

Psalm 39 • Let me know how fleeting I am!

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Psalm chapter 39. I'm going to go ahead and read through this Psalm. We're going to talk about some of the points of it.

*"I said, "I will guard my ways,
that I may not sin with my tongue;
I will guard my mouth with a muzzle,
so long as the wicked are in my presence."*

*² I was mute and silent;
I held my peace to no avail,
and my distress grew worse.*

*³ My heart became hot within me.
As I mused, the fire burned;
then I spoke with my tongue:*

*⁴ "O LORD, make me know my end
and what is the measure of my days;
let me know how fleeting I am!*

*⁵ Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths,
and my lifetime is as nothing before you.
Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!*

*⁶ Surely a man goes about as a shadow!
Surely for nothing they are in turmoil;
man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather!*

*⁷ "And now, O LORD, for what do I wait?
My hope is in you.*

*⁸ Deliver me from all my transgressions.
Do not make me the scorn of the fool!*

*⁹ I am mute; I do not open my mouth,
for it is you who have done it.*

*¹⁰ Remove your stroke from me;
I am spent by the hostility of your hand.*

*¹¹ When you discipline a man
with rebukes for sin,*

*you consume like a moth what is dear to him;
surely all mankind is a mere breath!*

¹² *“Hear my prayer, O LORD,
and give ear to my cry;
hold not your peace at my tears!
For I am a sojourner (that means a traveler) with you,
a guest, like all my fathers.
¹³ Look away from me, that I may smile again,
before I depart and am no more!” (ESV)*

Wow, you can tell that chapter 39 very much goes hand in hand with the previous chapter that we looked at because again, David is describing the disciplinary action of the Lord, the hand of God as it relates to His discipline upon his life, and the things that go along with that. But from this Psalm, there emerged two primary themes. One of them is lifting our complaints to God, and the other one is the brevity of life.

Let's talk about complaining just a little bit and let's start by saying, alright, let's face it, at some time in our lives, we've complained. We've had complaints about our life. Whether it's our job, whether it's a relationship that's gone bad, whether it's a lack of money, whether it's our health, whether it's loneliness, or however many other things that we could complain about, there's probably no end to them.

But I want you to notice here, complaining is one thing. I want you to notice that David begins this Psalm by saying, I've been determined not to complain in front of unbelievers. And that's the way he starts.

What he says in verse 1 is, *“I said, “I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue; (in other words, with my words) I will guard my mouth with a muzzle, (look at this) so long as the wicked are in my presence.””* And that's, he's referring to unbelievers there, the ungodly, if you will. Alright?

And by the way, this is really real wisdom. And this is really real wisdom for you and I. David says, the voicing of my complaints in the wrong company is something I'm going to avoid because that can really be a bad thing.

Why is it a bad thing? Well, for starters, it may communicate to other people who don't know the Lord that you don't think God cares about you, or at the very least you're not satisfied with the way He's caring for you. It may also appear that you are blaming God for your troubles.

We see this happen, frankly, and with the advent of things like Facebook, I cringe when I read a lot of Christians posts on Facebook. I think to myself. Okay, would you really do this if you went in a room full of people and you knew that the majority of them were unbelievers? Would you really go into that room and start complaining about the way you've been treated and complaining? And would you come out and actually say, I'm just really upset with God.

I mean, that's one thing to say in front of a mature believer. And I've heard people say it, and I don't deny them the right to say it in the proper circumstances. I can handle it, I'm sure you can too. If somebody comes up to you, and they're a believer, but they're struggling, and they're saying to you, I'm just really struggling, and I'm not real happy with God right now. I'm okay, you're okay, we're going to sit down, we're going to pray it through. We're going to talk about it. And nobody's going to stumble because of that sort of a remark.

But what about unbelievers? What about people that don't know the Lord? What about people who are just beginning to seek the Lord? Maybe they've been vacillating between the God of the Bible and some other deity that they've heard of lately. And you're this renowned, Christian, and they're thinking, and they hear you say what you say and they're thinking, I'll try the other direction because I don't think this God takes care of His people very well. I don't think He's a very good master. I don't think He's a very good Father. I think He's kind of a meanie.

Are we saying that to people when we get on social media? Are we telling people that God's a big cosmic killjoy who just likes to ruin our lives? Yeah. Well, David knew as he writes this Psalm that his emotions were running so high in this area of expressing his complaint, that if he spoke out, he could easily be misunderstood in the wrong company. And his words could end up being a betrayal of the loving kindness of God and God's faithfulness to our lives.

Our complaints and our lack of contentedness often tell people all the theology they're wanting to know. Tells them a lot about this God whom we serve. Let me show you a passage from Hebrews chapter 13, verse 5. It says,

Hebrews 13:5 (ESV)

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, (don't always be talking about how you're not happy with the way life has been doled out to you, why?) for (God) he has (told you) said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." That's a promise.

God gave you a promise in the Word that He would never leave you or forsake you. When you and I speak disparagingly about the Lord, we are basically denying that promise. We're denying the truth of it. We're denying the veracity of it, and we're essentially saying, well, He might have said that, but it sure hasn't happened in my life. And I don't think that's what we want to communicate to people, quite honestly. I think we want to communicate, something different.

Here's the point, when you're full of complaints, and sometimes it happens, David is going to express it here. But the point is, go to believers who are mature in the Lord, and can handle your complaint. Go talk to mature believers. Cry in front of them. Stomp, yell, kick and scream. They're going to be okay, but be very careful about what you say in front of unbelievers when you're talking about the difficulties that you are enduring in life, be very, very, careful.

Now, David is laying out his complaints to God here and in the very last verse of the chapter, I'm going to take things a little out of order. But you'll notice if you look with me again in verse 13, he says, *"Look away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more!"*

That's a pretty strong statement to say to the Lord, isn't it? Lord, I wish you'd turn your gaze away from my life so that I could at least be happy for a while. Look what he says at the end, *"before I depart and am no more."* That's a way of saying, before you kill me. Lord, I'm just asking if you would please look away before you kill me. Thank you. Would you just ignore me for a while?

It seems like the white hot search light of your holiness is constantly shining into my heart, exposing all of the dirty dark crevices, and all of the things in there that I don't ever want anybody to see, but you're exposing them. And it's like, can't you just look away for a minute and give me a break. Let me catch my breath for a minute.

Well, again, that's the statement you don't want to say. David says I made a determination to put a muzzle on my mouth. I'm not going to say that a thing in front of unbelievers. That's not the thing I'm going to say, because they're going to misinterpret and it will come out as a betrayal. It will sound very much like a betrayal.

Now, the other theme that we see in this Psalm is again, this whole issue of the brevity of life. And can I just tell you that in Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, which by the way, we call the Wisdom Literature, or the Wisdom Books in the Bible. This is a common thread.

There's other books in the Bible that mention it just as readily, but probably nowhere like Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. The brevity of life is replete in these three books and David is speaking about that, and crying out to the Lord about it.

And I want you to look with me again in verse 4, would you? Verse 4 says, "*O LORD, (this is David's request) make me know my end (meaning he's talking about the end of his life) and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am!*"

Now, I want you to stop here for just a minute, and I want us to think a little bit about what David is actually saying here, because it sounds a little morbid, to be completely honest with you.

It's like, Lord, let's talk death, and let's talk about my death. Let's talk about my end, the end of my days. I want to just really focus on this for a little while sort of thing. And you're left going, really? That's what you wanted to talk to God about? You wanted to have a discussion about that, did you? That's weird.

Well, what is David asking? Listen, David is not asking for specifics about his death. He's not asking about when it's going to happen, where it's going to happen. He's not asking about those things and what he's doing is he's asking to understand the brevity of life. And that doesn't mean just to simply know that life is brief. He's mentioned that already. Many times throughout the Psalms.

As we said, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, brevity of life is all through there, and David talks about it a lot. He already knows that life is short, so what is he crying out for? He's crying out to understand the brevity of his own days as it relates to his life, his relationship to God, and I believe that the essence of what he's wanting.

His desire is expressed in verse 12. Would you look with me there in your Bible? He says, "*Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears! (here's the point here at the end) For I am a sojourner with you, a guest, like all my fathers.*" Or as the NIV puts it, if you have an NIV on your lap, "*for I dwell with you as an alien, a stranger, as all my fathers were.*"

You see, this isn't just a request from David to God to receive specific information on his earthly existence. David is expressing something of a godly impatience to move on and to take hold of the life that is truly life. Let me know, let me understand the length of my days. Let me understand, beyond simply knowing that life is brief. Help me to understand, help me to lay hold of this life that you have called me to, that by the way, I don't really belong in this place. And that's what he says there at the end when he says, as a sojourner or an alien, a stranger, a traveler, David is communicating to God, I don't belong here.

Now, you guys might think that there's a record skipping in your brain, but that's not true. We actually did talk about this on Sunday. Just this last Sunday we dealt here with this issue, and we looked with some, into some passages that dealt with this issue of us being a stranger, us being an alien in this land, and we were looking at it from the context of Paul's remark in Philippians that said that, we are citizens of heaven. He said your citizenship is in heaven.

And we talked about that as it relates to the temporal nature of our living in this world. But you'll remember that last Sunday, I actually brought up on the screen a passage from Hebrews. And I want to read that again, but I want to enlarge it. I want to give you way more than I probably would normally give to people on a Sunday morning because this passage in Hebrews is so amazing. He writes,

Hebrews 11:8-10 (ESV)

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Let's stay there for just a moment. Hang on, let's go back. Do you see how this life of Abraham and the call of Abraham is so perfectly fitted to our life in this world? Right? “...Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that

he was to receive as an inheritance.” But did he know anything about that land that he was being sent to?

The Bible says he had no idea. The land of Canaan was it was given to him by promise. God says, I'm going to give you, he didn't know anything about it. Do you and I know what heaven is going to be like? No! I mean, we have these vague sort of insights, from the Word of God, but really there's not much to go on, to be honest, and you know why? I think that's on purpose.

The reason God didn't give us a lot of information is that we're to lay hold of it by faith. Just like Abraham didn't know, he didn't know anything about Canaan. It's mine? Yep. What's it look like? Well, just wait till you get there. Okay, here we go, right? We're going to start the journey. Okay?

Hebrews 11:8-10 (ESV)

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

“*And he went out, not knowing where he was going.*” Right? “*By faith...*” he went to live in the land of promise. As in a foreign land, now he gets there, and now there's this interesting new picture that takes over. The metaphor shifts and changes.

Now, living in Canaan, now it becomes this picture of living in the world, where he lives as a foreigner, in tents. What do you and I live in? Tents, right? We're foreigners, strangers. And notice that the reason that he went was because “*...he was looking forward to... (even a better) city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.*”

Alright? Let's go on and read.

Hebrews 11:13-14 (ESV)

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

Hebrews 11:15-16 (ESV)

If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city (for them).

Isn't that beautiful? Beautiful picture of what it is to be a sojourner, like David says. And that's why he prays, Lord, let me know my days. Let me understand this whole thing and the brevity of life because I know I'm just a guest here. I'm just traveling through. I'm just making my way through this land. And I have not set down foundations. I'm in a tent. The best that holds my house down is a stake, a peg.

And that speaks of the frailty of life, right? Isn't it amazing? That people spend so much time in this life, making things secure rather than living their life with an eye toward eternity and securing life there, which goes on forever.

This is a wisp, and yet we focus so much time on maintaining it. Securing it. Making it strong. Making it as permanent as we know how. I'm going to plant a tree, or I'm going to put up a rock, and I'm going to engrave my name in that rock, and generations to come are going to read my name and see that rock, and they're going to remember.

If we put just a little bit of that effort into securing our eternal future, our eternity with God, just saying, you know what, this life is just going to go, but I want to just make sure that I am secure in Christ. That my life with Him for all eternity is secure because that's the life that is truly life. That's the reality that's truly real. That's what David is talking about.