Plaudit and Plea

Psalm 40:1-17
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Commentary

by

Clyde M. Miller Text:

Psalm 40:1-17,

1. I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry.
2. 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.
3. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.
4. Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods.
5. Many, 0 LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.
6. Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.
7. Then I said, "Here I am, I have come— it is written about me in the scroll.
8. I desire to do your will, 0 my God; your law is within my heart."
9. I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, 0 LORD.
10. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly.
11. Do not withhold your mercy from me, 0 LORD; may your love and your truth always protect me.
12. For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me.
13. Be pleased, 0 LORD, to save me; 0 LORD, come quickly to help me.
14. May all who seek to take my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace.
15. May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!" be appalled at their own shame.
16. But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, "The LORD be exalted! "
17. Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; 0 my God, do not delay. (NIV)

Introduction:
I. Psalm 40 is unusual in that thanksgiving precedes lamentation. A.

    Usually, the reverse is the order.

    1. Perhaps the psalmist is overwhelmed with what God has already done for him.

    2. His present problems, however, cause him to cry out to the God that he trusts.

    3. He may wonder if the consequences of former sins may still be visited on him, or he may realize that present sins may continue to bring troubles on him.

    4. The theme centers on the value of trust (4,10,16).
a. Psalm 40:4, 10, 16, Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly. But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, "The LORD be exalted!" (NIV)

II. Psalm 40:13-17 is almost identical with Psalm 70 and parts of Psalm 35.

A. Scriptures:

1. Psalm 40:13-17, Be pleased, 0 LORD, to save me; 0 LORD, come quickly to help me. May all who seek to take my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!" be appalled at their own shame. But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, "The LORD be exalted!" Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; 0 my God, do not delay. (NIV)

2. Psalm 70:1-5, Hasten, 0 God, to save me; 0 LORD, come quickly to help me. May those who seek my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!" turn back because of their shame. But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation al-
ways say, "Let God be exalted!" Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, 0 God. You are my help and my deliverer; 0 LORD, do not delay. (NIV)

3. Psalm 35:1-28, Contend, 0 LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me. Take up shield and buckler; arise and come to my aid. Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say to my soul, "I am your salvation. " May those who seek my life be disgraced and put to shame; may those who plot my ruin be turned back in dismay. May they be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them away; may their path be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them. Since they hid their net for me without cause and without cause dug a pit for me, may ruin overtake them by surprise— may the net they hid entangle them, may they fall into the pit, to their ruin. Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD and delight in his salvation. My whole being will exclaim, "Who is like you, 0 LORD? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them." Ruthless witnesses come forward; they question me on things I know nothing about. They repay me evil for good and leave my soul forlorn. Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered, I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother. But when I stumbled, they gathered in glee; attackers gathered against me when I was unaware. They slandered me without ceasing. Like the ungodly they maliciously mocked; they gnashed their teeth at me. 0 Lord, how long will you look on? Rescue my
life from their ravages, my precious life from these lions. I will
give you thanks in the great assembly;
among throngs of people I will praise you. Let not those gloat
over me who are my enemies without cause; let not those who
hate me without reason maliciously wink the eye. They do not
speak peaceably, but devise false accusations against those
who live quietly in the land. They gape at me and say, "Aha!
Aha! With our own eyes we have seen it." 0 LORD, you have
seen this; be not silent. Do not be far from me, 0 Lord. Awake,
and rise to my defense! Contend for me, my God and Lord.
Vindicate me in your righteousness, 0 LORD my God; do not
let them gloat over me. Do not let them think, "Aha, just what
we wanted!" or say, "We have swallowed him up." May all
who gloat over my distress be put to shame and confusion;
may all who exalt themselves over me be clothed with shame
and disgrace. May those who delight in my vindication shout
for joy and gladness;
may they always say, "The LORD be exalted, who delights in
the well-being of his servant." My tongue will speak of your
righteousness and of your praises all day long. (NIV)

B. This need not indicate a break down in the unity of Psalm 40, or
suggest diverse authors or editors.

C. Repetition of familiar themes is common in psalms of lament and
petition, and for psalms of thanksgiving.

III. The best explanation for the varied emotions expressed in the psalm is to see
it as a royal liturgy in which the king expresses joy over past deliverance and
forgiveness, but also is concerning over approaching new circumstances which
may endanger him and the nation.
Past Deliverance and a Song of Thanksgiving

Psalm 40:1-3, 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, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD. (NIV)

Psalm 40:1, I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. (NIV)

I. "I waited patiently" is literally "waiting, I waited", an infinitive followed by a finite verb.
   A. Perhaps this pregnant phrase suggests his persistent waiting. B. Because of his importunate praying. God "heard" his "cry".

Psalm 40:2, 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. (NIV)

I. Verse 2 reveals that when God hears a fervent prayer he acts favorably.
A. The phrases, "Slimy pit" and "mud and mire", paint a vivid picture of his deep troubles.
B. By contrast. God "set" him on a "rock", a firm foundation, and gave him "a firm place to stand".

C. God delivered him from his slippery foothold.
Psalm 40:3, He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD. (NIV)

I. A new act of deliverance deserves a "new song".

A. This phrase is used six times in the psalms either as a declaration, an exhortation, or a promise (33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1).

1. Psalm 33:3, Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy. (NIV)

2. Psalm 40:3, He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD. (NIV)

3. Psalm 96:1, Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. (NIV)

4. Psalm 98:1, Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. (NIV)

5. Psalm 144:9, I will sing a new song to you, O God; on the ten-stringed lyre I will make music to you, (NIV)

6. Psalm 149:1, Praise the LORD. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints. (NIV)

B. Fresh songs are more likely to focus one's attention on the meaning of the lyrics.
C. "Song" and "hymn of praise" are synonymous expressions emphasizing repetition for emphasis.

II. The expressions, "will see and fear", yir 'u and yira 'u, form a word play, and here they suggest reception of and reaction to what God has done.

A. This praise is to be sung publicly so that the hearers will revere and trust God.
B. Public praise has a broader influence than private devotion. Blessing

From God and Extolling God

Psalm 40:4-5, Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. Many, 0 LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare. (NIV)

Psalm 40:4, Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. (NIV)

I. In three topic statements he elaborates the blessing of trusting and obeying God.

A. "Blessed is" introduces conditions that result in divine grace.

B. The trusting humble person of integrity receives God's blessings. (Kazab can mean "falsehood" or "false gods".

Psalm 40:5, Many, 0 LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you;
were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare. (NIV)

I. He expresses his desire, yet inability, adequately to proclaim God's greatness and goodness.

A. God's blessings often come in the form of "wonders" already "planned for us".

B. God is ready; He waits for us to match His readiness with a ready heart and mind.

C. We will discover that His blessings are greater than we can imagine or "recount".

D. Sometimes they are greater than we can explain. Personal

Life Commitment

Psalm 40:6, Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced,; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. (NIV)

I. He extols an obedience that goes beyond ritual requirements.

A. It involves a willing offering of oneself in full obedience of all of life.

B. Samuel reminded Saul that it is better to obey than to offer sacrifice with disobedience (1 Sam. 15:22).

1. 1 Samuel 15:22, But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey
is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. (NIV)

II. "Pierced" is literally "dug out", that is, opened.

III. The LXX Greek translation renders "a body you have prepared for me".

A. It is this rendering that is quoted in Hebrews 10:5-9.

1. Hebrews 10:5-9, Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.'" First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. (NIV)

2. The LXX treats the word "body" as a synecdoche for the whole person.

3. The Hebrew writer applies the word "body" to the body of Christ, as if God were speaking these words to Christ.

4. The New Testament is not using the psalm passage as a prophecy about Christ but as an analogy.
5. The psalmist desired but fell short of sinless obedience but Christ was sinless and offered his body as a willing and perfect sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 7:26-28).

a. Hebrews 7:26-28, Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. (NIV)

Psalm 40:7, Then I said, "Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. (NIV)

I. "Written about me in the scroll" could be rendered "with the scroll written for me" (NIV n.).

Psalm 40:8, I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." (NIV)

I. "Scroll" (7) and "law" (8) form a word pair.

A. The Law was to be obeyed but no one kept it perfectly (Ps. 143:2).

1. Psalm 143:2, Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you. (NIV)

B. The desire should always be in our hearts to be obedient in all things (1 Cor. 2:9).
1. 1 Corinthians 2:9, However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"—
(NIV)

2. All have sinned and fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23).

   a. Romans 3:23, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (NIV)

3. We need His forgiveness (1 John 1:5-10).

   a. 1 John 1:5-10, This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. (NIV)

Public Proclamation

Psalm 40:9-10, I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, 0 LORD. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salva-
tion. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly. (NIV)

Psalm 40:9, I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, 0 LORD. (NIV)

I. "The great assembly" was any time and place in which the nation as a whole was gathered for worship (2 Chron. 30:13; Ps. 22:25; 26:12; 35:18; 40:9-10), and God presided there in the assembly and gave judgment (Ps. 82:1).

A. 2 Chronicles 30:13, A very large crowd of people assembled in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month. (NIV)

B. Psalm 22:25, From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows. (NIV)

C. Psalm 26:12, My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the LORD. (NIV)

D. Psalm 35:18, I will give you thanks in the great assembly; among throngs of people I will praise you. (NIV)

E. Psalm 40:9, 10, I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, 0 LORD. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly. (NIV)

F. Psalm 82:1, God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the "gods": (NIV)
II. "Righteousness" is not further defined but it must refer to God's righteousness as in verse 10.

Psalm 40:10, I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly. (NIV)

I. Five terms are used to describe God that the psalmist proclaims in the great assembly.

A. "Righteousness" is here His right dealing with His people, as indicated in conjunction with "faithfulness" and "salvation".

B. His "love" and "truth" go forth for man's benefit, as verse 11 reveals.

1. Psalm 40:11, Do not withhold your mercy from me, 0 LORD; may your love and your truth always protect me. (NIV)

C. "Faithfulness" (lOb) and "truth" (lOc) translate the same root word.

D. "Love" renders chesedh, "steadfast", "unfailing", "loyal" or "covenant love".

Prayer for Preservation

Psalm 40:11-17, Do not withhold your mercy from me, 0 LORD; may your love and your truth always protect me. For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me. Be pleased, 0 LORD, to save me; 0 LORD, come quickly to help me. May all who seek to take my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned
back in disgrace. May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!" be appalled at their own shame. But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, "The LORD be exalted!" Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; 0 my God, do not delay. (NIV)

Psalm 40:11, Do not withhold your mercy from me, 0 LORD; may your love and your truth always protect me. (NIV)

I. "Love" and "truth" repeat the same words as in verse 10.

II. "Mercy" provides a fifth term describing God's attributes.

III. "Protect me" reveals the fact that these terms indicate more than divine characteristics; they suggest divine traits that cause God to act beyond man's deserts ("mercy"), in "faithfulness" to his covenant promises, and in a manner consistent with his "steadfast love" (RSV, NRSV).

Psalm 40:12, For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me. (NIV)

I. "For" shows that verse 12 provides the reason for his need for God to act in accordance with His perfect character.

II. "Troubles" and "sins" form a word pair.

A. He feels that his sins have brought on him his troubles.

B. This is not always the case but it was a pervasive concept in ancient Israelite as well as pagan society.
C. On the one hand, he perceives God's blessings to be beyond calculation (5); on the other hand, so is his conception of his sins (12).

Psalm 40:13, Be pleased, 0 LORD, to save me; 0 LORD, come quickly to help me. (NIV)

I. "Save" and "help" form a word pair.

A. Verse 12 indicates his recognition of his need for forgiveness; verses 14-15 suggest his need for deliverance from his enemies.

B. Because of his fear of death, he needs God to act "quickly".

Psalm 40:14-15, May all who seek to take my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!" be appalled at their own shame. (NIV)

I. He believes that he has enemies who desire to kill him. A. He asks that justice be done.

B. He prays that they be visited with the "shame" and "disgrace" (35:26; 40:14-15; 70:2; 71:13; 109:29) that they thought to bring upon him (Ps. 44:15-16).

1. Psalm 35:26, May all who gloat over my distress be put to shame and confusion; may all who exalt themselves over me be clothed with shame and disgrace.
   (NIV)

2. Psalm 40:14, 15, May all who seek to take my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire
my ruin be turned back in disgrace. May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!" be appalled at their own shame. (NIV)

3. Psalm 70:2, May those who seek my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. (NIV)

4. Psalm 71:13, May my accusers perish in shame; may those who want to harm me be covered with scorn and disgrace. (NIV)

5. Psalm 109:29, My accusers will be clothed with disgrace and wrapped in shame as in a cloak. (NIV)

6. Psalm 44:15, 16, My disgrace is before me all day long, and my face is covered with shame at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me, because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge. (NIV)

Psalm 40:16, But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, "The LORD be exalted!" (NIV)

I. In contrast to his plea for the discomfiture of his enemies, he prays that those who "seek" God be able to "rejoice and be glad" in God because they love God's "salvation". r|<g.

II. They will exalt God because l^is answers prayers.

Psalm 40:17, Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; 0 my God, do not delay. (NIV)
I. In simple trusting faith, he presents a closing description of his need (17a), express his trust in God (17b,c) and makes an impassioned plea (17d).

Application:

I. Repetitively, these psalms of lament and petition express dismay and trust, distress and hope.

   A. These are not contradictory emotions; they delineate the mixed emotions of the petitioner.

   B. We should never be hesitant to express our heartfelt feelings to God.

   C. He knows them before we express them (Mt. 6:8) but He wants us to be express our needs to Him (Jas. 4:2).

      1. Matthew 6:8, Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (NIV)

      2. James 4:2, You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. (NIV)

      3. "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (Jas. 5:16, NKJV).

   D. Sometimes we must ask repeatedly but we should never despair of asking (Luke 18:1-8).

      1. Luke 18:1-18, Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a
judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!"' And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never
enter it." A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (NIV)
Questions Psalm 40:1-17 (Questions based on NIV text.)

1. In what respect is Psalm 40 unusual?

2. The theme of Psalm 40 centers on the ________ of ________. Psalm 40:13-17 is almost identical with Psalm ________ and parts of Psalm ________, but ________ of ________ is common in ________ of ________ and ________, and for ________ of ________.

3. Explain the use of varied emotions expressed in Psalm 40.

4. New song is used in psalms variably as a ________, an ________ or a _________. ________ are more likely to focus one's ________ on the ________ of the ________. ________ and "_______ of ________" are synonymous expressions.
5. "I waited ______—^or the ___; he
to __________ and __________ __________
_________. He ______ me out of the ________
________, out of the ________ and _________;
he set my __________ on a __________ and gave me a
________ _________ to __________. He put a
________ _________ in my __________, a
________ of __________ to __________.
Many will __________ and __________ and put their

________ in the ______."  

6. Who is the blessed man?

7. What was the slimy pit, the mud and the mire in which the psalmist had
previously found himself? _____________________

8. How does the psalmist describe God's blessings in verse 5?

9. What did God not desire or require?
10. How did God pierce the psalmist's ears?

11. What was the psalmist's response to God's actions?

12. What are references in the New Testament to what is said in verses 7 and 8? What application is made of these verses in the New Testament?

13. Define "the great assembly" as used in verse 9.
14. Describe the ways in which the psalmist praised God. See verses 9 and 10.

15. For what did the psalmist pray in verses 11, 13, 14?

16. How does the psalmist describe his troubles and sins in verse 12?

17. "Yet I am ________^ and ______^____; may the __________ __________ of me. You are my ________ and my ________; 0 my ________.________________________
do not _____ ."

18. What does the Bible say about our freely expressing our feelings to God?
19. The psalmist prayed that his enemies be visited with the shame and disgrace they had intended to heap upon him. Was this the right thing to ask God in prayer? _______________________

20. How do your sins, problems and trust in God compare with the psalmist's as expressed in chapter 40? ________________