



Date: January 15, 2017

Title: "The Mud Psalm"

Scripture: Psalm 40: 1-11

Description: When your bogged down, mired in the pit, you need Psalm 40 included in your arsenal. David knows how to deal with it.

He said it's okay to tell this story. It happened back when he was in his twenties, a long time ago.

He lost twelve hundred on the blackjack table, then overdrew his bank account another thousand chasing that original twelve hundred. But being as he was chasing, he lost that thousand fast. The ride home is always the worst part. The regret. The names he called himself. "Idiot".

He lived with his sister at the time, and she could always tell if he lost all his money. He'd come into the house late, with a bag of Ramen Noodles to make it through until the next paycheck, but this time the next direct deposit would be eaten up by the negative balance in his checking account.

He worked at a bank. He managed the place, so he had to get there early to open up, unlock the vault so the tellers could get their drawers out. He put on his suit. He always felt stupid, he says, wearing a suit managing a bank inside a grocery store. It wasn't a real bank, they need to loosen up the dress code a little. I mean, this wasn't Wall Street. It's a grocery store.

He'd never noticed the bank's money. He'd lose all his money and then put \$20,000 in twenties in the ATM the next day with no temptation. But that day, he noticed. He noticed the 30,000 in hundreds, the 20,000 in twenties. He noticed how the dual vault security procedures weren't followed. He noticed that the tellers could go days without having to take money from the vault, because they weren't a busy branch.

He did not notice his morals, his sense of right and wrong. He didn't notice the consequences. There was an overwhelming voice inside of him. "You can't lose. If you

won just 10% of that amount, that's five grand. Then you can just put it back. It's like borrowing."

He agreed. He took the whole \$50,000.

He told the tellers he was leaving early. The money hung heavy in his pocket. He felt like a drug runner going through customs. The casino was a two hour drive. The girls working there wore these tight black leotards. He'd been out with a few of them. Really nice girls. But when he gambled, he wanted to be anonymous. He didn't want to know the dealers, the waitresses, the old couple sitting next to him. He didn't want anybody feeling sorry for him if he lost his money. He hated to leave the table and hear the dealer say, "Sorry about that, friend." What you sorry for? For what? *I'm* the one that's sorry!"

He sat down at the black jack table and bought in for 10,000 in twenties. It took a little time to count out 10,000 in twenties, which brought a small crowd, which he didn't care for, but whatever. He started betting from the 10,000. It went up. And it went down. It went up. And it went down. And down. And it was gone.

The crowd let out a sigh. "What y'all sorry about?" He set another 10,000 on the table. He was chasing. It went fast. He got up. The crowd showed remorse. The voice in his head, "You gotta get away from these losers!" Losing can be contagious.

He left the table to go to the high rollers room. *Bernie, at this point you go stand behind the pulpit.*) His pants were lighter, but still 30,000 heavy. That voice, "You just gotta change your strategy. Get your confidence up. Get your game on." He set the whole thirty on the table. It took a lot of time to count \$30,000. It brought out some guys who had to wear suits to work, like him.

He won. He won close to the 50,000 back. Then he gets a call from work. He doesn't answer it. Then another call. He listens to the voice mail. They need him back at work. But he's still short. Just a little bit. He could leave with what he had and deal with the consequences. Or he could go for it. He's feeling good about this next bet. The voice, "Go for it! Go for it!" He puts up the biggest bet he's ever played, close to \$20,000. In little orange chips. He doesn't know why so much; it's just a stack of chips. It felt good.

The dealer deals the cards. It's crazy to be looking at thirty, twenty, ten thousand dollars and not caring any more. Thirty. Twenty. Thirty. Twenty. Thirty. Twenty. (fade)

He loses it all. He gets up from the table, and the dealer says, "Better luck next time, friend." But he doesn't say anything. He just walks out to his car.

Ever been in a desolate pit? Stuck in a miry bog? May not have been in a casino; may have been an affair. You don't remember how it got started, but you can't get out of it. May be a business partnership or a job or a student loan or a house payment.

King David had been there. Maybe it was the time Saul and his posse were hunting for him. Or when David's own son, Absalom, was out to kill him. He remembered. And he wrote Psalm 40.

"I waited patiently for the LORD...." Really? King David did some great things, but waiting patiently was likely not one of them. The waiting is the hard part, isn't it. David's on the run, then finds himself off-trail, in a swamp, sinking. He tries not to struggle. Slime rising up his legs. Panic rising in his blood. If you fight the mud it claims you. You must not fight the mud; fight the fear and keep still. If you fight the mud, it will own you. You have to fight the fear and keep still. You have to be patient. You have to wait.

"[The LORD] inclined to me and heard my cry..." Notice the words are in the past tense. David is looking back. The first thing you do when you're bogged down, mired in the pit, stuck, you remember. You look back. You recall the past. David, writing this Psalm, is in trouble now. Look at vv. 12 and 13: "For evils have encompassed me without number...Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me; O LORD, make haste to help me." He's in trouble now. So he begins by looking back to the time when he was there before.

Slowly, with strength and gentleness, David was pulled up and out, feet connected with rock. He had never been so grateful for solid ground. *"He drew me up from the pit of tumult, out of the miry bog and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure."* (v.2) David remembered that bog his life long: when enemies encircled, when stress threatened to overwhelm, he remembered the reality of the help God had provided in the past.

When you're bogged down, mired in the pit, stuck, the first thing you do is remember. You've been through some hard stuff before. God has always brought you through. Don't panic. Remember.

And don't get all religious. V. 6: "Sacrifice and offering you do not desire...Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required." God doesn't want you to get religious. God wants you to get faithful, to trust, to remember, and to wait.

The way we do church has one great weakness. It can cause you to think that the main thing God wants of you is to go to church on Sunday morning—one religious act

per week (or as often as you can; who goes to church every single Sunday anymore?). Sit quietly, keep your hands to yourself, put something in the offering plate.

God doesn't care if you're in church on Sunday. God cares if God is in your heart all the time. (v. 8) "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." God doesn't want you in church; God wants church inside you.

We've had the same problem all the way back to King David's time. The thing is, we haven't come up with a better alternative to getting the things of God into our hearts than being in church. Being a faithful, consistent part of a community of people who want God's ways in their heart is your best shot. It takes time and discipline. Over time, the content of faith becomes part of your life, part of you. God's ways aren't the defibrillator hanging on the wall in case of emergency. God's ways are the air you breathe, part of who you are.

V. 7: "...in the scroll of the book it is written of me." That doesn't mean God is making an list and checking it twice. When you hear about "a certain man travelled the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves," you understand that you're that man. When you hear about Peter trying to walk on the water, sinking, and crying, "Lord, save me!", you realize Peter's story is your story. "...in the scroll of the book it is written of me."

The first thing David did was remember. He had logged some time reading the scriptures. A lot of time. Thus he had a lot of memories stored up, available when he needed them.

The second thing David did was share his story. (v.9) "I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation...." (v. 10) "I have spoken of your faithfulness and our salvation."

The most important thing we do on Sundays is share stories with each other. In this room, there is a vast accumulation of experiences of how God has touched lives, even lifted people up from the desolate pit. Some are told casually around the coffee bar; some in a Sunday School class, some shared with the friend who always sits in the pew near you, some whispered to a pastor in the Prayer Chapel. Those stories are rich potting soil, packed with nutrients. Hearing them, your own story grows like a giant sequoia.

Some of those stories come in the form of song. (v. 3) "God put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God." When you're bogged in the middle of a mess, a song from God may be your most powerful friend.

Maybe you sing a line, “Great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness” and remember singing it at Michael’s funeral fifteen years ago. Our world fell apart when Michael died young of brain cancer, but somehow we ended up with our feet on a solid rock. A faithful God got us through it.

Maybe you sing “There Is a Balm in Gilead” and remember your tears when Hyoun Joo and Kathy played it during worship the week your own heart had been broken. Somehow, in the singing, God’s balm soothes your fresh wounds again.

Maybe you sing, “God is my strength, God is my rock, God is my salvation” and though we’ve only sung it here for a year or so, you’ve found it cannot be sung timidly or faint-hearted. No matter how hesitant, you sing it boldly, in the face of whatever threatens you because the music calls courage out of you. When the hymn is over, it feels like you’ve taken whatever has been weighing you down and just brushed it off like lint.

Maybe you sing “On Christ the Solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand,” and from long ago you hear King David snapping his fingers and throwing in his own words, “God set my feet upon a rock.” (v. 2)

Maybe Psalm 40, which you hadn’t even thought about, has now become part of your arsenal, next time you’re bogged down.

1. This story was told by Shannon Cason on his new podcast, *Homemade Stories*.