

# PSALM 39

David seems to have been in a great strait when he penned this psalm, and, upon some account or other, very uneasy; for it is with some difficulty that he conquers his passion, and composes his spirit himself to take that good counsel which he had given to others (37) to rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him, without fretting; for it is easier to give the good advice than to give the good example of quietness under affliction. What was the particular trouble which gave occasion for the conflict David was now in does not appear. Perhaps it was the death of some dear friend or relation that was the trial of his patience, and that suggested to him these meditations of morality; and at the same time, it should seem too, he himself was weak and ill, and under some prevailing distemper. His enemies likewise were seeking advantages against him, and watched for his halting, that they might have something to reproach him for. Thus aggrieved,

**I.** He relates the struggle that was in his breast between grace and corruption, between passion and patience (v. 1-3).

**II.** He meditates upon the doctrine of man's frailty and mortality, and prays to God to instruct him in it (v. 4-6).

**III.** He applies to God for the pardon of his sins, the removal of his afflictions, and the lengthening out of his life till he was ready for death (v. 7-13). This is a funeral psalm, and very proper for the occasion; in singing it we should get our hearts duly affected with the brevity, uncertainty, and calamitous state of human life; and those on whose comforts God has, by death, made breaches, will find this psalm of great use to them, in order to their obtaining what we ought much to aim at under such an affliction, which is to get it sanctified to us for our spiritual benefit and to get our hearts reconciled to the holy will of God in it

## ~~480~~ PSALM 39:1-6

### DEVOUT REFLECTIONS

*To the chief musician, even to Jeduthun. A psalm of David.*

David here recollects, and leaves upon record, the workings of his heart under his afflictions; and it is good for us to do so, that what was thought amiss may be amended, and what was well thought of may be improved the next time.

**I.** He remembered the covenants he had made with God to walk circumspectly, and to be very cautious both of what he did and what he said. When at any time we are tempted to sin, and are in danger of falling into it, we must call to mind the solemn vows we have made against sin, against the particular sin we are upon the brink of. God can, and will, remind us of them (~~240~~ Jeremiah 2:20, *Thou saidst, I will not transgress*), and therefore we ought to remind ourselves of them. So David did here.

**1.** He remembers that he had resolved, in general, to be very cautious and circumspect in his walking (v. 1): *I said, I will take heed to my ways*; and it was well said, and what he would never unsay and therefore must never gainsay. Note,

**(1.)** It is the great concern of every one of us to take heed to our ways, that is, to walk circumspectly, while others walk at all adventures.

**(2.)** We ought stedfastly to resolve that we will take heed to our ways, and frequently to renew that resolution. Fast bind, fast find.

**(3.)** Having resolved to take heed to our ways, we must, upon all occasions, remind ourselves of that resolution, for it is a covenant never to be forgotten, but which we must be always mindful of.

**2.** He remembers that he had in particular covenanted against tongue-sins — that he would not sin with his tongue, that he would not speak amiss, either to offend God or *offend the generation of the righteous*, ~~1975~~ Psalm 73:15. it is not so easy as we could wish not to sin in thought; but, if an evil thought should arise in his mind, he would lay his hand upon his mouth, and suppress it, that it should go no further: and this is so great an attainment that, *if any offend not in word, the same is a perfect man*; and

so needful a one that of him who *seems to be religious, but bridles not his tongue*, it is declared *His religion is vain*. David had resolved,

**(1.)** That he would at all times watch against tongue-sins: “*I will keep a bridle, or muzzle, upon my mouth.*” He would keep a bridle upon it, as upon the head; watchfulness in the act and exercise is the hand upon the bridle. he would keep a muzzle upon it, as upon an unruly dog that is fierce and does mischief; by particular stedfast resolution corruption is restrained from breaking out at the lips, and so is muzzled.

**(2.)** That he would double his guard against them when there was most danger of scandal — *when the wicked is before me*. When he was in company with the wicked he would take heed of saying any thing that might harden them or give occasion to them to blaspheme. If good men fall into bad company, they must take heed what they say. Or, *when the wicked is before me*, in my thoughts. When he was contemplating the pride and power, the prosperity and flourishing estate, of evil-doers, he was tempted to speak amiss; and therefore then he would take special care what he said. Note, The stronger the temptation to a sin is the stronger the resolution must be against it.

**II.** Pursuant to these covenants he made a shift with much ado to bridle his tongue (v. 2): *I was dumb with silence; I held my peace even from good*. His silence was commendable; and the greater the provocation was the more praiseworthy was his silence. Watchfulness and resolution, in the strength of God's grace, will do more towards the bridling of the tongue than we can imagine, though it be an unruly evil. But what shall we say of his keeping silence *even from good*? Was it his wisdom that he refrained from good discourse when the wicked were before him, because he would not cast pearls before swine? I rather think it was his weakness; because he might not say any thing, he would say nothing, but ran into an extreme, which was a reproach to the law, for that prescribes a mean between extremes. The same law which forbids all corrupt communication requires *that which is good and to the use of edifying*, <sup>400</sup>Ephesians 4:29.

**III.** The less he spoke the more he thought and the more warmly. Binding the distempered part did but draw the humour to it: *My sorrow was stirred, my heart was hot within me*, v. 3. He could bridle his tongue, but he could not keep his passion under; though he suppressed the smoke, that was as a fire in his bones, and, while he was musing upon his afflictions

and upon the prosperity of the wicked, the fire burned. Note, Those that are of a fretful discontented spirit ought not to pore much, for, while they suffer their thoughts to dwell upon the causes of the calamity, the fire of their discontent is fed with fuel and burns the more furiously. Impatience is a sin that has its ill cause within ourselves, and that is musing, and its ill effects upon ourselves, and that is no less than burning. If therefore we would prevent the mischief of ungoverned passions, we must redress the grievance of ungoverned thoughts.

**IV.** When he did speak, at last, it was to the purpose: *At the last I spoke with my tongue.* Some make what he said to be the breach of his good purpose, and conclude that, in what he said, he sinned with his tongue; and so they make what follows to be a passionate wish *that he might die*, like Elijah (<sup><1194></sup>1 Kings 19:4) and Job, (<sup><1168></sup>Job 6:8, 9. But I rather take it to be, not the breach of his good purpose, but the reformation of his mistake in carrying it too far; he had kept silence from good, but now he would so keep silence no longer. He had nothing to say to the wicked that were before him, for to them he knew not how to place his words, but, after long musing, the first word he said was a prayer, and a devout meditation upon a subject which it will be good for us all to think much of.

**1.** He prays to God to make him sensible of the shortness and uncertainty of life and the near approach of death (v. 4): *Lord, make me to know my end and the measure of my days.* He does not mean, “Lord, let me know how long I shall live and when I shall die.” We could not, in faith, pray such a prayer; for God has nowhere promised to let us know, but has, in wisdom, locked up that knowledge among the secret things which belong not to us, nor would it be good for us to know it. But, *Lord, make me to know my end*, means, “Lord, give me wisdom and grace to consider it (<sup><1629></sup>Deuteronomy 32:29) and to improve what I know concerning it.” *The living know that they shall die* (<sup><2105></sup>Ecclesiastes 9:5), but few care for thinking of death; we have therefore need to pray that God by his grace would conquer that aversion which is in our corrupt hearts to the thoughts of death. “Lord, make me to consider,”

**(1.)** “What death is. It is my end, the end of my life, and all the employments and enjoyments of life. It is the end of all men,” <sup><2102></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:2. It is a final period to our state of probation and preparation, and an awful entrance upon a state of recompence and retribution. To the wicked man it is the end of all joys; to a godly man it is

the end of all griefs. “Lord, give me to know my end, to be better acquainted with death, to make it more familiar to me (~~874~~ Job 17:14), and to be more affected with the greatness of the change. Lord, give me to consider what a serious thing it is to die.”

(2.) “How near it is. Lord, give me to consider the measure of my days, that they are measured in the counsel of God” (the end is a fixed end, so the word signifies; *my days are determined*, ~~845~~ Job 14:5) “and that the measure is but short: My days will soon be numbered and finished.” When we look upon death as a thing at a distance we are tempted to adjourn the necessary preparations for it; but, when we consider how short life is, we shall see ourselves concerned to do what our hand finds to do, not only with all our might, but with all possible expedition.

(3.) That it is continually working in us: “Lord, give me to consider how frail I am, how scanty the stock of life is, and how faint the spirits which are as the oil to keep that lamp burning.” We find by daily experience that the earthly house of this tabernacle is mouldering and going to decay: “Lord, make us to consider this, that we may secure mansions in the house not made with hands.”

2. He meditates upon the brevity and vanity of life, pleading them with God for relief under the burdens of life, as Job often, and pleading them with himself for his quickening to the business of life.

(1.) Man's life on earth is short and of no continuance, and that is a reason why we should sit loose to it and prepare for the end of it (v. 5): *Behold, thou hast made my days as a hand-breadth*, the breadth of four fingers, a certain dimension, a small one, and the measure whereof we have always about us, always before our eyes. We need no rod, no pole, no measuring line, wherewith to take the dimension of our days, nor any skill in arithmetic wherewith to compute the number of them. No; we have the standard of them at our fingers' end, and there is no multiplication of it; it is but one hand-breadth in all. Our time is short, and God has made it so; *for the number of our months is with him*. It is short, and he knows it to be so: *It is as nothing before thee*. he remembers *how short our time is*, ~~878~~ Psalm 79:47. *It is nothing in comparison with thee*; so some. All time is nothing to God's eternity, much less our share of time.

(2.) Man's life on earth is vain and of no value, and therefore it is folly to be fond of it and wisdom to make sure of a better life. Adam is Abel —

*man is vanity*, in his present state. He is not what he seems to be, has not what he promised himself. He and all his comforts lie at a continual uncertainty; and if there were not another life after this, all things considered, he were made in vain. He is vanity; he is mortal, he is mutable. Observe,

[1.] How emphatically this truth is expressed here. *First, Every man is vanity*, without exception; high and low, rich and poor, all meet in this. *Secondly, He is so at his best estate*, when he is young, and strong, and healthful, in wealth and honour, and the height of prosperity; when he is most easy, and merry, and secure, and thinks his mountain stands strong. *Thirdly, He is altogether vanity*, as vain as you can imagine. *All man is all vanity* (so it may be read); every thing about him is uncertain; nothing is substantial and durable but what relates to the new man. *Fourthly, Verily he is so*. This is a truth of undoubted certainty, but which we are very unwilling to believe and need to have solemnly attested to us, as indeed it is by frequent instances. *Fifthly, Selah* is annexed, as a note commanding observation. “Stop here, and pause awhile, that you may take time to consider and apply this truth, that every man is vanity.” We ourselves are so.

[2.] For the proof of the vanity of man, as mortal, he here mentions three things, and shows the vanity of each of them, v. 6. *First, The vanity of our joys and honours: Surely every man walks* (even when he walks in state, when he walks in pleasure) in a shadow, in an image, *in a vain show*. When he makes a figure his fashion passes away, and his great pomp is but great fancy, <sup>4253</sup>Acts 25:23. It is but a show, and therefore a vain show, like the rainbow, the gaudy colours of which must needs vanish and disappear quickly when the substratum is but a cloud, a vapour; such is life (<sup>5044</sup>James 4:14), and therefore such are all the gaities of it. *Secondly, The vanity of our griefs and fears. Surely they are disquieted in vain*. Our disquietudes are often groundless (we vex ourselves without any just cause, and the occasions of our trouble are often the creatures of our own fancy and imagination), and they are always fruitless; we disquiet ourselves in vain, for we cannot, with all our disquietment, alter the nature of things nor the counsel of God; things will be as they are when we have disquieted ourselves ever so much about them. *Thirdly, The vanity of our cares and toils*. Man takes a great deal of pains to *heap up riches*, and they are but like heaps of manure in the furrows of the field, good for nothing unless they be spread. but, when he has filled his treasures with his trash,

he *knows not who shall gather them*, nor to whom they shall descend when he is gone; for he shall not take them away with him. He asks not, *For whom do I labour?* and that is his folly, <sup><2018></sup>Ecclesiastes 4:8. but, if he did ask, he could not tell whether he should be a wise man or a fool, a friend or a foe, <sup><2019></sup>Ecclesiastes 2:19. *This is vanity.*

## ~~<131E>~~ PSALM 39:7-13

### DAVID PLEADING WITH GOD

The psalmist, having meditated on the shortness and uncertainty of life, and the vanity and vexation of spirit that attend all the comforts of life, here, in these verses, turns his eyes and heart heaven-ward. When there is no solid satisfaction to be had in the creature it is to be found in God, and in communion with him; and to him we should be driven by our disappointments in the world. David here expresses,

**I.** His dependence on God, v. 7. Seeing all is vanity, and man himself is so,

**1.** He despairs of a happiness in the things of the world, and disclaims all expectations from it: *“Now, Lord, what wait I for? Even nothing from the things of sense and time; I have nothing to wish for, nothing to hope for, from this earth.”* Note, The consideration of the vanity and frailty of human life should deaden our desires to the things of this world and lower our expectations from it. *“If the world be such a thing as this, God deliver me from having, or seeking, my portion in it.”* We cannot reckon upon constant health and prosperity, nor upon comfort in any relation; for it is all as uncertain as our continuance here. *“Though I have sometimes foolishly promised myself this and the other from the world, I am now of another mind.”*

**2.** He takes hold of happiness and satisfaction in God: *My hope is in thee.* Note, When creature-confidences fail, it is our comfort that we have a God to go to, a God to trust to, and we should thereby be quickened to take so much the faster hold of him by faith.

**II.** His submission to God, and his cheerful acquiescence in his holy will, v. 9. If our hope be in God for a happiness in the other world, we may well

afford to reconcile ourselves to all the dispensations of his providence concerning us in this world: “*I was dumb; I opened not my mouth* in a way of complaint and murmuring.” He now again recovered that serenity and sedateness of mind which were disturbed, v. 2. Whatever comforts he is deprived of, whatever crosses he is burdened with, he will be easy. “*Because thou didst it; it did not come to pass by chance, but according to thy appointment.*” We may here see,

**1.** A good God doing all, and ordering all events concerning us. Of every event we may say, “This is the finger of God; it is the Lord's doing,” whoever were the instruments.

**2.** A good man, for that reason, saying nothing against it. He is dumb, he has nothing to object, no question to ask, no dispute to raise upon it. All that God does is well done.

**III.** His desire towards God, and the prayers he puts up to him. *Is any afflicted? let him pray*, as David here,

**1.** For the pardoning of his sin and the preventing of his shame, v. 8. Before he prays (v. 10), *Remove thy stroke from me*, he prays (v. 8), “*Deliver me from all my offences*, from the guilt I have contracted, the punishment I have deserved, and the power of corruption by which I have been enslaved.” When God forgives our sins he delivers us from them, he delivers us from them all. He pleads, *Make me not a reproach to the foolish*. Wicked people are foolish people; and they then show their folly most when they think to show their wit, by scoffing at God's people. When David prays that God would pardon his sins, and not make him a reproach, it is to be taken as a prayer for peace of conscience (“Lord, leave me not to the power of melancholy, which the foolish will laugh at me for”), and as a prayer for grace, that God would never leave him to himself, so far as to do any thing that might make him a reproach to bad men. Note, This is a good reason why we should both watch and pray against sin, because the credit of our profession is nearly concerned in the preservation of our integrity.

**2.** For the removal of his affliction, that he might speedily be eased of his present burdens (v. 10): *Remove thy stroke away from me*. Note, When we are under the correcting hand of God our eye must be to God himself, and not to any other, for relief. He only that inflicts the stroke can remove it; and we may then in faith, and with satisfaction, pray that our afflictions



may be removed, when our sins are pardoned (~~2387~~ Isaiah 38:17), and when, as here, the affliction is sanctified and has done its work, and we are humbled under the hand of God.

**(1.)** He pleads the great extremity he was reduced to by his affliction, which made him the proper object of God's compassion: *I am consumed by the blow of thy hand.* His sickness prevailed to such a degree that his spirits failed, his strength was wasted, and his body emaciated. "The blow, or conflict, of thy hand has brought me even to the gates of death." Note, The strongest, and boldest, and best of men cannot bear up under, much less make head against, the power of God's wrath. It was not his case only, but any man will find himself an unequal match for the Almighty, v. 11. When God, at any time, contends with us, when with rebukes he corrects us,

**[1.]** We cannot impeach the equity of his controversy, but must acknowledge that he is righteous in it; for, whenever he corrects man, it is for iniquity. Our ways and our doings procure the trouble to ourselves, and we are beaten with a rod of our own making. It is the yoke of our transgressions, though it be *bound with his hand*, ~~2014~~ Lamentations 1:14.

**[2.]** We cannot oppose the effects of his controversy, but he will be too hard for us. As we have nothing to move in arrest of his judgment, so we have no way of escaping the execution. God's rebukes make man's *beauty to consume away like a moth*; we often see, we sometimes feel, how much the body is weakened and decayed by sickness in a little time; the countenance is changed; where are the ruddy cheek and lip, the sprightly eye, the lively look, the smiling face? It is the reverse of all this that presents itself to view. What a poor thing is beauty; and what fools are those that are proud of it, or in love with it, when it will certainly, and may quickly, be consumed thus! Some make the moth to represent man, who is as easily crushed as a moth with the touch of a finger, ~~8049~~ Job 4:19. Others make it to represent the divine rebukes, which silently and insensibly waste and consume us, as the moth does the garment. All this abundantly proves what he had said before, that surely every man is vanity, weak and helpless; so he will be found when God comes to contend with him.

**(2.)** He pleads the good impressions made upon him by his affliction. He hoped that the end was accomplished for which it was sent, and that therefore it would be removed in mercy; and unless an affliction has done its work, though it may be removed, it is not removed in mercy.

[1.] It had set him a weeping, and he hoped God would take notice of that. When the Lord God called to mourning, he answered the call and accommodated himself to the dispensation, and therefore could, in faith, pray, *Lord, hold not thy peace at my tears*, v. 12. He that does not willingly afflict and grieve the children of men, much less his own children, will not hold his peace at their tears, but will either speak deliverance for them (and, if he speak, it is done) or in the mean time speak comfort to them and make them to hear joy and gladness.

[2.] It had set him a praying; and afflictions are sent to stir up prayer. If they have that effect, and when we are afflicted we pray more, and pray better, than before, we may hope that God will hear our prayer and give ear to our cry; for the prayer which by his providence he gives occasion for, and which by his Spirit of grace he indites, shall not return void.

[3.] It had helped to wean him from the world and to take his affections off from it. Now he began, more than ever, to look upon himself as *a stranger and sojourner* here, like all his fathers, not at home in this world, but travelling through it to another, to a better, and would never reckon himself at home till he came to heaven. He pleads it with God: “Lord, take cognizance of me, and of my wants and burdens, for I am a stranger here, and therefore meet with strange usage; I am slighted and oppressed as a stranger; and whence should I expect relief but from thee, from that other country to which I belong?”

3. He prays for a reprieve yet a little longer (v. 13): “*O spare me*, ease me, raise me up from this illness that I may recover strength both in body and mind, that I may get into a more calm and composed frame of spirit, and may be better prepared for another world, *before I go hence* by death, and shall *be no more* in this world.” Some make this to be a passionate wish that God would send him help quickly or it would be too late, like that, ~~811~~ Job 10:20, 21. But I rather take it as a pious prayer that God would continue him here till by his grace he had made him fit to go hence, and that he might finish the work of life before his life was finished. *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee.*