

Bring back the Smile

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Scripture: Psalm 39

If you have your bibles with you, would you turn with me to the 39th Psalm reading from verse 1

I said, "I will guard my ways
That I may not sin with my tongue;
I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle
While the wicked are in my presence."
² I was mute and silent,
I refrained *even* from good,
And my sorrow grew worse.
³ My heart was hot within me,
While I was musing the fire burned;
Then I spoke with my tongue:
⁴ "LORD, make me to know my end
And what is the extent of my days;
Let me know how transient I am.
⁵ "Behold, You have made my days *as* handbreadths,
And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight;
Surely every man at his best is a mere breath.
⁶ "Surely every man walks about as a phantom;
Surely they make an uproar for nothing;
He amasses *riches* and does not know who will gather them.
⁷ "And now, Lord, for what do I wait?
My hope is in You.
⁸ "Deliver me from all my transgressions;
Make me not the reproach of the foolish.
⁹ "I have become mute, I do not open my mouth,
Because it is You who have done *it*.
¹⁰ "Remove Your plague from me;
Because of the opposition of Your hand I am perishing.

¹¹“With reproofs You chasten a man for iniquity;
You consume as a moth what is precious to him;
Surely every man is a mere breath.

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

¹³“Turn Your gaze away from me,
that I may smile *again*
before I depart and am no more.”

Psalm 39 is an interesting psalm because it's a psalm that in many ways doesn't have a resolution. It starts and begins at the same place of desperation, of frustration. It's a psalm that cries out to the Lord about a situation and the situation hasn't changed and the crying is the same. So it's not a psalm that you can neatly tie up again and say okay this is the process, you start here and you end here and then everything will be fine.

It's one of those psalms that leave you hanging and saying, what do we make of this but obviously, David thought that this was important because this is a psalm he wrote and in writing it, he even gave it to his musician Jeduthun and Jeduthan was one of the three musicians who were responsible for putting all this to music and leading the children of Israel. This was one of the psalms they sung and David thought it was important enough for them to sing this kind of a psalm in the way that he had.

So we get to look at this a little closer, and at the first look I think we can find the different attitudes that we have towards God. In the first three verses there is kind of a determination – without God. The psalmist here is saying, I'm going to watch my tongue, I'm going to try and guard my mouth while the wicked are in my presence, I'll be mute and silent refraining from good and all of that—there's a determination that is coming through but it is just from him, it has nothing to do with God speaking, “This is the way I want you to be” and then verses 4-6 there's frustration with God. When he says, “Lord, what's going on in my life?” Then in verses 7-11 he says, I have hope and the hope is in you, but then where do I go from this place, which you have brought me to? Finally, is a plea to God in verses 12-13, “Lord, Would you please, please do something for me.”

We start with determination without God, frustration with God, hope in God and then finally a plea to God. Then he ends this whole thing by such a poignant line, he says, you turn your gaze away from me, don't look at me because when you look at me, this calamity or whatever this is that I am facing is upon me. Turn away from me, that I may smile again. The smile has been drawn out of him. As I looked at this psalm I was thinking how very relevant for us this is isn't it, because sometimes, the smile gets drawn from our lives and we are just stoic people who walk through life saying, I'm going through life, I'm going to get through this, God help me I'm going to get through this and we walk through like that.

And yet the psalmist is saying give me back that smile. I want a smile. It's a very simple request, and as I thought about that I began to smile, because I was thinking how often we get into situations but we are not smiling. We may greet somebody with a smile but it doesn't come as an expression of our hearts and what's going on in our lives. This spoke to me.

I was reading this poem by Mahima Pahwa and she writes this:

“I think of all my smiles that I've worn,
which hide my sorrows underneath.
No one seems to notice that,
I'm going through so much grief.
I cry and cry inside my pretty little tired eyes,
no one actually seems to realize,
what is presently going inside.
I'm going far away from everyone.
That no one seems to see my real pain.
My heart is totally broken after so much suffering,
unable to face anyone.
It feels like it's the last of my life,
As I have got no support by my side.
I have really started to abhor myself and
have started to find things quite uncertain.
I find people to be quite ignorant towards me,
as it is, I know they are idyllic without me.
I am very puzzled at present,
What to do? Is my situation.
I only meet illusive people in this inconsiderate world.
I am such a numpty person,
that in this world expect people to know my situation.
After knowing as it is they would remain ignoramuses.
So I have no smile.”

This is so much a condition of our lives written by someone who's not a Christian but good reflection, of where so many people are that situations and circumstances have drawn the smile out of our lives and we are left with this almost quiet determination that we see in the psalmist first three verses—I'm going to just keep going...

Then, if you look at the context it seems that there are people around him who are really mocking him as well because he is saying, I want to keep silent and I won't say anything that can be offensive. People will know that I am yours, but they are wondering how this may be going on in my life, where is your God? It seems like that is what they are asking. I am mute; I'm keeping quiet, I don't want to say anything that will in anyway cause harm or destruction. Then he says, I even stopped doing good—even good things, but then he says that when I stopped doing good my sorrow increased that's why he says, “I couldn't hold it any more that I blurt it out”. But the good things he blurted out towards God.

But what is the condition of his heart? Why is he going through this? We see why he is going through this when we look at verses 7 through 11, why he says, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you. Deliver me from all my transgressions; make me not the reproach of the foolish. Then he says, because it is you who has done this, you God have done this. I am in this place because of you. Please remove this—he calls it a plague. I’m perishing, what reproofs are you going to use to chasten me? So it seems as if he is paying for something that he didn’t do. There’s some kind of sin, some transgression that has happened that God allowed something into his life. Then in this place he cries out to God and it is interesting he cries out to God in two places, verses 4-6 and then in 12 and 13. In the first cry, it’s a cry of frustration. He cries out to God and says, Lord, what is life, what’s to become of me? How much life do I have? He turns from a softsicle and he says life is just a little bit of a whisper, a wake up and it’s gone, shake the ecclesiasts that you will find in the psalm, vanity, vanity is vanity. A cry of frustration—how long is this going to last with me, to the extent of my life?

At the end in verse 12 – 13, it’s the cry of anguish. He says, God, please, please do something! See my tears, I’m weeping, I’m crying, do something he says. Don’t be silent for I’m a stranger with you, I’m a sojourn, he says, like my fathers—please do something! And that’s the end of the sermon.

What we know about this psalm then is that something has come upon him, something the he would be at fault for, that he is in front of people who would mock at him and say where is your God? How come you are going through this? Then he turns to God and he says, Lord, you have done this to me. You’ve got to do something about it. That could very well be the story of our lives because fairy tale endings remain in fairy tales most often, that we have particular situation, then we pray and we wave that wand and (snap) is gone! I’m fine!

It seems God doesn’t work that way. He’s not the genie in the bottle that comes out and says,

Okay did you call?

What did you want?

“Oh job?

Here it is.”

“Went through an ailment?

Oh sure I’ll heal you.”

It’s like David is saying, no, that’s not life. Life is staying in the situation and then seeing how you will come through it. That’s what life is about. God is saying to you, I will allow you to go through these situations for whatever reason. But His promises are that He will be with us. He will not leave us, He will sustain us as we saw in our weaknesses, His strength is made perfect.

How do we navigate, what can be pulled from this psalm that can say, this kind of a no resolution psalm, what do I take from this? I think there are just a couple of ways that we need

to look at it. The first way would be when we look at something in our lives, is if we are going through a difficult time, is to say, Lord has allowed this to my life as a consequence of sin, as a consequence of following my flesh, as a consequence of being disobedient to Him, as a consequence of wanting my own will over His will and there's a repercussion for that just as Jonah found out. God told him to go to Nineveh and he got himself a ticket to Tarshish headed over there, landed up in the belly of a whale and all the rest of those unsanitary things that happened.

When you look at some of the things that are happening in your life, only two things can confront us.

1. We are responsible for it because of some sin
2. God has allowed it but it is not a consequence of sin but that it is something that God wants to do in us that will make us move from a milk stage to a mature stage. That God is refining us that we are in the process of growing up. There is a maturity that God is saying that you will only learn through adversity.

Those are the two options beloved, that we have, and if you are going through a difficult situation this morning, then this Psalm resonates with you — how long oh Lord, how long? Then it would be good to just look at your own life through the grid of these two issues and ask the question is there something that has happened in my life. Is there an act of disobedience, of self will that has brought this on me? And if there is, the way out to that is to ask for God's forgiveness.

“If you confess your sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive you your sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

To be able to use that scripture and to say Lord, forgive me, if I have done something wrong. And you will be able to get back on path.

I want you to remember this beloved as you deal with this area, and all of us do, when there is some sin that we have got entangled in, remember this— that it is a small sliver of the entire pie of your life. If you were to look at your life into a pie chart this would be a small sliver e.g. this area of your life you'd compromise in your work, your work is probably this much in context to your family, your community, the church, your personal life all of that, it's a small part. But here's what happens— Satan has landing rights on that area. Its sin, its darkness and he can land on darkness. What he does is he lands on that and then he tries to expand his area into all the other areas of your life. How does he do that? He turns to you and says, hey listen you are trying to now to go to church and give testimony, how can you with this sin in part of your life and automatically you get compromised. Then he tells you, how are you going to be loving with your family when this sin is there, so that part gets gone. That's his agenda. His agenda is to take this little beach head that he has and then make it a landing strip.

But here's the good news— the rest of that pie belongs to God. If you are a child of God, the Holy Spirit is within you and has access to all the rest of those areas. Here's what God's doing. God is trying to snuff that area out by bringing in all the good that is there in the other

area and remove this area where Satan has. Satan will have you believe that it had ruined your entire life. God is saying it's a small part in your entire life, deal with it. Because we come under condemnation from the evil one because we listen to him in this particular area, that we are completely useless in that area. This is an area where we need to let God deal with it as the psalmist comes to him crying, pleading, Lord, I'm sorry, Lord, forgive me. I am transgressed. Lord, you have the potential, you have the key bunch, Lord you take that area and make it clean. Secondly, God has allowed it but it's not as a consequence of sin, it's something that he thinks it he allows it God being omniscient, he knows all things so everything that comes to you he has seen and allowed it into our life for whatever reason, He has allowed it into our lives because He feels that it can do us good.

An example of this is Job. All that Job faced was not for anything that he had done. Today you are going through the same situation saying, Lord; I've been obedient to you in everything, why do I have this in my life. Why is this hurdle? What's the word for us?

It comes from the second verse that David wrote, he says, I was mute and silent, I refrained even from doing good. My sorrow has grown worse. Beloved, if that is where you are, if you are going through a difficult situation and you know that it's not because of something that you have done wrong, don't stop doing good, because our gut reaction is to drop out. It is to curl up and say Lord, when this is over I'm in service. Yet I believe God would want us to continue to do good in the context with what we are doing.

Remember that Paul wrote four of his letters from prison—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Well, he could have got up and said okay, I'll just wait till die. And what a breath of fresh air it has been church over the years.

Beloved, if you are going through a difficult situation, don't stop doing good, secondly, press into Him don't withdraw. I love the way The Message puts it in Psalm 42. He says

¹⁻³ A white-tailed deer drinks
from the creek;
I want to drink God,
deep draughts of God.
I'm thirsty for God-alive.
I wonder, "Will I ever make it—
arrive and drink in God's presence?"
I'm on a diet of tears—
tears for breakfast, tears for supper.
All day long
people knock at my door,
Pestering,
"Where is this God of yours?"

⁴These are the things I go over and over,
emptying out the pockets of my life.
I was always at the head of the worshiping crowd,
right out in front,
Leading them all,
eager to arrive and worship,
Shouting praises, singing thanksgiving—
celebrating, all of us, God’s feast!
Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul?
Why are you crying the blues?
Fix my eyes on God—
soon I’ll be praising again.
He puts a smile on my face.
He’s my God.
Sometimes I ask God, my rock-solid God,
“Why did you let me down?
Why am I walking around in tears,
harassed by enemies?”
They’re out for the kill, these
tormentors with their obscenities,
Taunting day after day,
“Where is this God of yours?”
¹¹Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul?
Why are you crying the blues?
Fix my eyes on God—
soon I’ll be praising again.
He puts a smile on my face.
He’s my God.

Beloved, God doesn’t stand far away and say, let me watch and see how my child is doing in this particular adversity. He is right there with you, pulling you up and saying my child, this has been there for a while come through, be an over comer and I will give you that crown of life. Over comers, we are called to be over comers not to give up and quit, so whatever is facing you this morning, it has nothing to do with something that you have done, beloved just ask the Lord and say Lord, hold my hand I will not stop doing good and I will press in on you.

Two responses that we have the first

verse 1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Get back on track.

Secondly just press in, continue to allow him to fulfill the work in you.

It's like the rose that is trampled and it brings out fragrance of its essence.

Dearly beloved, whether it's through confession or perseverance let's get the smile back on our faces. Amen.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for your words, thank you for your Spirit present here. Lord Jesus, we thank you for all that you have done enabling us to one day spend eternity with you. Lord we bring before you our situations, you know Master, where we each are in our lives journey and our prayer is that you would yield with us Master. Lord as you hear prayers of confession Lord, would you usher in forgiveness and cleansing. Lord where you hear cries for help Lord, would you continue to let your good works come to the fore in the midst of a wonderful embrace. We love you Master, and we thank you that you care so much for each one of us and even though, we walk through the valley of dark shadows, we will fear no evil, for your rod and your staff, we will reach forth to allow that to come forth for we pray this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.
