

PRAY WITHOUT CONCEALING

PSALM 39:12-13 MARCH 7, 2018

Psalm 39. We'll look at the last 2 verses, which are the last section of this first Psalm dedicated to Jeduthun. Jeduthun was the master musician who was given special responsibilities in King David's administration and who is forever associated with 3 songs in the Psalter: Number 39, number 62 and number 77. We've been taking a look at this first song given to him and seeing the themes that David wrote in it. Themes like the brevity of life and how God corrects and disciplines His people.

In tonight's verses, David closes with a prayer, not of praise or thanksgiving, but of desperation. One of the great and helpful lessons from reading David's Psalms is that we can and *should* always pray honestly to the Lord, without trying to varnish or mask ourselves. If we want to thank the Lord, thank Him big. Same with adoration and with requests. But it's also true in those times when we are frustrated or discouraged. The Lord isn't *afraid* to receive those prayers or angry when we offer them.

C.S. Lewis once wrote: "We must lay before him what is *in* us; not what *ought* to be in us."¹ And that is exactly what David will do tonight, starting in verse 12.

Psalm 39:12a - ¹²"Hear my prayer, O Lord, And give ear to my cry; Do not be silent at my tears;

David's words here are more *emotional* than they are suggesting that God *doesn't* hear prayers. The King himself was the one who wrote:

Psalm 145:18a - ¹⁸The Lord *is* near to all who call upon Him

and in Psalm 65 he refers to God as "You who hear(s) prayer." It's clear from his writing that he knew the Lord is someone who listens intently and responds to prayer.

But, as we've been seeing the last few weeks, David is in a time of depression and discouragement. He's afflicted with some sort of illness and it's having a profound impact on his physical and spiritual life. So here, he bears his heart, calling out to God, and asking Him to listen and respond.

For us it does beg the question though: Does God *always* hear our prayers? Does He hear *every* prayer? The answer isn't quite as simple as yes or no. Because, on the one hand, God is all-knowing and He is omni-present. He knows our thoughts before we think them and our words before they ever leave our lips. But on the subject of prayer we are told in the Bible that there *are* circumstances under which God does not *receive* prayer from a person or a nation.

In fact, some identify upwards of 15 scenarios in which God will not receive or answer prayer. First and foremost, if a person is *not* a Believer, they are not given the same kind of access in prayer. That is a gift for God's children. Now, in the Bible it's clear that when *anyone* calls out to God for salvation, the Lord hears them and responds. Jesus said in John 6: "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." But when an unsaved person prays for general help in life or things unrelated to salvation, they have no guarantee from Scripture that their prayer is heard. In fact, the Bible tells us

¹ C.S. Lewis *Letters To Malcolm*

that God sets His face *against* those who aren't saved. They are *separated* from God and, Isaiah says, God will *not* hear them.²

But the restrictions on prayer do not *only* apply to unbelievers. There are a variety of other warnings given that can impact our prayers lives as well. For example:

Proverbs 21:13 - ¹³ Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard.

Isaiah 1:15 - When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.

In that case, God was talking to His people Israel and calling out their violence.

Psalm 66:18 - ¹⁸ If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.

We can turn to the New Testament and find similar warnings:

James 1:6-7 - ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

Or, 1 Peter 3:7, where a specific warning is given to Christian husbands:

1 Peter 3:7 - ⁷ Husbands, likewise, dwell with [your wives] with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

Now notice that none of these warnings have anything to do with the style or posture of prayer. It's not that if you fill out the form incorrectly, God is going to bounce your prayer back and refuse to receive it. These warnings all have to do with the state of the heart, or the refusal to live in obedience to God.

David, we know, was in a time of discipline because of some disobedience and so here, as he works through the thoughts of his heart, he's *feeling* that hindrance that we're warned about in these passages. Of course, God had *not* abandoned him. The Lord *did* hear and would respond. David *knew* that to be true, but his words here are the outpouring of a heart in distress. But here's an encouragement for us: Notice that it says, "Hear my prayer, O Lord." David uses the name Yahweh there. It's God *Himself* who is on the other end of the line. He doesn't just send us to voicemail. He doesn't have some assistant take the call. He doesn't categorize us into groups like First Class and Coach. He Himself hears your prayers and will respond. Yahweh, King of heaven and earth loves to take your calls and is waiting to hear from you, day after day.

David continues in verse 12:

Psalm 39:12b - For I *am* a stranger with You, A sojourner, as all my fathers were.

² Isaiah 59:2

We heard a great sermon on the topic of being God's pilgrim a few weeks ago on Sunday morning. It was from Exodus 12:29-42. You can find it at calvaryhanford.com/straightouttaegypt.

For tonight, we are reminded that we have a special relationship with God. It's a relationship described in a few different ways in the Bible: Father and child, Master and servant, but here we have that familiar image of the pilgrim. David uses terms that had legal significance in the Mosaic Law. 'Stranger' and 'sojourner' were official categories which described temporary residents in the land of Israel which enjoyed protected status. But the terminology isn't just legal, David also means it to be historical. "As all my fathers were." We think all the way back to Abraham, the first of God's special pilgrims. And from him flowed an unbroken line of generations to whom God had been faithful, not just to *protect* but to *guide* and, most of all, the Lord was faithful to be *with* them. I love how David adds that in there: "I am a stranger *with You*."

The story of the Bible is the story of God wanting to be *with* human beings. That's how it started in the Garden. That's how it ends in Revelation 22. In between we see God walking with Abraham and the Israelites through the wilderness, and the kings and the prophets and the exiles. Then God came in the ultimate act of with-ness: The Incarnation. When Jesus came to earth He was called Emmanuel, God *with* us. Before He left He comforted us with that amazing promise: I am *with* you always. And now we live *with* the Holy Spirit indwelling our hearts until we are finally *with* the Lord, face to face in eternity. God *with* us is all over the Bible and it is a with-ness that nothing can separate us from. And that with-ness is described as a walk that He leads us on - a pilgrimage full of growth and progress and conformation.

David closes us out in verse 13:

Psalm 39:13 - ¹³Remove Your gaze from me, that I may regain strength, Before I go away and am no more."

Commentators make sense of this strange and sad request by classifying it with some of Job's statements or when Peter fell before Jesus and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." Derek Kidner wrote: "*God knows when [how] to treat [a plea like this]. The very presence of such prayer in Scripture is a witness to [God's] understanding. He knows how men speak when they are desperate.*"³

David felt that death was at the door and rooted in this final prayer is the hope that he would be able to return to his life once again with strength and ability to praise and serve and glorify the God he loved so much. And that, too, has been a theme from the start of the song: David's concern about the testimony of his life and how it preaches to those who are outside the family of God.

And then the song ends. We can imagine David drying the ink, rolling up the scroll and sending it over to Jeduthun, personally addressed, and therefore forever associated with him. He would be given the song with instructions to prepare it and present it to all of God's people, that they might sing it and make it their own.

As I've been thinking for a few weeks now, I wonder what Jeduthun thought of Psalm 39. A song that would forever bear his name, even though it was born out of someone else's heart. We know from the testimony of Scripture that he was *faithful* to execute his duty and to present this song with excellence and dedication.

³ Derek Kidner *Psalms 1-72*

Most of us would be surprised to learn that some of the most career-defining hits of many artists were actually covers of someone else's song. Let's do a little back and forth here. I'll say a musician, you tell me what song they're known for.

Whitney Houston - *I Will Always Love You* - Dolly Parton 18 years prior.

Aretha Franklin - *Respect* - Otis Redding, 2 years prior

Joan Jett - *I Love Rock And Roll* - British band *Arrows* 6 years prior

Cyndi Lauper - *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun* - Robert Hazard 4 years prior

It happens in Christian music too. If I asked you what your favorite David Crowder song is, some of you might say *How He Loves*, but that too was a cover. The song was first written and recorded by John Mark McMillan.

And that's all fine. We don't really care when we hear Aretha Franklin didn't write *Respect* because, whether she did or not, that song became *hers!* That whole list of songs are *defining* and forever attached to the artists who covered them. They became part of who those people were.

And what we want to do as we look through the Jeduthun Psalms is put ourselves in his place and remember that we are given songs to sing through our lives as servants of our King. They may not always be the melodies we were hoping to play, but they are given to us specifically. As the Lord prepares testimonies and gifts and callings, He has each of us in mind and delivers them to us for His glory and for our growth. His purpose is to forever associate us with Christ. So much so that He works day in and day out to shape us into that image.

As part of that process, the Lord gives us the Scripture, and songs like Psalm 39, to define who we are. Through our lives we want to be singing the truths that we learn here: That life is short, but full of meaning in the hands of the Lord. Not the fleeting quest for riches like we see out in the unbelieving world, but an ongoing relationship of grace and glory and intimacy with our Creator. A King we can talk to openly and honestly. A King who will correct our missteps. A King who makes something out of the relative nothing of our lives. A King who listens, who loves, who delivers and who gives strength to His people, even during dark days.