

11. Psalm 38-41

June 2, 2011

Psalm 38

One of the many things impresses me about king David is his candid heart toward God with the exception of the time of his backsliding. Of course I am talking about the time when he committed the treacherous sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah.

King David could express his heart of praise and adoration to the Lord as well as brokenness from his sins like no other. It is no wonder why he was called as “the sweet psalmist of Israel”. How many times did I not know what to say to the Lord because of the lack of words! That was the time I turned to the Book of Psalms and started to read. Often I find myself agreeing with the author of the psalm I was reading and only to find out that it was written by king David.

At the beginning of the study of this Book, I told you guys that the Book of Psalms can be divided into five sections. From chapter 1 to 41 represents ‘Humanity’ and it coincides with Genesis. Many of these psalms describe humans as blessed, fallen and redeemed by God. David wrote most of these psalms. They are very personal in nature.

In this individual lament David is overwhelmed with guilt, abandonment, and a desire for renewed fellowship with God. He suffers with a sickness from which he has not yet recovered. All the while he experiences the hand of God’s discipline and waits for the Lord to respond to his need. Because of the themes of sin, guilt, judgment, and hope in God’s salvation, Psalm 38 has been used as a penitential psalm with Psalm 6, 32, 51, 102, 130, and 143. The theme is essentially a lament, ending on a note of hope.

A. PRAYER FOR RECONCILIATION

Psalm 38:1-4 A Psalm of David. To bring to remembrance. O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure! 2 For Your arrows pierce me deeply, And Your hand presses me down. 3 There is no soundness in my flesh Because of Your anger, Nor any health in my bones Because of my sin. 4 For my iniquities have gone over my head; Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.

The psalmist is fully aware of the sovereign hand of God in his life. In his agony he has come to understand the nature of cause and effect. Not all disease results from individual sin. But this disease is associated with “Your wrath” in v1 and “my sin” in v4.

Suffering is a form of God’s discipline in the school of righteousness. Sometimes His discipline may seem harsh. But it is not more than we can handle, because the Lord knows how much we can handle.

The intensity of God’s discipline has affected the psalmist’s capacity to enjoy life. There is no part of his being that has not been affected. The evidence of God’s displeasure is with him, so that there is no “soundness” in his bones, a metaphor for his body.

David does not question God's justice. Throughout this psalm he recognizes his own sinfulness. He has come to the breaking point because the consequences of his sin have overwhelmed him. They are like an intolerable burden from which he cannot escape. Therefore he lifts himself up to the Lord with the prayer for relief, compassion, and reconciliation.

B. IN YOU O LORD I HOPE

Psalm 38:15 For in You, O Lord, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God.

In his total abandonment David cries out to God as his sole refuge. Even in the darkest moments there is still the glimmer of light coming out of a living faith in God. He knows that God can answer. In his call out to the Lord, he still calls on Him as "Lord my God."

In the Psalms this is far from being a pious phrase, a liturgical form, or an impersonal manner of empty prayers. David claims that the Ruler of the universe is his God.

C. I WILL DECLARE MY INIQUITY

Psalm 38:17-18 For I am ready to fall, And my sorrow is continually before me. 18 For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin.

David confesses his sins again. As long as he was still troubled by guilt and the consequences of sin, he clung to the Lord for his assurance.

This is not so different from a Christian who in his suffering from his sins continues to plead with God for full pardon and restoration.

But David didn't have the luxury of the Bible we have. He knew the Lord, but not in writing. We find many comforting verses throughout the Bible that our God's forgiveness is complete and we don't need to dwell on it time after time.

Jeremiah 31:34b For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

However, the problem is that there are people today who think they have confessed their sin when they actually have not. Far too many people think that to confess their sin is merely to acknowledge their sin. Therefore, they will sin, they will get caught, and they will say, "I acknowledge what I did. I confess that sin. That was a bad thing." Then they go out and do it again and say, "Oops, I did it again. I confess." That's not a true confession. They are simply recognizing what is obviously sin. We call it 'remorse', not repentance.

Confession means to see sin for what it is and the way God sees it, to be sorry for it, and to turn from it. You have to take your sin to the cross and recognize it is offensive to the one and only true God. Are you willing to do that? If so, then God will forgive you and cleanse you from all your unrighteousness.

D. APPLICATION

God's forgiveness for our sins is complete as long as we truly repent, not remorse.

Psalm 39

Many great men and women down through the ages have offered counsel on how to keep our tongues checked and caged. Like Will Noris, the American journalist once wrote:

If your lips would keep from slips,

Five things observe with care:

To whom you speak, of whom you speak, and how... and when... and where.

Publius, the Greek sage, put his finger on a technique we tend to forget: "I have often regretted my speech, never my silence."

A. PUT A SOCK IN IT

Psalm 39:1-3 I said, "I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me." 2 I was mute with silence, I held my peace even from good; And my sorrow was stirred up. 3 My heart was hot within me; While I was musing, the fire burned. Then I spoke with my tongue:

That's what it takes, folks. A conscious, tight muzzle on the muscle in our mouths. With emphasis on "conscious."

To accomplish that disciplined objective, I offer these three suggestions:

1) Think first.

Before your lips start moving, pause ten seconds delay and mentally preview your words. Are they accurate or exaggerated? Kind or cutting? Necessary or needless? Wholesome or vile? Grateful or complaining?

2) Talk less.

You increase your chances of blowing it if you talk too much. Furthermore, compulsive talkers find it difficult to keep friends. Conserve your verbal energy.

On the way to New York from Chicago a couple of weeks ago, a woman in front of me talked the entire two solid hours non-stop. What a motor-mouth!

3) Let's start this now.

Let's fit that muzzle on our mouths. I don't think that there is one person here who has no issue with one's mouth. It's a project we all have put off long enough.

B. THE MEASURE OF A LIFE

Psalm 39:4 "Lord, make me to know my end, And what is the measure of my days, That I may know how frail I am.

It seems that everyone wants to know how to prolong their lives with a few exceptions.. But here is what we need to realize: God has an appointed day for our birth as well as for our death.

Job 14:5 Since his days are determined, The number of his months is with You; You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass.

Let's say your doctor called you into his office tomorrow and said, "I have just received your test results, and I regret to inform you that you have approximately one year to live." If that were the situation, how would you live your life from that point on? Would you live any differently? Would you put so much emphasis on the same things that you've been holding onto so tightly? Probably not.

When it is all said and done, it is not just about living a long life; it is living a life that is full and purposeful. Sometimes people live long lives and waste them. Others live long lives and do horrible things with them and to others. And some live shorter lives, but their lives make a great difference. And a small number of people really know how to live for the Lord and for His glory.

Corrie ten Boom said, "The measure of a life, after all, is not its duration but its donation." What kind of donation is your life making to the Lord and others?

C. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Think first. Talk less. Start today.
- 2) Ask yourself: What is the purpose of my life? Am I making the difference in God's kingdom?

Psalm 40

I hate waiting. Any waiting for that matter. Great philosopher Jerry Hamby once told someone, "Patience is not one of Joonho's virtues." I agree, at the same time, I don't think that I am the only one who does not like to wait. But we all need to learn to be patient in God's timing.

A. HE HAS PUT A NEW SONG IN MY MOUTH

Psalm 40:1-4 I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry. 2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps. 3 He has put a new song in my mouth-- Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, And will trust in the Lord. 4 Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust, And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.

God never wastes suffering. Trials work for us, not against us. If we trust God and yield to Him, then trials will produce patience and maturity in our lives. If we rebel and fight against the trainings that the Lord allows to come our ways, then we will remain immature and impatient. God permits trials that He might build character into our lives. He can grow a mushroom overnight, but it takes many years-and many storms-to build a mighty oak.

Romans 5:3-5 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

The "new song in my mouth" may not be a cheerful victory song because all the trials and tests are over. It might be the song that comes in the result of simple surrender and faith in God. Does it make the difference? Of course, it does. The trial may not be over, but we would have the peace that passes all men's understanding.

Philippians 4:7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

B. APPLICATION

When we put our problems in God's hands, He puts His peace in our hearts.

Psalm 41

Psalm 41 reflects on the blessedness of the godly, even when they are taken by great sickness or adversity. The Lord blesses His own with sustenance, even when they suffer on account of sin. This psalm affirms that the Lord knows the integrity of heart and that He will have compassion on His own.

A. GOD'S BLESSINGS IN ADVERSITY

Psalm 41:1-2 Blessed is he who considers the poor; The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. 2 The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, And he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies.

How blessed are the children of God, as we receive grace upon grace! But God's blessings are not automatically bestowed on His people. The Father in heaven looks for those who wisely conform to His heavenly kingdom on earth: righteousness, holiness, love, mercy, and justice.

Our God cares for the oppressed and delights to see His children's concern with the things that are important to Him: concern for those in need.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Some people, including born-again Christians cannot think of anyone else other than themselves. Their favorite phrases is "Pray for me." It is all about them. They do not offer any prayer to the Lord for others. You can imagine what kind of participation they would have if they were asked to help someone in action. They always have some important reasons why they cannot be there to help others. They forget that helping the needy is one of God's top priorities.

B. APPLICATION

Take your eyes off from your situation and look for someone around you whom you can bless with the blessings from the Lord. You will be blessed by the Lord for that.

Matthew 25:37-40 Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'