**Every Adam is an Abel**

*consolation for pilgrims who are struggling with God's hand*

# Intro

TURN TO: Psalm 39

Superscription: to music-director, for leader of temple choir, a melody of David

Show me one song like this today? Which ends - to God: *look away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more!*

I'm so grateful that the Bible is not afraid to be true. That the scripture doesn't ice over the difficulties, and the mess in this world. It doesn't pretend that everything is fine - which is one reason I trust it. It declares how things really are, so that it can minister where people are really at. And the Psalms are particularly good at it.

These are songs that overflow - even as Michael sang for us last week - from the depths. It has been suggested somewhere that in worship, in corporate worship, sometimes we need to sing songs like this! cf Superscription. Songs that don't only end happily. Because the happy ending is yet to come.

Last week (Rom 8) we considered together the cause of Suffering in the World and the worthwhileness of persevering. I don't want to cover that again. But this morning, to acknowledge that disciples can remain for long periods in the dark valley, struggling with God's hand.

We're going to read David's journal, and let his trouble minister to us. (! Did you know that was possible? Rom 15:4 *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope*

This is counsel.

Not for what you must do. But for what you must go through.

It's good to know that others have gone through this before us, and important to know others will after us!

# READ

# PRAY

He failed in the most understandable of all sins - sinful words in the face of wickedness. (cf Moses - striking the rock.)

We don't know who the wicked were, or what David said - but the essence of it is this, and herein is our application:

* He saw the temptation coming
* He resolved to remain steadfast
* but He failed
* And between disappointment in himself and discouragement in God, he's withering.

> Anyone know what that's like? One man said last week - I got really angry with God when I saw those flames flaring up!

**Read v1-3**

APP: How familiar disciples are with this. The Tongue - murders people.

**Look how hard he tried.** In the Hebrew - (KJV) - "showed silence from good" - not 'silent treatment, but keeping quiet for the best'.

**Meanwhile** - what's happening: the wicked are going about in his face - thoughtless, criminal. Justice skewed. And the more he kept silence the angrier he became - until bang - lashes out, the muzzle blasts open and the steam whistles, scorching everything in its path.

**Regret**. But also frustration.

APP: I don't know why exactly we're given this Psalm today. I looked through the Psalms for today's sermon because they're unmatched in how they minister personal comfort - yet so many Psalms don't end like we'd like them to end. This is one such. I trust the Holy Spirit will apply it to you in power.

You could substitute David's sin with any. In the necessary circumstances, the best disciples can often teeter on the edge of sin, and despite our resolutions, will blow it. There is plenty wickedness going about, there is plenty of temptation, and plenty of decay... in our face - losing property, seeing donations abused; people being 'stupid'! (KAWS brokwn into and food and blankets stolen) Of course, in the current devastation there's plenty stress, and plenty opportunity to explode.

Take **a disciple**, combination **stress** and personal **failure and you'll find them** perplexed, like David, in a dark valley.

# PROPOSITION:

If in your distress you have given in to sin, and now feel discouraged - maybe David's prayer can minister to you.

It's a bit like a journey. It doesn't have an end. It's not over. But there are 4 milestones in His prayer, that disciples should connect with

## Recognising a lack [REVEAL TO ME]

 3 times David concludes the essence of the problem : it's preceded with the word, "Surely"...

* v5b: **Surely**, all mankind stands as a mere breath!
* v6: **Surely**, for nothing they are in turmoil: LIT: *for nothing* = as a breath
* v11: **Surely** all mankind is a mere breath.

He sings it 3 times, joined with the musical term 'Selah' (after v5, 11) - requiring a pause and consideration. This repetition and pause combine to make the point: Of everything David is experiencing, this is his conclusion. *I am a mere breath*. Longest point in the sermon - because it's the main thrust for David

**"Abel Moment"**

David was having an "**Abel**" moment.

* Abel - the son of Adam.
* *Abel* means "Breath" - the same word used here in Psalm 39.
* Abel is a great example of a mere breath. He was cut short.

The overwhelming conclusion of David is 5b: *Surely, all mankind stands as an Abel*

 4 "O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! (Psa 39:4 ESV)

There are things that we know, but we need to hear them afresh from God. Like how fleeting we are. **But it's after his failure that he's rediscovered it.** ie. The times we hear God the loudest, when we're finally ready to / even asking him to tell us, is in these Abel-moments.\

**APP**:

Failed God? The first stop should be a right estimation of ourselves - Lacking.

In **v5-6** man is compared to God - even placed before His face 5, "***before you***"

Disciples should connect with this because we know ... In this life, we really are nothing. A few "*handbreadths*".. before the God who fills eternity and carries the universe in His hand. Ps 103:14 - *those who fear Him, he has compassion on - for he knows our frame, that we are dust!* What did you expect of yourself? Maybe you forgot and started worshiping yourself/ trusted your own judgement.

**ILLUS**: " *a mere breath*" - these are not poetic thoughts - they are truths. When I was typing my sermon, one breath was 2.7 seconds. You've had plenty of those you weren't even aware of.

**v5b - every man standing is AS a mere breath. 2 implications**

* What are you fighting for, getting upset about, aiming for? The span of life you're upset about is nothing before God. There's something bigger at work than just a few more milliseconds of happy life. If you're 40, the lung has completed inhaling and about to be exhaled. If you're 80, there's a few milliseconds left. Until your entrance into Eternal Breathing
* 2) The agony of time spent putting up with others' sins - whatever it was that stirred you to sin - how now does that contrast to the agony of God Himself putting up with your sin?

v4: O LORD, make me KNOW my end... how fleeting I am.

## Wrestling with God [DELIVER ME]

 7 "And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.

 8 Deliver me from all my transgressions. Do not make me the scorn of the fool!

 9 I am mute; I do not open my mouth, for it is you who have done it.

 (Psa 39:7-9 ESV)

The point is - it hardly feels fair. He's reflecting on the ordeal and says,

* **(7) Where were you**?! [Perfect tense = what did I wait for?] In that test, I only had one hope - and it was you - and that's why I waited - ...but you didn't come through for me!
* (9) Again perfect tense - I not only waited, **but I worked jolly hard** to do what was right - and the REASON I didn't open my mouth (at first)... ***I knew it was you*** *ultimately who put me in that place!*

A disciple will recognise these questions because he or she knows God is sovereign. It's understandable that David wrestles with His God - as did Job, and Moses, and Jeremiah, and Elijah -

* 3. **(8)** because of this... there'll be consequences of my actions - and God, I need you to spare me from these!

Do you feel strangely comforted that David has written what you've felt?

We can learn that honest questions are not out of place. Job spent nearly 40 chapters arguing with God and his friends before God revealed Himself to Job - and it was not that God gave him answers to his questions - but He gave him a revelation of Himself - and Job had nothing more to say, except worship an awesome God! God may need to do that with you too.

## Resigning to God's burning [RELIEVE ME]

 10 Remove your stroke from me; I am spent by the hostility of your hand.

 11 When you discipline a man with rebukes for sin, you consume like a moth what is dear to him; surely all mankind is a mere breath! Selah

 (Psa 39:10-11 ESV)

It's just so clear that this isn't a theological treatise on dealing with failure/ total depravity. He's hurting and feeling finished. "you consume like a moth what is dear to him" - no appetite for anything.

A disciple will connect with this because appetite for sin is succesfully destroyed this way. Discipline is a hard lesson - and that doesn't necessarily mean it's a direct consequence of some sin - but it is the shaping and firing of us which bears rich harvest. - Heb 13 - every trial is a rich producer of righteousness in the disciple! ( *whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin*, (1Pe 4:1 ESV))

There's s sense of resignation here. I have received, and it has had its full work in me. I have no desire left for sin.

## Reaching for God's hand [RESTORE ME]

Notice how the prayer is not angry or vengeful - though there is dismay and questions, it remains faithful: Lord, Reveal to me; Remove from me; and now Restore me.

We can understand the last verse - look away, as in v10: remove your strokes... But don't look away from helping me!

12 "Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears! For I am a sojourner with you, a guest, like all my fathers. (Psa 39:12 ESV)

These 4 milestones can be in any order - but there remains a confident assurance, as the disciples said to Jesus: To whom else can we go?

"With you" - because I am WITH YOU, I remain a pilgrim. My home is not here. My home is WITH YOU. Therefore, you will be troubled by my tears. What a lovely image. Like a father who disciplines his child, but aches at the child's repentant tears.

# Summary

v11: *Every Man is a Breath*. or. **Every Adam is an Abel**.

Just look at him -

* eyes closed, and glistening tears
* head bowed in regret
* shaking his head: I tried

But on the back of that, his faith is active

* recognising his lack
* Wrestling with God
* Resigning to God's burning discipline
* Reaching out to God

May you be encouraged when you find yourself in the same position. I don't know how long David remained in this dark valley. But I do know, that he had a great testimony- see Ps 40:1-5!

**Abel Moments** are necessary in the Christian Life. Because every Adam is an Abel. Because every Adam is Unable. Praise be to God - Christ is the New Adam, and in Him, we have the assurance of God's love - He will deliver us!