

Lessons for Life
3-Year Bible Reading Plan
By Dr. Jeff Meyers

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Psalm 39
Preached On: Sunday, June 21, 2020

Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

This morning as we focus on seeing the glory of God, I don't think there's any section in the Scriptures that more graphically displays that than what we know as the book of Psalms. In fact, this morning allow me to encourage you to turn to Psalm 39 and if you're one of our online guests or maybe here in person not just for the first time in 13 weeks but for the very first time ever, I want to invite you if not already a part of it to be a part of our Bible reading plan as we as a family of faith are walking through the Scriptures, typically it's one to two chapters a day. You may have noticed as we're walking through the Psalms sometimes there's three or more but many of them are very brief. In fact, this last week as we walked through the Psalms there were maybe songs or choral anthems that maybe caught your attention as you read through them. One of the interesting things is 2,000 years after the tomb was discovered to be empty, we've written a lot of songs based on the Psalms. We've read about that God is our refuge and strength, he is a tower, he's a strong tower in our life. This last week we read that contemporary piece, "As a deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you." Just in recent days though we have not put it to music to my knowledge at least in a choral anthem, we had that confession of sin and faith of David in Psalm 51 after the incident with Bathsheba. But today I want to encourage you to turn to Psalm 39. To my knowledge there have not been any choral anthems written based on Psalm 39. I daresay that you're not gonna enter in one's home or even your own where you're gonna see the words of this Psalm nicely portrayed within an ornate frame. It's not that we just simply skip over it, it's just not one of the ones that we have regularly called attention to over time.

So I believe today it is perfectly fitting as we come not only to a day where we recognize the fathers and father figures in our life but also the day that we recognize our high school graduates. This is one of those days that we get to kind of double-dip, so to speak, recognizing those individuals in our lives and this is one of those days that only comes around once a year and so I thought it was fitting that maybe we would go into one of those Psalms that we would probably only read if it was a part of our Bible reading plan, and I want to address something not just for our high school graduates but for all of us. I want to talk about some lessons for life. Now for those of you who we recognize today as a high school graduate, let me give you some advice: learn these on this side of life rather than the other side, and for those of us who are on the other side, sometimes we need a refresher course, do we not? In fact, there are times in our lives where we need to be

reminded of some of the basics of life and Psalm 39 does that for us. In fact, I want to focus on three things for all of our lives no matter what our stage is and we're gonna go into Psalm 39 and see how the Lord has communicated very clearly to us. These may not be words that we use in everyday language, so to speak, as we're texting and emailing back and forth but by their definitions you're gonna see how critical they are in our life. Some of the lessons we need, we need some prudence, some perspective and some posterity in our lives. I'll unpack all that in just a moment but Psalm 39 beginning in verse 1, just the first eight verses. It says,

1 I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. 2 I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. 3 My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue, 4 LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. 5 Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah. 6 Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them. 7 And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee. 8 Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish.

Incredible lessons for life that not just for you and I as individuals or us as a faith community but I daresay the entirety of the world needs to heed today.

What's that first lesson? The first three verses is that we need prudence in our life and I know that's not a word that is used quite regularly in our vocabulary but it means one who or how one controls themselves, behaves themselves or allow me to use this definition, how they govern themselves. Let me talk about this for just a moment and those of you who are just are high school graduates may not have discovered this yet but I promise those on the other side of graduation have. The only person whose response and reaction you can control is yours. There's nobody else you can control and that's one of our problems in our world today, we want to facilitate the control of everybody else's response and you can't do it. The only person you can govern is you. The only person you can control is you. The only person that you can tame is you. And I don't find it ironic at all that the one instrument that the Lord uses in this passage is that of the tongue. If there was one item that gets us into more trouble than anything else it's the tongue, is it not? How many times whether with your parents growing up or maybe even with an employer or with an official, you wish you had just not made that last statement? It's that last thing you said that gets you in trouble, does it not? In fact, on the sport's field if we see a skirmish or what we might call a fight, it's not the guy who starts it that gets in trouble, it's always the guy who "finishes it," and often is our tongue that gets us in the most trouble.

I find it interesting that the Bible uses this imagery in verse 1 that I do not sin with my tongue, I will keep my mouth with a bridle. The power of the tongue. In fact, this

illustration is used later on in the book of James 2, it says that we put bridles in the horses and we steer them where we want them to go, we put a rudder on a boat and the large vessel is guided where we so choose with such a little item. Think about the comparison, the size of the bridle to the horse or the size of a rudder to a large ship. It is a very small item quantitatively but, man, does it exercise some power. You think about that large vessel sailing on the open seas making its way to open waters, all it takes is a little nudge of the rudder and it will come full circle in just a course of a matter of time. You turn it too fast and you'll turn it over, will you not?

The same goes with a horse and I think we understand there is incredible power in the words that we speak. Oftentimes it's the words we speak that are actually more powerful than the actions that we take and we're seeing that even in our world today. Let me give you some advice on your words. There's really only two things you can do with words: speak life or speak death. That's it. Now everybody wants to search for the middle ground but it's just not there. You think about somebody who is hurting, who is grieving, who is in pain, who is whatever they're struggling with, you can either put fuel on the fire and promote death or you can provide healing and a balm of life in them. Or how about somebody who is rejoicing and celebrating, experiencing the joys of life, all it takes is one word to pull them all the way down. Statistically they say that for every negative thing said to us in life, it takes nine positives to turn the ship around and in our world today, have we become loose with our words. Thanks to the wonderful sarcastic marvel of technology we tweet and go, "Oops." We post and go, "Ouch." Because here's the problem with words: you can't get them back. And I know you think you've erased a post and I know you think you've gone back and you've done whatever program it takes, but here's the problem: it's there. And our words, it may be for this illustration, for our words are a whole lot like toothpaste: you squeeze that tube, you're not getting it back in, are you? I dare you today, I'll give you a challenge. You know, as we went through virtual VBS and our kid's devotional every morning, I'll give you a challenge, adult, go home today, get a tube of toothpaste, squeeze it out and try to get it back in. I know what you'll do, you'll try it, then you're gonna Google because there's gotta be a way to do it. Not without any fancy equipment there is not and such are our words.

You know, one of the things that we've discovered in recent days is the problem with words, it's not just the fact that you can't get them back but oftentimes the context in which you say them. You know, we're living in a day where very famous people are having their pictures removed from the walls of powerful institutions, we're living in a day where representations of individuals that have been standing for hundreds of years are no longer there. They're being removed not just from physical view but it's just a matter of time before the new edition of the history book has them no longer there as well. One of the problems is that oftentimes we speak our words in the context of our culture. You do understand that just because it is popular, just because it's received, and just because the majority opinion holds to it does not make it biblically right, and just because that is the verbiage of the day does not mean it will not come back to haunt you in later days. Those of you that are recent high school graduates, let me warn you: that which you're posting on social media today will burn you when you're 30. You know

why? The world's changing every day. But what have we heard lately? But it was a different day. But it was a different era.

Can I just give you some lessons for life here? If you'll just follow Ephesians 4 that says let no unwholesome thing come out of your mouth but that which is godly, it doesn't matter what the context is, it doesn't matter what the day is. In fact, and I had this conversation oftentimes even within my own family, have you ever made this statement, "Now I wouldn't say this to you outside of our home"? Then don't say it in the home because one of my favorite books of all times is "The Scarlet Letter." "The Scarlet Letter," I won't just for the sake of time catch you up with the whole plot and the story therein, but there is the story of a pastor, an illicit relationship and that's not why I like the story, I promise you, but I love the story because it's a story of redemption, it's a story of personal redemption, it's a story of community redemption. But there's a young lady who has a child by the name of Pearl and there's a situation where she speaks in public. It's one of my favorite lines in literature, she says, "Honey," she says, "We do not always repeat that in public which we have discussed in private." You know one of the problems of social media, young people? It takes your private life and puts it in public and thoughts that you only had in your head are now gonna be discussed at your job interview, and we've got to learn some lessons, we've got to bridle our tongue. It is powerful and once we speak, you can't get it back. Let me give you some obvious advice: you've got two ears and one mouth for a reason.

Now let's move to perspective. Beginning in verse 4 I find it interesting, he says, "Lord, make me to know my end, the measure of my days, what is it, that I may know how frail I am." Because this is graduation Sunday, allow me to use an illustration that I know that teenagers will appreciate: you're not bullet proof. I think oftentimes we think, "I can conquer the world. I can do whatever I want. I got this. I'm strong." The problem is we all come to our end physically. We are frail, in fact, if a global pandemic has not communicated this to us, I don't know what will. Every day we've become subject to new data, new information, and oftentimes when we're young we think we can take on the world. We get several years past our high school graduation and if it doesn't hurt, it doesn't work, right? We discover that we are frail creatures.

You know, it's interesting back in the book of Job 14:5, Job, this one who had lost his family, lost his fortune, had lost his physical health, in fact, he honestly wanted to die but there he is on the hill, do you know what he says? "God numbers our days." I've got news for you: your days are numbered not by the CDC but by God. That's who has numbered your days and I think oftentimes we look at what actuaries say and what insurance companies say and what medical professionals say and we say, "Well, they say this." Can I tell you how many times I have sat at the bedside of somebody who was about to pass away saying, "I just thought I'd have a few more years."

Our life is frail but God has numbered it and I've got news for you: you can't add to it. I mean, you can eat everything you're supposed to, you can do everything you're supposed to. How many people have you heard of running a marathon drop dead? No body fat,

having eaten anything that tastes good in 10 years and they drop dead. Why? Because our bodies are frail.

You know, it's interesting, a few pages to the right in the book of Psalm 55:23, it does tell you how you can change the number of your days. You say, "Really?" Oh, you can shorten them. You can. It says, "The wicked's days will be shortened by God." You want to know how to shorten your days? Just look up at God and say, "Hey, God, watch this." When we act wickedly, when we do things in our personal life we have no business doing, when we consume things we have no business consuming, when we go places we have no business going, guess what? A wicked lifestyle has a good opportunity of shortening your days.

Now the Lord's numbered your days but according to his word you can act in such a wicked sinful manner that the averages won't work out for you. Our life is frail. The other perspective I want to give you is when it comes to finances. You know that the Bible that hopefully you're holding or reading or having on a tablet, whatever it may be, there's roughly 2,500 verses that regard our finances and money. You say, "Why is there so much there?" Because we're so bad at it. Notice what it says here, it talks about the money that is just fleeing from us. "We know not who will gather them." I love what Solomon says in the book of Ecclesiastes, he says, "A man works his entire life and he can't control what somebody else does with his fortune."

You know, and this relates to those of us who are adults but also those who we celebrate graduation Sunday today. You know, one of the great tragedies and travesties in our culture is we've communicated to people to work or to acquire an occupation or a career that will benefit you the most financially. Do you know the quickest way to erase a financial fortune is have a really bad frail sickness? It'll go by the wayside. How many times have people strived for that fortune and yet it can disappear according to the book of Proverbs like the wind. Don't believe me? Ask the young man who graduated high school just a couple years ago, decided to get involved in the internet investment world. Because of a computer glitch, not even reality, he came home one day and his account said that he was overdrawn roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million dollars. It wasn't real but now in our world you push one button and it vaporizes. Unfortunately that night that young man took his life because he didn't want to have to pay the price of all that debt and it was a simple mistake. You know, I love the world of technology, I love being able to do online banking from my phone but you do realize that it's one push of one button and it's gone. You see, finances are like the wind, they're vaporize. You don't believe me, just watch Wall Street. Every day is a circus. You never know what you're gonna get and yet how many times do we believe, "If I just had this paycheck. If I just..." Do you know what Rockefeller said once? They asked him, "How much money is enough?" He said, "Just a little bit more." You'll never be satisfied.

We need to get a perspective, our life is frail, our finances are easily fleeting, but last but not least we need to have what the Bible calls posterity. Now I know when we think of posterity we think maybe of our posture, really what that word means is we need to look down the road. We don't need to look just to next week or next month or even the next

hour, we need to look down the road and here's the problem with our society today: have become a "right now" world. We want what we want and we want it typically yesterday. If you don't believe me, have you ever gotten upset when Amazon told you two days and it took three? Goodness gracious! Have a century ago it would have come on a boat and yet now we're upset the drone didn't get to my house in time.

We live in a "right now" immediate gratification world and one of the things we need to think of is not just how the next minute is gonna go, the next hour, but what are my words, what are my actions, what are my decisions, what's this gonna look like in 10, 20, 30, 40, 300 years from now? We live in a world today where I bet if people could see 300-400 years in the future, they might have used different words than they did back then. So let me introduce to you a radical concept. You're not gonna learn this maybe anywhere but right here. Are you ready? It's called delayed gratification. It's a new concept, I know it. What does it say here in verse 7, it says, "And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in thee." In other words what he's saying is, "I'm gonna do it on your time, God, because every time I do it on my time, it always messes up." How many times have you gotten ahead of God? How many times have you gotten behind God? If you do it in God's time, it always works out. I cannot tell you how many homes, how many relationships go sideways because they did things on their time and not God's time. I can't tell you how many investments and how many businesses have gone upside down because they played the margin just a little too much. I don't want to wait on God because I want to do it now.

Delayed gratification particularly for our high school graduates but for all of us today. We look at the next four years and say the way things are going, we might not get the next four months, I'm gonna live it up. In 14 years from now you're gonna wish you had some delayed gratification, you're gonna wish that you looked five years down the road, 10 years down the road. One of the greatest pieces of advice that anybody ever gave me and I was a college student when this happened, someone asked me, they said, "If you knew that Jesus was coming back in one month, what would you do?" And I gave my answer. He said, "Wrong answer." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "If Jesus comes back in one month, he expects you to be a junior at Baylor University and he hopes that you're in the library studying because that's where you're supposed to be." You see, we get in this mindset of, "Oh, based on this news and based on this pandemic, things might change so I'm gonna alter the course." We get 10 years down the road and realize, "I should've stayed on the course God had me on." Delayed gratification. Let me speak in terms we can all understand: the tortoise wins the race every time.

Last but not least, deliverance. Verse 8, "Deliver me from my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish." Let's talk long-term, let's talk posterity here. Let me give you a little lesson or piece of advice. You don't have to be a recent high school graduate you just have to be breathing today. Do you realize that no matter how much you focus on your health, no matter how much you have in your bank account, no matter how much success or awards that you win, every single one of you will spend more time in eternity than you do on earth. It doesn't matter. You can strive to say, "I'm gonna be that person who's the oldest person on earth. I want them to interview me and say, 'How did you do

it?" It doesn't matter. You can live 120+ years, in fact, you can ask Methuselah, 969 years, you realize he's been in eternity longer than he lived. What we need to understand is the decisions that we make, the words we speak, they don't just affect tomorrow, next week, next month, next decade, they can impact eternity.

What does he say? "Deliver me from my transgressions." You know, there's a lot of lessons for life that we could give this morning, young people in particular, there's a lot of individuals who can give you a lot better financial advice than I could ever imagine, there's a lot of folks who can give you better relationship advice than I could, there's a lot of people that could give you a lot more wisdom, but can I give you some advice or a lesson that nobody else is gonna say any differently or better? At the end of your days, no matter how much you've accumulated, no matter how much you've succeeded, no matter how much you have experienced, if your sins have not been taken care of, it will all be for naught. If your transgressions, as it says here, have not been addressed, it'll all be for naught because on your dying bed one day it won't matter the plaques on the wall, the money in the bank, or the highlight film of your career, whatever it may be, as you step into eternity the only thing that will matter is have your transgressions, have your sins, have you been delivered from them. Notice what he says in verse 8, "Deliver me," because that's the one thing you can't do yourself. You see, a lot of you have aspirations, "I'm gonna be a businessman. I'm gonna be an athlete. I'm gonna be an educator. I'm gonna be in the medical field. I'm gonna be..." You can aspire to do all that stuff and I challenge you to do it but none of you has the ability to take care of your sin problem. None of you do. The only way our transgressions, the only way our sin can be taken care of is if we call on Jesus Christ to do so.

So let me urge you at the end of this hour, no matter where the Lord takes you, no matter how long it takes to get there, and no matter what bumps you face on the way, there's one thing that has to be addressed in life, you have to have your sin problem addressed because you will spend more time in eternity than you ever do on planet earth.