

November 26, 2017
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2017 David J. Whitcomb

MY HOPE IS IN THE LORD
Psalm 39

Parents too often teach their children from the moment they are born that they are the center of the universe. When the newborn cries both parents jump to their feet to stave off whatever crisis would make their precious child uncomfortable. And it seems that as the child grows and matures, the parents don't. Because so many parents respond to their children like this, the result is unbearable peer pressure even in elementary school. It becomes obvious that parents yield to their children's desire to be in every program, every sport, every activity possible. All the little tyke has to say is "I want" and helicopter parents don't even let them finish the request before they promise results.

No wonder teens grow up thinking they deserve the center of attention. No wonder immature college children all over the nation determine the degrees that a college will offer and determine what courses will be required to achieve the degree. I really cannot comprehend grown adults gathering by the thousands to scream at the sky because their preferred candidate was not elected president. . . . until I remember how they were raised.

Living in that kind of environment tries a saint's soul. It is easy for us to be so distracted by sin, so discouraged at the sin of other people that we can blame God, or worse, like the Sons of Thunder, call down God's judgment on everyone who disagrees with us. It is tempting to respond to people who might argue with us, mock us, or falsely accuse us in a way that is sinful.

David understood where we live. We really do not know what his culture was like. But we know from his writings and his history that he had to deal with wicked people who desired his failure, who

falsely accused him, and who looked for an opportunity to mock his relationship with God. He could have responded defensively. Instead, he held his tongue in check and then, talking to God, honestly assessed how unimportant he really was.

David's response is a good lesson for us. Rather than defend ourselves, we do well to submit to God and let Him take care of us according to His perfect will.

Life Can Be Discouraging (vv.1-6).

Sometimes it just seems right for us to keep quiet (vv.1-2a). In fact, sometimes it is best to remain silent in order to keep from sinning. That is why David determined that he would stay silent in what appears to have been some difficult circumstances. *I said, "I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth with a muzzle" (v.1a)*. This statement reveals that God's servant firmly resolved that he would not sin with his tongue.

Obviously there was some falsehood or untruth being bantered about, to which he was tempted to respond. Knowing the history of David and being familiar with his circumstances as he pours out his heart in the psalms, we can assume that he was the victim of a false accusation. The natural response to situations like that is for us to try to defend ourselves. No doubt David wanted to do that, but in this case he was greatly concerned not to sin by speaking. Twice he said he was resolved to guard his mouth. He was determined to muzzle his mouth.

God's servant understood that he could sin by expressing undue anger, or by not being honest in his defense. Or worse, he might make God look like He was not able to care for or protect His servant. Maybe the most subtle sin that comes to the surface when we try to defend ourselves is a spirit of pride. As Paul said, "Why not allow yourselves to be defrauded" (1 Cor. 6:7).

We naturally want to speak because we naturally want to defend ourselves. We must learn to discipline ourselves to keep from speaking if speaking leads to sin. Hear God's instruction through James: *For we all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body (James 3:2). For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile*

and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison (James 3:7-8).

In David's situation there was a good reason to stay silent. *So long as the wicked are in my presence (v.1b)*. Oh. That is not an unusual situation for us also. This is not an argument for the need to always show deference and kindness to the wicked. If the offender is truly wicked, they don't need deference. They need correcting. However, David probably feared that what he would say would be misunderstood by the evil people as complaining against God or perhaps blaming God for difficult circumstances.

Therefore, in the face of accusation or verbal assault, David responded like his Seed of whom he was a type, Messiah our Lord. He confessed, *I was mute and silent (v.2)*. Isaiah promised that when Jesus Christ was falsely accused He would remain resolute and silent. *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth (Isaiah 53:7)*.

We know by reading the story of Jesus that our Savior responded to His enemies precisely as the Father promised through Isaiah He would. *But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed (Matthew 27:12-14)*. We also know that it is God's plan for our Savior to serve as our example. So Peter wrote, *When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23)*.

Being resolved not to speak is our goal. If and when we achieve that willful silence, we might sense a victory. However, the process is not easy. Often, to remain silent might seem futile. Silence does not remove the stress of the circumstances. David confessed, *I held my peace to no avail, and my distress grew worse (2b)*. Even if we are able to hold our peace in the conflict, it doesn't make the problem go away. In fact, for David, the inner turmoil and distress grew worse. We know how this feels if the conflict continues for several days.

We long to be like our Savior who was so perfect that He did not experience this inner distress. But wait! Do we forget that Jesus was tempted and tested by every weakness that besets us? *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15)*. Does that really mean "in every respect"? It does. While Jesus was calm and silent on the outside, within His soul He was deeply agitated (John 12:27).

My favorite football coach of all time was Tom Landry. I admired him and wished I could be like him. The cameras would often focus on Tom during a game, especially if a referee made a bad call or one of his players really muffed a play. Landry's response was always the same. He stood perfectly still, like a statue, with his jaw set and his eyes focused on the field – like there was no response from him at all. I often thought, he has to be screaming on the inside. Yes, but like David and like our Savior, he was quiet on the outside.

When we try to remain silent and not defend ourselves, we have a turmoil within that is like a fire burning that needs to come out. *My heart became hot within me. As I mused, the fire burned (v.3a)*. That is how Jeremiah felt when the people rejected God's message that he preached (Jeremiah 20). The people mocked him and threatened him. *I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. For I hear many whispering. Terror is on every side! "Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" say all my close friends, watching for my fall. "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we can overcome him and take our revenge on him" (Jeremiah 20:7b,8,10)*. The preacher even concluded that God had been unfair, which caused him to sin with his lips. *O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed (v7a)*. But what was God's preacher to do since God's message burned in his heart like a fire? *If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot (Jeremiah 20:9)*.

Finally the fire bursts forth and there is a time to speak. We can almost imagine David trying to be quiet and . . . *then I spoke with my*

tongue: (v.3b). Solomon concluded that there is “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Ecclesiastes 3:7). The time to speak finally came. But notice that when David did speak, he didn’t talk to the wicked. Were they falsely accusing him? Probably. Were they threatening him? Maybe. Did David have a cause, a reason, an explanation, a fair, legitimate excuse? Sure.

But to talk to the taunting enemy, even to defend ourselves or our position, will more often than not erupt in angry arguments. It is possible the evil person knows the truth but is simply buying up opportunity to make life miserable for the person he or she perceives to be the enemy. It is also possible that the accuser, mocker, persecutor is totally unaware of the truth, but if the accused defends himself/herself, it will only be perceived as vengeance and attack in response.

So when you feel that you must speak, that you must defend yourself, that you must say the truth, **speak to God!** James Johnston writing in the *Preaching the Word* commentary on Psalms said, “I have often wished I could take back an angry word, but I have never wanted to take back a prayer when I asked God for help” (Vol.1, p. 399).

And when it is time to speak and you speak to God, admit reality (vv.4-6). We do well to honestly contemplate who we are in the sight of God. Like David, we need to ask for God’s help in facing reality. *O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! (v.4)*. When we are in difficulty, our prayer is typically for God to take away the difficulty. Another way of stating that is to say that we pray for God to make us comfortable.

David didn’t pray about hope, deliverance, or a fine and comfortable future in this case. Rather he demonstrated the heart of a humble and mature saint of the Lord. He requested that God would help him know how insignificant he really was. In this prayer, David was not asking for a revelation regarding the day of his demise. Nor was he asking for new information. We already know that life is short. Sometimes we need to ask God to remind us of that reality.

Realism is what Moses prayed to God. *You return man to dust and say, “Return, O children of man!” For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.*

You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning: in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers (Psalm 90:3-6). The only right conclusion to facing such reality is, *So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90:12)*.

When we honestly face reality, it is a sign we are maturing spiritually. But that reality can be brutal. *Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you (v.5a)*. This really is not a negative, pessimistic attitude. This is simply coming face-to-face with reality. This statement is simply a reiteration of the truth David had concluded before. It kind of reminds us of when David was running away from Saul. When David had Saul backed into a corner, he asked **the king of Israel** *why he was chasing after a dead dog or a flea* (1 Samuel 24:14).

We along with David need to acknowledge a very important principle about life. It is a principle David’s son Solomon repeated over and over in Ecclesiastes. The principle is tied up in the word “vanity.” Because all of life is infected with the sin principle, everything apart from God’s glory is vain. David used the same Hebrew word three times in this psalm to help us remember that life is very short. In verse 5, “Man at his best is but a *breath*.” In verse 6, “*For nothing* they are in turmoil” and in verse 11, “Surely man is but a mere *breath*.”

But life is not quickly passing for just God’s children. Life is a passing breath for everyone. But the wicked generally don’t care to think about that. Notice how David concludes that all human effort comes to naught. He reminded us that life is relatively short. *Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! (v.5b)*. *Surely a man goes about as a shadow! (v.6a)*. In Psalm 103, David put it like this: *As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more (Psalm 103:15-16)*.

Along with that truth is the fact that all our labors are temporal. *Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather! (v.6b)*. This is how Solomon expressed the reality of life: *I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me (Ecclesiastes 2:18)*. *Because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and*

knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil (Ecclesiastes 2:21). One person has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business. (Ecclesiastes 4:8).

The world is passing away, and the people of the world are very weak and small. But God is very strong and big. So talk to God.

Wait On The Lord (vv.7-13).

Recognize God's work in your life. When we see God involved in our lives, we realize that it is profitable to hope in the Lord. *And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you (v.7).* We do not look to the passing, empty things of life to sustain us. Turning to pleasure, distraction, even substances is very short-lived. Leaning on people will always result in disappointment because they too are passing away. Money, possessions, popularity are all temporary. All things and all people, like us, are but a breath. And we return to reality even in death.

Instead, the wise servant of the Lord puts hope in the Lord alone. Put your hope in the Lord. Hope in God is the confident expectation that He will keep His promises. In all his despair as life was very cruel to him, his wife abandoned him, his friends falsely accused him, Job still hoped in God. He steadfastly concluded, *Though he slay me, I will hope in him (Job 13:15a).* With hope fixed on God keeping His word, we wait, looking forward with confident expectation.

We can hope in the Lord even during discipline. See David's threefold prayer request. First, *deliver me from all my transgressions (v.8a).* Obviously, this trial heightened the awareness of David's sin. Possibly it was a recent sin. Or it could have been a distant past sin that continued to plague him. He prayed that God would deliver him, which is a prayer for forgiveness. It could also be a prayer for ongoing victory. Or it could be a prayer for God to remove the guilty feelings David continued to endure.

Second, David prayed, *Do not make me the scorn of the fool (v.8b)!* This part of David's prayer was for God to deliver him from the consequences of his transgressions brought on by fellow men. When we, the children of God are the object of the fool's scorn, we reflect badly on our Father's character.

Third, he prayed, *Remove your stroke from me; I am spent by the hostility of your hand (v.10).* The third part of David's request was for God to remove His application of sin's consequences. Spurgeon described the request like this:

In all probability the Lord would grant the Psalmist's petition, for he usually removes affliction when we are resigned to it; if we kiss the rod, our Father always burns it. When we are still, the rod is soon still. It is quite consistent with resignation to pray for the removal of a trial. (Charles Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, vol.1, p.218)

When we pray openly and authentically to God, we are likely to come to an important realization. *I am mute; I do not open my mouth, for it is you who have done it (v.9).* Realize that God is in control even when the wicked person slanders, attacks, or mocks. Realize that God is in control when the circumstances of life grow chaotic. Realize that God even controls our health; He simply chooses to use doctors sometimes. The best reason to remain silent is because we are resigned to submit to God.

The person who submits to God is the person who has a proper fear of God. In this case it was legitimate fear, the kind we don't like to think about. David prayed, *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! (v.11).* Because of the principle of sin, we are in the process of dying from the moment we are born. We are but a breath. We must never forget that God is virtually able to consume us in discipline. But we must also remember that most of the time He doesn't. That is because God's rebukes are for our good.

So what do you do when you are aware that life is short and, in that short life, God disciplines you in order to mature you? You talk to God about it. Ask God for help. Pray for God's good attention. *Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears! (v.12a).* God does show us unfavorable attention

to help us hate sin. But God loves to give ear to our cry. God loves to dry our tears with His peace that is beyond human comprehension.

So in your cry to God. Confess to God that you are wholly dependant on Him. *For I am a sojourner with you, a guest, like all my fathers (v.12b)*. An immigrant (sojourner) in David's day was very dependent. Picture Ruth gathering bits of grain in the field of Boaz. Without the kindness of the farmer, the sojourner would starve. It reminds us that as sojourners in this world we surely cannot depend on this world of sin to help us on to the Celestial city. This world is not going to mature us in our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

And while we are talking to God, it is good and proper to ask God to remove His chastening hand. *Look away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more (v.13)!* This is a principle we see repeated especially by David. He knew that God loves to make His children smile.

We are God's children. But we live in the enemy's world. Sin does knock us down, we do sin, and we should hate it. But when the consequences of sin come to bear, God's enemy and our enemies delight to remind us how foolish we are. Will you defend yourself? Will you argue with the wicked? Bite your tongue, seal your lips and go talk to God. He understands us and will help us understand us better. Our Heavenly Father desires that we would be conformed to His character more than we do. Trust Him.