

Psalms 39

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[0 : 00] I'll open up your Bibles to Psalm 39. Psalm 39. Psalm 39 is the Psalm of Confession.

! The title of the Psalm, you'll see that it says, To the Choir Master. And so it's a reminder! That this Psalm would have been sung. That's why it's inscripted. It's there so that you and I will sing the Psalms. And I think we often read the Psalms quickly, if that's your habit. You know how we read the Psalms, we read them quickly. And what we're doing is we're looking for the lovely verse. And we're looking for the lovely verse that maybe is on a calendar, or we can send it somewhere. The sweet verse. And that's not a bad thing to do, alright? But I want you to know that the book of Psalms have a logic. And they have an argument. And the Psalms go in a direction, and sometimes they go in a direction that we don't want them to go. And sometimes the logic isn't obvious, or the argument neat. But we need to understand them, and we need to understand the flow of where they're going. And do you know that the word amuse literally means not to think? I say I think I'm atheist, no God.

I think amoral, no morals. A means not. And amuse, amuse means to think or meditate. So to amuse is not to think. And we do need, don't we, to amuse ourselves now and again. We do need, some of you need, to stop thinking. And sometimes we need to rest our brains. And the problem is, we live in a culture, don't we, that amuses ourselves all the time. That's the disease in lots of ways of our culture. Comedians are superstars. Why? Because they stop us thinking. And we deliberately avoid thinking. Don't your friends find that? Don't you find that with your friends and your neighbours and your work colleagues? You try to drive them to the conclusion of their arguments, but they just won't think. And we are not to deliberately avoid thinking. We are meant to think. And we're meant to rest. And we are meant to amuse ourselves all at the right time. And these psalms call you to think. Psalm 39 stretches you. If you read Psalm 39 really quickly, you'll think that it's just like the title. Can you see the title of Psalm 39, which is inspired, What's the Measure of My Days? You'll think it's just about the brevity of life. Seems that the psalmist is a little bit alone, doesn't it? In the psalm. But as you read about it, read it more carefully, you see that the psalmist is confessing. The psalmist is about sin. And this writer, David King, David, he has the wisdom to seek God's forgiveness, which is absolutely crucial to say, because if you don't get forgiveness, you'll never meet that God safely. And God has made you and I to know him. God has made you so that you, little old you, can have fellowship with the great God of heaven and earth, but you need to be forgiven. And if you don't collect forgiveness, then you'll never have fellowship.

You'll never have friendship with God. The problem, of course, for us who are Christians, is we've often strained that fellowship, haven't we, in friendship. Or we bruise it, or we cloud it. And one of the reasons that we kind of go around in a sort of limbo spiritually, in a miserable condition, is either because we're not returning, like the prodigal son. Do you remember when he came to his senses, he got up and he returned to his father? Or maybe we're not rejoicing in his welcome like we should. And so we've got to keep asking questions.

I have to keep asking myself day by day, am I doing the returning to God? And whether I've done the rejoicing? People who are not Christians don't realise the importance of God's forgiveness either. And we know, don't we, that lots of people suffer from illnesses that are called psychogenic. Which means that their origin, the origin of their illness, is emotional or mental stress or distress. And these people are looking everywhere, but upwards to God.

[4 : 58] As I hope tonight we'll learn from Psalm 39. It's a terrific brief Psalm, 13 verses, and four little sections. And we know, don't we, that a sermon with four points, and that all begin with the same letter, is irritating, and cheesy, and artificial. It's terrible. But what can you do when the psalm begins with a crime, and it goes on to a conviction, and it moves to a confession, and it ends up with a crime? What can you do? You just have to go with it. So here we are, and first it's one to be the

crime, okay? That's what David says. I will guard my ways, that I might not sin with my tongue. I will guard my mouth with a muzzle, so long as the wicked are in my presence. I was mute and silent. I held my peace to no avail, and my distress grew worse. He wanted to speak, but he keeps silent.

He wanted to keep quiet. He didn't want to speak because there were unbelievers around him. What the Old Testament calls the wicked. The wicked are in my presence, and in verse one, so I'll guard my mouth. It's not because their behaviour was especially wicked and they were really evil people. They may be very lovely, but they were disconnected from God.

And so David decides, doesn't he, I am not going to speak. I'm going to control myself. I'm going to close my mouth. He was going to stay quiet. He didn't say anything at all, and then suddenly we realise in verse three, my heart became hot within me as I amused, the fire burned, and then I spoke with my tongue. He exploded. That's the sin of the psalm.

The sin of speech. There are others in the Bible that sin by exploding with their speech. So for example, Jeremiah says, I can't keep the word in. And he can't keep the word in.

He preaches. He explodes in an honourable way. Spreads the word of God. But there's a guy in the book of Job, isn't there, Elihu, and he explodes in a dishonourable way. He's so pleased in his happy pompous, and he says exactly what he wants to say in a bad way. And so David here explodes, obviously, in a bad way. What does he say? Well, you might think what he says is in verse four.

[7 : 30] Especially as it's got inverted commas around it. But look at verse four. Verse four, Oh Lord, make me know my end. And what is the measure of my days? Let me know how fleeting I am. Behold, you've made my days like a few hand breaths.

That's not a cynical thing to say, is it? That's alright. That's a perfectly fine thing to say. That is the sort of thing that comes up in the Psalms all the time.

So what did David say that was so wrong? Did he say something against his condition? Did he say something against his circumstance? Did he say something against the wicked?

Did he vent at the wicked? Did he yell at them? Did he yell at God? And the answer is we don't know. We don't know. We don't know what he said. Well, I think that's good.

Because he tells us just that he sinned with his mouth. And that is a principle for you and I to learn from him. God bless David.

[8 : 31] He frees up to the sin of his mouth. We often say, don't we on a Sunday, in our confession of sin, forgive us our sins of thought and word and deed. But we don't care that much about where the mind goes or where the mouth goes.

And if you don't think I'm telling the truth, think about the kind of conversations that you and I are capable of having in the car on the way home from church. We'll say what we like, won't we?

And David is facing up to his sin. He may have said something which dishonours God. He may have been a really poor witness to unbelievers around him, but it cut into him like a knife.

He felt his sin. And those of you who know what it is like, and we all do, to say the wrong thing or to explode. We remember, don't we, the words of the book of James, where the book of James says that there's no one who can control their speeches.

Or the tongue, well, it can lead to great blessings, says James, or it can be like a fire on a hot day on dry grass.

[9 : 40] And you and I, if we know anything, we know that we need the help of the Holy Spirit to control our speech. To govern and control our lives. And we're very grateful, aren't we, for those who do exercise great self-control in their speech.

And so one of the great challenges in life is learning when to speak and when not to speak. I read somewhere this week that one of the signs of a good marriage is that you don't say three things a day that you'd like to say.

I think that's true of all relationships. Do you not say some things? And the difficulty is, is knowing when we could speak and how things are made worse.

Or we decide not to say anything and then we're in danger of being misunderstood. It's a big challenge, isn't it? Knowing when to speak in life and when not to speak. We need to pray the words of Psalm 19.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight. And we need your help. And on the other hand, when we do explode, as we do sometimes, we feel so strongly about some things and we speak in an overreaction.

[10:51] You know those times when you've said something and a person has responded in a way that's just way over the top. It happens, doesn't it, quite often.

Or somebody has said something to you and you've given the strangest overreaction to a minor comment. And the reason for that is, well, there's a lot of evil and a lot of grief in our hearts. And again, we need God's help, don't we? To respond well. Not just to speak well, but to respond well. And we're very blessed, aren't we, that tonight we could raise this holy sheet of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is for him who never sings in his speech.

And whose perfect life is the cause of our salvation. And whose Holy Spirit is at work in his people to cause us to grow in this area. And so that's the crime. The crime of speaking.

That's what David says. And secondly, it's conviction. Now the conviction is, and it's really obvious, isn't it, in verses 4 to 6, it's the brevity of life. He's obviously sinned.

[11:59] He's exploded. And then he suddenly turns around in verse 4 and he says, Lord, tell me how long I'm here for. How short is my life? And it seems to me that I'm just passing through and I'm a waste of space.

There's a connection there. There's a connection between sin and the brevity of life. Which may not be obvious to you, but the Bible actually draws that link again and again. So for example, Psalm 90 says, people are like grass.

They're soon gone. And the reason is because of our secret sins. He links death and sin. And as the Bible goes on, he says we get 70 or 80 years maybe.

Have compassion on us, O God. Same in Romans 6, he said. The wages of sin is what? It is death. The brevity of life is traceable to our failure and our sin.

And what David is showing you and I in this psalm is after failure, it's possible to have a great sense of the hopelessness of life. Isn't that true? That after failure, it's possible to have a great sense of the uselessness of life.

[13:15] Maybe this evening you're a new Christian, maybe you're an old Christian, and you've fallen to sin, and what do you think? You think, I've really done it.

I've blown it. I've fallen too far. I'm trapped. I'm never going to change. And this is a sin that has got no answers, and it's too big for me to go on and say, why should I bother?

I'm a waste of space. And in your despair, you sound a little bit like verses 4 to 6. And you'll notice if you look carefully in these verses, can you just look carefully with them, it talks about breath.

Three times the word breath comes up. Or meaningless. It's the same word. And so you go to the book of Ecclesiastes, and you'll find that that word is one of the big themes of the book.

It means vanity. It means vapour. Breath. It's fleeting. And you see, what David is saying in these verses, is I'm sinful, and I feel insignificant.

[14:20] He's right, doesn't he, that our lives are very brief in the span of eternity. So you see that on verse 5, my days are like, I'm a number of hand breaths. Hand breath is, it's what?

It's the span, isn't it? From, kind of, of your hands. Your four fingers. And so he says, when I think of my life, in the span of eternity, when it just seems like a few centimetres.

I wonder if you've got something at home, that's a bit of a treasure. I'm not suggesting that you've got some expensive, fantastic, expensive antique lying there, but there may be something that, that is quite of a treasure to you, or it's valuable, isn't it?

About three years ago, I bought five volumes of books secondhand, at a ridiculous price. So much so that, I didn't tell Claire, for six months, until my friend, dogged me in.

But I own them. Two other people in London own them. And I, am one of them. I got a good deal on them. And now they belong to me, they're right. They're 600 pounds on Amazon.

[15:33] I didn't pay that, I don't. And I was showing off, someone recently showed them, and then, they said, well you'll have to pass them on to someone, one day, don't you? And you feel really miserable.

These books, they'll outlive me. That lovely chair that you own, it will outlive you. The painting that's on your wall, it will outlive you.

The All Blacks, New Zealand, they're the second best rugby team in the world. And they say about the All Blacks rugby jersey, that you never own it, you just look after it, for the next person, for one generation.

The span of our life is so brief, isn't it? So brief. When we said that, your existence in eternity is immeasurably long.

So yes, there is what's said, and compares to us, as I mean to you, a civilization is like a gnat. The human is being made for eternity. Somewhere, we will spend eternity.

[16:41] And even the civilizations that come and go, the Roman civilization, the Philistine civilization, the American civilization, the Chinese civilization, it's just like a gnat, compared with eternity.

That God has built into us, God has put eternity into your heart. And of course, where you spend that eternity, depends on, your response to Jesus. Because he is the one who said to me, I will give you eternal life.

So there is a crime, and there's a conviction. The conviction is, that sense of tininess. And third, there's a confession, verses 7 to 11.

Look at verse 7. He says, Lord, what do I look for? For what do I wait? My hope is in you.

Deliver me from all my transgressions. He looks up to God. There's a story of a boy, he was walking along the street, in his teenage years, and he found a five pound note on the pavement.

[17:48] And he resolved that, from then on, whenever he was in the street, he would just look down at his feet, at the street. Some years later, he apparently collected, thousands of buttons, thousands of bottle tops, and thousands of pins.

He had a very bad back, and he was, he had a miserable disposition. He would have done well, wouldn't he, to lift up his head, and look around, you know, walk around in life, just standing at his feet, on the street.

Seen the flowers, seen the sunshine, and you need to look up to God. You need to look up to God, if you're going to have, and find, forgiveness, and mercy. Seems such a small thing, doesn't it? Seems like such an obvious thing, for me to say tonight. To lift up your voice, to God, and ask him, for the mercy, which comes through the Lord Jesus. But I suspect, there are some people here tonight, and you've never done that.

You've never looked up to God, and truly asked him, for mercy. Which comes through Jesus. And very few in the world do it.

[18:58] And yet, that is the secret, of a relationship with God. What can be sadder, than that God, would reach down, by his grace, through his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and we would not reach out, with the empty hand of faith, and take it.

What can be sadder than that? So look at what David says, in his confession, verse 7 he says, first of all, my hope is in you. My hope is not in me.

My hope is not in you, and me. My hope is in you, verse 8. He saved me, from all my sins.

1 John 1, that great verse, isn't it? The blood of Jesus Christ, cleanses us from all sin. There is not a sin, that you can commit, that is too big, for the blood of Christ.

There isn't one major sin, that you've done, that cannot be forgiven. Lots of little sins, that can. Tell me the sin, tonight you've committed, and I'll tell you, that the blood of Jesus Christ, cleanses you from all sin.

[20:11] And then he says, in verse 9, doesn't he, I'm silent, I am mute, I have nothing to say, in disagreement with you God.

Then verse 10, remove the scourge, remove your stroke, from me. In other words, take your heavy hand, of justice off me Lord. And look at verse 11, he says, Lord when you discipline someone, you consume their wealth.

You're like a moth, it's a very quaint way, of saying, you take away, our false hope, you expose the idols, the things that I've relied on, and you make them look, useless.

And when we're, under conviction of sin, when we feel, his hand heavy upon us, there is no place, to go but to him. And this is, I think, a great prayer, of confession.

It is full of reality, it is full of experience, it is full of David, facing his guilt, and David is looking to God. It's a very good example, I think, because he's not hiding his sin, and he's not, missing the hope.

[21:24] I want to read you a quote, from John Stott, it's quite a long one, let me warn you. But he says this, nothing keeps people, away from Christ, more than their inability, to see their need of him, or their unwillingness, to admit it.

As Jesus said, it's not the healthy, you need a doctor, but the sick. I've not come to call, the righteous, but sinners. He did not mean, that some people are righteous, so they do not need salvation, but that some people, think they are.

In that condition, of self-righteousness, they will never, come to Christ, but just as we, only go to the doctor, when we admit we're ill, and cannot cure ourselves, so we will go to Christ, only when we admit, that we are sinners, and cannot save ourselves.

And the same person, applies to all our difficulties, deny the problem, and nothing can be done. Admit the problem, and there's the possibility, of a solution. It's significant, that the first words, of the 12 sets, of Alcovich's Anonymous, are we, admit we were powerless.

Some people says, Scott insists, that they are neither sinful, nor guilty, and that they do not need Christ. But if sin, and guilt, are universal, as they are, we cannot leave people alone, in their false paradise.

[22 : 35] The most irresponsible, the most irresponsible action, of a doctor, would be to acquiesce, in a person's, patient's, inaccurate self-diagnosis. Our Christian duty, rather, is through prayer, and speaking, to bring people, to accept, the true diagnosis, of their condition.

In the sight of God, otherwise, they will never respond, to the gospel. One of the reasons, why I love, holiday Bible club, is lots of things, I don't love about, holiday Bible club, but there are some things, I love.

So you get five days, you get five days, with those children, to outline the gospel. And they have, the opportunity, to listen to the mercy, of Christ, explained in various ways.

And our prayer, is that you children, and that the children, at holiday Bible club, will come to that point, and they will say, I need it, and I want it. That's what we're praying for, isn't it? That the seed sown, for eternity, would bear fruit.

There's a cry, and the sin of speech, there's a conviction, I'm very brief. There's a confession, I'm looking to you Lord, please remove, my transgressions, forgive my transgressions.

[23 : 48] And finally, there's a cry, in verses 12 to 13. And I just want you, to notice this cry, because it's so, so unusual. And as you read, these verses, you think, why does the psalm, finish like this?

Listen to the two verses. Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry. Well, okay, that's expected. Hold not your peace, of my tears, for I am a sojourner, or I am an alien, with you, a guest, like all my fathers, and then look away, from me, that I may smile again.

Before I depart, I'm no more. What a funny way, to finish the psalm. Looks like, doesn't it, the psalmist is finished, with no joy whatsoever. But he's praying for forgiveness. So what's the problem?

The problem is, that his feelings, are lagging, behind. He still feels very, heavy.

Look at verse 12, he says, I am, a foreigner. I am a sojourner. I am a stranger. That's what that word is.

[25 : 02] I'm like a Gentile. I'm like someone, who's outside the people of God, but he's not. That's his feeling. Or verse 13, look at there.

Look away from me, Lord. Don't fixate on me. Don't focus on me. I don't want your judgment, anymore. Please look away from me, so I can enjoy my life, before I die.

That's what he feels like. He's like Job. Do you remember Job, where he says, God, stop concentrating on me. Give me a break, Lord. But King David, is not an alien, and he's not a stranger.

He is a citizen, of God's family. And God, is not looking, at David angrily. God, is looking, at David, mercifully.

And David, is expressing, at the end of the psalm, his feelings. And I find this, very comforting, because we often take, don't we, longer, to get our feelings, in line, with the facts, of the gospel.

[26 : 09] We often, take much longer, to believe, the mercy of God, than he does, to grant it. So we confess our sin, and God forgives us, and we walk on, like nothing has happened, at all.

And we've done the returning, but we've not done, the rejoicing. And I think, this is a perfect example, of somebody, who's taking, longer to rejoice, than God takes, to forgive. And one of the things, that you and I, need to really work, and I really, need to work on this, as we mature, in the Christian life, is to take God, at his word, and not live, by our feelings.

The one, who brings their sins, to Christ, and confesses, will, be forgiven. And we bring, our confession to him, and we walk out, of our prayer time, or our church, on Sunday morning, or Sunday night, and we feel as miserable, as we did before.

And we need, to take seriously, the returning, and we need, to take seriously, the rejoicing. When Jesus came, and praised the Psalms, he would have, prayed Psalm 39.

And he would have said, I've watched my speech. I've said the right thing. He never said the wrong thing. Jesus would have said, wouldn't he, in the words of Psalm 39, my time in this world, is very, very brief.

[27 : 45] And Jesus could have said, when the scourge, has been laid on me, when your stroke, has been put on me, bring me through it, Lord, bring me through it.

Because in the end, Jesus fulfills Psalm 39. All the sin, which is my problem, and your problem, he's solved for us. All the hope, that was disappearing, he's provided for us.

And so I want to end tonight, and suggest, that we ask ourselves, whether the feelings, of the Christian life, are lined up, with the facts, of the Christian life. How are you feeling, in the Christian life? Have you done your returnment?

Have you done your rejoicing? The closing challenge is, we should take our sin, more seriously. And we should express it, fully and properly, to God.

Because it could well be, that the failure, to confess, and return, is one of the reasons, that we're wandering, around in a fog. But when we've done, our confessing, and when we've done, our returning, we must take seriously, that the blood, of Jesus Christ, cleanses us, from all sin.

[28 : 56] And do our rejoicing. And so here is, the call of this psalm, it is to return, as David does, and not end up, at the end of the psalm. With the feeling, of still being cut off.

But feelings, which are in line, with the gospel, of the Lord Jesus. Jesus said, to the woman, who'd been brought, before him, who'd been caught, in the very act, of adultery, he says, I do not condemn you.

Go and leave, your life of sin. And that is where we go, when we've confessed. Let's pray. Amen.