verses 4 and 5 have a sense of reflection.

Can I continue to trust God? What does it mean to be somebody who trusts in God? Blessed. That word in Hebrew has a sense of being happy. Happy is the one who trusts in the Lord.

If you're somebody who trusts in the Lord you'll be happy. David looks out at people and says those who trust in the Lord they will find joy. Those who do not look to the proud, who don't turn aside to false gods. Back in David's time finding different gods was just like going shopping.

Like you know oh we're done with this God he didn't help us when we thought he would. We're now going to go to Asherah, we'll go to Baal, we'll go to this God, we'll find the next one, we'll put a pole up for that person, we'll put a temple up for that person. We saw in the Old Testament that it didn't take the Hebrew people too long. Even when Moses was up the mountain, by the time he came back down they'd made a golden calf to Baal because choosing your gods is quite easy and it's nice for us sometimes we look back and go yeah we're not like that are we? We don't find new gods easily. We're Christians and we follow our God. As long as it doesn't interrupt the TV, me going out with my friends, buying that new device, so earning money, having a good holiday. I don't have idols, I'm fully with God but as long as it doesn't interrupt my coffee on a Wednesday, as long as it doesn't make a difference and make stop me going out and doing that thing, I'm all for God. So I want you to think about this, that this isn't just about people 3,000 years ago finding idols. You and I are similar to them. We might wear different clothes, wear different clothes, live in a different era but we're similar to them.

So if you can continue to trust in God, what happens? Well we've seen 6 to 8, there's a sense of what does God want from us? What does he need from us?

[6 : 29] Now it's really interesting the translation here that you heard, but my ears you have opened. The Hebrew for that word is pierced. It's a really definite action and brutal. God has done something brutal to make you hear his voice. He has pierced your ears, not just like the lobe, the pretty bit, like literally opened, jammed something in so that you will hear him. I think the NIV here that we've got kind of waters it down maybe a little bit and says, oh my ears you have opened, oh that's lovely.

But actually the word is pierced. He has done something really definite. Burnt offerings and sin offerings you don't require. Is that really strange in a time when offerings would have been really normal? That here's David saying, that's not what God wants.

God doesn't need all your offerings and stuff like that. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying don't put something in the plate today. But he's looking for more than just something brought to an altar. He's not looking for more than that. He's looking for something that is bigger than all of that. 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 within my heart. The sense here of David is that it's both himself and there's a bit of, we see Christ in this. Always when I'm reading the Old Testament, I'm trying to think of like, how do we see Christ revealed in this? And the one who has been perfect in living their life with their ears open to the Lord, the one who follows everything and says, here I am, I will go and do everything that my Lord requires of me, that God needs of me, whose law was perfect and followed it, was Christ. And so David here both says, this is my aspiration. My aspiration is, here I am, I've come. I know that I desire to do your will, my God. I know that your law is written in my heart. But actually, there's a sense here that this is not just for him, but it's a sense that the Messiah will do this perfectly. And that's who we're seeking to follow. And if you care to reference that, you'll see this passage is referenced, Psalm 40, in Hebrews 10, verses 5 to 10. You can check that up as a bit of homework if you fancy. And then there comes a proclamation in verses 9 and 10.

I proclaim your saving acts to the great assembly. I do not seal my lips, Lord, as you know. I wonder how many times you've had God act in your life and you've gone, oh, I prayed about that and God did something and that was great. But you don't bother sharing with anybody because you think, oh, people aren't going to be interested, are they? They're not going to want to know about my life.

They're not going to know that I think that there's a God that exists. So I'm just going to keep that secret. Or maybe you say, actually, my faith is for me and I've been taught very well that we keep our faith private. It's just one of those things we don't talk about politics, we don't talk about faith because that's a private thing. Well, the Bible doesn't really allow you that. The Bible says, if you know that God has acted in your life, if you know that he has been present in something, if you know he has done something, you are to proclaim it in the great assembly. The great assembly is all people, by the way. That's what they mean by the great assembly. When all of the people of, all of the Hebrew people came together, that's the great assembly. You're to proclaim the mighty acts of God. So essentially what we'll be told here is if you know God has acted in your life, you are to go into the town centre and tell people. That sounds a bit scary, doesn't it?

[10:33] I've seen people saying, Gareth, I'm not really up for that. You can take my money and I'll do the offering thing, but I'm not really up for the proclaiming God's work thing. That's what God requires. You don't necessarily have to start big, by the way. We're not really asking you today if that's really worrying you. Maybe start by telling your friend or your neighbour what God has done for you.

Telling somebody you know you would like to see come to faith, tell them. Tell them the next time you pray for something and God answers. Share that with a non-Christian you love, who you would love to see come to church and see how that changes their view. Proclaim it. Do not let your lips be sealed.

Don't hide your righteousness. So it's not a private faith. We could end there, couldn't we? David could have ended there. He could have said, that's it. The psalm is written. All is well.

But 11, he comes back again. Do not withhold your mercy from me, Lord. May your love and faithfulness always protect me. For troubles without number surround me. Oh my goodness, it's come back again.

The sin that David talked about, Dave talked about in the beginning about our seeking forgiveness. The reason why we do it regularly is because we completely get it wrong regularly and we keep after coming back. This isn't a one-time only thing you notice in this psalm. David starts at the beginning by saying, God has rescued me from the slimy pit. But now we see he's back in another slimy pit.

[12:10] How many of us live that life from pit to pit to pit to pit to pit? Perpetually, it feels like. And this sense, and I love this idea, that our sins are so bad that they have overtaken me.

They've outrun you. Wherever you go, they surround you and they outrun you. There is no way you can get away from your sins. Do you need rescuing again? I think that's the common story of a Christian, is this consistently needing to be rescued.

He then gets a little bit frustrated that it feels like, verses 13 to 15, that if, come to save me, Lord, come quickly, Lord, come to my help. Because there's lots of people around me that are battering me and making my life hard. And he wants to say to God, God, I don't mind if it's you who's bringing me low. I don't mind if it's you, if our relationship, if that dialogue, you're telling me that I'm feeling low because you're telling me the things I'm doing bad. But don't let it be the other people. Don't let it be life. Come and look after me in my life.

Because I know that you are my help. And then again, so we go through a cycle. The first three kind of blocks. Rescue, celebration. I don't want it to happen again.

And then we come back. I need rescue from my enemies. And then we come back to the joy again. But for me, I am poor and in need. May the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer. You are my God. Do not delay. He knows that God will come and rescue him again.

[14 : 03] So what does this mean for us? Well, Kirkhard's insight at the beginning helps. We don't have the luxury of living life backwards, do we? We don't have the luxury of that, of seeing everything that's coming. We live forwards in faith, informed and strengthened by what we have seen God do before.

Kirkhard's full quote goes something like this. It is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards. And if one thinks over that proposition, it becomes more and more evident that life can never really be understood in time, simply because at no moment, no particular moment, can I find the necessary resting place for which to understand it. If we think about it truly, we can see the things that have happened in the past. We have no idea what happens in the future. And we can never seem to stop to fully understand what that means for us in the present.

Jesus comes and he gives us some help. He says in John, in that chapter of John, that if you come to him as the shepherd, if you put your trust in him to lead you, you don't have to worry about the backwards and you don't have to worry about the forwards, because the shepherd will lead you wherever you need to go.

The good shepherd will look after you. And that great verse, half a verse at the end of verse 10, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. That's for all of you here today.

You can have life in its fullness if you put your trust and your hope in Jesus. And that stops you having to do the worrying about the backwards and the forwards and the present and all that.

[15 : 55] give your life to him. Put your trust in him daily, an ongoing thing, every morning, every evening, every action, every choice. Put your trust in him to lead you on the path that he wants to take you.

And then celebrate with new songs and new joys at the end. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can look back and see you in action. Thank you that you give us the ability to see where you have acted. But Lord, we pray today that you would give each of us a new revelation of you walking with us, that we may be freed from the worries and the anxieties of Psalm 40 and instead live in the joy of John chapter 10, verse 10, that we might have life today and life in all of its fullness.

So help us to come to you afresh today, Lord, and to place our life into your hands, the Good Shepherd. Amen. Amen. Thank you.