



# THE FIRST WORD

FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BONITA SPRINGS

## SING A NEW SONG

SERMON BY REV. STEVEN GRANT ■ FEBRUARY 4, 2018

---

I would like to begin this morning by sharing with you something about a man who was very dear to me, Paul Lough. My Uncle Paul, may God rest his soul, thought that he had life by the tail. He was a highly successful corporate executive in California, complete with all that comes with high living: wealth, travel to all the places everybody dreams about, eating at the best restaurants, and an endless investment portfolio. He loved to play golf, had a beautiful home, and more than one luxury car. Life was grand. But then a series of things happened that conspired to cause it all to come tumbling down. It impacted his career, destroyed his marriage to my dear Aunt Donna, and ruined his health to the point where he descended into the pit of despair and hopelessness. In fact, he descended so far as he wrestled with his disappointments and his despair and the pain in his body, that he wanted to end it all. He even went to a gun shop to buy a weapon to carry out his plan. In typical Uncle Paul style, he went into the store to buy the most expensive and unique weapon in the shop. After he had purchased it, his high-toned taste ended up coming to his aid. The shopkeeper did not have in stock any bullets for that particularly unique weapon, so he told Uncle Paul to come back in the next few days. Not wanting to appear too anxious, he agreed and went home.

Provisionally, that same evening, a friend who knew that Paul was in pain and despair invited him to go to an event at his church. In Uncle Paul's misery, the last thing he wanted was to be with a bunch of people. His friend insisted, however, and Uncle Paul finally decided to go. At that service Uncle Paul started to hear things that he had never heard before; some of the things sounded familiar, but he be-

gan to hear them *in a way* in which he never had. That was the beginning of a whole series of spiritual encounters that changed my Uncle Paul's life and changed his eternity forever. God had lifted him out of the pit of despair and placed his feet on solid rock. His despair turned to joy; hopelessness turned to new life as God transformed my uncle from the inside out. God had put a new song on Uncle Paul's lips. Whereas before he would crow about all his accomplishments and the worldly perspectives that he had, now he expressed gratitude for the grace, the goodness, and the faithfulness of Almighty God; giving **Him** the glory, giving **Him** the credit. Whereas before he had lived very much for himself and for his personal indulgences, now his whole focus transformed to becoming a disciple of his Lord Jesus. Whereas before he had lamented the pain, disappointment and bitterness, and burned with anger at God, at others, at himself, and the whole world, now he exuded joyousness that was contagious.

Other people were amazed! How was this possible? After what he had just gone through, how could he be so full of joy? He even called his estranged wife, my Aunt Donna, on the phone and went on and on about the goodness of God. It was just like Pentecost. She literally asked Paul if he was drunk. He exclaimed that he was not drunk, that his was an authentic transformation. Then he proceeded to tell her that she must hear about the goodness of Almighty God and what He had done in Paul's life. It was not long after that she, too, came to a new-found faith in Christ, as did my cousin Terri.

But the story does not end there. What did Paul do with all of this, or rather, what did God do with it through him? My uncle could not wait to tell others. Like the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, he simply could not keep it to himself. The Apostle Paul said, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (I Corinthians 9:16). He **had** to preach, he **had** to tell others; he could not contain it. This is exactly what happened to my uncle. At first my uncle thought maybe he should leave the corporate world and go into ministry full-time. God, however, thumped him on the side of his head and said, "Why do you think I chose you? None of those corporate executives with whom you deal go to church. I want you to bring the Lord to them!"

The next thing you know, Uncle Paul was holding Bible studies and prayer meetings in his office. All those millionaires were starting to come because they saw something in Paul. They wondered what had happened to him. Those people who had seemed to have everything said, “Paul, I want what you have. There is something missing in my life in the midst of all this wealth and privilege, and I want to have it.”

Also providentially, it was about that same time that I was wrestling with the whole question of whether to let go of my dream of a music career to go into the ministry. When I heard Paul’s testimony, heard him talk about the goodness of God, and I saw the miracles in his life, I decided that I had to be a part of it too, and my decision was made. All because God put a new song in Uncle Paul’s mouth.

This is what King David is talking about in Psalm 40, and reflects Jesus’ words in Luke 6:45: “...out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks,” meaning that it would never have come out of our mouth had it not already been in our heart. Not only speech, but any manifestation of our behavior that comes out of us is first within our heart. We are often in denial about this. We make excuses: “I mis-spoke” or “I was really angry so I said what I did not mean.” What we really are saying is that we are sorry we said what we meant!

It is good for us to periodically have a reality check on what is in our heart. There are times when we sincerely try to discipline what comes out of us. We want to bridle our tongue or amend a behavior, but we fail and are frustrated because we keep trying to deal with the symptom! What we need to deal with is not the symptom but what is driving it. To change something in our life that is coming out, we need a new heart: a **heart transplant**! This is especially evident when we say things when we are most vulnerable; for instance, when we are facing our own mortality or the mortality of a loved one; when we are dealing with a broken relationship or lost dreams or economic struggles; health issues, or concerns about our kids. All of these things make it seem as if our world were turning upside down and our expressions of cynicism, hopelessness and despair come out in our honest laments.

Unlike Job, sometimes we really give God “what for.” At the very least we come to him, as we should, with broken hearts because we feel that we have been robbed of our joy. Where before we might have covered it all up for effect or for appearance’s sake, when we are at our worst, at our most vulnerable point, what really is in our hearts has a way of coming out.

There is a common phrase we use to refer to a change of attitude. We say, “Well, that will change your tune!” King David had a more eloquent way of saying it, “He put a new song in my mouth” (Psalm 40:3). What he meant was that God has a way of transforming our hearts, which in turn transforms how we express ourselves. In Psalm 40:8, he says, “your law is within my heart.” He realized that is where it starts because that is what is driving everything else.

David was a singer, a songwriter, a harpist; he knew about good songs, but he knew about the goodness and character of Almighty God. The Holy Spirit used David and his gift of music as a way of revealing to us who God is, that we can have hope in Him. Look how David begins Psalm 40 in the very first verse: “I waited patiently for the LORD.” I can just hear you all saying, “Now, *that’s* easy to do!” Waiting can be difficult! I guarantee that my Uncle Paul was not waiting very patiently either. One of the reasons why waiting is so difficult is not because we are necessarily being impatient (although that might be part of it); rather, it is because we may think that while we are waiting we are wasting time. We want our life to move forward and it just does not seem that God is moving fast enough or that things are happening the way they are supposed to, so we think we are wasting time.

I want to encourage you, friends, that you are not wasting time. You must understand that God is always at work! It might be that during a time of waiting, God is doing His work within us. He might be doing work in others or in other situations about which you know nothing but which need to happen before whatever it is you are praying for can come to pass. We must trust God’s intimate activity in human life.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks about being anxious. I remember that the first time I read that passage I wondered if this were some New Age thing where He talks about birds and flowers. What did He mean when He said not to be anxious? He reminded them to consider the birds and consider the flowers. Almighty God, the great Creator of the universe, is so intimately involved in His creation that He even makes sure that the birds have something to eat and that the tiniest flower is a miracle of beauty. Do you not think that God might be able to help you with what it is you are dealing with? Are you not so much more valuable than the birds and flowers? God is always at work, and that “patiently” part reveals that you trust Him. I am waiting because God is at work, and I wait patiently because I trust Him.

Then David, continuing in verse 1, reminds us that God does hear; He is not ignoring us, He is not on vacation, He is not asleep, He is not too busy: “He inclined to me and heard my cry.” Anytime you bring something to Almighty God, even at your worst moments, trust that He hears and that He lovingly says to you, “I know.”

David then goes on and gives his testimony of God’s grace.

He drew me up from the pit of destruction,  
out of the miry bog,  
and set my feet upon a rock,  
making my steps secure. (Psalm 40:2)

This is exactly what my Uncle Paul experienced. God gives us a more solid foundation on which to base our life. God’s work in our life may not necessarily be exactly what we were asking for, but it is exactly what we need, and it is exactly according to His purpose. The great news is that there is life after trouble! As David says in Psalm 23:4, “...though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” God is working out His purpose in our lives. There is life after trouble! As a result, a new song comes from our lips. Look what he says in the next verse:

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

Others will see and be amazed. They will wonder how you can have so much joy in your heart when you have been through such trauma. How can you have so much peace after what you have been through? You see, they are expecting bitterness and sorrow, a long recovery time, and lasting wounds. That is how they would respond because they do not know Jesus. They try to be understanding.

No! There is a new song! Do not wallow in Satan's pit! Our Lord is all about **new life**. He is all about rebuilding us. Sometimes we go through those valleys "of the shadow of death" but God brings us through those! Sometimes He has to break us to rebuild us in His own image. Jesus does not want us to just learn how to cope with life. He wants us to heal! He is all about resurrection! When others see God's work in us, they want what we have, too. We have a tremendous witness to offer! We are not boasting about ourselves, but rather, we are witnessing to the glory of God and what He has done.

My friends, this is only possible if we authentically, genuinely, and ultimately trust in Him. And this is what David asserts:

Blessed is the man who makes  
the LORD his trust,  
who does not turn to the proud,  
to those who go astray after a lie! (Psalm 40:4)

Whenever we pray the Lord's Prayer, we say, "Thy will be done." Is that really our prayer? Do we earnestly seek His will? When we earnestly desire His purpose, we must come to terms with Who is sovereign. Is it we or is it He? Whose will is the priority here? We must understand that when we accept Jesus as Lord, we embrace the fact that our lives are not our own, we belong to **Him**. Our lives are **His** and He is free to do with them as He pleases. We are called according to **His** purpose.

There are things in this world in which we must trust to some degree, but the things in this world are fallible; they are temporary and full of false promises. David goes on to say:

You have multiplied, O LORD my God,  
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;  
none can compare with you!  
I will proclaim and tell of them,  
yet they are more than can be told. (Psalm 40:5)

What he is saying here is that God's examples of faithfulness are endless. His track record is amazing! We discover that His way is always the best way even if it is hard for us to see. Remember how the 23rd Psalm ends? "...goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life..." The word "follow" does not mean just tagging along; it literally means "to pursue." God's goodness and mercy are chasing after us; we cannot get away from them! They are all around us. When that peace and that inner joy comes, we can rest, trusting in His purpose. We will not be able to do that until we really know Him. When we do, we find that He is worthy of that trust.

And then, like my uncle, David declares how he will tell others about what God has done:

I have told the glad news of deliverance  
in the great congregation;  
behold, I have not restrained my lips,  
as you know, O LORD. (Psalm 40:9)

I do not think we do this often enough. We do not make this a habit or create occasions when we share with others what God has done in our lives. We keep it to ourselves. We think other people do not want to hear it, or we do not want to sound like a "Jesus freak." When we share, when we testify to one another about God's activity in our lives and describe specific things that God has done for us, we build each other up. Many people go through trouble without a reservoir of testimony. They do not know whether they can trust God. God has done so many unbelievable miracles throughout

human history, and He has done miracles in our own lives. David is saying that he does not want to hold those things back, he wants to tell everyone in the great congregation all of the things that God has done in his life.

I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart;  
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;  
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faith-  
fulness from the great congregation. (Psalm 40:10)

We can testify to one another and encourage one another. God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving. During spiritual challenges, when we go through one of those valleys and life hits us squarely between the eyes, we must understand that all the things about God are still true. He still is all-powerful, all-loving, and all-knowing; somehow, we have to learn how to rediscover this in light of our new experience. The truth is God never changes. We may need to change, especially when life comes at us the hardest.

Sometimes we sabotage ourselves from being able to fully grasp the hope that God gives us. Look at the beginning of verse 12: “For evils have encompassed me beyond number...” Remember what I said a moment ago about the 23rd Psalm: “goodness and mercy shall follow me...”? What do we do? We sabotage ourselves when trouble comes; all we focus on is the trouble. It is as if we have blinders on and cannot see all the incredible miracles of grace and love that surround us and should encourage us even as we fall into the pit. If all we look for is darkness, then darkness is all we are going to see. His goodness and mercy **does** follow us and is all around us!

David goes on to say, “...my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head...” We become aware of how sinful we are, as if Satan were whispering in our ear that God is getting back at us for being such awful people. No! God is not punishing us! He does not operate that way! He put all that sin on Jesus!



Do you understand that the full wrath of God was focused on just one place: the cross? His most extreme expression of wrath was on the cross and Jesus bore that burden for us! As a result, Almighty God looks at us as if we had never sinned a day in our lives.

The simple reality is that we live in a fallen world where we must deal with our sins, the sins of others, and calamities of all sorts. The ultimate question is, will those things defeat us? When we have Jesus Christ as the Lord of our life, when we fully embrace what David is trying to get us to see, the answer is a resounding, **“No, it will not defeat me!”** Those burdens that weigh us down are not the end of the story! We must reject the belief that our sins are beyond numbering and our troubles are so overwhelming they are going to defeat us; that our sins are such that God is so mad at us there is no hope for us. We must reject that and believe the Gospel; believe what Jesus has done for us. If we do not, as David says at the end of verse 12, “my heart fails me.”

That is exactly what happened to Uncle Paul. His heart failed him and the only option he saw was to destroy his life. But when that brother took Paul to a church service, he heard the gospel. Jesus Christ said, “No, your life is not over Paul. I have plans for you.” Satan was rejected, and Jesus was and is the Victor. We must be able to say to ourselves that whatever life throws at us, whatever Satan throws at us, we will not be defeated because Jesus is the Victor and we are His.

At the end of Psalm 40, in verses 16 and 17, you might think that David is contradicting himself when he says, “...do not delay, O my God!” What happened to waiting patiently? I submit to you that he is not contradicting himself. What has happened is that David’s perspective has changed as he sings the psalm.

But may all who seek you  
rejoice and be glad in you;  
may those who love your salvation  
say continually, “Great is the LORD! (Psalm 40:16)

In the beginning of Psalm 40, David was seeking for God to **do** something. At the end of the Psalm, he was not seeking what God will *do*, he was seeking *Him* regardless of what God did; David wanted God. He wanted that intimacy, that closeness, that relationship. He asked God not to delay because he wanted to be with Him! It is like when a loved one has been away for a long time and we are waiting for their return; we just want to **be** with them. This is what David is saying at the end of Psalm 40, in contrast to what he said at the beginning.

Friends, as I close I want to share my heart with you. Someday, many of you will come into this room and participate in a memorial service in memory of me. I know that God has already chosen the day of my death, and I do not worry about that. What I am concerned about is how I live my life in the meantime. The end of my life will come someday, and when it does, I want you to know that I am very much looking forward to seeing my dear parents and my dear brother David again, along with my Uncle Paul and my seminary roommate John. If my dear Nanette or our son Evan precede me in death, of course I will want to see them. But even amid all of that, the one I want to see more than any other is Him: my Lord Jesus. I want to be able to look upon His face, I want to be able to hear His voice and to feel the touch of His hand.

What about you? Do you love Him so much that He is ultimately the desire of your heart? If He is, He will lift you up out of the pit, put your feet on solid ground, and enable you to love others as you could never love them before. He will secure your feet and you will have His peace that passes all understanding and the healing and new life that we all crave. My prayer for all of you is that God will put a new song on your lips. A song that proclaims that God is good, that He is ever faithful. To Him be all praise and glory. Amen. ■

