

Psalm 38

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[0 : 00] All right, well, it's great to be here. Let's grab our Bibles at this point. Maybe you can share with the folks sitting to your left or to your right. I'm going to try and get a handle on looking at folks over here and over here.

That's not going to be easy. But we want to all be moving in our Bibles to the 38th Psalm. And when you get there, you'll see it's a Psalm of David, the 38th Psalm.

The Psalms are these great sections in our Bibles that I think all of us are really glad that God has left for us. I'd say most of us this morning are probably in love with the Psalms.

The Puritans, if you've ever read those men, they used to call these Psalms God's great medicine chest for our hearts. In the sense that when we're opening them up, we find that there's things in there that soothe us.

And much the same as myself this morning when I woke and there was this croak in my throat and I was rummaging around for Beecham's and so on. And often when we hit crisis point in our homes and lives, we turn to the Psalms and we find that there's things in there that soothe, I suppose, these answers to queries that we have that God knows that we need.

[1 : 21] And so maybe, for instance, I don't know, we've been watching the news, there's no doubt we've been doing over the course of the last number of weeks, and we're thinking of all of these bombs that are raining down from a great height on IS.

And there's this sense, at least in my heart, that it's not making a button of difference at all. There's still all of these threats like last night on the London Tube or even over in the west coast of the States.

And so suddenly, you see, we're maybe climbing the pole and we're getting worried for our kids. We're thinking of their lives. We're wondering if all of this is going to come to these streets.

And yet, do not be fretting, Psalm 37, this is a great text, you're not to be fretting, Psalm 37, over men that are evil or be envious, as he adds, of all of those who do wrong, for they are like the grass, and they wither, and they're gone, and just like green plants, they will die, as he says.

And so straight from the throne, you see, when we get into the Psalms, and even in this instance of fear, as we're saying, there's this wonderful, rich perspective that our Father knows that we need, as if we came for the medicine, you see.

[2 : 38] And the Father, as it were, he delved all the way into his cabinet of truth. That's the sense that this gives to us. And then maybe much the same thing when we're getting a little too big for our boots, some have lost a sense of, I don't know, a sense of perspective, or a sense of wonder over the interest of the Father.

And for once, we were so staggered that one so great and out of this world could love me and shower over me his interest and his affection, and his mercies, and his time, and all of his interest even in our families and our homes.

And we remember some Sundays when that thought on its own made us praise. We were sitting in our seats saying, this is amazing, I have a Father and he loves me.

But maybe not now. And we've moved on from those times, and the years have been passing, and we've kind of been rolling in on Sundays and growing up in the church.

And if we're being honest, the wonder is kind of a way, and it's gone. There's no more sense of amazement in his kindness and his care, mainly maybe due to the crises that have risen up and stolen our minds.

[3 : 55] I don't know what's going on in your lives, but we would concede, wouldn't we, that life's events end up stealing our minds. Or maybe we've been thinking about all of the things that are just transient and passing, like our houses and exams and our pensions and our mortgages and our

interests and our sports teams and all of these things.

And God, if we were being honest, is kind of shunted to the side. And this is the way that it is. We would know this. And then maybe one night, who's to say, over the course of the winter, when you're walking under the stars and there are all of these lights, even millions and billions of them, and the moon is just hanging there.

Or maybe there's a sunset and it gets you. And suddenly you see the doors to the medicine cabinet have kind of swung back on their hinges, because when I consider your heavens, we will say, and the moon and the stars that you have set in their place, well, hold on.

What is man that you are mindful of him? Or the son of man that you would be caring for me? That's the eighth psalm.

And suddenly you're away and your spirit is lifted and the medicine from the psalmist just hits the spot. Do you see what we're saying? And on and on in that kind of sense, we could go exploring all sorts of different medicines that the psalmist has kindly left for our churches and our lives.

[5 : 25] And actually here it's the same this morning. It's basically the same for us in the 38th psalm, because Lord, David is saying, don't rebuke me in your anger or discipline me, he says, in your wrath, which we could say is a shot of medicine for those who've kind of wandered away from God's ways and they've been up to their ears in all kinds of pursuits, which is maybe the case for some of us this morning, or maybe a psalmist that we're to tuck away for the future and keep in our minds when all of your closeness with the Father is gone.

Don't rebuke me, he says, for your arrows have pierced me, he says, and your hand has come down on me, and because of your wrath there's no health in my body and even no soundness in my bones because of all of my sin.

My guilt has overwhelmed me, he says, like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I'm bowed down and brought low, and all the day long I am mourning.

My back is filled with a searing pain. There's no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed. I groan in anguish of heart, and all of my longings lie open before you, Lord.

My sighing isn't hidden from you. My heart pounds. My strength fails me. Even the light has gone out from my eyes. My friends avoid me because of my wounds.

[6 : 51] My neighbors stay far away, and then those who want to kill me set their traps. Those who would harm me talk of my ruin, and all the day long they scheme and they lie.

Oh, I'm like the deaf, he says, who cannot hear, and like the mute who cannot speak, and I become like one who doesn't hear and whose mouth can offer no reply.

But Lord, I wait for you, and you will answer, Lord my God. For I said, do not let them gloat or exalt themselves over me when my feet slip, for I'm about to fall, and my pain is ever with me.

I confess my sins. I'm troubled by them. And many have become my enemies without cause, and those who hate me without reason are numerous. Those who repay my good will, with evil, lodge accusations against me, even though I seek only to do what is good.

Lord, do not forsake me. Do not be far from me, my God. Come quickly to help me, my Lord and my Savior. Psalm 38, one of seven penitential Psalms that are all over the Psalter.

[8 : 07] We've got Psalms 6 and 32. 51 is another one. 103. 130 is the fifth one, which of the seven in the cluster is probably the most famous of all of them, because if you, Lord, kept a record of our sins, who could stand?

And so out of the depths, I cried out to you, Lord, for mercy, and with you there's forgiveness, and so you're to be feared. Psalm 130. Psalm 143, then, is the seventh.

And all seven, as we're saying, are often labeled as Psalms of penitence, where there's this sorrow in his heart, and there are even tears in his eyes, this sense of contrition and sadness, because of all of his failures and his sins.

As if, as one writer puts it, the psalmist's whole life, he says, is like a bruise, a bruise, which is surely an analogy which helps us along in at least some of our minds, maybe some of us thinking back to football practice last Tuesday when someone kicked us in the shins, or they ran their studs over our thighs, or maybe they stamped on our toes, and now there's this throbbing pain in our toes, and yet here's a man bruised, Psalm 38, from his head to his toes.

That's what he's saying. And every which way there's this soreness and this grief and all manner of discomforts that are all over his mind, and even his body, he says, and on into his soul, and the

cause, as he says, is his sin.

[9 : 49] It's his sin. And hence this psalm that we're in gets a place in the cluster of seven, where we're shown in this text the true state of our hearts and how Christians, who are real Christians, are going to feel about that inside.

Now, let me ask you, where do we go when God himself is offended? What do we do in those days?

And the reason he's offended has got nothing to do with anyone else, but it's me. We've come out here to church this morning, and no one around us can see it, and yet hidden away in your heart there's this pile, this whole pile of if-lys.

If only, Graham, if only I had kept myself pure, or if only I could change the whole story of my life till this point, if only I could get back all of the years that I've wasted.

We look back in our teens, and maybe all of the times when there wasn't a closeness with Jesus, and your conscience is seared, and there's this sense of your guilt.

[11 : 07] I mean, when I was driving here this morning, I was thinking about the state of my prayers, the inconsistency of my prayers, the lack of endurance at times in my own prayers.

And so what have you got, David, for me in this psalm? Well, in terms of your sin, he'd say, Graham, there's a need, firstly, to feel, he says.

Now, if you're taking notes, you can just scribble these down. A need to feel it, which is the sense that he leaves, you'll see this literally all over, the psalm as he writes, though the occasion itself isn't mentioned.

And probably no bad thing in a sense, given if we knew it for sure that this came after Bathsheba, well, we would be saying to a man, wouldn't we, David, is it any wonder you were feeling it?

I mean, that was a sin that ended in the loss of a life and the child and all the mess and your family and the shame that came down in the name of the Lord.

[12 : 10] And so surely we'd be looking from a great height down our noses and saying in our pride, listen, surely it's obvious we're not the same. We're not the same.

This is a guy who is not in our league. He did things that disgust me. His sins are worse than our own.

And so God in his providence, you see, he just sets the sin to the side. We don't know. And now it might well be, who's to say, a loss of temper in his marriage.

It might be. He got up in the morning, he just blew a gasket with his wife or a failure to rear his kids as he ought to have been doing in his home. Some thoughts that were lustful or maybe like me, a loss of passion in his prayers.

Maybe a love in his heart for all of his money. As in all of the things we're seeing all the time in our own lives. And because there's this silence, well, the psalm is now saying something like this.

[13 : 13] Graham, now listen to me. Is it the case that you are so close to the Lord and you're living your life all the time in his ways and living in submission to the work of the Spirit and you're passionate about big things like being holy for Jesus, that sin, your own sin, any sin, is so serious to you that it leads you to a brokenness?

Do you feel? In verse 1, we might say, you'll see this sets the tone for the psalm where he's clear on his standing.

He's worked it all out in his thoughts that intellectually and theologically speaking, he knows the Lord is offended. Verse 2 starts to come. Not only he knows it, but he feels it.

There are symptoms of a conscience. I mean, could we say it this morning as a truism? I don't know you. As a truism of this church and all of our lives, that we've got more than theology and a bunch of thoughts in our minds because we're so tender to the Spirit that we've got a conscience that feels.

Do you feel it? He thinks and he feels. It's in his mind, but it's also in his heart. He's been studying the Scriptures and those same Scriptures are now shaping his life.

[14 : 46] And so clearly he knows in verse 1, God is offended. And now here is an insight he's saying into how that truth made me feel.

That's what he's saying. Or this is how the whole experience of this sinfulness made me feel. We could put it in those terms. Like when you're pursuing it and from a distance it looks to you like it's amazing.

Much the same as the fruit in the Garden of Eden. And David is saying to us, no, no, no. No, listen to me. Because sin, in the first instance, he says, it was so draining for me.

Now there are three things here. This is the first one we're going to see in our Bibles in Psalm 38. And verse 4. Jesus' yoke, of course, being easy.

His burden is light. And how we're thankful this morning, aren't we, if that's the experience of our lives. We're living with this sense of freedom and this peace in his ways.

[15:50] And sure, there are all of these rules, but God, we know, has given them to us for our good. But David says, now, life apart from all of that, it was draining for me.

And in what sense? Well, in this sense, he rules it all out in verse 4 for our minds that he did whatever it was that he did and then he gets up in the morning, he was probably sitting over his Cheerios, eating his breakfast, and he was mulling over the events or maybe some of the words that he exchanged.

Maybe it was the day that he looked from the roof from Bathsheba and Nathan has been and clearly he knows it was me and so does the Lord. I mean, he saw it all from his throne.

That experience, David is saying, it was like a burden too heavy for me. It's in the fourth verse. It's this image, we could say, if this makes sense to us, of what happens in gyms.

Maybe some of you young lads are pumping iron in the evenings and there's this weakling in the corner, which was probably me, and he's over there lifting weights for what, the first time in five years and he's so conscious of others so he's piling the discs onto the bar and then he goes for the lift and he takes the bar in his hands and his knees are going sideways and both of his eyes have popped out and much the same as he says up the page in verse 2 where the hand of the Lord, he says, it's come down upon me.

[17:20] You see what he's saying there? Which is different from the hand of a mother, say, who guides. Like, say, after the service and there's danger from cars and so out comes the mother's hand and she leads and she guides.

That's a great experience. Or maybe an arm on the shoulder from your friend. You've been living your own nightmare and there's this arm. What is it saying?

Well, probably it's saying, hey, I'm here for you. We can pray about this. And to a man we would all say, that's a great experience. Or even the hand that comes out on a Sunday because this is your first time in this church and there's a steward at the door and he greets you and he looks you in the eye and he welcomes you.

It's great to see you. And again, we would all be saying, that's an amazing experience. But right here in this text, God's disciplining hand is in view.

And down it comes from his throne. Look at verse 8. I am crushed, he says. It's like a weight. My God is against me.

[18:35] My sin is exposed. I've offended the Lord. Oh, my guilt is so terribly heavy and wearisome to me. That's what he's saying. Number two, he says, it's gross.

My experience that I thought would be the best of all thrills, it turned out in the end to be massively draining and really gross.

Given the image he leaves in verse 5 of a wound. It may be much the same thing as the one I've got this morning tingling away on the back of my leg. For I too was playing football last Tuesday and someone kicked me good and hard.

You could call it a lack of respect for the pastor and he just came right through me and this wound has been weeping and it's been scabbing and so on. And so what David is saying, you see, is probably something like this.

That this sin in my life and all of this guilt, this shame that I'm experiencing, when you compare it to God's sweet ways, oh, it was loathsome to me.

[19:39] That's what that means. Number three, he says, it was depressing and constant. This experience of guilt was draining.

It was gross. Here in the sixth verse, it was depressing and it was constant. For I'm bowed down, he says, and brought low all the time, all of the time, morning, mealtimes, times with the Father, especially in the evening when he was away in his bed, times with friends, the journey to work, even here on a Sunday, and all the while, it's just in there.

I'm not in step with the Father. I know this just is not his will for my life. And not by the way that this is the way that it always is in our lives.

You know these Christians who are always dejected and they're miserable and they're glum and they're negative and I mean, you speak to them and it's like the Schumer gene has been taken out

and so we never have Cayleys and we can never tell any jokes and we can never let our hair down and come to think of it, how could we?

Because we're always crying into our coffees. That's not what this is, but do you ever mourn? Like, ever.

[20 : 59] Do you feel it? Have you a conscience that speaks to you? Are we finding that the longer we're walking with Jesus we're more tolerant or possibly less tolerant men of our wandering eyes?

Or your words and your sentences that are harsh, your tones, and maybe the whole of the day you've just been letting fly at your wife. And to you, this is normal.

There's no sense of conviction. David would say to you, you need to know that's not right.

Something is wrong.

This is Spurgeon. He says this to us. I wish I could write this stuff, but I can't. He says this to us.

Beware of light thoughts of sin, he says. I think this is a paraphrase of what he said. For at the time we're saved, the conscience is usually so tender, and many of us are scared of, even the slightest of our sins, a holy timidity, lest we should ever offend the great God of our lives.

But time, he says, brings change. And where once we were scared by the sin of our hearts, we can get to a point of being completely unmoved, like the ear, he says, of a soldier in which the cannon has been booming.

[22 : 22] But then gradually through time, he rarely picks up on that sound. That's a great statement. Now also, as David says, number two, it just might be, it might be that we suffer.

It might well be, it's both, he's saying, that we feel it and we suffer. For, because of your wrath, there's no health. In verse three, now what is he saying to us?

My bones are lacking a soundness because of all of my sin. My back is filled, in verse seven, with pains. My heart pounds, the tenth verse. The light has gone out from my eyes.

My pain, in verse 17, he says, it's ever before me. Now we know, John's a good teacher, so he'll have told you this, we know in our Bibles that illness and disease are not always a result of our wanderings and our sins.

We would know that. I mean, we're getting a sneeze or maybe something that's worse. What are we saying? That if we're sneezing in church this morning, oh, he's been guilty of something, he's done something in his home.

[23 : 32] A little cough in the corner, he seems to have a rash on his arm. He's been up to no good. He's been sinning. That's not what this is. No one was sinless like Jesus, but no one suffered like him.

Job, another, a man who was righteous as it says, few men in our world ever suffered like him. And then even Jesus and the blind man and John 9, who sinned, was it him or his parents?

It was neither of them. And so clearly, we just can't always say that a dose of sickness means sin. But here's the point.

It might be. Which is probably one of those thoughts that doesn't easily sit, does it, with our minds. We don't like that.

Paul's letter to Corinth, for instance, some of you have got sick, he says. Some of you, some of you, he said, even have died, and all because they were messing around with the bread and the wine. A lacking of a love for Jesus, a reverence, a sense of reverence and worship and an honor for the Lord.

[24 : 45] And so suddenly, there was this discipline in the form of sickness and even death, which is one of those texts we can hardly even believe it's in here. I picked this up a few months back from Kevin DeYoung, and he picked it up from James Montgomery Boyce.

This is good for us. Four questions to ask his boys in a season when there's a sickness that's come. Now listen to this. Number one, have I sinned and wandered away from what I ought to be doing, and is this setback God's loving way of drawing me back to the fold?

Now, again, that's a good question. Although, as we were saying at the start, not in the sense of tying ourselves up in knots and, you know, what on earth did I do?

I've broken my arm. Graham was saying on Sunday, this is a punishment from the Father. It's not that, but rather more in the sense of keeping a check, a good check, on your soul. Is there anything?

Maybe there's not. In which case, that's okay. Move on. Number two, is God using this illness to deal with rough edges in me in order that in time a Christ-like character might come?

[25 : 55] Again, a great question. Three, is God using my suffering as a kind of a stage in which his wisdom and his grace and his name might be praised?

It might be. Four, is this season a time for me to finally prove that I love him for who he is and not the gifts that he gives and not even the wonderful, amazing gift of my health?

That's a test. David says in this psalm, and aren't we grateful that he is so raw and honest with us here that our Father in Heaven brings discipline into our lives.

And often when we're off, we're just off and we're away in the world and there's sin and he's Father and so he picks up on these dangers and so suddenly he comes and sometimes even into our bodies, even our bonds with other people as he says in verse 11, relationships.

And so maybe, you know, there are some of us sitting here in church as we speak and a hardness in recent years has come all the way into our hearts and we're far from the Lord Jesus and we're wandering away.

[27 : 10] We've long since forsaken all of his teachings and his rules and yet here is this psalm that comes right out of the lips of David the sinner. God isn't mocked.

And painful and serious suffering from the throne might be known and all in the shape of a discipline from the Father who loves you. He loves you because he really, really cares.

And so this is a man who felt contrition over his sin. Surely he was also a man who ended up suffering due to his sin. Thirdly, and we see this, he clearly responded well to his sin which is obviously the climax that David is building to as he writes and probably the ending if we were being honest that we're glad is in this psalm.

I mean, how would we feel if we just wandered off now with our tails between our legs to our homes? And so, if it is the case that there is sin or there will be maybe next week or into next month or next year, whenever it is, well then, here's three prayers that we can pray at that time as we finish.

Prayer number one, this is the first one, it was me, which is the statement that he makes at the end of verse 3, isn't it?

[28 : 34] I have no soundness in my bones because of what? Because of my parents? No, not my parents. He doesn't say that. Okay then, I have no soundness in my bones, Lord, because of all of my genes.

He doesn't say that. Or because there were pressures coming at me from every corner of my campus, my school, my office, wherever it is, it isn't in here. No, I have no soundness in my bones, he says, because of all of my sin.

That's a good prayer. It was me, Lord. No verbal gymnastics. There's no fancy, vague-sounding formulas. My life, my sin, my rebellion, my shame.

It was me. Prayer number two, I'm sorry, the 18th verse. It was me. I'm sorry. I confess to you. I'm sure in my mind, Lord, you must be offended.

I'm coming to you. This word here for sin, just to quickly comment on it in the passing, this is a word that refers to our natures being bent out of shape, twisted, iniquitous, a perverseness.

[29 : 49] It's that sense, like, when you career into a lamppost on your bike in a dark night and so you walk to your house, you bring the sorry bike into the garage, you switch on the lights, you can see the whole thing is twisted.

The frame, the spokes, all of it, it's iniquitous, it's twisted, and not quite in the shape it was intended to be. David's just saying here, that's me in this text, I'm sorry, Lord, I'm not what I ought to be.

Thirdly, I need you, which is clearly the conclusion that he gets to at the end. It was me. I'm sorry, Lord, what I really need is you.

Come close to me. Don't forsake me. Lord, I'm needing your help here. This is not good. I need you, not on Monday or Tuesday or next week, but quickly, as he says, even now in these, right now in these moments, come, Lord, forgive me.

Give me the grace that I need. Wash me again so that I might be clean. I want to walk with you. I want to obey you. I want to honor you. Be close to you.

[30 : 59] I want to live my life always, Father, for the praise of your name alone. You can pray that prayer. If we confess our sins, says John, he is faithful.

He's a good God and he is just and he will forgive us all our sins and cleanse us from literally every last remnant of unrighteousness so that, just like David, we can experience his grace and live our lives for him again.

