

PSALM 39

A PSALM OF SILENCE

In the opening of this consolatory composition, the Psalmist resolves that his mouth would be bridled so that he might not break out into blasphemy and murmuring when he sees the wicked apparently prospering in this world. These evil persons proudly despise God and His Word, and they think of nothing except amassing riches and wealth. And the Psalmist is disturbed as he compares their state with that of the Godly; for they are often afflicted with various temptations, and they are engaged in conflict with both the world and the devil. Hence he finally cries out, "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days!" He knows that there will eventually be an end to his earthly life; and he beseeches the Lord to teach him to magnify the future, which does not yet appear. He asks to be guarded from that perilous security of the wicked, in which they give themselves up entirely to this world; they devote themselves to coveting the things thereof, and they are exceedingly proud and ambitious – imagining that they shall live here forever. Alas! It is often a great vexation to the people of God – and even the Lord's prophets themselves have often complained of it – as they see that the wicked ones of this world abound in every kind of luxury. They wallow in all the pleasures of wine and feasting, and they live their whole lives in carnal security. They seem to be strangers to trouble and affliction; and yet at the same time, the Lord's people are afflicted, tempted, and distressed on all sides.

But the end of this Psalm shows that the Godly are indeed happy; and that the wicked, with all their perishable "happiness," are truly miserable. Hence the

Overview of the Psalm, adapted from Charles Spurgeon:

The title of this Psalm indicates that it was written "to the chief musician, even to Jeduthun." Jeduthun's name, which means "praising" or "celebrating," was a most appropriate one for a leader in sacred Psalmody. He was one of those who were ordained, by David's order, "for song in the house of the Lord with cymbals, psalteries, and harps" (1 Chr. 15:6); and his children after him appear to have remained in the same holy service, even as late as the days of Nehemiah. To have a name and a place in Zion is no small honor, and to hold this place by descendants in a long succession of grace is an unspeakable blessing. O that our families may never lack a person to stand before the Lord God of Israel to do Him service!

The Psalmist, bowed down with sickness and sorrow, is burdened with unbelieving thoughts – which he resolves to stifle, lest any evil should come from their expression (verses 1-2). But silence creates an insupportable grief which at last demands utterance and obtains it in the prayer of verses 3-6; it is almost a complaint and a sigh for death – or, at best, it is a very desponding picture of human life. From verse 7 onward, the tone is more submissive, and the recognition of the Divine hand is more distinct; the cloud has evidently passed, and the mourner's heart is relieved!

Psalmist asks, “And now, Lord, what is my expectation?” – or, “What wait I for?” It is as if he had said, “Shall I be always thus afflicted? Shall I be utterly overwhelmed? Will these temptations continue to return upon us forever?” “No!” says he; “the Lord is my expectation!” In other words: “In the end, after all these temptations and death, I shall find eternal life, a reconciled God, and the pardon of all my sins; and even in this world, I shall never be forsaken!” But the wicked, on the other hand, will find – after their short life – nothing but eternal death.

What are some of the practical lessons that we may learn from this Psalm? For one thing, if an evil thought arises in our minds, we must pray for grace to suppress it. When we are unable to physically remove ourselves from the presence of wicked men, we should remember that they will watch our words and turn them (if they can) to our disadvantage. Second, even in our greatest health and prosperity, every one of us is nothing but vanity. Relatively speaking, our lives are very short; we may even pass into eternity this very day. This is an undoubted truth, but we are often very unwilling to believe it. Therefore, let us pray that God would enlighten our minds by His Holy Spirit, and fill our hearts with His grace; for then we shall be ready for death, every day and hour. Another lesson that we may learn here is that there is no solid satisfaction to be had in anything of this earth; but real fulfillment, pleasure, and contentment is most assuredly to be found in the Lord Jesus, and in a saving relationship with Him. So it is to Him, and Him alone, that we should be driven by our disappointments. Since the world is nothing but vanity, may He deliver us from having or seeking our portion in it! When creature-confidences fail, it is our comfort to know that we have a God to go to, and a God to trust in. Moreover, when we are under the correcting hand of the Lord, we must also look to Him for relief – and not to any other. Afflictions are sent to stir up prayer within our hearts. If they have that effect, then we have certain reason to believe that the Lord will hear our prayers.



Lord Jesus, we praise You for the fact that although we are pilgrims here on this earth, yet we are far more blessed than those who sit on thrones; for You Yourself travel in our midst, You make Yourself responsible for our wellbeing, and You have promised that You will bring us safely home. Help us to be detached from all things here on this earth, and to always be on the lookout for that heavenly city above! Amen.