

BROKENHEARTED AND IMMOBILIZED BY ANXIETY AND FEAR

Psalm 39: 1-13 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

The Book of Esther is the only one of the 66 Books of the Bible that does not mention the name of God, yet God is all over that book, and His sovereignty and His providence is written on every chapter. As we come to Psalm 39, I see no mention of fear or anxiety, but as I read this chapter, I see a man, the man we know as the man after God's own heart who is brokenhearted and immobilized by anxiety and fear. An unusual feature of this psalm that has drawn me to it is—David resolved a foolish resolve in this psalm that thankfully he did not keep. He tells us he is going to guard his mouth and not tell us how bad things are, and then, he tells us anyway. There is a candidness in David's complaining to God, that isn't extremely hopeful, but nevertheless, this psalm has much to teach us about what to do in the face of anxiety and fear, when we are brokenhearted and immobilized—even paralyzed by fear.

When I think of being paralyzed by fear, I think of Wyoming jack rabbits. Perhaps the greatest cause of death in these rabbits is not old age. Rather, they run out on the roads of our state and see a car or truck coming. Without heading very far, one way or the other, to get out of the way, they bounce to the left, then the right, and back to the left, before their indecisiveness brings premature death. Road kill jackrabbits abound across our state. We don't usually get real sentimental about jackrabbits. But I know we all do get concerned when we see our spouse, our children, or others we love brokenhearted and immobilized by anxiety and fear. As I was preparing this message, I got a call from a woman out of state who told me blow by blow some difficult things that were happening to her and her husband and family. I counseled her to give God another chance to answer their prayer, and not to give up. Suddenly she began to cry and cry. Catching her breath, she said to me, "I'm glad God helped me cry. This is my first time to cry about this." Beloved, there is release in putting our hearts on the line with God as David has done in this Psalm 39. Crying out to God helps us to mobilize our faith afresh and it gives us wings to fly to the arms of God with our broken hearts.

We are living on the cusp of what could be another great depression. In the early months of 1933, the United States was in one of its bleakest times historically. Ahead were the dark purple clouds of the Great Depression sweeping down like a tornado upon our country. At that time, 13 million workers were unemployed. The banking system was failing and soon would

entirely fail, on the heels of the end of the roaring twenties. As the nation was collapsing, a new president was elected, a president who knew what it was to be handicapped. Leading the nation from his wheelchair, few people thought of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as handicapped. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), was elected four times as president of the United States, serving from 1933-1945. These were some of the most turbulent years in U.S. history. FDR gave America the very image of a strong leader. Hidden from the public was the fact that Roosevelt, a victim of polio, could not walk. He was almost never photographed in his wheelchair. Facing the Great Depression, FDR believed that leading America meant helping get beyond the failing of our economy to the failing in our courage. Thus, on March 4, 1933, as he delivered his first inaugural address, President Roosevelt called the citizens of the United States to look fear in the eye and refuse to blink. He declared: "So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself---nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." That was a stirring challenge and it still is. Fear is the overwhelming enemy of our hearts and our spirits.

David too was a handicapped man. He was immobilized by fear in this psalm, brokenhearted and paralyzed. He refused to tell us what the matter was, but as you heard today, the situation was bad. He was like a soldier caught in no man's land, somewhere between friendly troops and enemy lines. He couldn't move in either direction for fear of being killed by one side or the other. Let's explore David's 13 verse psalm. In this psalm I see different crisis moments in David's plight, in his brokenhearted fear. If we acknowledge these crisis moments in our own lives, perhaps we too, with David can make it past the paralyzed state we are in, and on to victory.

BROKENHEARTED FEAR DOES WELL TO DISPLAY INTEGRITY IN THE FACE OF THE STORM. (I.)

Notice verses 1,2, "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." I was dumb and silent, I refrained even from good; And my sorrow grew worse." A pastor once announced on Sunday morning that in the evening service he was going to publicly name the most dangerous member in their church. Needless to say, the church was packed out that night anxiously awaiting the announcement of who this most destructive member was. Then the pastor announced his text from James 3: 5 where he read, "Even so, the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little

fire kindleth. “David knew that to display integrity in the face of wrong treatment would be a huge struggle. So, in his brokenhearted fear, he resolved to muzzle his mouth, to put a governor on his engine. We hear the phrase, “Cool your jets.” Apparently, David knew the danger ahead if he didn’t guard his lips. How many times have we wished we had a muzzle for our mouths when we have spoken unkindly, insensitively, and unnecessarily. Even engaging in defending ourselves in our struggles needs to have David’s concern in verse one. “While the wicked are in my presence.” David is aware that if he lets out his fears and thoughts in the presence of the wicked, they will laugh and gloat over his apparent lack of faith, or his lack of self-restraint in the face of the storm. No godly man or woman needs to make remarks that will rob the Lord of His glory.

How many times have we been on the receiving end of an unmuzzled mouth? Do we guard against mis-speaking? Careless words are more damaging than we could ever know or dream. David knew that without muzzling his mouth, unwarranted words were on the verge of exploding from his lips. Speaking before we think is so easily our habit. Those words released from our mouths are never fully retrievable. We cannot recapture them. So many situations are made worse by rash words. But this guarding of our mouth has not only an up side but a down side. This self-imposed silence came for David with a certain huge emotional price tag. While guarding his tongue, David’s heart was exposed and bearing the brunt of his broken heart.

Notice verse two, that the immobilizing fear and anxiety that shut the lips of David, also further immobilized him. He refrained even from doing good or saying the good things that he now suppressed. This suggests that whatever David’s situation, like Job, he wasn’t completely in sympathy with what God was allowing to happen to him. The statesman Edmund Burke warned centuries ago, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” James warns us in our immobilized times to be careful and balanced. James 4: 17 declares, “Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

Charles Spurgeon in his Treasury of David on this verse, comments. Listen! “David was not quite so wise as our translation would make him; if he had resolved to be very guarded in his speech, it would have been altogether commendable; but when he went so far as to condemn himself to entire silence, “even from good,” there must have been a least a little sullenness in

his soul. In trying to avoid one fault, he fell into another. To use the tongue against God is a sin of commission, but not to use it at all involves an evident sin of omission. Commendable virtues may be followed so eagerly that we may fall into vices. Wisdom and integrity requires balance—a balance of recognizing the value of guarding our tongues while being willing to speak the truth in love when necessary. There is a second crisis moment.

BROKENHEARTED FEAR DOES WELL TO ACCEPT THAT

DEATH IS AHEAD. (II.) Notice verses 3-5. David is hot with fire in his meditating. Whatever his situation was, it appears David had a feeling of some sort of injustice in his situation. Yet, he is asking God not to let him forget that life is transient and death is certain. Inwardly, David is guarding himself, saying, “Be careful, my soul.” Some observations in our troubles make us angry and irritated. The more we muse and meditate, the more inflamed our hearts become. We get furious with inward pressure that gets over the top. We want to strike out, but then we remember how futile it would be and how transient our lives are. After these words, we read Selah. Think of that! Every time I preach a funeral, I think once again that one of these days, I will not be preaching the funeral. Someone else will have the call to preach the funeral and I will be Home with Jesus. That open casket someday will have my body lying in it. It’s not morbid to be honest about death ahead. It’s a Godly reality, I need to embrace and prepare for.

David’s original resolve was not to speak, but in verse 3, now he speaks. The very member of his body he resolved to keep muzzled, he now un-muzzles. Perspective is the heart’s cry of David in verse 4—“Lord, make me to know my end and the extent of my days. Let me know how transient I am. Is David possibly saying, “Tell me, Lord, when am I going to die? Let me know and experience the temporary nature of my life. Verse 5—Show me that my life is but a handbreadth, as nothing in Your sight, man is a mere breath. Think of that!” Our earthly life is no longer than the next breath that we will take. There is a third crisis moment in David’s plight.

BROKENHEARTED FEAR DOES WELL TO LET OUR HEARTS
BOUND BY TIME BE FIXED IN GRACE. (III.)

In verses 6-11, I am seeing into David’s heart, for he feels like a phantom walking around, making an uproar about nothing. (v. 6) What’s the big deal, David asks if we are so short-lived? A life with purpose can face life’s brevity, but in a life without purpose, it is senseless to live. Burt Bacharach wrote, “What’s it all about, Alfie? Is it just for the moment we live? What’s it all about when you

sort it out, Alfie? Are we meant to take more than we give Or are we meant to be kind? And if only fools are kind, Alfie, Then I guess it's wise to be cruel. And if life belongs only to the strong, Alfie?" The difference in David's psalm in his heart bound by time and Alfie's words is that David's heart is fixed in grace. David says in verse 6—if we are just phantoms, what's the uproar about. We amass riches and we don't even know who will gather them. But verse 7 sorts it out rightly. The heart bound by time fears pointlessness and futility at death. No one wants to be a meaningless phantom with a pointless uproar.

At this point, I say—Glory, David. As an Old Testament saint, you get it. In the midst of the futility of his situation, whatever it was, David says, like Andre Crouch—"Through it all, I've learned to trust in Jesus, I've learned to trust in God." In the midst of it all, verse 7, David says, "My hope is in You." What a sweet affirmation of confidence in David's storm. Only God can defeat our fear of our temporary existence with the hope of our eternal life in Him. There is more than life and death and the grave. Follow David in verses 8-11. I get in on part of David's situation. He is under discipline when he writes this psalm. In verse 10, he says, "Remove Thy stroke from me, I am consumed by the blow of Thine hand." (Maybe tell my brother Tim's story with Dad.)

Beloved, how do we respond to God's disciplining hand? In this case, David has enemies around him. He is in trouble. God is using people to bring the discipline. God said this to David through Nathan in II Samuel 12:7-13. Could this be the occasion of the psalm? Not after the prophet Nathan's coming, but could it be while David was absent from his kingdom and his son Absalom was in treason—ripping the kingdom temporarily from him? I believe this is a good candidate for the occasion of psalm 39. Discipline from the hand of a person who is walking in sin—that's tough. Again in verse 11, David repeats himself—"Surely, every man is a mere breath. Selah. Beloved, even when God brings discipline in your life, is your heart bound by time, fixed in grace? Are you still finding hope in the Lord as David did? This brings us to the final fourth crisis moment in Psalm 39.

BROKENHEARTED FEAR DOES WELL TO ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE OF LIFE THAT IS NOT GOVERNED BY THE LENGTH OF OUR DAYS. (IV.) Notice verses 12, 13. The challenge of life is not governed by the length of our days. We can regret the limitations that we endure and live grieving or we can live our lives above the snake

line of our circumstances—and live life to make a difference. David is crying out for God to hear his prayers and see his tears and see his crying. (v. 12) Only when we are more concerned with living than we are with dying will we be able to truly live meaningful, victorious and purposeful lives. Tears will flow in our walk with the Lord. Our lives are but a sojourner's life and the brevity of our lives punctuates the need for us to live all of life for the Lord. David closes this psalm asking God to remove His gaze upon him and his sin as he views God as chastening him until he dies. He asks God to let him smile again before he departs and dies. What this last verse shows me is the honest sense that David isn't sure when or if the chastening he is facing will ever cease or whether it will continue until death. Thank God we have the New Testament—perspective and truth that chastening is not to kill us but to purge us and help us live out the rest of our lives more clearly for the Lord. Turn with me to Hebrews 12: 7-11. God's discipline has an "afterward." We don't have to ask God to remove His gaze on us. He loves us as a father who never takes his gaze of love from his son or daughter. But in the moment of discipline, we as sons and daughters struggle to understand. God wants us to smile again and accept the challenge of life for him. Thank God He brought David through. David's last words show us he made it past Psalm 39.

Turn with me in closing to II Samuel 22:50-51, 23: 1-5 and I Kings 2: 1-4. David came through his trials. God will bring us through and help us smile again. Trust Him. Be not afraid. Let's bow!