

# Here Today, Gone Tomorrow

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**Bible Text:** Psalm 39  
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Our text for this evening comes from Psalm 39 and I would invite you to turn to Psalm 39 as we read God's word that we're going to study together this evening. It is a Psalm written, as it were, in the minor key of spiritual life and it's going to be a delight to study it together.

1 For the choir director, for Jeduthun. A Psalm of David. I said, "I will guard my ways That I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle While the wicked are in my presence." 2 I was mute and silent, I refrained even from good, And my sorrow grew worse. 3 My heart was hot within me, While I was musing the fire burned; Then I spoke with my tongue: 4 "LORD, make me to know my end And what is the extent of my days; Let me know how transient I am. 5 Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. Selah. 6 Surely every man walks about as a phantom; Surely they make an uproar for nothing; He amasses riches and does not know who will gather them. 7 And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in You. 8 Deliver me from all my transgressions; Make me not the reproach of the foolish. 9 I have become mute, I do not open my mouth, Because it is You who have done it. 10 Remove Your plague from me; Because of the opposition of Your hand I am perishing. 11 With reproofs You chasten a man for iniquity; You consume as a moth what is precious to him; Surely every man is a mere breath. Selah. 12 Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; Do not be silent at my tears; For I am a stranger with You, A sojourner like all my fathers. 13 Turn Your gaze away from me, that I may smile again Before I depart and am no more."

Our elder chairman, Dan Jackson, has a phrase that I like to hear him speak from time to time, he says that when we walk through the word verse by verse or chapter by chapter, the word walks through us and that's an especially helpful perspective as we come to Psalm 39 tonight as God's word walks through us and shapes us and sifts us and does its work in our lives. Psalm 39 is not a Psalm that you would choose to preach on just out of hand just to pick something random to preach on because its theme is somewhat heavy. David is in deep inner turmoil as he writes this and for preachers that want to have a

bouncy message for their audiences, this is not a Psalm that you would go to in order to accomplish that purpose, but here at Truth Community Church, we have a different goal in mind. It's not that we're trying to have every message and every time we gather together to be bouncy and light and all of that, we just want to teach the whole counsel of God. We want to have the whole counsel of God come to bear on our lives, and for some of us Psalm 39 comes at a very particularly good time in your life because you're in the minor key of life. You're in a sad and difficult time in life and this Psalm is going to give voice to your innermost concerns, your innermost troubles in a way that is going to give you a good perspective on life.

In Psalm 38 last week, we saw David praying for mercy while he was under divine chastisement. He was experiencing human abandonment and gross injustice, and as we came to the end of the Psalm, look at the end of Psalm 38, verses 21 and 22, he ends with a prayer for God to show mercy to him and to help him and to alleviate the situation. In verses 21 and 22 of Psalm 38, he says, "Do not forsake me, O LORD; O my God, do not be far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!" And so there is a lot of external pressure upon him as we went through Psalm 38. As we come to Psalm 39, there is another dimension of the pressure that he is dealing with. He is processing the inner turmoil that God's discipline has brought upon him. He is processing the inner discouragement and the questions and the deep wrestlings of his heart and he brings that to the forefront and deals with that in the presence of God; he's processing inner turmoil as he comes here in Psalm 39 and as we consider it here. We're going to see this Psalm in four sections as we walk through this time with David, and having been in the midst in times gone by, in the midst of times like this, I really love this Psalm and have an appreciation for it, and if you're in a time of discouragement, this Psalm is soon to become very precious to you, I'm sure.

First of all, we see David laying forth his silent distress. That's our first point for this evening: his silent distress. He opens this Psalm with a resolution, with a commitment not to sin with his mouth; not to sin by the things that he would say under the provocation of his inner turmoil. Look at verse 1 with me, he opens up and he says,

1 I said, "I will guard my ways That I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle While the wicked are in my presence."

David is deeply troubled as he opens this Psalm and he has made a commitment as this Psalm begins that he is going to restrain his words; that he is not going to give voice in the presence of wicked men to the inner struggles that he's having with his walk with God; the questions that he is having about God's dealings with him. He says, "I am not going to speak such things in the presence of wicked men lest they take the occasion to blaspheme God and to mock me in the midst of my troubles. They have no context, they have no perspective with which to understand these things and so I am going to keep my mouth shut lest the dogs come and the pigs come and attack the pearls that are in my heart." There is something to be said for being mindful of that. We all go through struggles and the funny thing is what I've come to learn over many years in pastoral ministry, is that the pastor is usually the last one to know about the struggles that are in

your heart. That's okay. I don't mind that so much, just know that I pray for you as you go through them even if I'm not aware of the details of what's happening. But here's the thing that you should be mindful of in light of this verse here, is that there should be an element of concern for the glory of God in your heart even as you are going through those difficult times so that you don't lay forth before people who do not know God, who do not have a biblical worldview, who do not share the Spirit of God and a commitment to the crucified and risen Christ, don't lay your questions about God before them and give them an opportunity to find justification for their own unbelief. That's not what you do. Even in the midst of your deepest turmoil, you still have a fundamental commitment to the glory of God in protecting the honor of his name and not giving people an occasion to blaspheme against him. That's what David is doing here and so he has made a commitment to hold his tongue. You don't have to verbalize every question that you have in front of every person that you know and David recognized that, and even in the midst of his struggles, David has committed himself to this quiet spirit and holding his tongue before men, but the reality of it was that that made his inner turmoil even worse. Not being able to give voice to it made it even more difficult for him.

Look at verse 2, he says,

2 I was mute and silent, I refrained even from good, And my sorrow grew worse.

While he was maintaining his silence, the agitation of his heart like being in a pressure cooker, the pressure just built more and more. And if you've had those struggles where you're just not in a position to talk about them with anyone, you know what this is like. You are constrained. You are agitated over particular relationships perhaps that are difficult and there is just never an appropriate setting to be able to share the burden with anyone because other commitments keep you from speaking in a way that would cause you to be able to say those things because of what the implications would be if you voiced it to someone else, and so you have to hold your tongue. Perhaps there's a sense of shame that you have because a family relationship isn't what you would want it to be and yet you don't feel the freedom to verbalize it to anyone and so you hold onto it. Maybe a marriage issue, and you know what that's like, as you hold it and it weighs on you and you can't speak it and the pressure just builds more and more and David says, "That's what it was like for me. My sorrow just grew worse. I had a bad set of options. I cannot speak about it and yet the consequence of that is that the pressure builds all the more inside of my heart and the agitations of my heart grip me more and more." You sympathize with him, don't you? You feel the weight of that. You can't talk about it but the silence, while the silence is the more honorable thing to do, it doesn't resolve the distress. So as David is writing this Psalm, the continued reflection on his dilemma began to overwhelm his heart. The more that he thought about it, the worse it became.

Look at verse 3, he says,

3 My heart was hot within me, While I was musing the fire burned;

This is just really gripping me but I can't say anything and it just gets worse and worse. The prophet Jeremiah had a similar experience in a different context. You will remember this verse when I read it to you even if you didn't know the citation. Jeremiah said in chapter 20, verse 9, he said, "if I say, 'I will not remember Him Or speak anymore in His name,' Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; And I am weary of holding it in, And I cannot endure it." Don't you love the honesty of Scripture? Don't you love the fact that Scripture goes here? That Scripture goes into the depths of our hearts and gives us voice for the experiences that we know in the minor key of life? Don't you appreciate that? Aren't you glad that Scripture isn't superficial in its treatment of life and that everything is bouncy as we said earlier, that Scripture just would mock the sorrows of your heart by not dealing with them seriously? That's the way men are. That's the way much of what passes for evangelical Christianity is like here today in our day and age, but the Bible isn't like that and I love the Bible for that. I love the fact that I can come with the burdens of my heart and say, "Here is a book that understands me. Even better, the author of this book, the God of the Bible, understands the agitations of my heart and I can bring them honestly before him. I can lay this out before him. Why? Because he went before me 3,000 years earlier, laid this out in David's heart and gave inspiration to the words that David wrote so that David wrote and gave that which would become an experience to many of us in our Christian lives." I love that about the Bible. I love the brutal honesty of this Psalm. I love the fact that the Bible doesn't shy away from the deeper issues of life.

Look at what David is doing here. His heart is hot, the fire within him is burning. "I cannot take anymore of this," and look what he does in verse 3. He says,

Then I spoke with my tongue.

Then his tongue becomes kind of a bracketing bookend for these first three verses of the Psalm. I always love these inclusios, an inclusio is a section of Scripture that starts and ends with the same word or the same phrase and gathers it all up into one unit of thought. I love that. We'll find some of that on the Sermon on the Mount when we get to that in due time. But notice in verse 1 he says, "I'm going to guard my ways. I'm not going to speak with my tongue." Then in verse 3 he says, "Then I spoke with my tongue." There is something interesting going on there. Notice the shift in emphasis. In verse 1, he's talking about using his tongue to speak before men, in verse 3 as you pivot into verse 4, you see that instead he uses his tongue to speak to God.

Here's what David does, here's what you need to do more of most likely in your own difficult spiritual life in the struggles and trials that overwhelm your heart, David says, "I'm going to restrain my tongue before men," but what he does instead is he uses his tongue to bring his distress before God in prayer. He speaks to God and he speaks to God and in the solitude of his prayer closet, as it were, voices the struggle and works through it alone with God. Most of us would grow spiritually, most of us would do well to learn from this, and I have the same temptation and the same propensity that you do, when a trial hits, when something comes in my mind that really bothers me, the first thing you want to do is pick up the phone and call somebody and tell them about it and to voice it to

man and bypassing the vertical dimension which is where these things should be brought the first place. Well, let this Psalm caution you about that. Let this Psalm prompt you to a step in the direction of spiritual maturity that says, "Do you know what? Sometimes there is a place for me not to voice this before men and instead to set aside time to rearrange my schedule to make it a priority to go someplace where I can be alone with God and voice these things to him," realizing that your tongue was not given merely for horizontal communication but to be able to lift it up before God in prayer. David, under the weight of silent distress, now turns to God in prayer.

You know, one other thing that's completely off the point but which I need to say here, the truth of the matter is, beloved, is that when you get into these times, men can't help you anyway. Haven't you seen that? Haven't you found that? When your heart is so overwhelmed and you go and you lay it out before me and whatever they say, a man or a woman, you say, "That was not helpful. You don't even understand, let alone have a perspective to give me helpful advice." And it just becomes like sandpaper on a blackboard, just irritating to see the lack of perspective, the lack of insight that men bring to the table, even Christian men and women. Well, when you're in a position like that, beloved, the door of Psalm 39 is opened wide to you for you to enter in, and having been on the other side of conversations like that, you know, yeah I'm a pastor, but sometimes I don't know what to say either except to point people to the Scriptures and to point them to their sufficiency in Christ and to exhort them to trust in that. I can't explain your hidden circumstances. So all of that to say, not that we don't need human counselors, that's not my point, the point is to make coming to God in prayer the priority rather than the second, third, fourth or fifth option. To use a football analogy, going to God in prayer should be your go-to receiver, not the third or fourth option on the play.

Now, as David pivots here and we move into our second point, we're going to see part of what the inner struggle was that gave rise to this Psalm, and our second point here, we've seen his silent distress, the second point here: we're going to see his short duration. His short duration, and he lays forth the brevity of life before God in prayer. You know, there is just so much on my mind and on my heart here tonight as I have the privilege of opening this to you. It's just such a blessing that you guys are so faithful to be here on Tuesday nights because I love this series that we are doing on the Psalms and I'm glad we can share it together. You know, some of us are of a mind that we want to be in control of our circumstances and if there's a problem we want to fix it. I know many of you are like that and you just want to get hands-on. If there's a problem, you jump in and, "By golly, I'm going to fix this broken relationship or whatever. I'm going to fix our broken society and our broken political system, get active and get other people involved." Well, do you know what? You don't have to live too long to start to realize that it's often simply not in your power to reverse the pressures of the world or to fix that broken relationship: the person just won't listen; the person is hard toward you, doesn't want to hear, doesn't have time. You know, the further I go along in life, the more I see how utterly helpless and impotent I am for the things that most concern my heart. It's very humbling to find that your heart affections and the things that you most care about are things that are beyond your ability to do anything about: people don't listen; the laws go against you; the elections go against you; So-and-so doesn't want to listen. And when you come into that

situation and you start to feel the inner pressure of that and that starts to dominate your heart, once again, the doors of Psalm 39 are opened wide to you to understand and invite you in.

And notice what David does here. He says at the end of verse 3, "Then I spoke with my tongue." Now, here is a point where you should be leaning forward into the Psalm, as it were, saying, "I want to hear what he said when he opened his mouth." With that kind of inner turmoil and inner burden on his heart, what did he say and to whom did he say it? Well, let's look at it here. Look at verses 4 and 5. This is not what you would expect. This is not what anyone would say to you to go, that those kinds of pressures and the turmoil, no one would tell you to go here except the Bible. Too many people are prone to tell you how to try to fix it and they don't have the first clue on what is really at stake. David doesn't go there. Look at what he does in verses 4 and 5. He says,

4 LORD, make me to know my end And what is the extent of my days;  
Let me know how transient I am. [What?] 5 Behold, You have made my  
days as handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; Surely  
every man at his best is a mere breath.

Do you know what your first prayer should be when you are under the weight of affliction and inner turmoil that you cannot solve and that you cannot fix? Do you know what your first prayer should be as you interact with this Psalm? Your first prayer should be what David says here, "Lord, teach me. Lord, here I am in the midst of this difficulty and this turmoil." And we've been conditioned by so many years of bad teaching to say, "God, fix this. God, make this go away. God, give me what I want." As if the earthly circumstance was the major priority in prayer. No. That's not right. That is a very immature way to approach prayer and to think about spiritual life. When your heart is overwhelmed within you, you come to God, you humble yourself before him and you say, "Lord, whatever else you do in this situation, O God, teach me. Enlighten my mind. Give me understanding that I might respond to this properly because, Lord, I'm so overwhelmed and I'm so lost in the midst of my own agitations that I don't know where to turn. God, take my hand and lead me and give me understanding."

Brothers and sisters, could you not benefit from that most basic disposition, that most fundamental approach to spiritual life? Wouldn't that be helpful for many of you, if not most of you? Wouldn't that utterly reorient your life in prayer? Rather than immediately seeking relief or expressing your complaint to God, what if you started from just the most fundamental basic approach that said, "God, in the midst of this, teach me. I humble myself before you. I am a disciple of Christ. I am under your tutelage. I need to learn. I don't know how to resolve this. I don't have the spiritual capacity to make these issues of my heart go away. I am weak. I am vulnerable. I am impotent before you, O God, and my heart is too weak and my flesh has failed. God, take me in this position and teach me. I utterly surrender and submit to you. Just make me what you want me to be. Just give understanding and direction to my mind." And that's so much different than saying, "God, why this? God, why that? God, how could you do this?" It's completely different, just that fundamental basic thing, and what David asks for here is for an understanding. This is

just so profound. He's asking God in the midst of his turmoil to say, "God, expand my mind and help me understand how transient I am, how passing the nature of my life is." Look at it there with verse 4, "LORD, make me to know my end. What is the extent of my days? Let me know how transient I am."

You know, all of us are prone to view life from a completely wrong perspective. We get so involved in our priorities and what we're doing in life and our whole perspective is limited and earthbound and horizontal in nature, never stopping to step back and say, "This is rushing by like water over a waterfall," and just so consumed in the earthly matters, the earthly turmoils, the earthly goals, the earthly aspirations, that we never step back to look at it as a whole unit and say, "This is going by really rapidly." And by the time you hit the later portions of your life, it's just accelerating all the more. David says, "God, help me see life from that perspective, to see how quick and passing it is."

Look at verse 5 there, he says, "Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths." Handbreadths was a unit of measure, about the width of four fingers across. It was one of the smallest units of measure that they had at that time. What is David saying here? Simply this, "God, life is short. You have made my days fleeting." And what that does and why David is praying to understand that, when you come to grips with the brevity of life from a serious profound perspective, what it does is it diminishes your pride and the entire significance of man. It humbles you to realize that all of this is passing.

I've thought about this a number of times. One of the places where it came to mind, I've talked about this kind of stuff before so just bear with me. I was in the cemetery, the Vernon Cemetery about an hour and a half, two hours from here. I had some extra time on my hands and something occurred to my mind. I said, "I want to find the biggest tombstone, the tallest tombstone in this cemetery." Now, the Vernon Cemetery is a beautiful cemetery but it's not given to great big massive monuments or anything like that as you might find in some of those cemeteries back east, for example. So I went and I found what I determined was the tallest monument in the Vernon Cemetery. I didn't write down the name. I wish I had. This person had died 100 years earlier and in their effort to leave their mark and the family and all of that, they built this tall, the tallest monument in the Vernon Cemetery. Do you know what? No one has any idea who that person is. No one has visited that grave for decades. And in their effort, in their futile, feeble, prophetic effort to leave a mark that said, "I was here," they rather just left a monument to their own futility and passing nature and the fact that they are here today and gone tomorrow. It's meaningless today. No one knows who that is.

David says, "God, help me understand that my life is fleeting, passing. I'm here for a short while and then I am gone and I am no more." Look at the end of verse 5, that Selah is calling you to meditate on, to stop and consider what's been said here. Your life and mine is of that same passing transient nature. It doesn't matter that you're a teenager, a young person just getting into college and into life, the same thing is true about you and soon enough, your life will be over, and time will go and the wind will blow the sand across the testimony of your life and there is not going to be anyone further down the

road to really take note of it in due time. David says, "Lord, help me understand the transience of my life."

Now, I realize that sounds, you probably didn't come here wanting to hear something like that and I understand that that sounds like a real downer but do you know what? Here's the thing: it's true and we're all going to do better if we calculate truth into our perspective on life. If we take this perspective and incorporate it into our lives, then we are going to see life from a proper biblical perspective and establish our priorities and our view of life in a way that will make us more constructive citizens of the kingdom of God, and the mere fact that it's unpleasant and the mere fact that it is an assault on our pride is not reason to ignore it, particularly when it is laid out here so plainly in God's word.

David says, "This is all passing." Do you know what this means, beloved? This means that we need to see the temporary prosperity of sinners from that perspective, first of all. As we see wicked men rise and gain prominence and wealth and authority, we don't need to, in the words of Psalm 37 which we studied two weeks ago, we don't need to fret over that; we don't need to get all worked up over that. Why? Because we've got a different perspective. We see through it. We see beyond it. We see that the time is coming when their grave will be forgotten and so this is not something of lasting eternal import that I'm seeing in this life in front of me as sinners prosper. And beloved, this also gives you a perspective on your own difficulties and the turmoils of your own heart. I don't diminish them. We weep with those who weep but, beloved, it's all passing and that perspective changes the way that we look at it.

Look at verse 6, David says,

6 Surely every man walks about as a phantom; Surely they make an uproar for nothing; He amasses riches and does not know who will gather them.

Beloved, you see it, don't you? That there is no lasting significance to the rise of men. There is no eternal duration to it. They may dominate headlines for a time. They may have the authority to make life difficult for us during our own short sojourn here on earth. They may come to have great authority but where is Sennacherib, the former king of Assyria? Where is Nebuchadnezzar? Where is Cyrus? Where is Caesar? Where are these men today? Beloved, they all leave the scene. Someone else will take over their riches or the scepter of their earthly authority and they will recede and fade into the background like a morning mist that burns off with the noonday sun. You and I have the benefit and the blessing of a biblical perspective that lets us see that so that we don't have to get all wrapped up and all worked up in what we see going on around us. We see through it because we look at it and see the short duration of life.

It's very easy to illustrate this, even though I've already done it, I want to use this illustration since it's in my notes. Do you know offhand who the 13th president of the United States was? Just offhand, just like that? You don't know, do you? Do you know who the governor of Kentucky was in 1960? Both of those men were once men of great prominence, great authority. They spoke and things were done because of the position



that they had, but look at us now. We have forgotten them. They're not important. They don't matter. I know you're dying to know. Millard Fillmore was the 13th President of the United States, 1850-1853, the last Whig president, I believe, and Bert Combs was governor of Kentucky from 1959 to 1963. Why does that matter to you? It doesn't, and you see, that's the point. That's exactly the point. Men at the pinnacle of power in their respective realms now don't matter. Wow.

And beloved, here's the thing and this is really humbling and this is where the word of God crushes our pride and this is a healthy thing that you need to embrace with what is about to be said: if that is true of prominent men, what about our lives and our concerns? Utterly passing. Utterly temporary, transient. Here today, gone tomorrow. And what this means is and David says, David's prayer...you see, think about this: we naturally resist entering into this conversation. I know that some of you don't even like to talk about death and you cringe when I talk about cemeteries. I get that. Thank you for bearing with me as I do. You say, "I don't want to think that way. That's uncomfortable. I don't like to think about those kinds of things." Do you realize that King David, the writer of inspired Scripture was the exact opposite of you that way, if you're like that? David said, "God, help me understand it." David prayed to be able to assimilate that into his perspective. "Help me to know." You see, beloved, you cannot begin to properly understand life at all, you can't begin to process it with any sense of accuracy and godliness until you come to perfect grips with its utterly passing nature. James 4:14 says you're just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Psalm 90:12, "Teach us to number our days that we might apply our hearts to wisdom." So I think about this. You know, my life is passing. A time is going to come quick enough where no one even remembers who I was and it's humbling, but there's also a certain liberty in that. There's a certain alleviation of pressure on you that comes when you recognize that and say, "Okay, I don't have to take myself and my concerns so profoundly seriously that I just let it dominate what I think because even the hardest issues of life, the deepest turmoils of my heart, are one day going to be gone. It's temporary. It's passing just like I am."

Now, the Psalm isn't done here. God doesn't bring us to that point to leave us there. David now pivots from that and he takes that recognition, that humbling acknowledgment of the short duration of his life even in the midst of his severe turmoil, he takes that and he pivots and he expresses faith. Look at verse 7 as we go to our third point as David addresses his severe discipline. His severe discipline. David's heart is now humbled. He says, "The prosperity of the wicked is temporary. My own life is transient. God, I am humbled before you. I am not a man in my own right, in my human realm of eternal significance." I qualified that carefully in what I said and so if you have questions about it, go back and listen again when the file comes out. David views his earthly life from a right perspective and now he's going to address the severe discipline. Having been humbled, David now turns to the Lord in faith.

Look at verse 7, he says,

7 And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in You.

We're following the flow of thought here in the Psalm. We're not focusing unduly on any one particular theme or verse, we just want to follow the flow of what David is speaking, and when David says, "now, Lord," he is transitioning in the Psalm. He is done addressing the brevity of life and now he is pivoting from that, informed by that perspective, he now turns to God in prayer and he commits his way entirely to the Lord for encouragement or help. "Now, Lord," is his transition. "In light of what I've said in the past, now, Lord, here's what I would have to say to you," and he says, "My hope is in You." And beloved, this is, in some ways this is the spiritual high point of Psalm 39, this verse right here. This right here is the magnet that should attract your soul and it is that which keeps the brevity of life from becoming utterly overwhelming to you. This is where you go once you have found this. You see, it's not brevity of the life simply for a morbid state of introspection that we contemplate that. No, it's so that we would transcend, that we would move out of the temporal transient nature of our earthly existence and move into that which is eternal and that which would be the rock and refuge of your soul. That's the point. That's the ultimate point of that, but it's not until you have utterly abandoned any sense of earthly significance that you are prepared to pray this and to receive this with any meaningful significance whatsoever. It's not until you have been crushed and found your bankruptcy that you start to look for someone to deliver you from it. And if you're here still in sin, still feeling the weight of your guilt, the weight of your separation from God that you have broken his law, there is no good to commend you to God, you need to come to this very point where that guilt so dominates and changes your perspective that finally you abandon yourself, you deny yourself and you cry out to Christ to save you. "Jesus, I leave it all behind. O, Son of God, I abandon my sin. I abandon self and I come to you alone and ask you to save me from my wretchedness and make me your own." David here is writing as a believer and says, "God, in light of the brevity of my life, I come to you and I abandon myself completely to you. You are my hope. You are the Master of my situation. You are the one who overrules and oversees my life. O God, in you and in you alone I have a certain eternal hope in the midst of this passing transient life." And all of a sudden he's ringing a loud bell of glorious hope in the midst of his own weakness, despair, turmoil and transience. It's an incredible prayer that he prays here. "Lord, my hope is in you." So now having abandoned all sense of earthly significance, his focus, his attention is directed entirely to Yahweh as he prays to Yahweh in verse 12 here using the word that means Master, the name for God that means Master. "Now, my Master, what do I wait for? My hope is in You." And what he does here, having so humbled himself, he now asks God to relieve him from the distress that his own sins have caused to him.

Look at verse 8, he says,

8 Deliver me from all my transgressions; Make me not the reproach of the foolish.

He says there in verse 8. He's saying, "God, look at my miserable condition. Here I am, God, a passing vapor of a man. I'm in this great turmoil. My own sin has brought this upon me. My own sinful condition leaves me in this miserable wretchedness. There are foolish people that would love to mock me even more in the midst of this, who would

blaspheme you because that's what fools do. They would look at my excessive hardship and mock your name. God, deliver me from this. Save me from this. Help me in the midst of this turmoil which is beyond my ability not only to change my circumstances but it's beyond my ability. I've reached my breaking point internally, Lord. My heart is hot within me. My sorrow has grown worse. God, God, look at my miserable weak condition and deliver me from it." It's an appeal to divine mercy and kindness. "God, I know that you're a God of compassion and a God of pity. Look on my pitiful state and help me, would you?" And as he goes on, he acknowledges that God is the one who has brought this discipline upon him.

Look at verses 9 and 10. He says,

9 I have become mute, I do not open my mouth, Because it is You who have done it. 10 Remove Your plague from me; Because of the opposition of Your hand I am perishing.

Look at what he says here, verse 9, "You have done this." Verse 10, "It's the opposition of Your hand under which I am perishing." He says, "God, I am under the stroke of divine chastisement here. My life distress comes from the unseen hand of God." He says, "God, somehow this severe condition in which I find myself comes from you." David would not have brooked three minutes of a health-and-wealth prosperity Gospel preacher at this point. What we see here in the life of David, beloved, and I encourage you to enter sympathetically into what he is saying here, David is saying, "Life is hard and I'm losing the battles and I don't have the power to deliver myself. I don't have the strength under this dispensation of your providence, God, to continue on. I cannot preserve what is precious to me. I don't have the power to change it and, God, it came from you and here I am, this weak, transient, passing creature under the stroke of God. God, have mercy on me. God, deliver me."

Look at verse 11. He says,

11 With reproofs You chasten a man for iniquity; You consume as a moth what is precious to him;

You know how moths eat up garments, just bite by bite render it into nothing?

Surely every man is a mere breath. Selah.

The spirit of what is underlying what David says here is, "God, you are dealing severely with me and I am a man of a transient passing nature. My life is brief. I am weak and you, the eternal God of all power, are dealing severely with me in my helpless condition. God, why would you deal so severely with a temporary man? Why would you act this way upon me?" And he turns and comes to his final section of this Psalm and makes his prayer in verses 12 and 13 for his spiritual deliverance.

So just by way of the briefest of review here, David has articulated in the Psalm his silent distress, "I'm going to stay quiet under the hand of God but I will open my tongue and I will pray and I will speak to God about this." And he says, "God, help me understand how transient I am. I'm temporary in the midst of this suffering and this sorrow." And he says, "This severe situation in life in which I find myself, it comes from you. This is discipline from you. I'm a guilty sinner before you, O God. I acknowledge that your hand has done this but, God, in light of my weak position, my transient nature, in light of your surpassing power, I ask you, please back off. Please help me." So here in the final section, the fourth point for tonight, we see his spiritual deliverance. His spiritual deliverance. The distress, the transient nature of life, the severity of the discipline here framed David's concluding prayer and, in essence, he's praying for mercy and grace.

Look at verse 12, he says

12 Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; Do not be silent at my tears; For I am a stranger with You, A sojourner like all my fathers.

There are so many spiritual longings wrapped up in what David says here. Biblically, strangers and sojourners were foreign residents in the land who were supposed to be welcomed but they had no permanent rights. They had no root in the land of God's people and David says, "The way my circumstances are going here right now, God, there is nothing about life on a horizontal plane that gives me anchor or assurance. Here I am living life in your presence and it's like I have nothing to appeal to." So he appeals, look at verse 12 with me again, he appeals to Yahweh. "O LORD," that covenant keeping name of God as the basis upon which he asks for mercy. "God, there is nothing in this life that I can anchor myself to. I'm like a stranger passing through a foreign land. I can only appeal to you. O LORD, my covenant keeping, my promise keeping God, I appeal to your character and ask you to have mercy on me. Help me in my weakness."

And in verse 13 he closes the Psalm and he says,

13 Turn Your gaze away from me, that I may smile again Before I depart and am no more.

He says, "God, my life will be over soon enough. I'm just a passing vapor on this land and I'm under the severity of divine discipline, a stroke of chastisement that is so painful, O God, so much inner turmoil wrapped up in this and it has come from you as I said earlier. So Lord, in light of your covenant keeping greatness, Lord, in light of the severity in which I am going through, Lord, in light of the temporary nature of my life, I ask you, please pull back from the severity of this discipline so that I might have some room to breathe and to smile and to enjoy a few of these short days that I have left on earth." It's a very humble prayer. "God, allow me to enjoy life in these remaining days rather than continuing in this kind of suffering. God, since this severity is from you, please relent on this passing creature so that I might at least enjoy these brief days here before I continue on, before I die, before I depart from this life and I am no more." There is a certain poignancy to that prayer; there is a certain power and persuasion to it as he appeals to a

merciful God who knows all things. He says, "God, what's the purpose of taking me through this unending depth of sorrow and not give any relief? Why would you do that on such a frail passing creature as me? I have confessed my sin, O God, I appeal to you." And he closes on a note asking for mercy and in the way that the entire Psalter is arranged, we'll see the answer next week in Psalm 40 as these Psalms sometimes bleed from one into another and continue themes as we view them all together.

Let me give you two points to close for your own life here in light of what we've said. First of all, beloved: God sometimes brings you into profound distress to which there is no answer. David plainly says in this Psalm, "God, you have done this." You face difficult trials that crush you, that have no clear resolution and that are beyond your understanding to try to calculate how anything good could come out of it. You know what that's like, don't you? Here's what you need to see, beloved, in light of Psalm 39; this is your hope even if it doesn't sound like it at the moment: somehow the severity of that trial is part of God's providential plan for your life. God brings this into your life. These things did not happen apart from the will of God for you. This was not some severe twisted turn of impersonal fate. It's more than simply that God allowed it to happen as if you were subject to forces that were beyond God's control and he just chose not to intervene. God is at work in everything that happens in the lives of his children. God has a purpose for it all and it does not do your soul any good to try to separate the purposes of God from it and say, "Well, he allowed it." No, God has done this. God has orchestrated this. God ordained this for you. Somehow it's a part of the reason that you exist is to respond to it. Part of it, beloved, having gone through long years of things I can say this, sometimes and know that I'm speaking to you as one who is on your side, the depth of the trial and the length of the trial is designed to humble you and the depth and the length of the trial shows you how deeply rooted pride and self-sufficiency is in your heart and you have to be purged of that and that doesn't happen under the sound of a single message, it doesn't happen under the memorization of two or three Bible verses. The purging of that pride and self-sufficiency in your life is a long process because sin has wrapped its root around your affections and your heart so deeply that the trial has to be long and deep in order to purge you and separate you from it. Wow. You almost get the idea that life is serious and that God is intent on sanctifying you, don't you?

Secondly, God's eternal purpose transcends your passing life. Oh, do I want you to grasp this. God's eternal purpose transcends whatever happens in your life. You really need to grasp this, embrace it and define your worldview through it. Beloved, there may not be an earthly explanation for your sorrow. Sometimes things just happen and they seem to be random and you say, "What did I do? How come this? Why that?" And there is no answer to that question. One of the things that that does for you, one of the things that that is designed to impress upon you is that you are an alien and you are a stranger on this earth. Beloved, mark it and let this become finally the stream of water underground to which the roots of your life can go and finally draw the nourishment, draw the refreshment, draw the vital power, life-giving sense of spiritual water that would animate you and help you to understand and help you to transcend it all. Here's the thing, beloved: God's greater purpose in your life is always to prepare you for eternity, not to give you what you want in this life. Sometimes in his grace and mercy and goodness he gives you

exactly what you want and you rejoice in that, but in those times where severity comes, where things are withheld from you, where you lose that which is close to you, understand that your starting point, the beginning point of perspective on all of it is that somehow God is preparing me for eternity through this. 1 Peter 2:11 says, "I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against your soul." You're an alien. You're a stranger here if you're a believer in Christ. Paul said in Philippians 3, our citizenship is in heaven. In Colossians, your life, you died and your life is hid with Christ in God. Hebrews 12:10 says that he disciplines us so that we may share his holiness, not simply in this life, although that's part of it, ultimately he is preparing us so that we would share his holiness and glory forever, and sometimes severe trials is exactly the prescription; it's exactly what the doctor ordered to shape you for that greater day, that greater eternal moment when you are with him and everything about life is geared toward that, not about what happens in this earthly transient life. Beloved, think about it: how could it possibly be that God's ultimate purpose is about what happens to you in this 70 year window of your life? How could that possibly be what life is about? If it's transient, if it's passing by scriptural testimony, it's going to be gone like a vapor, you're going to pass away, future generations are going to forget you, the whole book of Ecclesiastes tells you that, then it can't be ultimately about this life, can it? That's a question that you're supposed to answer yes to. That's right.

So Psalm 39 gives us a window through which to see, "Oh, this is all about preparing me for something else. I can let go of the earthly sorrow. I don't have to grasp all of the bitterness of those broken relationships. I don't have to manipulate people to get what I want. I don't have to cheat to get the resources I want. I don't have to question God and deny him and turn away from him and sin against him simply because he is using a hot fire to refine me. No. No, I'm an alien here. I'm a stranger. I'm a pilgrim passing through. I can deal with the temporary setbacks of life no matter how deep and how severe they are. Why? Because it's not about this life for me anyway, it's about preparing me for glory."

And beloved, I'll close with this, as you think through these things, think through the temporary nature of earthly trials designed to bring about eternal glory, remember your Lord Jesus as you think this way. Jesus Christ has already gone before you on that path. His earthly sufferings fulfilled the eternal purpose of God, accomplished your salvation and secured eternal blessing for you. He cried out in distress and agony on the cross but that temporary suffering secured an eternal blessing for you in like manner as you walk through this life and severity comes. Beloved, it's temporary and it is securing for you an eternal weight of glory far beyond any comparison. That will help you process the earthly distress. We recognize our transient nature. We cry out humbly to God and trust him to fulfill that which he has promised to us and which he appointed for us before the beginning of time.

Let's bow together prayer.

*O God, indeed our hope is in you. We fix our eyes on the eternal reward that you have for us and accept the fact that sometimes earthly circumstances will be hard and severe*

*and beyond our strength. In those times, O God, teach us our own transience, our own passing nature, that it might loosen our affections for the things of this world that we might submit to your sanctifying purposes in our lives and submit to you as you mold us and shape us for eternity where there will be no more sorrow, no more tears, no more sin, no more pain, no more broken relationships, no more betrayed trust, no more inner distress, but all will be bliss when we see our Savior face to face. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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