

David's Despair and Hope

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We pray that as we hear your word today, that you would speak to us and guide us. Encourage us to live for you with Jesus as our Lord and Savior. In his name we pray. Amen. Okay, well, let's have a look at Psalm 38. So if you've got a visitor's Bible, it's on page 467. And it's just before halfway. Psalms are pretty easy to find, actually. So Psalm 38. I'll read that out and then we'll talk about it.

A Psalm of David for the memorial offering. O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows have sunk into me and your hand has come down on me. 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 have gone over my head. Like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness.

I am utterly bowed down and prostrate. All the day I go about mourning. For my sides are filled with burning and there is no soundness in my flesh. I'm feeble and crushed. I groan because of the tumult of my heart.

O Lord, all my longing is before you. My sighing is not hidden from you. My heart throbs. My strength fails me. And the light of my eyes, it also has gone from me.

[1 : 41] My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague. And my nearest kin stand far off. Those who seek my life lay their snares. Those who seek my hurt speak of ruin and meditate treachery all day long.

But I am like a deaf man. I do not hear like a mute man who does not open his mouth. I have become like a man who does not hear and in whose mouth are no rebukes.

But for you, O Lord, do I wait. It is for you, O Lord, my God, who will answer. For I said, only let them not rejoice over me who boast against me when my foot slips.

For I am ready to fall and my pain is ever before me. I confess my iniquity. I am sorry for my sin. But my foes are vigorous. They are mighty.

And many are those who hate me wrongfully. Those who render me evil for good accuse me because I follow after good. Do not forsake me, O Lord.

[2 : 50] O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation. You know, the other day it occurred to me that it's been a full five years since a new coronavirus was first detected in China.

That which you will now affectionately know as COVID-19. And which eventually led to one of the most disruptive pandemics in history. And of course, it's still around today and its effects are still being felt.

It so far caused the death of at least seven million people and counting. And clearly this pandemic caused huge and far-reaching disruption to societies around the world.

And there were massive social and financial, there's massive social and financial suffering on top of the health effects. At the same time, though, the COVID crisis had some positive effects.

So what we've seen are significant scientific advances. And as often happens in something like this, all the attention has turned to solving the problem.

[4 : 05] And so things like the way we do vaccines have changed for the better since COVID. The way that we work is different. And we can still see the effect there.

The way we interact. And so there's a host of other things. And the effect of this pandemic will be felt for years to come. And in fact, there's a couple of new terms that have come into the language.

You know, pre-COVID and post-COVID. When people say that, we know exactly what they mean. So it's clearly had a big effect. Now, in terms of illness, the virus was quite indiscriminate in who it affected.

And so clearly what we saw were those with access to better health care fared better than those without. So it had a bigger effect on low socioeconomic areas.

But those who were old and those who already compromised in health definitely suffered the worst. And many times it seemed quite random or unfair as to who was infected and who missed out.

[5 : 10] And at the same time, in the way that some people, when they were affected, were really serious and had long-lasting effects. Whereas to others, it seemed like nothing much more than a bad cold.

Now, of course, all humans are subject to illness. We all are. And some people seem to sail through life and hardly ever get sick. While others are struck down with serious and sometimes life-threatening diseases, even in childhood.

And it begs the question, why is this the case? So why do young children sometimes get struck down by serious disease? As believers in a sovereign and loving God, how do we rationalise this?

When on the surface, it just seems unfair. It is a difficult issue. And it's one that's been debated over the millennia by much smarter people than I.

And many books have been written on the subject. And my aim today is not to really dig in too deeply to these issues. But the psalm does raise these questions.

[6 : 19] And so we do need to think about it. So let's have a look at the psalm. And I think we can break it up into three parts. So I'm looking, first of all, at verses 1 to 10.

And then verses 11 to 14. And then verses 15 to 22. And you'll see in the bulletins, if you grab one of those, that it's broken up there in those ways.

And I've called the first section the agony of sin. The second section the agony of rejection. And the third section the hope of salvation. Now, Psalm 38 is one of what's called the penitential psalms.

And there's seven of those. For those who are keen, you can look up Psalm 6, Psalm 32, Psalm 51, 102, Psalm 130, and Psalm 143.

And so they're all similar in the nature of the subject matter. And the title given here, as you'll see, is A Psalm of David for the Memorial Offering.

[7 : 23] Now, that's a bit confusing to start with. And in some translations, it's rendered differently, as in to bring to remembrance. So slightly differently.

And it's the same as the way that Psalm 70 begins. It also starts with that title. So what exactly does that mean? It's not totally clear.

But really, I think this is a psalm of confession. And so I think what David's doing is here. He's remembering, bringing to mind his sin and confessing it to God.

So I think that's most likely what that means. And like Psalm 70, it's a very intense and very personal psalm. And pleading for God's help.

Okay, so let's look at the first bit, the agony of sin. And here we see David laying out the nature of his situation. And it's not pleasant reading, but he lays out his agony.

[8 : 21] And he's quite direct about what's caused the pain. So in a nutshell, he's in great pain. And this is a result of his sinfulness.

And so in the first 10 verses there, he describes the pain he's feeling in intense and graphic detail. He uses phrases such as, there is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation.

There is no health in my bones because of my sin. That's verse 3. My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness. Verse 5. For my sides are filled with burning and there is no soundness in my flesh.

In verse 7. So what is clear here is that due to God's anger, David is experiencing such acute pain that it has led to an actual illness or injury or some sort of malady.

And we can't be sure what it is. But whatever it is, it's clearly really bad. And commentators have tried to work out what the physical causes he might be referring to here.

[9 : 28] What sort of things might lead to these symptoms from what he said. So for example, in verse 7, the ESV says, my sides are filled with burning. Actually, a more literal translation of that one is, my loins are full of inflammation.

Which might refer to a problem with the kidneys. Who knows? Like kidney stones. And you can speculate about those things all day long. But actually, well, it's interesting, I guess.

The main point is he is feeling intense pain. And it's so intense that he groans because of the tumult in his heart.

And actually, a more literal translation of that verse that the King James Version uses is, not I have groaned, but I have been bored. So it's like an almost animal guttural response to the pain.

Now, there's no indication here that this refers to any one event in David's life. In other words, is there a particular sinful act that he's committed recently that has caused God to be angry with him?

[10 : 38] And there clearly are a few possibilities along those lines. Because, as we see many times, the Bible doesn't attempt to gloss over David's sin.

Despite his key role in the establishment of God's kingdom. And despite him being the forerunner to the ultimate eternal King Jesus. The Bible doesn't hold back.

And nor does David. So he attributes his situation directly to God's displeasure with him. Rather than just being unlucky and having caught some disease.

So almost every time here in these verses when he describes his pain, he adds the little, the cause at the end. Because of my sin. Because of my foolishness.

Because of your indignation. So each time he puts the blame on himself. And he never suggests that God is being unfair or unjust in bringing this upon him.

[11 : 40] So that's the gist of the first ten verses there. He recognises that he is sinful. And that as a result he is suffering acute physical pain. He recognises that this discipline that he's experiencing is from God.

And he wants it to stop. But let's just go back to look at how the psalm begins. So the way that he introduces this in verse 1.

Is actually exactly the same as Psalm 6. So that first verse there. If you read Psalm 6, don't bother looking at it now. But it's another one of those penitential psalms that I mentioned earlier.

And it starts, So they both start the same way. But what is interesting about that.

Is that when he begins. He begins with a direct appeal to God. Not to rebuke him. Although clearly God is angry with him. And he knows that.

[12 : 43] Now does this make any sense? So surely this is exactly what he and we as sinners deserve. And we should expect this from a just and righteous God.

We know that God can't tolerate sin and disobedience. So how can David plead to God to hold back and not discipline him. When he clearly realises that he is sinful.

And that this is the consequence of that sin. Is he hoping that God might overlook his sin? The sin that he is so clearly aware of and troubled by.

And surely if God is angry with me. I should expect him to discipline me. Because of his nature. The things that I have done can't be hidden from God. God is holy.

And can't tolerate sin. So why is he asking God to not rebuke him? Maybe he should just instead be saying. Oh God. Please give me strength to tolerate your right and expected discipline.

[13 : 49] Well I think one reason could just simply be that. The suffering is so great that. He just can't take it anymore. And he's calling on God's mercy. To soften the blows of judgment and displeasure.

So not that he doesn't expect this to happen. He acknowledges that. He knows that God is his father. He knows that he is weak. And he easily falls into sin.

So Lord. Please treat me as a loving father with a difficult child. And you know what it's like with children. They misbehave. Their parents get really angry with them.

And they say. Don't hurt me. Don't hurt me. I think it's kind of like that. It's just a human response to. But not. Notice he never blames God.

He never tries to hide anything. But he just pleads on God. God's mercy. And so. And that's actually seen later on.

[14 : 50] As we get to towards the end. In verse 15. Where the tone changes. And I'll talk about that later on. So then. In verses 9 and 10.

He recognizes. That God. Is aware. Of the depth of his desperation. And he's totally transparent about this. And so. You know. As humans. Our instinct is.

Want to. Hide our sin from God. And. And hide from him. As Adam and Eve did. So right from the start. Or at least. To just put things out of our mind. Oh yes.

That's not so bad. Or. I forget about those. Those sins. That I've committed. But he doesn't do that here. It's all laid out. And David makes no attempt.

To play anything down. His sin is. Is out there. But. Also. Is his longing. For deliverance. So he's appealing to his merciful God.

[15 : 44] For deliverance. But that's not the end of his pain. And we move to. The next section there. Where. In verses 11 to 14. The agony of rejection. And so.

Here. We see. That. In. In David's misery. He's not getting any help. He's not getting any help. From his friends. And companions. Not even from his relatives.

That is. His nearest kin. So when he might have hoped for. Some sort of empathy. Perhaps. Or. Practical help. Kind word. Pat on the back.

Maybe a meal delivered. Night. He gets nothing. And it's interesting. He uses the word. Plague. In verse 11. And I think. That might be.

A deliberate. Choice of words. To describe his condition. So. Again. We don't know what it is. We don't know if it's infectious. Or what it is. But the use of that term.

[16 : 39] Plague. Would. At the time. Most likely. Refer to. Leprosy. And so. We know that. Lepers. Are. Treated. Absolutely.

As someone. That you just. Don't go near. Because. You might catch it. So. He is being treated. By. Friends. Companions.

And relatives. As someone. Who might have. Some horrible. Infectious disease. So no one. Will associate it. With him. Or even go near. He can't rely on anybody.

For assistance. But only God. Can help him. And then. At the same time. He faces enemies. So in verse 12. We see. He has enemies. Who are attacking him.

In a variety of ways. Plotting his destruction. And. Meditating on. How they might hurt him. And then. In the face of these attacks. Coupled.

[17 : 32] With. The awareness. Of his own guilt. He seems. Utterly. Defenseless. So that. He doesn't. Hear their words. Or make any response. It's. It's really.

Very sad language. He can't even open his mouth. In. In self-defense. I've become like a man. Who does not hear. And his mouth. I know rebukes.

And. Back in 13. Like a mute man. Who does not. Open his mouth. So at that point. It's. It's about as low as it gets.

He feels completely. Powerless. And. And all seems. Absolutely hopeless. But then. The tone changes. So in verse 15. And.

To the end. We see. There is hope. There is hope. Of salvation. And verse 15. You see. Begins with the important little word. But. So when he's reached.

[18 : 27] The lowest point there. And we're starting to think that. All hope is gone. He reveals that. No. He has clung to hope in the Lord. And so.

Rather than becoming bitter. And blaming God. For this desperate situation. That he's in. He chooses to allow his affliction. To turn him toward God. It's interesting actually.

In verse 15. It uses all three of the main Hebrew words. To refer to God. All in the one verse. So we see. Verse 15. But for you.

O Lord. With all capitals. Do I wait. It is you. O Lord. With all capitals. My God. Who will answer. So the first. Lord there.

The one with capitals. Is. Is the Hebrew word. Yahweh. Which. We recognize. As. Used for. The covenant. God of Israel. The second one.

[19 : 22] Lord. Is. Adonai. Which is. God. As. As master. And Lord. In that sense. As master. And then. My God. From Elohim.

Which is God. As a deity. So. As distinct. From all created things. So. That's. Kind of interesting. And. And it. Perhaps. Shows.

The depths. Of his despair. And his complete. Dependence. On the Lord. For. Deliverance. He's. He's. Throwing. Everything. In here. He's really. Pleading. To God. For help.

And using. All the. The names. That he can. Think of. In a way. So. It shows. The depths. Of his despair. And his complete. Dependence. On the Lord. For deliverance. So.

In response. To the attacks. Of his enemies. He leaves it. To God. To answer. He. He has no arguments. Against them. But he knows. That God. Will answer. And so.

[20 : 18] There is a hopeful. Note there. And as we've seen. Right from the start. Of the psalm. David has recognized. That he's sinful. He's feeling immense pain. He's an outcast. As a result.

But he knows. That despite all that. God will help him. And. It really seems. Quite genuine. Look at. Verse 18. I confess my iniquity. I'm sorry.

For my sin. It really seems like. It really seems like. A genuine. And repentant. Confession. So. It hasn't been. The most. Cheerful. And encouraging.

Psalms. Up to this point. But in the last. Couple of verses. There is. A hopeful. Section. So. He repeats. A plea.

And it's actually. Quite similar. To the way it starts. Back in. Verse 1 and 2. But it's. It's different. But similar. In that it kind of. Brackets. The start and the end.

[21 : 11] So. The way he ends. Is with a. Heartfelt cry. And more than anything else. What David. Really. Desires. Is a sense of. God's presence. He says.

Oh my God. Be not. Far from me. And make haste. To help me. Oh Lord. Myself. Myself. Salvation. So. He's desiring. God's presence.

He's also. Desiring. That it comes soon. So. He. Clearly. Doesn't want God. To delay. Possibly. Because he's feeling. That he's at a point. Where.

If there's any delay. There might be. Destruction. And you. Did you notice there. Once again. In that verse. Then. All three. Words for God.

Are used again. Oh Lord. With capitals. My God. Oh Lord. God. So. It does end. On a hopeful note.

[22 : 06] Because. He does say. Oh Lord. My salvation. So. He has clung on to hope. Despite of all that. And the implication there is. He is confident.

That. God has heard. His heartfelt pleading. And God will save him. And. And. Importantly. He has no doubt. Where. His salvation comes from. And that God is able to save.

So. In this psalm. There's no resolution. So. After this. There's no. Oh. And the Lord saved me. So. It's like one of those. Shows on TV.

Where they come to the end of a. A series. You know. And you. Left with this. Clean. Cliffhanger. And you don't know what's coming. You think. Okay. They're really important characters. Like David.

You think the Lord will save him. But we don't actually. Find that out. Until the sequel. Which is the next couple of psalms. So. Keep coming after this week. And we'll find out. But.

[23 : 04] Sticking to this one. So that. In summary then. We have that first section. We've seen the agony of sin. David's. Agony. These. These. These. These. These. These. These. These. These. These. These. These. These.

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These. These. These. These. These. These.

Here. To. This. bridge. between sin and illness because clearly it's made over and over again here but what do we make of this in terms of our own sin and our own illness or misfortune and secondly the seriousness of sin that also comes out of this psalm and thirdly the sure hope of salvation so firstly let's think a little bit about the connection between our sin and illness or misfortune so throughout this psalm david makes it clear that he is suffering illness that is a direct result of his sin and although we can't be sure what the nature of the suffering is or what sins may have been the cause and so what what do we draw from this so if i'm struck down with a serious illness should i examine my life and work out what sin i've committed that i need to repent of so that god will heal me of that ailment it's not a trivial question and it's one that's caused an enormous amount of debate over the years and really we could give many talks about just this topic but i'm just going to spend a few minutes i'm digging a little deeper into the scriptures to see what the bible says about this so to begin with what does the new testament have to say about it and there are some passages that do seem to imply that there is a direct connection between illness and sin so one example of this that's often quoted is james chapter 5 from verse 13 let me read that to you is anyone among you suffering let him pray is anyone cheerful let him sing praise is anyone among you sick let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him anointing him with oil in the name of the lord and the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick and the lord will raise him up and if he has committed sins he will be forgiven therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working so that's interesting there does seem to be a link made there and there are other passages too where the bible seems to suggest a link between sickness and sin in certain contexts let me just read you a couple of others john chapter 5 jesus heals an invalid by the pool of bethesda on the sabbath and other afterwards jesus said to him in 514 see you are well sin no more that nothing worse may happen to you so here we said the consequences of sin are worse than the condition he's been healed from and so in this case it seems that his lameness was fatherly discipline from god to provoke repentance another example of that is 1 corinthians 11 30 which says that is why many of you are weak and ill and some have died and that's referring to people who are eating the cup and sorry eating the bread and drinking the cup of the lord without discerning the body so there seems to be some links there and so we need to think about what this means and i'll refer to a very nice commentary on james written by a guy called sam albury and when discussing that passage i read from james chapter 5 he says the new testament urges great caution in making the connection between someone's sickness and sin in general illness is part and parcel of living in a

broken and fallen world it's part of the fallout from our collective rebellion against god and in that sense it is indiscriminate and john chapter 9 verses 1 to 3 is a good example of that so it says as he passed by that's jesus he saw a man blind from birth and his disciples asked him rabbi who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind jesus answered it was not that this man sinned or his parents but that the works of god may be displayed in him so there are some specific contexts in the bible where there is a connection but most sickness does not arise from specific personal sins and the bible urges us to be cautious in making those connections in our day-to-day lives and so to quote sam albury again in certain contexts of collective double-mindedness such as in james 5 some sickness can be part of god's disciplinary plan it's wise then to practice self-examination when we are sick if and when we become aware of specific sins we haven't been repenting of it's appropriate to involve our church elders in the way james outlines this is important healing is not automatic but much more importantly forgiveness is so illness is a fact of being human in a fallen world and in his goodness god has given most of us the means to live long and healthy lives but i think these days the temptation is to take for granted how wonderfully we are made and the more i learn about biology and the miraculous complexity of human life the more miraculous it seems that our bodies generally work so well our health is a wonderful gift from god and we should continually thank him for allowing us to live so well and then another thing we can learn from this from david's response to this is that when we inevitably suffer from illness or misfortune it's going to happen our temptation is to look for someone or something to blame and our society seems to be moving in more even more in that direction where we need to be able to attribute blame to everything that happens um but rather than that we need to be constantly reminding ourselves that god sees our pain and he understands suffering so to blame god or reject him because we somehow feel that we've been treated unfairly fails to acknowledge that we are all deserving of god's wrath um and so in his goodness he sustains us and blesses us in ways that we just don't deserve and we should be just grateful for that but it is hard and somehow sometimes seemingly very unfair situations happen um to to christians to faithful believers my own family actually is an example of that my family was touched by tragedy um when my older sister died from a brain tumor at just six years of age having fallen ill and lost her sight over an 18 month period and on top of that just two years later my father died suddenly from a burst aneurysm and went to be with the lord in his mid-50s so when faced with these tragedies my mum um god bless her remained faithful um never accusing god of injustice but she continued to serve god for the rest of her life in many many ways including the music

[31 : 52] ministry in her church right up until she had a stroke and could no longer play the piano in her late 70s so these things can seem quite indiscriminate and very hard but the other side of that um is that our physical health can become an obsession almost an idol i would say in a subtle way if we become too focused on it so if all our prayers are for continuing good health um or for healing for of ourselves or our loved ones and we become too focused on that then we may have got our priorities a bit mixed up because while good health is important it certainly is it pales into insignificance with the prospect of eternity in the presence of our lord in a new heavenly body so let's not get too absorbed with the here and now and certainly looking after these miraculous bodies that god has given us is really important and we are blessed with a fantastic health system and the many benefits of modern medicine and health care praise god for that so that we can serve god without being weighed down most of the time by illness and pain so we should give thanks all the time for that and take advantage of the the health system that is available to us and we should certainly pray for those who are sick and suffering but let's always remember in that that our spiritual health and that of our family members our church friends and acquaintances is of supreme importance to us and more importantly in god's sight nowhere in the bible does god promise that we will live long and healthy lives here on earth because we follow jesus as our savior but what he does promise that is eternal life with him makes all our suffering on earth pale into insignificance so that's all i want to say about the connection between um that's the long the long application point by the way um i was still well under 50 minutes that's okay but i'll be brief with the last couple of points um let me just talk a little bit about the seriousness of sin so as we've seen david's sin here weighs so heavily on him that he's physically ill and in deep distress he's rightly deeply sorrow for what he's done and he doesn't hold back in confessing that he has not lived up to his lord's standards even though he doesn't go into any detail about the specifics he makes no excuses no attempt to cover up or pin the blame on other people or on circumstances but he genuinely remorsefully remorsefully takes the blame for his sin and the consequences of that and as we saw in verse 9 god knows everything that david has done and what is in his heart so there's no hiding of sin from god and the same applies to us now in 2025 as it did for david there is no hiding sin from god and sin has consequences not necessarily directly um but our rebellion from our creator is incredibly serious and the reason that david takes his sin so seriously is that he recognizes that god takes sin seriously how seriously well so seriously that god did not spare his own son the sinless lord jesus to die for our salvation to take our sin upon himself and suffer and die for us which means we have third point the sure hope of salvation so david ends as we saw with a plea for the lord's salvation do not forsake me oh lord

oh my god be not far from me make haste to help me oh lord my salvation so the wonderfully encouraging fact we can draw from this is that we know that god answered his prayer and all of our prayers in the sacrificial death of jesus on our behalf god did not forsake david and god is his salvation as he prayed and god has not forsaken us as is so clear now and we see his love for us in the sacrificial death of jesus so powerfully seen as jesus died on the cross carrying the penalty for the sin of the world god has shown his love for us in an incredible way as we see all through the the scriptures but i'll pick one verse i'll pick one john 4 9 following in this the love of god was made manifest among us that god sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him in this is love not that we have loved god but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins how encouraging is that the wrath that we deserved came upon upon jesus on the cross but not for his sins for ours how deep is the father's love that he should give his only son for us who are so undeserving so let's persevere in following our lord and savior jesus knowing that whatever trials we might encounter as we go through life whether it's ill health tragedy misfortune or rejection god will not forsake us for we have the sure hope of eternal life in jesus to which nothing on earth can compare let's pray our loving heavenly father we thank you that we are so marvelously made and that you love us and sustain us in this life even though we continue to sin and rebel against you father we thank you that we can be confident that whether we are in good health or are sick you will not forsake us and despite our suffering you have given us the means to be forgiven through faith in your son and to embrace the sure hope of eternal life with you by trusting in our lord jesus and it's in his name we pray amen