

PSALM 38

A REMEMBRANCE OF SORROWS

The 38th Psalm is a fervent prayer to the Lord, in which David complains – with terrible groanings – that he is stricken and bruised by the sense of his sin. He says that he is distressed in his spirit, that he is under the deepest sorrow, and that he can see nothing and feel nothing except wrath from heaven and the terrible lightnings and arrows and threatenings of God – and, in a word, death and hell itself! And what makes this even worse is that this great distress exhausts not only all the moisture, strength, blood, and marrow of the Psalmist's physical body; but it also fills him with an unspeakable alarm and agitation, and makes him pant and sweat with agony – so that the intenseness of his feelings actually destroys the natural color and appearance of his face, and affects his whole body! To feel, in reality, the burden of a conscience that is under a sense of sin – it is a distress and a terror that far exceeds all other distresses and terrors! And these deep temptations of the Godly are greatly increased by those wicked ones in the world around them; these malicious evildoers never cease to falsely attach labels to the children of God. They call them heretics, seditious persons, and murderers. These hypocrites arrogantly boast – in the very presence of the Godly – that they are the true saints, and the true church, and the real people of God. And in the meantime, it seems as if the Lord will never bring help and consolation to His people; and so they are deeply grieved and afflicted, as if He was their enemy because of their sins.

When, like David, we are brought to a point where we perceive our true spiritual condition because of our sins; the Good Physician must immediately be valued, sought, and obeyed! But alas! So many persons let their wounds rankle because they delay to go to their merciful Friend at once! The intense groanings which cannot be uttered with our mouths are not hidden from Him Who searches the heart and mind.

Overview of the Psalm, adapted from Charles Spurgeon:

According to the Hebrew title, this is “a Psalm of David, to bring to remembrance.” David felt as if he had been forgotten by his God; and therefore, he recounted his sorrows and cried mightily for help under them. This same title is given to Psalm 70, where – in a similar manner – the Psalmist pours out his complaint before the Lord. It would be foolish to make a guess as to the specific point in David's life when this was written. It may be a commemoration of his own sickness and endurance of cruelty; or it may, on the other hand, have been composed by him for the use of sick and slandered saints, without any particular reference to himself.

The Psalm opens with a prayer (verse 1), continues in a long complaint (verses 2-8), pauses to dart an eye to heaven (verse 9), proceeds with a second tale of sorrow (verses 10-14), interjects another word of hopeful address to God (verse 15), pours out a flood of griefs for the third time (verses 16-20), and then closes as it opened – with renewed petitioning (verses 21-22).

But this Psalm also teaches us to constantly hope for, pray for, and expect the help and consolation of God. In the midst of the agonizing conflict of this temptation, the Psalmist sustains and lifts himself up by taking courage from the Divine promises. Here he maintains his cause – which is not the cause of men, but of God – as a strong fortress against Satan and his forces; and here again, the consolation of faith flows in upon him. In this same manner, we also ought to pray always! No temptation needs to force us to yield to sorrow of mind – even though we are sinners, and even though Satan shakes us with the horrible terrors of sin – for God’s grace is stronger than our sin!

Before we leave our study of this Psalm, let us turn our attention to its Hebrew title – “A Psalm of David, to bring to remembrance” – for therein, we may see a picture of Christ! What else is worthy to be remembered, except that which concerns the Lord Jesus? Is not the Holy Spirit said, by Christ Himself, to be His “Remembrancer”? (John 14:26) And is not this act of bringing Him to our remembrance one of the Spirit’s sweetest and most blessed offices? Therefore, since this same Holy Spirit inspired the Psalmist to pen this portion of Scripture, we may clearly trace Christ as being set forth before our spiritual vision! The view of sorrow for sin in this Psalm reminds us that it was these iniquities which brought forth the agonies of the Son of God on our behalf. He endured that curse which the law denounced against the sinner; and thus He redeemed us from the curse by becoming both sin and a curse for us, so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him! (Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:21)

Lord, we confess that we have often sinned against You – grieving You by our manifold iniquities. We pray for grace to have faith in our blessed Surety, so that we may find deliverance from all the sins, sorrows, and punishments which are justly due to us for breaking Your law. We give thanks to the Lord Jesus for standing in our place and suffering as the Just for the unjust, so that He might reconcile us with You, O Father! All thanks be to Him for being our strength, our song, and our salvation! Amen.

