

Today's Quick Word Psalm 40:1-3

By Bruce Christian

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.*

Another of my Hebrew lecturers (cf yesterday's TQW on Ezekiel 3:5-6) tried to convince me that she had a better understanding of 'genuine faith' than I did because she identified with Soren Kierkegaard's definition where he likened true faith to 'treading water in 70,000 fathoms'. My response to her was that continuing to 'tread water', when God has given me a 'rock' to stand on, is not faith, but stupidity. Liberal theology cannot cope with the firm assurance afforded by Biblical, evangelical, reformed theology but, rather, prides itself in the 'thrill' of uncertainty.

Our personal testimony of the work of God's saving grace in our lives is a powerful evangelistic tool - perhaps more powerful than most of us realise. The experience of some of us might reflect fairly closely the experience which David recounts in this psalm; for others of us, it mightn't be quite so dramatic. But, in this dark and darkening world of our own society where we see

more and more of the unsettling effects of sin and godlessness impacting the lives of so many people around us, to be able to demonstrate openly and boldly that we have a firm and solid Rock on which to stand will send a strong message to them that all other ground is sinking sand.

If our lives are characterised by 'a new song in our mouths and a hymn of praise to our God', who knows how many might 'see and fear and put their trust in the Lord'? What a good reminder this is of the importance of a consistent Christian witness today! The author of Hebrews (10:5-7) applies this psalm to Jesus whose own testimony of trust and obedience in the face of unjust opposition not only impacted the lives of the early disciples but led to the giving of his life on the cross for us so that he might be our Rock - the 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me'. And Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16).

Today's Quick Word 1 Samuel 26:21

By Bruce Christian

1 SAMUEL 26:21 *Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly."*

What an important lesson there is for all of us in this brief interchange between David and Saul in the Desert of Ziph beside the road on the hill of Hakilah facing Jeshimon (1-3).

Saul's heart burned with jealous anger as he pursued the man whom Samuel had anointed to replace him as the LORD's King over Israel, and he was determined to put his rival to death. But this was now the second time David had had the opportunity to escape the danger by killing his pursuer, and his merciful sparing of his life had really exposed the built-in corruption of Saul's heart.

In the light of this, it seems that the King was expressing genuine, heartfelt remorse for his sinful attitude and actions. Twice during the course of this interchange Saul addressed his 'rival' very affectionately as 'David my son', as he had also done on the previous occasion when his life had been spared (cf 24:16).

But, sadly, Saul's subsequent behaviour showed that the 'remorse' was only superficial, and what was needed was not just a human

attempt at self-reformation, but a complete 'heart transplant' - the sort of radical surgery that the LORD would reveal through later prophets: "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time, ... I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, ... For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:33-34), and "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 36:26)!

And, of course, it was what Jesus was referring to when he said to Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." (John 3:3).

The lesson for us is that we ARE NOT ABLE to 'improve' our lives by making 'New Year resolutions', or by doing ANYTHING in our own strength. Rescuing us from ourselves needs a divine work of God's grace IN us. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the GIFT of God - not by works, so that no-one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8).

Today's Quick Word Psalm 49:7-9

By Bruce Christian

PSALM 49:7-9 *No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them - the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough - so that they should live on for ever and not see decay.*

This psalm draws a sharp contrast between two world-views: one that puts MAN at the centre and rates everything in terms of HIS status and achievements; and the other that puts GOD at the centre and interprets all the vicissitudes of life in terms of the outworking of HIS sovereign will, of HIS power, and of HIS love and mercy and grace.

On the basis of the first world-view, we can see no hope in life: Experience proves that we all die, and are buried, and are gone from the earth forever. In the light of this experience we can only conclude that there is no hope of anything beyond the grave.

The second world-view provides us with an explanation as to WHY this is our experience. God tells us in his Word that he made us in his own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27) and therefore designed us to LIVE FOREVER. But he goes on to tell us (Genesis 3) that we REBELLED against his Plan for us and therefore, as he had warned (Genesis 2:16-17), we LOST our immortality. God is a consistent, just and faithful God who ALWAYS carries through on his warnings and promises, which shows just WHY our experience of life/death is as it is.

Sadly, the first world-view EXCLUDES God from the picture

altogether, so it has no place for the wonderful divine revelation that occupies the remainder of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, namely, that God, in his amazing grace, has provided a RESCUE PLAN which was COSTLY FOR HIM, but has been made available FREELY for US. The ransom price for our failure to obey his word IS far too high for us to meet his just demands! In spite of all our achievements there is no man on earth who can EARN God's favour, so ALL is lost, and meaningful life and freedom are beyond the reach of anyone who embraces the first world-view! "This is the fate of those who trust in themselves" (13a).

On the basis of the second world-view, however, there IS hope. The certainty of this hope is expressed in verse 15: "But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead; he will surely take me to himself." So how is this possible? What 'miracle' could possibly occur to break the nexus between sin and its consequences? Only the intervention of someone who is different, someone who is both man and God, someone who might come among us from 'outside', live a life of perfect obedience and thus earn the right to eternal life, and then give his life for ours as the costly ransom to redeem us to freedom and life. "There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin, HE ONLY could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in." (Cecil Frances Alexander). "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16).