

Psalm 39

Overview

It seems that the beginning of this Psalm (vv. 1-3) is David reflecting on what he had resolved to do in the past as a result of what he experienced and later observed and prayed in the present in vv. 11-13. He was experiencing the heavy hand of God's rod. And he begins by unburdening his heart. His burden was what he previously determined to do when he was in the company of the wicked. While under God's chastening hand, he had determined to keep silent before the wicked (vv. 1-2). While under the pain of God's chastisement, which he expresses in vv. 10-11, he resolved not to speak while in the company of wicked men. But while he was thinking ('[was musing](#)', v3) on the matter of God's chastening and the emptiness of all that he was in himself — his own vanity; while musing on his frailty and the brevity of his life (vv. 9-10), his heart grew "[hot within](#)" himself. That is when he broke silence. Then he spoke (v3)!

The question that arises from this is: Why was David resolved in vv. 1-3 to keep silent while he was in the company of the wicked?

First, because **he would not seek mercy from merciless man**. "[And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man](#)" (1 Chronicles 21:13), because man is cruelly merciless! As Jesus told the merciless freewill¹, self-righteous religionists of His day, "[Go learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance](#)" (Matthew 9:13). God is merciful. Christ is merciful. But man is merciless. Man is cruel, unjust and untrue in all of his ways! The persecution of all of the prophets and of Christ, who alone is good, by the wicked, prove that.

Second, he was silent because **he did not put his trust in man, but did put his trust in the LORD** (Jeremiah 17:5, 7; Isaiah 26:1-3). Why call on man who cannot be trusted, who deceives and is deceived (2 Timothy 3:13; Titus 3:3; Ephesians 2:1-3; Mark 7:21-23; Romans 3:4 — God is true, every man is a liar)!

Third, because **man would not and could not help him**! It was not against man that he had sinned, but God. And it was therefore not man who would or could forgive him and deliver him from his sin, but God alone!

¹ Freewill is hostile to God's sovereign will, and is the only will that can or will save sinners!

Fourth, **it was the LORD who made him sorry, who brought the sorrow on his heart, therefore, it was to the LORD that he pours out his cry/plea.** "I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it" (v9). it was not man's chastisement; it was God's stroke (vv. 9-10).

Fifth, **he would not open his mouth to plead for himself against men.**

His grief was inward. But men added to his inner grief. He would not plead against them himself. He committed himself to God, who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:22-24). If we speak for ourselves, we make ourselves the ultimate authority. If we defend ourselves, we make ourselves our own savior. It is our wisdom, therefore, to keep silent under the rod of God. If God speaks for us, who can speak against us (Romans 8:33-34)? As Christ Himself prayed (and which His people prayed in Him, who are to follow Him by taking up this prayer to Him who prayed for them) "Plead my cause, O LORD, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help! Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against those that persecute me: say unto my soul, I AM thy Salvation" (Psalm 35:1-3). My sins are my great foe! I cannot deliver myself. Only God can. Only God will. He does so only by Jesus Christ (Romans 7:24-25). Christ can because He is the Lord, and because He bore our sins and put them to death and rose again to save us to the uttermost, to give us the victory (Romans 5:9-10; 8:36-39; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57). This is the essence of the Gospel!

- a) I am a sinner, full of sin; ("O wretched man that I am...")
- b) I cannot deliver myself; ("Who shall deliver me from the body of this death!?")
- c) Only God against whom I have sinned can deliver me; ("I thank God...")
- d) He delivers sinners by His Son, Jesus Christ alone, our sovereign Lord; "...through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Acts 4:12; John 14:6; Matthew 1:21).

In light of this fifth reason why David resolved to keep silent before the wicked, let us take a slight diversion from the springboard of Psalm 35:1-3. While doing so, let us see in this diversion that it is Christ who fulfilled Psalm 39 preeminently (Colossians 1:18).

(From Psalm 35:1-3) Men and devils opposed my Savior when He undertook to do the will of God and answer heaven's Supreme Court and for my sins! Their opposition and hostility arose because of my sins: it was my fault! The entire matter/issue was my sin against God in heaven, against my Faithful Creator, against my Holy Sovereign! But God took the initiative! He undertook to save! He appointed Christ to do so. Christ interposed Himself in this initiative and purpose. He undertook to bear all of the guilt and all of the

filth that I was in my own person, and in all that I did. He shouldered all of my sin and the judgment of God's justice that I deserved. So that He, bearing my sins, bore the reproach and slanders of the enemy that arose from my sin. So being slandered, so mercilessly persecuted, He answered God for me with Himself (Hebrews 7:27; 9:14, 24, 26; Genesis 43:8-9; 44:18:34; Psalm 119:122; Hebrew 7:22; Philemon 1:12, 17-19). His answer was by the will of God. God gave this to Him to do (John 10:17-18)! He was to bear all in silence, for He became guilty! "" (Isaiah 53:4-7). He bore all without pleading for mercy to merciful enemies who never knew God, who knew no righteousness, who knew no justice, who knew nothing of grace, who showed no mercy (Matthew 9:13), but who served only their own sinful pride and rebellion in their pride to unseat God, to destroy His Son, to defame His holy name and character, to overthrow His sovereign rule and holy cause and purpose of grace and saving work. They wanted only to throw down His crown to the ground, and kill His loved ones! Nor did Christ, while before God, bearing all of the guilt and reproach that I was, vindicate Himself before wicked men! He did not even take His rightful place as Judge of all to judge them for the greatest of all evils, which they imagined to do and did to Him because of me, what I am, and what I did! But He kept silent! Why? First, because He was guilty and knew He deserved what God brought for my sin that He willingly bore! Second, because He first answered God for me with Himself, and then advocated for me against all my accusers with His own blood! He pleaded His own justification that His Father pronounced when He raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to His own right hand! And Christ advocated for me to God at His right hand by His own intercession, the place of victory, favor, honor, all authority from God to write and do as it pleases Him against all my enemies, for my eternal salvation, and for my eternal life, inheritance and blessings, all which blessings are by His grace and merits alone! Shall I not therefore keep silent and look to Him and cry to Him to plead for me against my sin according to His cause, His work, His prayer, His word of sovereign right and rule, His truth and righteousness and glory?!? Therefore, let me cry to Christ most high and look to Him to answer God in all for me with Himself, and thus silence all of my accusers in because of all my sins (Romans 8:33-39)!

Sixth, he is silent because **he will not justify himself before wicked men**. To do so is unwise. First, because wicked men do not know justice and do not do justly. Their wicked hearts prevent them from doing what is just and from being just! God's justice is beyond their understanding. God's justice and God's way of justifying does not fit their thinking. They cannot understand the severity of it, nor how God can be holy and freely justify ungodly sinners in one way only: through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24-26)! There is no reason to justify ourselves before men. To attempt to do so is foolish, because there is one Lawgiver and Judge to

whom all must give an account, and He is the only Savior of sinners! It is God alone who justifies His elect! It is God who justifies His elect in His justification of His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! ["Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification"](#) (Romans 4:25; 5:9)

Seventh, David is silent while the wicked is before him because he knows the wicked delight to see Christ fail when his people fail! It gives false religion (kingdom of satan) sinister delight to see those who profess the Gospel fall. Follows of Christ, by Christ's own word and works, claim that salvation is all of grace! They claim that Christ is all of our righteousness and strength, our peace and joy! Therefore, if we fall, satan and his kingdom accuse God of failing! The child of God cringes to think we are the cause of blasphemy against our Savior! Under the rod of God, we are therefore silent while the wicked are before us so that they have no occasion to speak against our Savior. His ways are always right. He always does what is best. All things work together for our good because of His good will. We do not want to complain in unbelief. We want to trust in our Savior though He would have us die for His cause (John 21:19-22; Romans 8:36-39). We raise our prayer to God. We speak *with* Him, but we desire never to speak *against* Him! Yet the wicked will slander when there is no cause! How much more if we speak to our God in their presence of hard things from His hand? They will fault our Savior no matter what God sends. We therefore do not speak to them of these things, but to our Master (John 11:1-ff).

Eighth, David [Christ] refrained his lips while he was among the wicked because he reserved his praise to God for when he was with the congregation of the Lord! Our Lord Jesus said, ["I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee"](#) (Hebrews 2:12). Christ prayed only for His people. He revealed Himself only to them (Matthew 11:25-27; John 17:2-3, 20). Therefore, David, as the prophet of God, as David's son and Lord would do in His life and under the chastisement for our sins, would not allow devils to speak, and would not cast pearls before swine or give what is holy to dogs. He gave only His disciples His Father's word, and revealed to them alone His Father's name (John 17:2-3, 6, 8, 20).

David kept silent because he spoke of Christ, the Lamb of God

The reasons why David kept silent reflect the greater reasons why Christ kept silent before His accusers. Preeminently, this Psalm speaks of Christ. He, as a Lamb, was silent. He was ["dumb before His shearers"](#) (Isaiah 53:7). ["When he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he](#)

answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly” (Matthew 27:12-14). Before God, He owned our sin as His own (Psalm 38, Psalm 40, Psalm 69, Isaiah 53; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24). He loved and praised and thanked God because He is holy in all of His ways (Psalm 22:3; 145:17; Matthew 26:37-44; John 14:31; Hebrews 10:5-18; Psalm 40:6-8). He would not appeal to or seek mercy or justification from men. The sins He bore that were mine were against God only, so that He sought deliverance from God only. He loved righteousness, truth and justice. He would not seek deliverance except if it were according to truth, righteousness and justice (Psalm 85:10)! The stroke upon Him was the stroke of God; God did it (Psalm 39:9-10). His appeal was to His God only. Only God could remove the stroke of justice and truth and righteousness in holiness to His glory! Only God is holy. Only God is merciful. Only He can save by a holy and merciful salvation! Christ therefore was silent when He stood before God as our Surety and answered God with Himself for us (Genesis 44:32-34; Philemon 1:12, 17-18; 1 Peter 3:18).

Even from good

He seems to claim that by his silence he withheld too much, because he refrained “*even from good*”. We sin when we speak ill-advisedly. But we also sin if we refrain from good. But rather than failing to speak any good, he is possibly referring to his resolve (still in vv. 1-3) to not speak of his good so as to *vindicate* himself before his accusers and his persecutors in his own defense (eight reasons above). At the least, he was resolved not to defend himself to the ‘*wicked*’, because he did not look in dependence to them to deliver him. He sought mercy from God only. He trusted God only, who rules over the wicked and himself and all things. Therefore, rather than speaking to the wicked about his woes under God’s hand, because they would neither understand nor care, he takes his case directly to the Lord (v4)!

It is difficult to know what situation led David to write this Psalm. It is not possible (for me) to know the specific circumstances that provoked him to such sorrow and frustration, which he expresses in this Psalm. Whatever the matter that made him sorry, it was very personal! We should learn from this. Our needs and our prayers to God are very personal. It must be so. “*God be merciful to me, the sinner!*” (Luke 18:13). “*Lord, save me!*” (Luke 5:8). “*Woe is me; for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips!*” (Isaiah 6:5). “*O wretched man that I am!*” (Romans 7:24). It is not merely God in heaven! He is my God. I cry. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord of me, the God of me! (John 20:28, literal translation, “Ho Kyrios mou; Ho Theos mou” — Thomas’ words to the risen Christ: “The Lord of me, the God of me”)!

The Psalmist took his own personal needs to the LORD his God, his Creator, his Provider, his Sustainer and his Savior! He cries to the LORD his God (v4, v12, v13).

He cries for help. The LORD is his help! He expresses his expectation, the LORD his hope (v7). He pours out his pain to God: the LORD his longing and his reward (v7, Genesis 15:1²; Psalm 16:5³; 73:26⁴; 119:57⁵). He confesses his sin (v8). He asks the LORD, "deliver me from ALL my transgressions" (v8, Romans 7:24-25).

Thus, it appears that the heavy stroke of God's chastening rod (vv. 9-11) was the underlying matter that put him in the frame of mind he was in, which led him to resolve what he said in the beginning of the Psalm (vv. 1-3).

His chastisement was for his 'iniquity' (v11, his sin against God). He took full responsibility, full blame for it! It is all my fault (Psalm 51:1-6; Romans 3:3)

It appears that the result of God's dealings with him was to make him realize in himself, he was nothing (vanity) and that his remaining life was very short, that he was very frail (vv. 4-6). He therefore asks God to instruct him, that he might know (v4) how little time he had left to live, and might know how frail he was.

He observes how very short and useless he is in himself (altogether vanity, v5).

He observes and testifies that every man in the flesh is vanity! 'Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity' (v5, 1 Peter 1:24; Romans 7:18).

He said that the wicked spend their lives under self-imposed stress. They burden themselves with self-created anxiety. They stress themselves to establish their own importance in the estimation of others, to acquire status among men, to acquire possessions, and all of it is to secure their own life and position in this world. But this is sheer vanity! Thus, they are 'disquieted in vain' (v6). They forsake peace in pursuit of man's empty praise and worthless riches, both of which are no more than smoke, telling out their future demise! It is all for nothing. Their life and all of their supposed honor and possessions will last no longer than a few days, as short a measure as

² "The word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Genesis 15:1).

³ "The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Psalm 16:5-6).

⁴ "My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Psalm 73:26).

⁵ "Thou art my portion, O LORD: I have said that I would keep thy words" (Psalm 119:57).

the shortest of measures: a handbreadth, or as a wave of the sea, a vapor of breath on a cold day!

Vanity of religious works, self-righteousness

Vanity is not limited to the ambition of status and position and possessions in this life! Men spend all their days *'walking in a vain show'*, or as the apostle Paul said of the Judaizers, desiring to *'make a fair show in the flesh'* to men (v6, Galatians 6:12). Under this same temporal, empty pursuit, they treasure up for themselves what will prove to be nothing in the end, what will literally come to nothing, even to destruction (2 Peter 3:7). Destruction is near. It is not far off! It will come in a very short time (v6, Isaiah 55:1-2). It will come when least expected (1 Thessalonians 5:3). All fleshly labors for worldly gain and glory from men shall leave the product of those labors to unknown wasters, because they know not *'who shall gather them,'* (v6). "Gather" does not merely mean to take possession, as of an inheritance. The Lord shall gather all men in the end of the world. So that "to gather" at its most fundamental meaning, means to take an accounting of what they produced by their labors. Did anything and all of their labors profit the Master (Matthew 7:21-23; 25:13-30; Romans 3:19-20; 4:4; Galatians 2:16, 21; 3:21)? Or was it all the temporary benefit of man's empty praise, and worse, the idolatrous, God-hating product of man's freewill works religion?

A stranger with God

"Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were" (Psalm 39:12).

The Psalmist concludes his cries to God. He asks the LORD to not hold His peace, to not keep quiet, not answer, not care for his tears! He has no hope but the LORD. Only He can deliver him from all of his sins (vv. 7-8). As the conclusion in another Psalm, *"Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever"* (Psalm 73:25-26).

He has one hope and one inheritance: it is the LORD his God!

Note: the effect/result of God's hand in the lives of His people is to bring them to this (Psalm 107; John 6:35-69; John 15:5)! When I am weak, the apostle Paul said, then am I strong! (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). When I have nothing but Christ, I have all things! This was the cry of God's Son in our nature! He had only His God and Father. He became weak. His strength was His faith and love in His God! Our strength is that we have nothing but Christ, that we find our all in Him and give all credit to Him, that He is all to

us, and we live by faith upon Him, and love Him that He is so very good to us! Chastening removes our attention from this world and our own wisdom, righteousness, riches and strength to find Christ as all of our wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption — **all of our glory is that He is all of our glory** (1 Corinthians 1:30-31)!

Give me life to praise you!

v13) The Psalmist asks God to spare him, so that before he dies, he might recover strength. This is as much as to ask that his days be prolonged, that he not die until he has served out the full purpose God has for him! He prays to live out his life in this world, that his life not come to a premature end before his appointed time. We should always pray that God's will be done, knowing that whatever pleased Him is best, for His glory, for our good! And we should always ask for mercy and grace to do His will, to appeal to Him and all times, especially under the rod of His corrections!

Hezekiah's prayer on his death bed

Hezekiah asked God to prolong his life. His plea was that the grave, death and they that go down to the pit cannot praise Thee! It is the living, the living shall praise the LORD!! Thus, we see in this that the Psalmist asks for life to be able to praise his God and Savior! This is a great privilege reserved only for the living! God is the God of the living, not the God of the dead (Matthew 22:32)! If God is our God, we live. If we do not live, God is not our God! We were dead in our sins! **"But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)"** (Ephesians 2:4-5)! For this shall everyone who is "living" hope in Christ, the Truth, and praise the LORD Jesus Christ and the Father by Him!

"17 Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. 18 For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. 19 The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth. 20 The LORD was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the LORD?"

Perhaps the best commentary on v13 is what the apostle Paul said to the Philippians.

"19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 20 According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with

all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live in the flesh, this *is* the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. **23** For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: **24** Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. 25 And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith" (Philippians 1:19-25).

The apostle Paul had an earnest expectation and hope. It was that he would be ashamed in nothing, and that Christ would be glorified in his body, whether by life or by death! He wanted to depart to be with Christ, which he said would be far better for himself. But he wanted to remain in this life, stay in this world, until his appointed time, for the furtherance and joy of the faith of Christ's church! This is what the Psalmist prays in v13 of Psalm 39.

Resurrection of Christ

But considering the words of Psalm 39:13 as applied to Christ, our Lord desired to be raised again from the dead, to celebrate His God and Father in heaven's glory, to show Himself to His apostles by many infallible proofs (1 Corinthians 15), to commission them to the great work of preaching the Gospel of His kingdom by His conquests over sin and Satan and the world for His elect sheep throughout the world, and that those disciples would see Him ascend up to glory in the clouds, that they might know that He who ascended first descended, and therefore, gave gifts to men (Ephesians 4:7-11). As He ascended up into the clouds, He would come again in the clouds in power and great glory and majesty, to bring all of His sheep to Himself and to His Father (Matthew 28:18-20)!

"20 For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: **21** Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself"
(Philippians 3:20-21).

Plain observations taken from Psalm 39

There are many very plain things in this Psalm that we must catalog:

- God corrected and afflicted him for his iniquity (v10)
- His prayer to God was initiated, and given by God himself. God's stroke was upon him. God's stroke evoked his cry. It was the hand of God that brought him in prayer, to cry, to make his supplications!

- God must turn us. Christ was exalted to be a Prince and a Savior to give repentance to His people, the Israel of God (Acts 5:31; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Jeremiah 31:18-19; Hosea 14:1-4).
- When God turns us, we cry to him out of our weakness and express to Him that He is all of our hope. We ask Him to deliver us from ALL of our sins (vv. 7-8; Psalm 107).
- His prayer goes up to God. This is so obvious that we often miss it. It is so important that I am surprised I often neglect it! Let every sin and anxious thought drive us to the One who saves sinners and works all to the good of them that love God, who are the called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)!
- Though a sinner, the LORD was his one hope! Jesus Christ the Lord is THE hope of every believer (v7, 1 Timothy 1:1)! Hope is a confident expectation regarding the future. Believers have a confident expectation regarding the future. What is their confident expectation? It is Christ. It is that God will accept me for what He did! This is justification! If God accepts me for what Christ did, then what Christ did, I did in Him! Therefore, I have a confident expectation that God will accept me for Christ's sake: that He will say to me, "[Well done, thou good and faithful servant](#)" (Matthew 25:21)! But how can I have such a confident expectation? Wouldn't such confidence be nothing less than self-imagined goodness in the arrogance of my sinful ignorance and self-righteous pride!? How can you or I have such confidence? Only one reason! I have a confident expectation that God will say, "[Well done thou good and faithful servant](#)" because if Christ did well, then I did well. Christ did well for His people! God justified them for what He did! God appointed Him to do all for them (Daniel 9:24; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). And God has accepted all that Christ did as theirs in Him (Romans 5:9, 19; Isaiah 45:17, 24-25; 54:17; Romans 10:4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-16; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31)! But how can **I** know that what Christ did, I did in Him? If Christ and what He did is your only hope, then what He did, you did in Him! He is the "end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:4)!
- In great contrasting light to the pride, lust and pursuit of the wicked for everything that is not Christ, the Psalmist expresses his one desire and prayer to God. What was it? "[Lord, my hope](#) [confident expectation] [is in Thee!](#) His desire and expectation was that God would deliver him from ALL of his transgressions! "[And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee. Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish](#)" (vv. 7-8). **What was important to the Psalmist in all of his pent up frustrations with the wicked, with himself, with his own tendency to speak unadvisedly with his lips? It was that Christ would take away**

ALL of his sins, for all of his hope for deliverance and righteousness and life and glory was in Him!

- He has nothing in himself to trust, for he is frail and weak and sinful.
- We have nothing in this life, for we are strangers in this world. We walk by faith. We see what the world does not see. We depend on what is unseen to the world, to natural man. We depend upon the word of God. We find his promises and rest upon them. We trust and roll upon and rest upon His Christ!
- His prayer is very personal. He is the sinner needing salvation!
- He is poor in spirit.
- He mourns over sin. One writer said, "This Psalm is the most beautiful elegy" (elegy: mournful, funeral song). We mourn when all hope is gone. When all human hope is taken away and all we have is Christ, then Christ is most precious in His all-sufficiency!
- He was made very meek by the hand of God. He submitted to the rod in silence.
- He hungered and thirsted after righteousness, the righteousness of God that Christ made us when He laid down His life in atonement to God for our sins (Philippians 2:6-8; 2 Corinthians 5:21)!
- Before we die, to fulfill God's purpose for us — to be to the praise of the glory of His grace (Ephesians 1:6) — we need strength! We want to cry to the Lord and praise the Lord for His salvation. We want to praise Him for saving us by grace, through God-given faith! We want to serve Him by serving His people. It is our great privilege to give ourselves for the eternal benefit of others! But to do anything, to do what we want to do most, to do the will of God (John 6:29), we need the strength of faith that comes by grace alone from God alone!
- (v3) He has a burning desire to speak the good of the Gospel. He can barely hold back. But to do so, God must set him free from the burden of sin, that he might tell sinners about his Savior. **12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. 13 Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness"** (Psalm 51:12-14).
- He has been brought to a place of utter dependence with only one hope, which is the Lord himself (v7). And this is the effect of God chastening hand. God removes his unbelief. God makes Christ his only refuge. When he does, we find our refuge in Him! We find our refuge in the cleft of the rock, in the Lord Jesus Christ and Him crucified (Exodus 33:21-22). This is walking by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:1-ff).
- Men disquiet themselves unnecessarily in order to make a vain show in their flesh. This is referring to men and religions, who make

themselves appear sad before others, and afflict themselves or work up emotions to light their own fire (Isaiah 50:11). It may also refer to the worldling, who stresses himself to gain for himself in this world. The worldling is a picture of the spiritual worldling, who goes about to establish his own righteousness and will not submit to the righteousness of God, which is the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 18:10-12; Romans 9:31-10:4)! "How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44). With only this world as his trust and confidence to help and love, the unbeliever has nothing! But the believer has only one trust and confidence and hope and love: It is the Lord himself: "The Lord is my portion." The believer has all things (1 Corinthians 3:21-23; Colossians 2:9-10; 1 Corinthians 1:30)!

- To seek riches in this world is an empty thing, for it is to serve a heart of covetousness. But even more empty, if anything could be more empty, is to seek acceptance with God by our own work or merit, or to try to remove His stroke because of my sin by my own self-abasement! We can never trust our works. We can never trust our sorrows or tears! We should never attempt to make ourselves sorry to gain favor from God. God's favor is in Christ alone! If we are sad, let us ask the Lord to make us glad in Christ, and thank Him that the sadness he has given to us has brought us to cry to Him as those who have nothing but Christ. If we are not sorrowful for our sin, let us ask the Lord to give us godly sorrow, which leads us and leaves us with Christ alone (John 6:35-69).
- He prays to know His frailty. Therefore, to know our frailty, God must give it. We must seek it. It is a gift of God. Unless we are poor in spirit, unless we mourn over sin, unless we hunger and thirst for Christ righteousness, unless we have been made meek to submit to Christ righteousness, then we walk in a vain show.
- When he finally spoke (v4) it was after he had been silent. And yet he spoke first of His frailty! He spoke to His God and he spoke of His God. He spoke of his sin and of his Savior, the restorer of his life!
- You cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). To "serve" mammon, is to do whatever it takes to gain money because we trust money to bring us security. But mammon is but a portrait of every idol that we trust instead of trusting and serving Christ alone.
- To be poor in spirit is a blessed thing! To be bankrupt in ourselves qualifies us to possess the kingdom of heaven!
- If we seek to be rich in this world, it is because we trust in uncertain riches. To trust in riches is the opposite of trusting Christ.
- But there is wealth, which men imagine will sustain them. They imagine that wealth will preserve their lives. But such wealth is only what they can acquire in this world. "Ye are they which justify

yourself before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). The wealth of riches and self-righteousness gives unbelieving men the false sense of security. But it is wealth that will not stand the scrutiny of judgment!

- The wealth that men seek, which lies at the bottom of all covetousness, is the riches of their own proud spirit of self-righteousness.
- The truth of the matter is that all men are spiritually bankrupt. (Revelation chapter 3:15-22). The Lord says, "Buy from me gold tried in the fire." Why "do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness!" (Isaiah 55:1-2).
- You cannot say that you are poor and wretched and blind unless Christ is all that you have, unless He gives you that by His free, rich grace! To be poor in spirit is the gift of God, the gift of His grace.
- Men not only heap up for themselves riches in this world, which riches are passing and at best temporal. But they mostly are trying to heap up to themselves riches for the world to come by their own works, rather than by trusting Christ's work alone! Men know that their time is not forever. But because Judgment seems a long way off, and does not come to them immediately, but seems to be far into the future, therefore, their hearts are fully set in them to do evil (Ecclesiastes 8:11).
- We cannot see the gravity of our life in light of God's word, and most especially, we cannot see the emptiness of our labors for either spiritual or physical self-made wealth unless the LORD shows that to us (v4).
- There is only **one true wealth**. That is **to know Christ**. In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3). In Him is the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and we are complete in Him (Colossians 2:9-10).
- **There is only one true righteousness**. It is the righteousness of God, the obedience of Christ unto death. There is no righteousness among all men. (Psalm 71:16; Romans 3:10-12, 21-26).
- Therefore, in this Psalm, the vanity of all that men strive to produce, and acquire is set forth. And this is what the Psalmist himself had to learn. In the Psalm, he rids himself of everything and comes in his prayer to his one desire (vv. 7-8). That desire is to be delivered from his sin. That desire is to learn his own vanity in light of Christ, who is the only true riches. That desire is Christ, his hope, his expectation! "The Lord is my portion."

- We must be made to know our own emptiness in order that we might know true riches, which is in Christ alone. This we must learn by God's own hand. The lesson is painful, and yet it is a lesson of grace which leads to life and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Expository thoughts

Psalms 39:1 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.

- Preeminently, this must apply to Christ. Who is the only One who cannot only say but also who did what He said: "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue!" Only the Lord Jesus never sinned with His tongue! But how much sin do we do with our tongue? We sin with our tongue every time we open our mouth!
- "I was dumb with silence!" This was true of Christ before His accusers!
- "Make me to know mine end". The "end" of Christ is His glory (John 17:4-5)!
- "Make me know the measure of my days!" The end of His days in the flesh in this world. "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (John 16:28).
- Every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Christ made Himself of no reputation (Philippians 2:7), also translated, vanity).
- "My hope is in Thee. Deliver me from all my transgressions." This is how truly our sins were taken from us and made His: He bore them in His own body. We died to sin in His death (1 Peter 2:24). What Christ did, we did in Him! This is our justification, that God justifies us for what Christ did. Therefore, God made Him to us in all that He did (1 Corinthians 1:30; Hebrews 7:9; Romans 5:19).
- "I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were" (v12). The world was made by Him, but the world knew Him not! He came unto His own, but His own received Him not" (John 1:10-11)! God made this world! He sustains this world! Yet He is a stranger in this world! Men treat Him as a foreign intruder! (Treasury of David, by Spurgeon, Psalm 39).
- We may resolve to do right, but we must ever confess, "When I would do good, evil is present with me" (Romans 7:21).
- How often have you or I resolved to never say the hurtful, foolish, critical, judgmental things? We are so prone to say what we ought not, to speak foolishly and sinfully in pride about ourselves or against others, especially painful is when we foolishly or ill-advisedly speak against Christ and His Gospel in false doctrine or hypocrisy! How often

have we found ourselves doing the very thing we resolved to not do!? Not so with Christ! Therefore, this Psalm ultimately applies to Him.

- But here, in this Psalm the Psalmist resolved not to mount a defense to vindicate himself to his enemies. He resolved not to go to them, to their courts, to plead for mercy from the merciless unjust, cruel, self-serving, God-hating wicked. He did not even set out to condemn and destroy them. But with laser beam focus, He determined to take His case to God alone, to let God plead Christ's cause, and so pleading His cause, to plead against his sin enemies! The cause of God and of Christ and of God's elect are one and the same. That cause is that Christ save and deliver His people from their sins!
- If we answer for ourselves, our answer is nothing. But if we keep silent and God answers for us, then nothing can be said against us (Romans 8:33-34).
- He remained mute. The word "bridled" means rather, "muzzled." He muzzled his mouth; he bridled his tongue. He had kept silent not only because it was futile to justify himself before men or seek man's aid under God's rod, because it was God who did it, and it was because of his own iniquity against God (vv. 10-11).
- But while he was silent, he mused (v3). While he mused, the fire burned within him. His heart was hot within Him (v3). When he finally spoke, he mourned! He poured out in moaning to God, and to God only! He cried out of frailty.
- Note: Christ made Himself of no reputation (Philippians 2:7). The word "no reputation" is also translated "vain," of "none effect," "void," because He took man's nature into union with His divine nature. And He humbled Himself as a man to serve, a Servant to His people in service to God, to serve them so far as to give His life a Ransom for them (Matthew 20:28)!
- This service of Christ in the "no reputation", "vain" nature, required Him to undertake to bear all that we were in the guilt and filth and reproach and punishment of our sins. He was obedient unto death. He was obedient even in His death on the shameful, painful cross of God's cursing (Galatians 3:13; Philippians 2:6-8). He tasted death. He felt guilt. He knew frailty. He said that He was a "worm". He did not measure as high as the level of a man, but became a worm and no man (Psalm 22:6; Job 25:6; Psalm 39:4-5)!
- The sins of the tongue! Anger, flattery, lies, harsh, judgmental, hurtful words!

How many times have I been upset by what others say about me?!

"Take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others" (Eccl. 7:21-22).

1 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. **2** For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same *is* a perfect man, *and* able also to bridle the whole body. **3** Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. **4** Behold also the ships, which though *they be* so great, and *are* driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. **5** Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! **6** And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. **7** For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: **8** But the tongue can no man tame; *it is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. **9** Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. **10** Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be." (James 3:1-ff)

Psalms 39:2 I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred.

- If we do not speak, we may refrain from saying something sinful.
- But if we do not say what is good, then we sin.
- David here does not necessarily say he sinned by withholding words that should be spoken.
- But he was silent to speak of his own good, to justify himself. This, I believe, is what is meant.

Psalms 39:3 My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue,

- His suppressed words produced heat and strained at his mouth until he finally spoke.

Psalms 39:4 LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.

- But his prayer, his words, went up to the LORD.
- What is the end of every believer? It is to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son (Romans 8:29).
- This knowledge puts me in proper perspective throughout my life!
- When I am weak, then I am strong!

- When I am utterly weak in myself and when in my weakness, Christ is my only confidence, trust and hope, then I am strong, for He is all my strength, all my boast, all my worship and love!

Psalms 39:5 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.

- Every natural man walks in a “**vain show**” (v6). Men expend their energies, their labors, their money, all that they have, to waste their all in order to make a show before men and God that amounts to nothing, indeed, less than nothing, for it does not speak favorably for them, but witnesses to God against them (Isaiah 55:1-2; Galatians 6:12; Luke 18:10-12; Matthew 5:19-20; 7:21-23)! This is the natural man. He is “**disquieted in vain**” (v6). He is anxious and places himself under self-made stress because of his ambitions to gain status among men, honor from men, security in this world, in this life, against suffering and dishonor and even death. He does all for the esteem of men, foolishly imagining that he can even do gain the esteem of God(!), and yet, for all the physical, temporal, material riches and honor that he heaps up, and for all of the supposed spiritual currency that he imagines he is gaining by his works, he does not know “**who shall gather them**” (v6). All of the honor he gains to himself in this world quickly passes. It is trodden down (Think of all of the statutes of great men of history which have been recently broken down and removed and spit upon.) His honor dies with himself. His possessions are left to those that waste all of his life’s labors. And all of his self-made supposed goodness before God is exposed as rottenness, because it denies the need for Christ’s righteousness, and concludes that Christ’s death was empty and vain — for nothing, without purpose, without value, without effect (Galatians 2:21; Luke 18:10-12; Romans 9:31-33; 10:1-4). Man, by seeking acceptance with God or improvement of themselves before God by their works deny the need for God’s will in Christ to be done to the glory of Christ alone (1 Corinthians 1:30-31; Hebrews 10:5-23; 13:20-21). In this they “knoweth not who shall gather them”, not knowing that God shall gather all to hold them accountable and shall find them wanting (Daniel 5:23, 27)!
- Whether me or Adam, every man changes.
- Only Christ changes not!
- See the foolishness of all men: from Adam to Solomon and to me!
- Altogether — there is *nothing* but vanity in ourselves, in the best that we are, or in the best of us!
- One thing is certain about me and about mankind in our natural, fleshly selves: all that I am, all that man is, is only vanity!

- Therefore, Christ must be our all!

Psalms 39:6 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.

- Everyone projects an image at all times.
- We do quite well acting. Hypocrisy is being an actor.
- We have to project an image!
- Todd Nibert noted this: "Someone says, 'What's wrong with you?' To which he replied, 'The same thing that is wrong with you!'"
- Worry, anxiety, stress, striving, grappling to gain...all such is trying to control everything. But that is foolish; that is a person who imagines they can control things! But it will all prove empty and passing!

Psalms 39:7 And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.

- My hope is in Thee!
- The Psalmist gets the matter down and draws the string tight here!
- Hope is confident expectation with regard to the future
- I have a confident expectation that when I stand before God on judgment day, he is going to look at me and say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" How can God say that?! Because if Christ did well, I did well, because my hope is in Him!
- Moreover, I have a hope that everything is working together for my good and His glory!

Psalms 39:8 Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish.

- I do not want to sin!
- I want to be delivered from my sin!
- Note the four essential points of the Gospel that are stated in Romans 7:24-25: The only way I am going to be delivered is if God through Christ delivers me! Therefore, to the LORD! "LORD! Deliver me from ALL my transgressions!"
- I do not want to bring reproach to Christ, to His Gospel or to His people, His kingdom, His honor, His Majesty, His glory! I do so if I do not ascribe to Him the glory due His name! But my weakness to do so makes me often want to say nothing! However, if I withhold my mouth from good, that also is sin. I sin if I say wrong. But also sin if I do not say good! Christ crucified is the GOOD news I am not ashamed to tell! I must therefore speak about Him!

Psalms 39:9 I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.

- God's chastisement makes me very still and quiet. Spurgeon said, "When we are still, the rod is soon still."
- God rebukes; man shrivels. God speaks Christ crucified; man lives and thrives!
- Do not think that God lifts us up only to cast us down! Such talk is the voice of unbelief under the rod of God!

"Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me" (Isaiah 49:14; 1 Kings 17:18; Job 16:12-22).

- But the LORD says (and faith repeats),

"Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of *my* hands; thy walls *are* continually before me" (Isaiah 49:15-16).

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him!" (Job 13:15)!!

- And faith joins this chorus:

"As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. **37** Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. **38** For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, **39** Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39).

Oh that I might be given to so trust Christ!! (Matthew 26:37-44; Hebrews 12:1-3; Isaiah 49:1-8)!

- I deserve far worse than whatever trouble I get!
- God's chastening is for my good, to conform me to Christ.
- It is because of His love!
- It is for His glory, the glory of His Son.
- Because God did it, it is not only right, but it is best!
- Why should I complain or speak negatively when God works!
- Though life itself and loved ones fail, it is of the LORD.
- He does only good and His purpose for me is only good (Romans 8:32)!
- "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10).

Psalms 39:10 Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand.

- This is the cause of the sorrow and lamentation contained in this “funeral”/“mournful” Psalm! It was the rod of God, applied in love, accomplishing its purpose, to bring us to Christ!

Psalms 39:11 **When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man *is* vanity. Selah.**

- Since this is the case, let me be found in Christ!
- Make me look to Him only!
- Make me call on Him alone!
- Let me not put any stock in anything of what I am or in anything that I think, do or say!

Psalms 39:12 **Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I *am* a stranger with thee, *and* a sojourner, as all my fathers *were*.**

- Believers have only one lot, one inheritance: it is Christ. “The Lord is my Portion!”
- God is a stranger to this world!
- Christ was strange to this world and its religion!
- How much more are the children of God, the followers of Christ?

Psalms 39:13 **O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.**

- Let me have the great privilege of laying down my life for Christ’s brethren (1 John 3:16; Philippians 1:19-25)!
- Let me justify my Savior and God under every trial, to His glory!