

Eternal Lord and Fleeting Life

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[0 : 00] God, we long to meet with you, to hear your voice, and to speak to you, adore you, bring our requests to you, confess our sins to you.

And we want to intercede on behalf of our church and behalf of our city. We pray that you will lead us, speak to us first from your word so that our prayers are winged by the truth of your word, informed by them, shaped by them, so that we may pray according to your will and be confident that our prayers will be answered by you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. We're in Psalm 39. This is to the choir master, to Jeduthun, a Psalm of David.

I said, I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue.

I will guard my mouth with a muzzle so long as the wicked are in the presence. I was mute and silent. I held my peace to no avail and my distress grew worse.

[1 : 30] My heart became hot within me as I mused. The fire burned. Then I spoke with my tongue. O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days.

Let me know how fleeting I am. Behold, you have made my days a few hand breaths and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath.

Surely a man goes about as a shadow. Surely for nothing they are in turmoil. Man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather. And now, O Lord, for what do I wait?

My hope is in you. Deliver me from all my transgressions. Do not make me the scorn of the fool. I am mute. I do not open my mouth for it is you who have done it.

Remove your stroke from me. I am spent by the hostility of your hand. When you discipline a man with rebukes for sin, you consume like a moth what is dear to him. Surely all mankind is a mere breath.

[2 : 35] Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry. Hold not your peace at my tears. For I am a sojourner with you, a guest like all my fathers. Look away from me that I may smile again before I depart and am no more.

In the book that C.S. Lewis wrote entitled *A Grief Overb*, in a tongue-in-cheek manner, he asks this question.

He says, what do people mean when they say, I am not afraid of God because I know he is good? Have they never even been to a dentist? Because he's saying, basically, when we visit a dentist, two factors help us to endure the painful drilling of our cavities.

One is knowing that it's only going to last a little while. Two, it's knowing that contrary to our instinct to flee pain, the dentist knows better than we do and that it's going to end up being good for us, the drilling that he is doing.

And these two simple observations translate to our spiritual life as well and help us endure far deeper troubles and afflictions when we remember that, one, it's going to only last a little while, and two, that God's behind and sovereignly and he is good.

[3 : 52] And in Psalm 39, we find David in some kind of distress and he goes from reflecting on his distress in verses 1 to 3 to a realization in verses 4 to 6 and finally to a request to God in verses 7 to 13.

Reflection, realization, and a request. And the summary of the Psalm is that we are to hope in the eternal Lord and not in this fleeting life. And so first, he goes into his reflection in verses 1 to 3.

He writes that due to the presence of the wicked around him, he has resolved not to sin with his tongue. So he's experiencing some kind of affliction and we don't know exactly what it is.

Probably all the better because then it's universally applicable what he's going through. And he really wants to cry out to God bitterly and complain to him. But he is concerned that in doing so he might speak rashly and presumptuously and sin against God.

And he's particularly wary of blaming God in the presence of the wicked lest he fuel their unbelief in God and their disdain for God's people. So David notes in verses 2 to 3, I was mute and silent.

[5 : 03] I held my peace to no avail and my distress grew worse. My heart became hot within me as I mused the fire burned. So the expression my heart became hot within me is similar to an expression that's used by Prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29 where he says if I say I will not mention him or speak any more in his name there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones and I am weary with holding it in and I cannot.

So it's describing that kind of burning passion a zeal an irresistible urge to say something. And so after reflecting on his distress in verses 1 to 3 of Psalm 39 he goes to he comes to a realization in verses 4 to 6 and in verse 4 of chapter 39 it says O Lord make me know my end and what is the measure of my days let me know how fleeting I am.

So in other words he's saying O Lord when is this all going to end? show me that this will all be over soon that my life is short. And at the end of his reflection David realizes he already knows the answer to the question and so he starts to say in verses 5 to 6 Behold you have made my days a few hand breaths and my lifetime is as nothing before you surely all mankind stands as a mere breath say love surely a man goes about as a shadow surely for nothing they are in turmoil man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather hand breath is a measurement of four fingers basically it's one of the smallest measures units of measures in the Hebrew measurement system and so when he compares his life to a hand breath he's saying that our life is fleeting it's a mere breath it's here today and it's gone tomorrow it's like a shadow he says like that shifts and disappears with the slightest movement of the sun so then he concludes in vain do the wicked prosper in vain do people fret and grumble in this life in vain do people invest countless energy and hours to heap up wealth that they will leave behind shortly and so it's not unlike the way he describes it not unlike a little child in the beach at the beach who is you know with meticulous care building a sandcastle not knowing that in just a few moments a wave is about to come and to wash it all away right just these people who are heaping up wealth and investing in this life and so with that he comes to that realization that we should hope in the eternal Lord and not in this fleeting life this is a really helpful perspective when we're in the middle of distressing times and circumstances

I heard the story in 1852 the English poet Edward Fitzgerald wrote this or retold rather this babel that's been around for a long time it's called the Solomon's Seal he says that there's a sultan who asks King Solomon you know like so if because he had heard of his wisdom asks him hey he's there a saying that you know that will hold true no matter what situation in life that will guide me that can help me in life and apparently Solomon responded this is probably a made up story but he says this too shall pass right you guys probably have heard that I've heard my neighbors use it and so that's helpful to remember right that means our difficult neighbors will pass right yes and our our your illness will pass right it's the your life will pass right David applies this particularly to distressing times but it's equally applicable in times of joy and celebration right so when whatever we are enjoying if it's if it's related to our temporal life here on earth it will pass right the delicious food we enjoy will pass first Corinthians 6 13 says food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food and God will destroy both one and the other right uh sexual intercourse is one of the strongest pleasures of earth but that too will pass right as Jesus says right there's no marriage in heaven

Mark 12 25 so the earthly pleasures will be superseded by far superior eternal pleasures so that phrase this too shall pass helps in both distressing times and uh and in good times to help keep proper perspective on our attachment to earth um and then so after his reflection on his suffering and his realization of the fleeting nature of life he comes to his final request to God in verses 7 to 13 he says and now oh Lord for what do I wait and then he answers my hope is in you so he's saying concluding that we are to hope in the eternal Lord and not in this fleeting life and because God is the only worthy object of our hope right and when our attention turns from this fleeting life to the eternal Lord uh that's when for David the pressing issue no longer is his circumstances his suffering his distress but his own sin so he prays in verse 8 deliver me from all my transgressions right so as so he and then as he realizes that it's

[10:24] God's disciplining him afflicting him for his sins he retreats once again into silence and uh uh and so this this is a really helpful uh truth to remember that even the distress and the affliction uh come from God's sovereign hand right not only is our suffering short-lived it also comes from a sovereign God out of his providence so David prays in verses 10 to 11 remove your stroke from me I am spent by the hostility of your hand and when you discipline a man with rebukes for sin you consume like a moth what is dear to him surely all mankind is a mere breath so David's affirming that God's disciplining him uh as his father as Hebrews 12 6 says the Lord disciplines the one he loves uh and uh and God disciplined David in this case like a moth that consumes what is dear to him right this is kind of hard for us to relate to because we rarely deal with uh moth infestations in our city's context but but moths are pretty destructive right

I mean they you know lay larvae and uh and they consume all kinds of natural materials right it's like wool like hair leather you know anything natural they eat it and it's destroyed and uh and so God's it's he says God consumes like a moth what is dear to him and why does God consume what is dear to us right in what he's disciplining us afflicting us and I think it's he loosens our desperate grip on this world when he consumes what is dear to us right things of this world that are dear to us when he consumes it he loosens our grip on earth and draws us near to him makes us cling to him instead of clinging to this world and uh and so because of that David's teachings we are to hope in the eternal Lord and not in this fleeting life and and with that he comes to this conclusion verse 13 oh Lord I am a sojourner with you a guest like all my fathers he says all his fathers of faith all the people that preceded him were sojourners and this is in spite of the fact that he's already in the promised land right

David is the one that conquers Jerusalem he's in the promised land yet he says he is a sojourner because I think he realizes that all of us our ultimate home is with the Lord in heaven and therefore all the people of God who are on earth are still sojourners and a lot of the New Testament authors grab hold of this idea and use it and as he hopes in the Lord he asks God to pardon his sins because he realizes that's what's keeping him from his full enjoyment of the presence of God verse 13 look away from me that I may smile again before I depart and am no more obviously David's not asking God to go away and not deal with him but he's asking God to look away from him in judgment from condemnation and this is true for all of us right if God were to count and mark all our iniquities none of us can stand right yet because no one can escape

God's all-seeing eyes and that's why right as Christians who have experienced the ultimate redemption of God in Christ we have a better hope than even David knew I mean he knew prophetically of what God would do but he can't really in good conscience ask God to look away from him because God's a just judge but God can look away from him God can forgive him God can pardon him because he looks ahead to Jesus his son who lives a perfect life and dies for our sins and rises again so that his righteousness is imputed to us and so that as it says in Isaiah and other parts God does not remember his sins against us and I mean God's not forgetful he doesn't it's not that he forgets our sins but he chooses not to remember our sins against us meaning he doesn't count it against us and so David's prayer becomes a reality for us God looks away from us from judgment and comes to us looks to us in grace and love only and for that reason we have even more hope than

David to place our hope in him more reason than David to place our hope in him and not in this pleading life