

January 13, 2019 Salvation: Full and Free Psalm 40:1-11

In the movie, *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, Gonzo the Great, plays Charles Dickens and narrates the story. He is accompanied by Rizzo the Rat who plays the friend of Gonzo, and therefore the good friend of Charles Dickens. Rizzo's most memorable line is, "How does he do that?" Gonzo (as Dickens) is continually predicting what happens next like, "Ebenezer Scrooge, who will appear around that corner... now!" Rizzo looks straight at us as audience and says, "How does he do that?"

Psalm 40 bears the heading, "For the Director of Music. A Psalm of David. These headings are not Publisher's Notes. As long as the Scriptures of the Old Testament have been translated from the original Hebrew they have been part of the translations of the texts. In other words, they are comments of historical significance. And they have been recognized for a very long time, as part of the original documents, *The Psalms*, in Hebrew. It is a very new trend in modern English translations to drop these Headings. They are significant. They point to the fact that we are unable to get back to a time before which the Psalms bearing these headings were believed to be written by David the King of Israel.

I share all of this because I am often tempted to respond to my reading of a Psalm, and Psalm 40 is one of those, with Rizzo's line. David the King, writer of this Psalm, how does he do that? For a believer the answer is rather easy... the Holy

Spirit of God! What my question reflects is a sense of awe and wonder, that David could write what he did, when he did, and that Israel, and then the Church would so easily recognize these lines have profound meaning for believing communities.

For the ancient Jewish community Psalm 40 was viewed as a Psalm foretelling in a word of prophesy, what would happen to the Messiah. For the ancient Christian Church it was almost automatic on that basis to reflect...these are words of prophecy about Jesus. We turn to Psalm 40 as 20th century Christians. Here is what is revealed to us. To the Jewish mind these are the words of the Messiah. "I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me up out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and the mire, to 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." This is a word of prophesy about the resurrection of the Messiah. Why 3 days? Because the Messiah would be patient and obedient, in all things submissive to God the Father.

And on the 3rd day...the second day of the new week God will raise HIM up. For us as Christians the words have a dual meaning. First and foremost they are about Jesus for we recognize HIM in light of the testimony of the New Testament writers...witnesses and as Luke reminds us, eye witnesses to so much of Jesus ministry and HIS death on the cross, and HIS resurrection. Here David the prophet confirms that death and burial are part of the lot of Messiah. Here we

recognize Jesus died and was entombed and at precisely the right hour was raised up. As Psalm 40 says..."Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord." That is the last line of verse 3. And we recognize, especially in light of the New Testament Gospels, Acts, and the letters, the Epistles, that that is how history unfolded. The ultimate conviction and conversion of the disciples was effected by this singular reality. They saw Jesus die. They or members of their trusted number participated to some degree in Jesus burial in the tomb. They knew about the guard placed there that no grave robbing might occur. And on the Sunday morning they heard about Jesus being raised from death. They testify they did not believe it.

Peter testifies that he saw the emptiness of the tomb, the stone rolled away. What he believed was that the tomb was empty. John affirms that reality for himself as one who ran with Peter to the open tomb. Faith came with seeing. A conviction so deep they gave themselves to the cause come what may, Peter paying with his life, John interned in a prison camp on the Isle of Patmos where we presume he died, a very old man. We know the story of Thomas who said he would not believe except that he get to put his finger in the nail prints, and his hand into the wounded side of the Lord. He saw. They all heard Jesus offer Thomas both. There is no mention of Thomas's actually doing what he said he wanted to do. I may be wrong but I assume...seeing the risen Lord, seeing the wounds of Christ, was more than enough. We do know that Thomas spent his life taking the gospel to India, that he died a

martyrs death near Madras, at Mt. St. Thomas. Because he saw the risen Lord.

And then of course there is St. Paul. There is no question that the disciples and the Christian circle was afraid of him in his life as Saul the Pharisee, an instrument of the persecution of the Church. On the way to Damascus, with orders to arrest Christians and bring them to Jerusalem for trial, he was met by Jesus. He spent days in blindness, healed at the hands of Ananias, who was afraid to go and meet and pray for Saul who becomes Paul. Paul would insist that his chief credential for his being an apostle...was that he saw the Lord Jesus and received from his hand as one example, the sacrament of Holy Communion. "Many will see, and fear (which means they will become God fearing people, believers) and they will put their trust in the Lord...specifically Jesus.

I am tempted to say, well, no surprises there. I mean the disciples and the people who made up the early Christian community, were clearly touched by God and experienced the miraculous. Their stories continue to inspire. Their experiences continue to be top soil if you will in which the faith that centers on Jesus, germinates and grows. For those who have ears to hear with, and whose souls of the "eyes" to envision these things make so much sense.

But there is a 3rd level to which the words of Psalm 40 speak and with which they resound. The mind and the soul of believers like us. You need to hear those opening words of

Psalm 40 and take them personally. Especially as you are involved in a church, pursuing the faith, participating in worship at least once a week, and hang out with your own personal preacher from time to time. I paraphrase the words of Jesus. This is not a blessing given only to those who have a fortune in faith built up over the years as a result of keeping the faith in the real world in real time. As much faith as a grain of mustard seed said Jesus, is enough to move a mountain and make it go jump into the ocean. If you have a kernel of faith, these words are for you, and are about your life. Hear them again.

“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.” As surely as David prophesied this about Jesus, he also prophesied this about you. I am not going to underline the word patiently. I know that many of us, me included are not convinced, that we are patient, while we wait for answers to prayer. We think we are impatient. But remember this because God does. You are still coming to worship. Still participating in the activities...all the activities that your church affords you. You have worshipped the Lord, praised HIS name, prayed according to HIS principle lesson on prayer, read and listened to the Biblical word, been through countless sermons. If that is not evidence of patiently waiting for the Lord I do not know what would qualify.

Many of you have said to me personally, “I believe in the power of prayer,” or “Prayer works”. I can only assume, but I do assume, that means at some point you have a conviction about prayer answered. Well listen to this. Verse 2 is also about you. Specifically about you and Jesus. Life after death. Life lived after your bodily remains or ashes are buried. “He lifted me out of the pit, the mud and the mire and set me on a rock...gave me a firm place to stand.” David is writing about you and that bit of faith you have in Jesus. Eternal life. Heaven. A new song, a new hymn to God.

And one more thing. You have no idea who or how many are watching you to see how you deal with crises, pain, grief, the trials of age...growing old. Someone is going to say I saw him, I saw her. And that’s why I trust in God, follow Jesus. Take it personally. David wrote these words and they are about your current time and your future. Praise God!

Pray with me;

Lord sometimes we just limit what the eyes of our believing can see. Your word is in print. It has stood the test of time, the passing of the ages. Your power is alive in it today. Help us to mark these 3 verses in our Bibles at home and to realize that even as they speak about Jesus they speak about us as your children. And I guess we should also underline verse 4. Blessed is the man, the woman, the child who makes the Lord his or her trust. Thank you Lord. Receive our praise. Amen

