

Psalm 41

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[0 : 00] And turn to Psalm 41. Now I said to you last week, I've said that many times preaching from the Psalms, the Psalms have a threefold focus.

There's the original one, here we have a Psalm of David, it says at the beginning to the choir master, he's setting it to music, here are the verses that King David has written.

And then, all scripture speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, all scripture testifies of him. So where is the reference here to great David's greater son, the Messiah, our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we will see that Jesus in fact quotes from one verse in this Psalm. And then the application to us. The application to us.

This is a poem. And then we can in fact work out some things about the context when it was first written.

[1 : 12] And we can also see some things about its structure. I'm going in fact to divide it into three parts and then there's a concluding postscript.

The concluding postscript in verse 13. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting, Amen and Amen. Is not just the ending of this Psalm.

It's the ending of this, the first book of Psalms. And if you look ahead and see where the Psalter is divided in different books.

You will find that each book ends with a similar doxology. So for example in Psalm 72.

We read. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever. May the whole earth be filled with his glory.

[2 : 15] Amen and Amen. The prayers of David, the son of Jesse are ended. Blessed be the Lord, the Lord of Israel. So at the end of each book, each section of the Psalter, there is a doxology.

Blessings pronounced upon the Lord, our God, the God of Israel. So verse 13 stands as a conclusion of this and of the Psalms that have gone before.

And then that leaves us with the other 12 verses. And I would suggest that they start with the first three verses.

A promise. The blessed man. The promise for the blessed man. Then from verse 4 to 10, there's a prayer. It's the prayer of a sinner who is suffering.

One who has been betrayed. And then at the end, verses 11 to 12, is praise.

[3 : 20] Praise for the psalmist who is secure in the Lord. Now I'm not going to do this now, but if you want an exercise, some homework to do, I did read one very good Tyndale commentary on the Old Testament, who told us that here there is a particular poetic structure to this, to these 12 verses.

Verse 13, as I said, is a conclusion of post-scriptodoxology. But this clever writer and commentator said that there's a poetic structure in these 12 verses in the form of A, B, C, B, A.

In other words, you can find something from the first verses to match to the end. From blessed is the one who considers the poor.

You will find something, verses 11 and 12, that says something about that. And so you go on a bit and you will find another section which has a parallel near the end and then another section in the middle.

I'll leave that for you to try and analyse the poem like that. I don't think it's got a particular relevance to me preaching it.

[4 : 44] So I shall concentrate on the different divisions that I've given you. But to put the psalm in its context, we need to look at the middle part, the prayer verses 4 to 10, which are 6.

Pardon me. It's about a sinner betrayed. Well, from verse 3, you can see there's a mention of a sickbed being restored to full health.

And it would appear from verse 4 onwards that the psalmist is suffering, or has been suffering on his sickbed. And he's had some comforters come to him, a bit like Job's comforters, haven't brought much help to him.

In fact, worse than that, they've gone out and gossiped and told lies about him and said he's not going to get better. We don't know what incident in the life of David this would be about.

Obviously there were times when he wasn't well. But we do know something about, we can think something about verse 9, gives us a particular context.

[6 : 08] David says, Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me. David has had a friend who has betrayed him.

And that is possible to find in the book of 2 Samuel, learning something of David's history.

Because in 2 Samuel 15 and verse 12, we are reading there of David's son, Absalom, his conspiracy and rebellion against David.

And David had a friend who was a valued counsellor, advisor, a man called Ahithophel. Verse 12 we read, And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices he sent for, Ahithophel the Gileonite, David's counsellor from his city, Gilo.

And it appears that Absalom sends for Ahithophel, and Ahithophel leaves David, as it were, leaves his cause, and goes over to the rebel, Absalom.

[7 : 30] And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing. And again you can read later, from 2 Samuel 17 and verse 15, well verse 20, Absalom said to Ahithophel, Give your counsel, what shall we do?

And Ahithophel gives his advice to Absalom. So there David had had this man he relied on, and he betrayed him.

He was his friend, they ate together, he lifted his heel against me, says David. He was a good friend, but he's gone over to my son Absalom, he's betrayed me.

And that's a particularly difficult feeling. We can know of the difficulties of physical suffering, of illness, but there's a wound in the spirit, isn't there?

When a friend in whom you have trusted, that friend acts against you. And that didn't just apply to King David.

[8 : 47] It also applied to our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because Jesus says this of Judas.

He says it in John's Gospel. John 13, 18, I think. Just looking through.

Let's put that right. Jesus quotes these exact words from the psalm. In John 13, 18, Jesus says, So this passage, which we think that David spoke of his former counsellor, Ahithophel, our Lord Jesus Christ applies it to his betrayal by Judas.

Judas, who chaired three years of ministry and closed friendship and fellowship with Judas. Judas went, sold his Saviour for 30 pieces of silver and betrayed him with a kiss.

He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me. So this is something of the context of the psalm. It's one of betrayal and we'll see something of sickness here also.

[10 : 26] So, David is up against it. I've said to you before, I've done a survey, you can do a survey of all the psalms and try and look at the context and you'll find for most of them, the psalmist, whether it's David or someone else, is in a particular need and needs to cry out to God for help.

Life is not a bed of roses. Becoming a Christian doesn't answer all of life's problems. It sorts out some about a proper relationship with God and with those around you, but it also brings the antagonism of Satan, so brings other problems.

But back to the beginning of this psalm, the promise, the blessedness of the man, the man who is writing the psalm, we hope.

Remember, Psalm 1 started with blessed is the man. Well, here, blessed is the one who considers the poor. in the day of trouble, the Lord delivers him.

It has been said that the sign of how a government or a ruler is, the real test, is how it cares for the poor in its society.

[11 : 53] And, in Israel, we know that there were particular provisions made for the poor in the land.

Every seven years, the land was to be, I think it was seven, was to be left fallow for the poor people to have the crop that grew there from seed that had been left in the soil.

When they cut the crops, they were to leave the edges of the field so that the poor could pick up the gleanings there.

Similarly, with the harvest of the vines, there was to be a share for the poor. God wrote into his law his consideration for the poor in the land as well as, of course, saying that there was to be justice for everyone.

You weren't to give the rich or the poor special treatment. Everyone was to be dealt with justly according to God's law. But that blessedness of considering the poor is also brought home to us in our Lord's words, I think, in Matthew 25.

[13:16] What does Jesus say in Matthew 25? 25. Some very challenging words to us. Read from Matthew 25 and verse 31.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

and he will place the sheep on his right hand but the goats on the left. Then the king will say to those on his right, Come you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world for I was hungry and you gave me food.

I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me.

I was in prison and you came to me. And the righteous will answer him saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and clothed you?

[14:30] When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the king will answer them, Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me.

Blessed is the one who considers the poor. I think we have some people in this congregation, I'm not going to embarrass them by naming them, but you know there are people here who have had particular concerns for and help for the homeless and for those who are struggling with poverty. Well, there's a blessedness pronounced upon you here and a challenge for the rest of us that we should share in this blessedness. Blessed is the one who considers the poor.

It's a very interesting thing. We were looking in adult Sunday school about the monasteries a week ago and how the monasteries, in fact, they had a big ministry of caring for the poor and when Henry VIII in England dissolved the monasteries and pinched all their wealth and lands, then who was to look after the poor?

Well, that largely introduced in the introduction of the Elizabethan Poor Law, which carried on for centuries to the Victorian Age, where it was the responsibility of the parishes to look after the poor.

[15:59] It was sort of one stitch removed from the individual Christian responsibility, but they were taking some corporate responsibility.

It's interesting also, historically, on completely the opposite side, in the Soviet Union, in the evil communist empire, it was illegal to give charitable things to others, to the poor, because the state was supposed to have supplied everybody's needs.

Well, blessed is the one who considers the poor, God's word says to us, says to us today, because God cares for those who cares for others, and God's scripture here has a promise and says, you care for the poor in the day of trouble, the Lord delivers him.

But who is the deliverer of the poor? Well, the one who has considered them. And if you have considered the poor, then the Lord will consider and deliver you.

It's a bit like what the children were learning about forgiveness. Here is God's promises.

Deliverance, protection, keeping alive, being called blessed by others, being protected.

[17:27] protected. Here are God's mighty promises to those of us who have not a theoretical faith that doesn't do any good in the world, but a practical faith which is involved in helping and caring for others.

So here we have God's promise in the first three verses of protection, of deliverance, of healing, sustaining on the sickbed, in illness, restoring to full health.

Now we know that not all Christians are restored to full health, but here is God's blessing upon those who are strong in faith in the Lord and considering of others.

So, first of all, there's a promise here. David is to be relying on that promise because he himself is suffering.

He is in this difficult situation that is described in verses 4 to 10. Here is his prayer. I say it's the prayer of a sinner who's been betrayed, one who is now a sick man.

[18 : 50] As for me, I said, O Lord, be gracious to me, heal me, for I have sinned against you. Now, don't get it wrong. Scripture doesn't say that there is a necessary link between physical suffering and sin.

The disciples said to Jesus concerning the man born blind, who sinned, him or his parents? Jesus said neither. He's in this situation so that the mighty power of God will be evident in him.

And the book of Job shows us very clearly that there is no necessary causal relationship between someone suffering and having done wrong, having sinned.

That was the whole problem with Job's comforters. They said, Job, you're suffering. And Job really was suffering. He'd lost his family, he'd lost his wealth, he'd lost his health.

The only thing he hadn't lost was his wife, and she wasn't any help, because she said, curse God and die. So there you are. He has these comforters, and they make this mistake of thinking that there's a direct link between Job's sinning and Job's suffering.

[20 : 10] And there wasn't. Job was suffering so that God should be glorified, in his life, and even in his suffering. So God could say to Satan, Job doesn't just follow me from what he can get out of me.

Job really does trust in me. But these friends of David, these who visited him, well, no, not his friends, his enemies, it says here, verse 5, they speak maliciously.

They're looking forward to David's death. for his name perishing. Are these some people from the house of Saul, at the time after Saul and Jonathan were killed?

We don't know. But David sometimes has these visitors. Some come to me and says they utter empty words. Job's comforters were like that.

While his heart gathers iniquity, he goes out, he tells it abroad. Have you seen that, David? Have you seen how he's suffering? Deserves it, doesn't he? They whisper together about me and imagine the worst for me.

[21 : 26] They say a deadly thing is poured out on him. He will not rise again from where he lies. I think you can also see perhaps a parallel with those mocking mocking Jesus on the cross.

He trusted in God. Let God deliver him. So perhaps there's also an echo of our Saviour's sufferings here.

But David cries out, cries out for God to be gracious to him. For God to raise him up. And we know for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, God was gracious.

God took him through death, took him through the grave, took him to resurrection. But here actually there is a dissonance, a difference between us and our Saviour and David.

David says, Lord be gracious to me and raise me up that I may repay them. Was David wanting personal vengeance?

[22 : 38] I don't think we need to read it like that. I think the way we should read this is that David was the king. David had a duty to give justice, to care for the poor and to stop and punish evil.

And that's why he had a divine duty to repay those who were rebels against him. we have not been put in such a position of authority.

We are under a Saviour who says vengeance is mine, says the Lord. We are to wait for God to put things right, for God to balance the books at the great day of judgment when the Lord Jesus Christ comes and he will repay those who have rebelled against him.

So here there is something different between David and the Lord Jesus Christ and us. But we go on, having seen that promise, having seen David's prayer, we then go on to David's praise, the strong and high note on which to end.

David has this remarkable statement, he's come before God as a sinner, for I have sinned against you. And he comes before God as one suffering, suffering sickness.

[24 : 11] He comes before God with the pain of betrayal. And yet, here is this triumphant mountaintop declaration in verse 11, but this I know, that you delight in me.

my enemy will not shout in triumph over me. This I know, you delight in me. My enemy will not shout in triumph over me.

But you have upheld me because of my integrity, and set me in your presence forever. forever. Is that David's future hope of resurrection?

Certainly the case of David's greatest son, our saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is set now in God's presence forever, at his right hand.

But go back to that first line of verse 11, God but this I know, you delight in me. That is a wonderful thing for us to think and meditate upon, that God delights in us.

[25 : 32] Though we are sinners, God takes delight in us. Though we have rebelled against our God, yet we are special to him.

He takes delight in us. Zephaniah, don't often read from Zephaniah, but Zephaniah chapter 3 and verse 17.

The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you by his love.

He will exult over you with loud singing. I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach.

Christian, do you feel downcast? This is what God's word says. God's word says, the Lord, the covenant God, is among you.

[26 : 38] God is a mighty one, a mighty saviour. He will take delight in you. He will rejoice over you with gladness.

He will quiet you by his love. If your heart is troubled tonight, be quieted and rest in the love of our God, the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Quiet you by his love, and he will exult over you with loud singing. Doesn't sound very Presbyterian, does it? But loud singing. God is going to exult over you with loud singing.

By this I know you delight in me. Here is a really great word for you. Not just from one prophet, from two.

Don't often quote from Zechariah either. But, Zechariah 3.7, if I've got it right. Oops, I don't know if I have caught that one right I may have to leave that one I think it was supposed to have been something about God regards you as precious and he who touches you touches the apple of his eye I'm sure that's what I was looking for and seeking to quote We are as precious to God as his sight

[28 : 43] Anyone touches us, it's like touching the apple of his eye The enemy will not shout in triumph over me Do not rejoice when I fall Satan will not triumph Christ will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail Satan will not prevail in North Korea, in Afghanistan In Syria, in Iraq, Iran, Northeastern Nigeria The enemy will not shout in triumph The Lord Jesus Christ, he is the victorious one Christus Victor Well, the psalmist believes that God upholds him And he will enjoy God's presence forever We shall not die, we shall live

We shall be resurrected We shall share the presence of the Lamb Our great Saviour We shall be before his throne forever In a new heavens and new earth Where all the evidence of the fall is taken away All the evidence of sin All suffering and death Vanished forever Christ will wipe away every tear From our eyes We will be set in his presence forever Now this obviously Is a great comfort For David In his suffering Knowing betrayal Knowing the malice of his enemies He can rejoice Can you rejoice this evening And say with David Blessed be the Lord The God of Israel From everlasting to everlasting

Amen And Amen We should bless our God Because he is the God Of a great salvation You've got your Bibles open before you Let's say that verse together And say it loudly and enthusiastically Verse 13 Blessed be the Lord The God of Israel From everlasting to everlasting Amen And Amen Now we're going to sing it