

The Discipline of the Lord

A Sermon on Psalm 38

by

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1. Introduction

2. The Genuinely Repentant Cry Out to God in Recognition of Their Sin (vv. 1-4).

a. *David is keenly aware of the discipline of the Lord being brought upon him (vv. 1-2).*

i. The startling reality of David's condition is that he has an immediate awareness that the discipline of the Lord is upon him.

1. Notice David does not start by asking God to remove His discipline from him

a. He says, "Rebuke me not *in* your wrath, and chasten me not *in* your burning anger."

b. The emphasis in David's prayer is not on the fact that God is rebuking and chastening him, but on God's wrath and anger.

2. There is no hint in his voice of him blaming God for any of this, he's just asking for mercy because he knows that God is merciful.

a. This is incredibly important simply because even though David has committed serious sin, he immediately shows a sincere faith and trust in God.

b. He knows he doesn't deserve God's mercy.

ii. There is a sense of both physical and spiritual affliction from God that David is sensing upon him.

1. We will touch more on the physical nature of his affliction shortly, but for now, I want to draw your attention to the language he uses here to describe this discipline.

- a. He is being pierced by the continual bombardment of arrows that sink down deep into him.
 - b. These are not merely surface wounds the psalmist suffers, but arrows which pierce down into the depths of his being.
 - 2. Notice he also speaks of the hand of the Lord being pressed down upon him (v. 2).
 - a. There are several other references to this same kind of thing throughout Scripture.
 - b. In each case though, the hand of the Lord being raised against someone shows that the Lord is opposed to them and set upon afflicting them.
- b. *David is keenly aware that this discipline has been brought upon him because of his sin (vv. 3-4).*
 - i. Again, we will see the grotesque reality at hand in David's illness shortly, but I want you to notice how plain this is to David.
 - 1. First, notice that there is the wholistic effect to David's sin.
 - a. He tells us in v. 3 that there is no soundness in his flesh, nor is there health in his bones.
 - b. His iniquities are a heavy burden that weighs far too much for him to bear (v. 4).
 - 2. Secondly though, notice that David has no doubts in his mind that this is the discipline of the Lord.
 - a. In vv. 3 and 5, David uses the word "because" three times to draw attention to the fact that this is the Lord's punishment upon him for sin.
 - i. There is no soundness in my flesh *because* of your indignation (v. 3).
 - ii. There is no health in my bones *because* of my sin (v. 3).

- iii. My wounds grow foul and fester *because* of my folly (v. 5).
 - b. Then in v. 4, David simply lays it all out for us to see in saying, “My iniquities are gone over my head.”
- ii. Everything from here on out is a portrayal of a man who has hit rock bottom and he has a keen awareness that he has sinned against a holy God, and it is eating him alive from the inside out.
 - 1. This is particularly why this is evidence of a truly repentant heart—because David sees his sin for what it is.
 - 2. He sees that the Lord is chastening him and does not beg Him to stop. He does not explain it away. He owns it. He owns his sin and calls it for what it truly is: rebellion and foolishness.
 - a. And if we are to be a people who demonstrate true repentance in our own lives, we must follow in this same example.
 - b. Yet David does not merely acknowledge his sin, he *cries out to the Lord for mercy*.

3. The Genuinely Repentant Submit Themselves to the Discipline of God (vv. 5-16).

- a. *David describes the fulness of God’s discipline against him (vv. 5-12).*
 - i. The last thing I want to do is cause everyone to think that every time you get sick, it is a result of sin.
 - 1. In one sense, this is true. We have all been born into a broken and distorted world due to the disobedience of Adam.
 - a. Because he took of the fruit of the tree and ate it, sin and its consequences have been rampant on this earth ever since.
 - b. So many times, we suffer sickness or disease simply as a result of living in a broken and fallen world—and it is not necessarily because of any personal issue of sin.

2. In another sense though, there are sicknesses that are brought upon us due to our own sin, as a discipline from the Lord.
 - a. The apostle Paul warned the believers in Corinth to take the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner.
 - b. We also know that the body can suffer many different physical ailments as a result of things like anxiety, depression, or even things like unchecked anger.
- ii. The point in all of this is that this is what David is experiencing here—he knows without a shadow of a doubt that God has afflicted him due to sin.
 1. From vv. 5 on down to 12, I am going to simply summarize all of the different ailments David is experiencing right now as a result of his sin.
 - a. In v. 5 he describes open wounds that are growing foul and festering due to his folly.
 - b. In vv. 6-8 we see that all day long, he is in intense pain, and he mourns, and groans, and even howls because of it, and it is little wonder why.
 2. So, the question we must ask then is why God brought sickness upon David because of his sin.
 - a. Most simply stated, it is to bring David to the point he is at in this psalm. He's finally repentant. He's finally seeing his sin for how destructive it truly is.
 - b. This sickness, in other words, is what truly opened David's eyes to his spiritual condition before God.
- b. *David resigns himself to the discipline of the Lord and trusts that God will vindicate him (vv. 13-16).*
 - i. In contrast to his very vocal opponents, he says, "But I, like a deaf man, do not hear; and I am like a mute man who does not open his mouth. Yes,

I am like a man who does not hear and in whose mouth are no arguments” (Ps. 38:13-14).

1. David recognizes his condition is beyond the need for self-defense.
 - a. Rather than plead his case before his accusers, David takes the position of silence, but he also takes the position of simply ignoring them.
 - b. There is a tremendous amount of wisdom shown here, but the heart attitude behind it is what I want to draw your focus to.
 2. In light of his afflictions brought on him through the discipline of the Lord, the afflictions of his enemies are not all that important.
 - a. Detractors come and go, and David is no stranger to men who hate him without cause. They are a dime a dozen.
 - b. But the active hand of the Lord pressing down upon you is an altogether different thing, but David still knows this is born out of the covenant love of Yahweh.
- ii. “For I hope in you, O Yahweh; You will answer, O Lord my God. For I said, ‘May they not rejoice over me, who, when my foot slips, would magnify themselves against me’” (Ps. 38:15-16).
1. There are several key things we ought to notice about this short prayer.
 - a. For one, David’s hope is still firmly placed in his covenant-keeping God.
 - b. For two, notice in v. 15 that just after he shows great confidence that God will answer, David shows equal confidence that God is still very much *his* God.

- c. Finally, we see in v. 16 that David has confidence that God will judge the wicked and will not let them rejoice over him in his current state.
- 2. Yet notice that in no place does David ask for the consequences of his sin to be removed.
 - a. This is why I say he has resigned himself to the discipline of the Lord.
 - b. He embodies the same reality we find in the book of James in chapter 4 when he says, “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your heart, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn, and weep. Turn your laughter to mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

4. The Genuinely Repentant Confess Their Sins (vv. 17-20).

- a. *David acknowledges his guilt is before God (vv. 17-18).*
 - i. Once again, David affirms his frailty and grief over what his sin has done.
 - 1. He knows that his sin has brought disastrous consequences upon him and he is near death—and it has filled him with constant sorrow (v. 17).
 - a. He has a genuine sorrow, in part, because his life is so miserable, but in full, because he knows his misery is a result of his sin.
 - b. This is a small glimpse into the heart of what genuine repentance looks like once again.
 - 2. Notice now that David *finally* confesses the weight of his sin against God, but it is not merely because of the disastrous consequences that he has already suffered.

- a. When he speaks to the fact that he is filled with anxiety because of his sin, he is looking with an anticipatory dread over what future consequences may come upon him.
 - b. He has a concern that the past is but a glimpse into the horrible future he awaits.
 - ii. This is a rather profound statement about the nature of what unrepentant sin brings upon us.
 - 1. It is not simply that we are unsettled about what has already happened, but we are constantly looking over our shoulder, waiting for the other shoe to drop.
 - 2. There is a constant sense of dread and fear of what may come next, of what else might be discovered—but with confession of sin, those fears are quieted.
- b. *David affirms his blamelessness with regard to his enemies (vv. 19-20).*
 - i. Even though David is now facing the discipline of the Lord, he is able to say that his enemies are seeking his harm without cause.
 - 1. He has many enemies that are in full health, who not only hate him wrongly as he says in v. 19, they repay evil for good, and specifically, they oppose him because he follows what is good (v. 20).
 - 2. This is a strange couple of verses to find in the midst of a psalm of lament over sin—but it is not so strange after all if you pause to think more deeply upon it.
 - a. At the heart of David’s cry here is the age-old feud between good and evil. It involves the explicit covenant given to David from God Himself.
 - b. This also shows us the fundamental nature of every person who is a genuine child of God. God’s people still sin, but

our overall disposition is one in which we seek to do what is right.

- ii. In other words, flagrant sin is not the normal pattern of a man or woman who is genuinely repentant, because they actually seek to live in obedience to God.
 - 1. Whenever we become aware of our sin—even if it takes us a while to see it—once we actually do see it, we will have no greater desire than to confess it, and seek to repent of it.
 - 2. This is so vital for us to understand simply because if we are genuinely in Christ, our new nature will have it no other way. We are always a people of repentance.

5. The Genuinely Repentant Plead for Mercy and Salvation (vv. 21-22).

- a. *David pleads to his God for only that which He can give: relief and salvation (v. 21-22).*
 - i. After everything that David has described and pleaded for with his God, notice now he makes two simple, final requests.
 - ii. “Do not forsake me, O Lord; O my God, do not be far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my Salvation!”
- b. *David entrusts himself to his God, knowing that even if all depart from him, God will not.*
 - i. In both lines, we can clearly see that David’s cry is that the Lord will not abandon him in his most desperate condition.
 - 1. He has watched his friends and family depart from him.
 - 2. He has watched his vitality and health depart from him.
 - 3. He has watched his enemies surround him, eagerly awaiting his life to depart from him.
 - ii. He is keenly aware that only God can bring him back from the brink of death and deliver him, not only from the devastating effects of his own sinful folly, but from all those who hate him.

1. Will God help him? In David's mind, just as there is no doubt that his sickness is from the hand of the Lord, there is no doubt that salvation is also from the hand of the Lord.
2. Notice once again, David calls the Lord *my* God and *my* salvation. God is his, and he is God's. There is no shadow of a doubt in his mind—he simply asks that the Lord make haste to do just as He has promised.

6. Conclusion

Small Group Questions

1. Though no one finds the discipline of the Lord pleasant at the time, why do we know it is actually a good thing? Why is it a thing of much hope?
2. We often think of God in only very pleasant terms, but this psalm shows us the startling reality that God will bring us under severe affliction to remove sin from our clutches. How does this shape your understanding of God and why?
3. It is important to keep a balance and understand that not every sickness is the result of personal sin (example: John 9:1-3). David *knew* this was punishment for sin. Without sharing all of the gory details, has there ever been a point where you *knew* the hand of the Lord was against you?
4. Explain the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Why is this difference incredibly important?