

God, This Hurts

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Last time we went through a 40 verse Psalm in about 60 minutes, Psalm 37, and the premise of Psalm 37 was to trust the Lord despite the sinful ways of evil men around you. Look at Psalm 37 with me for just a moment just to kind of draw a bit of a connection between that Psalm and our Psalm for this evening. Psalm 37, "Do not fret because of evildoers, Be not envious toward wrongdoers. For they will wither quickly like the grass And fade like the green herb." Verse 3, "Trust in the LORD and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness." Go to the end of Psalm 37, "the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in time of trouble. The LORD helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, Because they take refuge in Him." And as the Psalms so often do, they are just cultivating this sense of knowing the true God, here in New Testament times knowing Jesus Christ through having put our faith in him for salvation from sin, and realizing that he is trustworthy to keep us and to love us and to direct our paths as we go through life, ultimately to lead us safely into heaven. That's who our God is. He is worthy of our trust and that principle is taught to us again and again and again.

As we come to Psalm 38, the picture is a little bit different in this sense, in that it's not someone else outside that is guilty of the wrongdoing, it's David himself. David himself is the sinner. David himself is under the hand of divine chastisement, and the question is: can you trust God then when you have brought it onto yourself? Are you on your own? Are you suddenly separated from the lovingkindness and faithful love of the Lord when you're the one to blame? When it is your sin that has plunged you into ruin? When it is your sin that plagues your life and plagues your conscience, what then? You know, there are whole systems of theology, some of you were raised in it, that would say that, "Well, when you find yourself in that position, you have lost your salvation. You have sinned yourself out of the grace of God and you are experiencing the judgment of God on your soul," and you are left with this sense of God being your enemy in this situation and how can you call out in those circumstances?

Well, as we come to Psalm 38, David is asking for God's help in the midst of a diversity of affliction, some of it of his own making. And here's the thing, beloved, here is a Psalm for those of you that are suffering as a result of your own sin, suffering as a result of some of the foolish decisions that you have made in the past, perhaps finding yourself in relationships that you could have avoided but you chose and you went into and now you

are really paying a heavy price for them that perhaps affects you day by day and you feel the weight of so many things that have come together to weigh on your life and to make you feel like, "I don't even know where to begin to turn. I have no idea where to go from here. I am assaulted on every side and I can't even think straight." How gracious of God to bring you here tonight to hear a message like this from Psalm 38, to see that there is a Psalm for someone just like you to find rest and comfort and direction for your soul in. We love the Scriptures because of the diversity of the ways that they minister to us. Here's a place for you to go when it hurts in so many different ways.

David here, I want to just give you a little bit of a picture overview before we go sequentially through the text, just to give you a little snapshot of how bad it was for him. David, first of all, is carrying a burden of guilt as he writes this Psalm. Look at verse 3, he is feeling inner conviction, deep sin. Verse 3, he says, Psalm 38, "There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; There is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities are gone over my head; As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me." We'll talk about this more a little bit later just to see that David is writing with a sense of guilt in his soul that he owns that he is responsible for. Not only that, he is suffering physically. He has some kind of foul disease that is affecting him physically. Look at verse 5, he says, "My wounds grow foul and fester Because of my folly. I am bent over and greatly bowed down." Verse 7, it's as if he had a severe fever, "my loins are filled with burning, And there is no soundness in my flesh." There is a physical component. There is an inward spiritual component to his suffering. To make it worse, his friends have abandoned him. Look at verse 11, he says, "My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague; And my kinsmen stand afar off." The very people who had loved him earlier in life now wanted nothing to do with him. They stood apart from him. They were separate from him. In this time of spiritual and physical difficulty when he most needed human consolation, human help, human comfort, human solace was nowhere to be found. Not only that, as if all of those things weren't enough, his enemies see his weakness and find in it their opportunity to strike, and it's not just one, there are many. Verse 19, he says, "my enemies are vigorous and strong, And many are those who hate me wrongfully."

So David feels completely estranged from everything. He feels the weight of the chastisement of God on his soul; his own conscience convicts him of his sin and folly, whatever that sin or folly was. He feels alienation from relationships that should be close and loving to him. And then on top of that, he's got these people who are opposed to him seeking to do him harm. Where is he to turn? He is isolated and alone and this Psalm is written as if he were crying out, "God, this hurts!" And it's no superficial pain that he feels, this is deep and it is wretched that he finds himself in. Have you ever been like that? Knowing the feeling of physical illness and your mind is already diminished by the physical struggles that you're going through and it seems like in that physical weakness you're reminded of your past sins and that adds to it, and the separation humanly begins to multiply and you're just sinking in quicksand, aren't you? You know what that's like. Well, what a comfort to you, what a sweetness from God to have a Scripture that says God sees that, God has anticipated that in Scripture, and here's a way forward for you in the midst of it. Once again, we see the mercy of God unfolded for us in Scripture and

David writing 1,000 years before Christ, was simply a forerunner of the greater mercy that would be shown for sinners like you at the cross of Christ when he offered up himself; for you in your ungodly condition, Christ intervened in order to save you from your sins; to offer his life as a ransom payment for the sin of your soul; that Christ would take your sin and your punishment from God in his own body so that his righteousness could be counted to you and you could be fully reconciled to a holy God. This Psalm echoes that kind of God to us, and what I want you to see tonight, especially if you're in that kind of quicksand sinking sort of place, is that you despite all of that, you can still turn to your God and find him ready to hear.

We're going to build our message tonight around three sections in this Psalm and, first of all, what we're going to see is David's prayer for mercy in chastisement. David's prayer for mercy in chastisement. God is punishing him as this Psalm opens. David is suffering physically and spiritually and look at verse 1, he says,

1 O LORD, rebuke me not in Your wrath, And chasten me not in Your burning anger.

There is a very important nuance for you to see in this opening verse that will help you kind of open the door to the totality of what is being said. We need to read this carefully to get it right. If you just read this opening verse quickly, you would think that David was objecting to the chastisement of God completely; as if you he were saying, "Do not rebuke me. Do not chasten me." But that's not at all the sense of this opening verse. David is not objecting to the chastisement altogether, he's simply appealing to God for mercy in it. He's not saying, "Do not rebuke me at all." He's saying, "God, do not rebuke me in anger. Don't rebuke me in your wrath." The total life situation that he is facing that we just looked at, internal, external, relationally, the whole life situation is so severe, and I know that some of you are in the midst of those multifaceted severities of life, the total life situation is so severe that it makes it look like God has turned against him completely and is now just pouring out his wrath because there is nothing in life, there are no tinges of mercy to soften the blows that he is currently undergoing.

David makes this plain as he goes on in verse 2. He says, "For." He says, "Here's why I am saying this, God." The way that the verse opens up it's, "Lord, not in your wrath, rebuke me." The emphasis is not on, "Don't rebuke me but not like this, Lord. Not in this kind of what seems to be anger from you." And why would he pray that? Verse 2 and 3, he says,

2 For Your arrows have sunk deep into me, And Your hand has pressed down on me. 3 There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; There is no health in my bones because of my sin.

As you read that even in English, you get this sense of a weight on his shoulders that's just gradually crushing him down. The pain of his life is sharp like an arrow has punctured him, the pressure is heavy on him, and David attributes it to his sin. He says,

"God, this is because of your indignation. You are chastising me and I recognize it." And he says, "This has come about because of the sin in my life."

Now, we're not used to thinking about God like that. We're not used to revering this aspect of his holiness. But sometimes God does bring physical suffering to accomplish spiritual correction in the lives of his children and when we are under the affliction of physical ailments, we need to be mindful of whether perhaps our own sin has brought that onto us. We saw this even when we were studying communion in 1 Corinthians 11 a couple of Sundays ago. In 1 Corinthians 11:30, Paul said, "Some of you are sick and some of you even sleep because you have disregarded the Lord's table and treated it in an unholy manner." So even in the New Testament, we see this principle that God will sometimes bring physical suffering to bear on the life of his children in order to accomplish spiritual correction in their lives. We'll talk about that more at the end on how to think through that personally here in the 21st century. For now, let's just stay with what David is saying. In David's mind, it was clear that his present physical condition was a result of his own sin.

Verse 4, he takes responsibility for it. He says,

4 For my iniquities are gone over my head; As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me.

Now notice this, beloved, this will be a major step forward in your spiritual growth if you've never dealt with your soul and dealt honestly with God this way. In fact, even more broadly, I would go so far as to say that someone doesn't even enter into true salvation until they deal with their sin this way and they take full complete responsibility for it without offering any excuses, without blaming someone else, and without saying that, "God, you're being too harsh on me." There is no salvation until you stand before God or you fall before God, as it were, and you say, "God, this is my sin. I own it. I don't excuse it. I'm not blaming anyone else. It's my iniquity that is weighing me down right now." That's a starting point for appealing to God for mercy is coming to grips with your own sin and accepting responsibility for it. David calls it "mine." He says, "It's my iniquity. It's over my head and it is weighing me down, O God." So, you know, just knowing the nature of human life, some of us just need to stop blaming other people, and I realize that we live in a culture that engenders that and that there is a whole realm of psychology and Christian psychology and counseling that would look to blame your parents for the way that your life is or to blame somebody else and look at them and get your pound of flesh for them. Don't do that. Don't be that way. Make the aim of your heart that you're going to be a biblical Christian and where your sin is evident, you just own it and not blame anyone else. You take responsibility for it.

David, look at verse 4 again as we just identify and sympathize with his soul, he says, "It's a heavy burden, they weigh too much on me." In other words he says, "This is overwhelming me. God, I'm buried under the sense of guilt that I have." So as this Psalm opens, beloved, here's what you need to see: David is not protesting his innocence here, he's throwing himself on the mercy of God and that's what he's saying. It's not, "Lord,

never rebuke me. Don't rebuke me." He's saying, "Lord, not in your wrath." In other words, what is he saying? He has implied in that, "Lord, rebuke me, correct me in your mercy." If you remember from Habakkuk 3:2, he prayed a very similar prayer as he was anticipating God's disciplining hand upon the nation, he said, "Lord, in wrath remember mercy." And if you are under the chastising hand of God, maybe you're seeing things go wrong in relationships and you look back and say, "Man, I messed that up," and things are going in a really bad direction for you in that and you're seeing the multiplicity of consequences come from decisions and habits you cultivated in the past, go to God, confess your responsibility, and then say, "God, deal with me. I realize what my sins deserve. They deserve anger but I'm appealing to you, O God, on the basis of sheer mercy, of sheer grace. Deal with me in kindness even though I deserve something else." And just lay yourself out before the mercy of God while you're taking responsibility for your sin.

Now, the spiritual state that David was experiencing would have been bad enough, that feeling of weight and all of that, but as I pointed out earlier, he has a foul disease that is making matters worse. Look at verse 5,

5 My wounds grow foul and fester Because of my folly.

Then he expands on the misery that he is in, and when you remember those times when you are doubled over in a really bad intestinal flu or something like this, you can get a picture of how miserable he is and identify with him in it. Verse 6, he says,

6 I am bent over and greatly bowed down; I go mourning all day long. 7
For my loins are filled with burning, And there is no soundness in my
flesh. 8 I am benumbed and badly crushed; I groan because of the
agitation of my heart.

His physical suffering combines with his spiritual suffering to leave him in a very weak diminished and helpless position. He can't change it. He has no strength to change his physical condition, that's beyond his power. He has no strength, no merit, nothing to turn away the guilt that is in his sin. Inner and outer man utterly crushed before God. A tough place to be. And beloved, that state of helplessness that he is describing is exactly the state of helplessness that you were in in your lost condition. You were utterly unable to correct your spiritual debt against God. You were completely unable to reverse the judgment of sin against you. You were helpless just as David was utterly helpless here. And what do you do in that situation? You go as a bankrupt beggar, claiming no right to what you're asking, but saying, "God, in sheer grace, in sheer mercy, deal with me according to some measure of kindness rather than the wrath that I deserve." That is the basis upon which we approach God. Not with a sense of demand, not with a sense of expectation, certainly not with a sense of entitlement. "God, I come before you as a guilty bruised sinner that cannot help myself. I just ask you to be gracious to me because of who you are." David is asking for that kind of mercy in the midst of the discipline that the Lord is giving.

Here's a question for you. Think about this, think along with David so that you get a glimpse of who God is. Why do you think that David is describing this spiritual and physical suffering in such detail in prayer to God, the God that he sinned against? Why do you think he's doing that? It's not that God needs the information. God already knows what David is suffering. David is laying out his low condition, he is laying out his suffering as a means of invoking the mercy and the pity of God on him. It shows us that God is concerned about the suffering of his children, that he is moved to respond to it when it is called to his attention, as it were. God cares for us in our suffering even when it's suffering that comes about from our own sinfulness. That's how great his mercy is. That's how wonderful his grace is. That's how stupendous his kindness is, is that even when we find ourselves in self-inflicted misery, we can still come to God and say, "God, have compassion on me." And the depth of our misery becomes a basis upon which to make the appeal because God is that compassionate to respond. Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that wonderful? God is exactly the opposite of almost all of your human relationships. When you offend a human relationship, most of them want a pound of flesh before they'll even consider any reconciliation. It doesn't work that way. "You need to grovel a bit and then I'll consider it." God is moved to mercy at the depth of the suffering and David here, mark it, he's just saying, "God, sheer mercy. There is nothing in me to commend myself to you. I ask according to who you are to help me." Do you ever pray that way? I'm learning to. More and more to just say, "God, I just appeal to sheer grace here. I know I don't deserve anything from you and I'm just asking according to sheer grace." That's the way for you to approach God, to purge yourself, to humble yourself of any sense of self-righteousness, merit, entitlement, to purge it all out and say, "God, I am appealing to you solely on the basis of your grace and mercy." That's how you approach God.

Now, as David goes on, we find him, secondly, making a prayer for comfort in abandonment. A prayer for comfort in abandonment. He calls out to God again in the midst of his suffering. He comes back to prayer. He opened in prayer, he went through the details of his spiritual and physical suffering, and now he's circling back to prayer. He's renewing the spirit of prayer again. You see that in verse 9 as he addresses God again. He says, "Lord," so he's back to prayer, addressing God directly rather than describing his own condition. He says in verse 9,

9 Lord, all my desire is before You; And my sighing is not hidden from You. 10 My heart throbs, my strength fails me; And the light of my eyes, even that has gone from me.

There is no brightness in his countenance. The heaviness of his soul is dragging even his face down, you might say. And what he is doing here, now he's not appealing so much to mercy, although that's always woven into this Psalm, here in verses 9 and 10, he's appealing to God's omniscience. Look at it again, verse 9, he says, "Lord, all my desire is before You; And my sighing is not hidden from You." He knows that God sees his suffering. He knows that God is aware intimately of what is going on and so he appeals to that omniscience and says, "God, you know everything about this situation and you know how heavy it is on me. God, therefore," watch how his theology moves his praying, "God, based on your omniscience, based on what you know to be true about my situation,

let your omniscience move your mercy to give me relief. God, it's all there before you. I am abandoned. I am physically decimated. I am spiritually guilty. God, all I can do is just heave a sigh of desperation in it and groan, 'O God!' You see all of that, O God. Since you are a merciful God, couldn't you let the knowledge of that motivate you to provide comfort in my distress?" And he goes on and he says it's not just this physical and spiritual suffering, "I'm suffering at the hands of men as well."

Look at verse 11,

11 My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague; And my kinsmen stand afar off. 12 Those who seek my life lay snares for me; And those who seek to injure me have threatened destruction, And they devise treachery all day long.

"My friends stand apart from me. My enemies see their opportunity and their treacherous plots are being put into motion to decimate me even further." And David is defenseless.

Look at what he says in verse 13 in light of that, and this is an expression of his trust, believe it or not. He says in verse 13,

13 But I, like a deaf man, do not hear; And I am like a mute man who does not open his mouth. 14 Yes, I am like a man who does not hear, And in whose mouth are no arguments.

What is he saying here? What he's saying here is, "Lord, I abandon myself to trust you to such an extent that I'm not even going to defend myself. I'm not going to open my mouth to make arguments on my behalf, to defend myself against my accusers, to call those who have separated from me to call them back." Wow. That's something to think about. He says, "God, I'm just going to turn my ear away from that. I'm not going to let that influence my perspective. Why? Because I have shut myself up completely to your mercy." He said, "Lord, don't rebuke me in your wrath," appealing to mercy, "Lord, all of my sighing is before you," he is appealing to omniscience to draw God's mercy and he says, "Lord, so complete is my trust in you alone, so much is my appeal only to you and not of anything to myself, I'll make no human response to the things around me. I'm just going to rely on you. My trust is in you despite my circumstances." It's another way of saying, "Lord, I will wait on you in this and not take matters into my own hand." So he's praying for comfort in the midst of the abandonment that is around him saying, "God, here it is. I lay it out before you. Take note of my sobs."

That brings us to the third aspect of the Psalm that we want to see this evening: it's a prayer for help in injustice. A prayer for help in injustice. He has asked for mercy, he is asking for comfort, and now he's asking for help in injustice. Let me just kind of pause here for a moment to try to strengthen your soul in the midst of what you may be going through here this evening. When you're in these circumstances and everything is lined up against you, it is easy to just turn that against yourself and to recognize and to think that God is opposed to me. What I want you to see is in the midst of all of this spirit of

weakness that men would look at and perhaps say, "You've been abandoned by God or God has left you," you see a thread of true faith being manifested here that even in the midst of this kind of suffering, David is still appealing to his God. There is a reality to his faith that is manifested in the fact that he appeals to God; he calls upon God even when everything is destroyed around him. And what I would have you to do for your own encouragement and what I would particularly have you to do as you look in the lives of others who are going through deep suffering and they are wailing and they are groaning and they don't manifest anything that we're accustomed to thinking about Christian joy being present there, look for, listen to, hear them for those faint echoes of a residual trusting God and blow on that dying ember to encourage them that it might flame up. David here is trusting God. He is calling upon God and that appeal to God is real. It is a mark of true faith even though there is nothing external or internal to testify, that would seemingly testify to the truth of the reality of his faith.

As we go into verse 15 and we see this prayer for help and injustice, you see this perhaps as clearly as any place else in the Psalm. Look at what he says there in verse 15. In the midst of all of these swirling difficulties, verse 15 he says,

15 For I hope in You, O LORD; You will answer, O Lord my God.

In the midst of all of these things that were going on, his faith had not been extinguished. He could still rise up and confidently say, "God, you will answer me." And his confidence is that God will protect him in his weakness; that God will receive him favorably even though – mark it – even though he has no claim on that, he is confident that God will receive him favorably. Do you know what that has to mean? It has to mean that he's trusting in the character of God because he has already said, "There is no reason for you to receive me in myself." That's how great his confidence in the faithfulness of God was, and based on that confidence, David starts to unfold more and more his argument, if you will, the reasons, the bases upon which God should receive his prayer favorably. Why should God grant him relief? Well, David opened it up, opened up the whole Psalm, "O Lord," appealing to God's covenant faithfulness. "God, I belong to the covenant family here. I'm one of your children. You are a promise keeping God so I appeal to that." And now as you go on, David says, "You should give me relief because my enemies who are also your enemies are boasting over me and, God, you should not honor their evil ways."

Look at verse 16, he says, "You will answer, O Lord, my God, For," because, here's why you'll answer me,

16 For I said, "May they not rejoice over me, Who, when my foot slips, would magnify themselves against me."

He goes on and he says, "My situation is desperate." Perhaps he's near death. He says in verse 17,

17 For I am ready to fall, And my sorrow is continually before me.

What David is doing here is he is multiplying the grounds upon which, from a human perspective, God should respond to him. He says, "God, it wouldn't be righteous for my enemies to prevail over me in their evil ways. God, my situation is so desperate and I am so ready to fall. I need your immediate intervention. And God, I'm confident that you'll respond because I have confessed my sin to you."

Look at verse 18,

18 For I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin.

In some ways, this is the central appeal that David is making. "I have confessed my sin. I confess my iniquity." James Montgomery Boice said at this point about this passage, and I quote, "The purpose of discipline is to bring honest confession followed by a corresponding change of life. That purpose has been accomplished. David has confessed his sin therefore it is time for the heavy hand of God that is upon him to be lifted." In other words, David said, "Lord," opened it up saying, "not in anger, deal with me." Now he's at this point in the Psalm where he says, "God, I have confessed my iniquity. I have owned it. Based on the way that you deal with your people, now it's time for your mercy to be displayed."

If you'll turn over to Proverbs 28, Scripture makes this promise elsewhere. In Proverbs 28:13 and 14 Scripture says, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion. How blessed is the man who fears always, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity." The way that God deals with men and the way that God deals with us as his people is that when we confess our sins and forsake them, we have positioned ourselves to receive his compassion. When a sinner comes to God in the first instance and says, "God, I confess my sinfulness to you. I repent. I submit to Christ. I take up my cross to follow after the Son of God. I receive the redemptive work of Christ on my behalf as my only hope of reconciliation to a holy God. I receive that. I submit to it. I acknowledge I don't deserve it, but in faith I trust your promise and receive the Lord Jesus Christ." God shows mercy. God shows compassion. If you're a Christian, isn't that exactly what he did when you turned to him? Isn't that exactly what he did when you forsook your sin? When you truly repented and turned to Christ? Didn't you find an ocean of compassion, an ocean of grace starting to wave over your soul? Didn't you? That's what happens to every true Christian. Well, this is what David is appealing to here. He's saying, "God, I have forsaken my sin. I own my responsibility for it. I'll stop. You're right and I'm wrong." And David says, "On that basis, O God, I expect you to answer. My repentance is sincere. I have forsaken this sin and, God, based on your promise, not because I deserve it, based on your promise, based on who you are, the fact that you're a God who delights in forgiveness of sin, I expect your mercy because that's who you are. You are a merciful God to those who come to you confessing their sin."

Still further, David appeals still further to God in verse 19 and adds yet another reason why God should come to his aid, God who is compassionate, God who is merciful. He says, "I have confessed my sin but," verse 19,

19 But my enemies are vigorous and strong, And many are those who hate me wrongfully.

So picture this and remember the whole context of the Psalm as we talk about these things. David is in weakness, alone, suffering, and against him are multiple enemies, strong and vigorous and set on his destruction. David says, "God, this isn't a fair fight on a human level. God, take notice of the injustice of this, take notice of my vulnerability and you who are a protector of the weak, come to my aid. Shouldn't you look if you're a God of mercy, a God of kindness, upon those who are weak? I am alone and weak, God, why wouldn't you help me now?" And how I urge some of you to lay ahold of God just like that tonight. "God, my sins have gone over my head. I can't even begin to sort out the consequences of the mess that I have made of my life. I own it, Lord. I blame no one but myself. I exonerate you in your righteousness. I did not honor your word. I did not honor Christ. I went my own stubborn way and now, Lord, I am alone in the midst of a life catastrophe that I cannot work out on my own. God, I beg you, have mercy on me. God, remember who you are. Remember that you're a compassionate gracious God. Remember that the whole purpose that Christ went to the cross was in order to deliver poor, miserable, wretched sinners like me. I come to you on that basis. I am a poor, miserable, wretched sinner and on no other basis than your invitation to come, I come." Go to God just like that. No one who has truly gone to God in a repentant spirit, no one who has called on Christ unconditionally in repentance and faith has ever been turned away. Christ has never turned away a sinner who has sought him. Never has, never will because he's not like that. So, beloved, even tonight, even in the midst of the depth of the mess you've made with your sin, Christ invites you to come. What a blessed Savior he is.

David goes on and he says, "It's not just that my enemies are many and strong, it's completely unjust how they're dealing with me." Verse 20, "God," he says,

20 And those who repay evil for good, They oppose me, because I follow what is good.

"God, I do what is good." He's speaking comparatively here, compared to his enemies. He has confessed sin so he's not claiming any kind of sinlessness here. But David had shown good to his enemies and now they are returning evil. "God, this is unjust. God, you should not allow that to continue. God, that's a violation of your moral order." So all of this combines together – watch this – there is this cumulative impact of these first 20 verses, a cumulative impact of appealing to God and developing an expectation that God will answer him favorably. Why? Because he has appealed to God as a God of mercy in the midst of profound spiritual and physical suffering. Why? Because God is a God of all comfort, 2 Corinthians 1:3 and 4. He's a God of all comfort and, "God, I have appealed to you for comfort in the midst of this human abandonment that I have faced. God, you are a God of justice. You are a God who helps the weak. You're a God who comes to the aid of

your suffering people and here I am suffering, God, having confessed my sin, having multiple enemies coming against me. O God, I appeal to you to see this and to respond and to not stand idly by."

So in verse 21, we see the culminating prayer of this Psalm. He says,

21 Do not forsake me, O LORD; O my God, do not be far from me!
22 Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!

Notice this: David uses three different names for God in these closing verses. You see the first one in the first line of verse 21, LORD, all caps, Yahweh, expressing God's covenant keeping faithfulness. "God, because," watch this as he's appealing to these different names of God, bringing about the final certainty and expectation of God's favorable response to his prayers. "God, you are a covenant keeping God. On that basis, I appeal to you not to forsake me." He says in verse 21, "O my God," showing forth the personal pronoun "my," showing forth an intimate relationship. "You're my God. I am under you. You are my Deliverer, my Protector. You're the God alone who can save me and so from your position of authority and sovereignty over me, O Elohim, do not be far from me!" In verse 22, "Make haste to help me, O Lord, Adonai, my salvation!" emphasizing the Lord's authority to intervene. "You are the Lord over this. You have the authority to intervene, O God. It's your universe. It's your moral order. It's your character to which I appeal. O God, make haste to help me because deliverance comes only from you. I can't deliver myself, O God. I have appealed to your mercy, to your omniscience. I have appealed to your Lordship. I have appealed to your compassion. I have appealed to your justice. God, now as my God, I ask you to intervene."

Do you know what's encouraging to you here tonight? David had sinned and apparently had sinned pretty severely. We know about his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah, we don't know if that's what's behind this Psalm or not. There is not the indication as there are in other Psalms that that's the case. But David knew that his sin had provoked this discipline, this chastising hand. He had brought this on himself and perhaps you're in a situation that you've brought onto yourself. Beloved, beloved, do you see that God's character, even when you are in that situation, God's character, it still invites and welcomes your prayer? Do you see that God has not abandoned you? That as a child of God you have not forfeited your salvation but now you are in a position to call upon him? And how much more for us 3,000 years later on the other side of the cross where we look back, we have New Testament revelation saying that God took the initiative in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ on a mission of mercy to sinners just like you, went to Calvary to bear their sin and to reconcile them to a holy God. If he did that, if he did the greater thing, if he received you in your initial repentance, don't you think that he'll receive you now in your repentance as you live out your imperfect Christian life? Do you see that you can still go to him and expect him to receive you favorably? Isn't that the most wonderful thing in the world, that God is like that?

A couple of points of application as we close, coming back to this whole issue of sickness and God's discipline. Point 1, just by way of application. We need to say this carefully

and we need to say it in both positive and negative. Sickness and anxiety may be due to sin. They may be. Scripture points us to this. David specifically attributes his weakness in the flesh to sin, and if you find yourself in sickness and weakness, it's biblical to test yourself in that manner; to step back and to ask yourself, "Is this physical condition giving me opportunity in my physical weakness to examine my life for spiritual sin and rebellion?" It's biblical to ask that question.

Now, having said that, I want to qualify it lest you misunderstand. The point is not to draw a cause and effect relationship from this sin to this symptom. "Oh, I sneezed, I must've done a minor sin. I've got the flu, I must've done something more serious." That's not the point. That's not where we're going with this at all. It's simply to let your physical suffering be an instrument to sanctify your soul. Maybe there is not a direct cause and effect relationship between one sin and this particular sickness but to recognize that your physical weakness, your physical diminishment is somehow related to the fall if nothing else, and to use a prayer like this, "God, take this physical suffering and use it to sanctify my soul." Not to be overly introverted about it, not to be anything like that but just to say, "God, whatever you would teach me through this physical weakness, teach me. I'm willing to learn."

Now, having said that, let me quickly say that not all suffering, not all physical sickness is due to sin. Jesus suffered physically on the cross and yet he was without sin. Job had great calamities come upon him and the Lord said beforehand, "He is blameless." In John 9, the blind man, Jesus said, "This is not because of sickness but it is for the glory of God." So I don't want to send you off chasing your tail trying to figure out why you're sick. That's not the point. The point is just not to treat it as something simply physical without contemplating and humbling yourself, would be the bigger point, humbling yourself before God under your weakness and saying, "God, teach me. Take me."

And one other thing about that, having said that, we don't give you that point about the connection between physical suffering and sin, this is not for you to take and judge others with. "Do you see how sick he is? I wonder how he sinned?" That's not the point. This is for you to apply to your own soul, not to hammer other people with. God is at work in everything that happens in your life and so it's always a call for us to test ourselves to see if there's any unconfessed sin in our life.

Secondly, final point of application here: you should draw near to Christ in your suffering. This is a sweet note to end on. Do you suffer physically? Our Lord Jesus did too when he hung on that cross. He knows what physical suffering is like. Have your friends abandoned you? Do you know what? Jesus knows exactly what that's like. The Gospel of Mark says all the disciples abandoned him and fled. The men closest to him left him alone. Do enemies mock you? They wagged their tongues at Christ as he hung on the cross. So no matter where you might fit with identifying in David's experience here in Psalm 38, David in his sin was a mere picture of how Christ would suffer without sin in his incarnation and we find in Christ a sympathetic Savior. David before Christ, went and asked God for sheer undeserved mercy; beloved, in your suffering with an even

greater assurance that God will receive you well, go to him and ask for sheer undeserved mercy in your suffering and wait for him to work out his answer to your prayer.

Bow with me as we close.

Lord, we thank you for your mercy, your comfort, and your justice. We humble ourselves before you, Lord, knowing that even as your people, there are still remnants of sin within us that are a violation of your holiness. Have mercy on us and, Lord, have mercy on those who are in the midst of abandonment, difficult relationships that have no human solution in sight. Be gracious. Prove yourself to be the God that David appealed to and found answers. Father, show yourself faithful in ways that go beyond all that we ask or think as we appeal to you and look to you here this evening. Be with us now as we close in this hymn and as we go forth from this place. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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