

Measure Your Days

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[0:01] Well, would you please take your Bibles this morning and open them up one last time to the book of Psalms for the summer school is back in session. The boys are back in school, which means we are preparing to depart from the Psalms once more and we'll be somewhere else next week.

But one more Sunday this morning in the book of Psalms, Psalm chapter 39. If you don't have a Bible of your own, you can use one in the seat back nearby. We provide those for you to make it easy for you.

But you do need a Bible open. I want you to have your eyes on God's word even as you hear it from my mouth. So Psalm chapter 39, when you've found that, let's stand in honor of the reading of God's word this morning.

This is the Psalm of David. He says, 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 my presence.

I was mute and silent. I held my peace to no avail and my distress grew worse. My heart became hot within me. As I mused, the fire burned and then I spoke with my tongue.

[1:14] Oh 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, oh 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. Hear my prayer, oh Lord, and give ear to my cry.

[2:15] 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.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever. Father God, we pray once more, would you speak through the preaching of your word?

Would you show us Christ and draw our hearts to him in faith? We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. I love to hear missionary stories, and I was reminded this week of the story of the missionary C.T. Stud.

C.T. Stud. He was a missionary back in the 1800s. He had just about everything going for him. He was born into a wealthy family.

He quickly became a star cricket player and was world-renowned for one of the best cricket players in the British Empire. But when he heard the gospel and put his faith in Jesus at the age of 18, everything changed for C.T. Stud.

[3:26] His priorities changed. His perspective on what a successful life looked like changed. His vision of life and success changed. And he was one of what we call the Cambridge Seven, who left behind their elite status to go and follow Hudson Taylor to China as missionaries in 1885.

The life that C.T. Stud. chose is worlds apart from the life that he left and the life that he could have had. And just to give you an example of this, two years later in 1887, he received an inheritance in the sum of \$125,000, which in today's money doesn't seem like that can buy too much, right?

But in today's economy, that would be well over \$4 million today. And what did C.T. Stud do? He gave most of it away for the cause of missions and the spread of the gospel.

He gave away this successful future, this promising life, in order to face all sorts of struggles overseas. He faced chronic asthma. He lived in poverty. He dealt with heart issues and disease. He ate a diet that was mostly just wet rice. And he and his wife were constantly sick, constantly ill. They had to send their children back over to England. [4:46] They lived separated from them so that they could have a good education there. They voluntarily lived in hostile climates, in hostile territories, with hostile people, and houses made out of mud.

It was a far cry from the life of luxury that could have been for C.T. Stud. And you wonder, what in the world can motivate someone to live like that? C.T. wrote a poem at the end of his life in 1931. By this time, he was in the Congo, again, doing mission work. He was battling the illness that would eventually take him out. And in this poem is the constant refrain that helps us understand his motivation.

He says this, Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Only one life will soon be passed.

Only what's done for Christ will last. C.T. had learned the lesson that David asked God to teach him here in Psalm 39.

[5:52] He learned the bad news that life here in a fallen world is hard. And we experience this, don't we? And we deal with issues. We deal with stress. We deal with sickness.

We deal with sacrifice. The life in a fallen world is hard, especially if you want to live faithfully to Christ. But he also learned the good news that this present life, with all of its hardship, with all of its suffering, with all of this weight of sin, and this present life is a passing moment in the scheme of eternity.

Soon and very soon, our God will come and transform this world, and we who know Christ will be with him forever. Church, that truth ought to shape the way that we go about our lives here and now.

Amen? David, here in Psalm 39, he is dealing with the weight and the difficulty of living in a fallen world. He's dealing with some of these same tensions that you and I deal with here in a fallen world. And he gives us three strategies for life in a fallen world. This will be our outline if you're taking notes. Three strategies for life in a fallen world. The first strategy he gives us, guard your tongue.

[7:09] Guard your tongue. Look there with me to verse 1. Here, it's like David is having a flashback. He's remembering a time of intense suffering. We don't know exactly what was going on here.

It could be when Saul was still occupying the throne, and David faced intense persecution then. It could be when his own son Absalom rebelled against him.

You could draw from a number of instances in David's life. But David is thinking back, and he's recalling this time of suffering, and he remembers a commitment that he made to himself.

Look there at verse 1. He says, I said, I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue. And I will guard my mouth with a muzzle, so long as the wicked are in my presence.

David commits in this moment of suffering to keep a close guard on his tongue. And he gives us two clear reasons why. They're in verse 1. The first reason, for one, and maybe the most obvious reason, he says he's going to guard his tongue, guard his ways, so that he doesn't sin with his tongue.

[8:17] Now David hits on something very important here, doesn't he? He understands how easy it is for us to sin with our speech. David understands that our words have incredible power, more power than any weapon on the earth.

Our words can build up or they can tear down. Our words can lead one another into truth, or they can lead one another into destruction and deception.

Our words can make someone feel like they are worthy, and like they can just go do anything. We can build one another up and encourage one another in that way, or our words can make one another feel worthless, and like we can't do anything.

Our tongues, our words can speak in ways that honor the Lord, as they were made to do, or they can speak in ways that dishonor the Lord, as we often do here on this side of the fall.

Church, when we're pressed, and when we're under distress, when we're suffering, I think it's an all-too-common occurrence that we fail to keep a guard over our mouth, don't we?

[9:25] And we're tempted to grumble, and to complain when we don't get our way. We're tempted to speak foolishly, and to speak quickly, and to speak rashly. Do we realize that like David, we don't have to say everything that we think?

You can, like David, put a metaphorical muzzle over your mouth if you're worried that something might come out sinfully, if you don't. You know, this is wise. This is practical wisdom here for living in a fallen world.

We ought to, as God's people, be very careful with our words. In the New Testament, the book of James, he says something very similar, doesn't he? In James chapter 3, he says, how great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire.

He's talking about your tongue. The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But listen to this. But no human being can tame the tongue.

[10:35] It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.

My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Have you experienced this in your own life? Do you ever wrestle with what comes out of your mouth? You wish you didn't say that thing that you just said?

David knows he is in danger of sinning with his tongue. And so he says, I'm going to keep silent. It is better for him and for us, church, to suffer in silence rather than for us to speak and to sin against the Lord with our tongue.

That's the first reason. The second reason, he says he will guard his mouth with a muzzle because he is in the presence of the wicked. See that in verse 1.

Now think about that for a minute. This is God-centered wisdom here for David. Why does he not want to speak sinfully? He says that he is in the presence of the wicked.

[11:40] Well, why does that matter? It's because he does not want to give the wicked any reason to rob God of the glory that he's due. David's not just thinking about himself and defending himself and speaking that word that he's talking back and speaking against those accusations that are coming against him.

He's not just speaking about himself, thinking about himself. He is thinking ultimately about the glory of God. What would these wicked people say if they heard God's anointed covenant king just grumbling and whining about his life?

What would they say if they hear God's anointed king complaining about what God has brought into his life by his hand of providence? You can imagine how they'd run wild with that.

What would they say about God? How would David's foolish words commend God's goodness to the wicked? We have to realize that God's opponents, even if we don't think that they care at all about what we say when we are in our best day talking about the goodness of God, we can be sure that they are listening when we grumble and complain.

And they will take that and run wild with that to rob God of the glory that he's due. David is resolved, as we should be, to only speak in ways that magnify the glory of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[13:13] Church, I confess to you, this is incredibly difficult. Isn't it? Am I alone in that? Church, I confess, I think about the ways this week, and you take inventory of this week, the ways that I have spoken to my family, to others around me, the words that I thought that I should speak in my head, but it's hard to rein it back in.

This is incredibly hard. But church, God will give you grace. You can speak in ways that honor the Lord. I want you to try it with me this week as we look ahead to Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Take inventory of your speech. Speak carefully and intentionally to only speak in ways that magnify the glory of God.

And church, would you pray for his help? Because we need it. David is determined to muzzle his mouth, but we see in verse 2, that determination only lasts so long, doesn't it?

Verse 2, he says, I was mute and silent, but I held my peace to no avail. My distress grew worse. My heart became hot within me, and I mused, and the fire burned.

[14:25] It's like this image. You see an image of a volcano here? It is bubbling and gurgling under the surface. You've probably felt this very thing before.

In your mind, you're telling yourself, don't say it. Don't say it. Don't say it, right? And you can cover up your mouth if you want, but at some point, that just kind of burst its way out.

And there's no getting it back. It's rumbling here inside of David. It's hot like fire, and then he speaks, but it may surprise you to see what he says and who he says it to.

He doesn't speak horizontally to the wicked at all, does he? He doesn't lash out at them. No, when he speaks, he speaks vertically, directly to God.

And what he says to God may surprise you. He doesn't complain about the wicked. He doesn't wish evil on them even, not at this point. Rather, he asks God to give him the grace of a new perspective.

[15:27] This is the second strategy here. Second, measure your days. Measure your days.

What does David pray in verse four? Look there with me. He says, Oh Lord, make me know my end. And what is the measure of my days?

Let me know how fleeting I am. Now that is a strange prayer, isn't it? David wants to know how long he has to endure life in this fallen world.

God, when will all this be over? How long do I have? Are we talking about one year of this suffering here? Are we talking about two years? Are we talking about 20?

Are we talking about 30? What is it? If I can maybe see the light at the end of the tunnel here, maybe I can press on a little bit further. He asks God to show him, to impress upon his heart, the reality of how short life really is.

[16:32] He says, Behold, you have made my days a few hand breaths. You know what a hand breath is? You look at your hand. A hand breath is the width of your hand, the four fingers across.

Everybody has different size hands. Some of your hands are bigger than others. When you shake Treg's hand, your hand gets lost. You hold somebody else's hand, a baby's hand, you realize how small that hand is.

When David says, it's just a few hand breaths stacked together, you realize how short that really is, don't you? David says his days are just a few hand breaths.

He says, My lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath. He speaks like we read in Ecclesiastes, doesn't he?

Vanity of vanities. All is vanity. This life is short as a breath. How many breaths have you taken this morning? Do you think about your next breath?

[17:30] You breathe in. You hold it as long as you can. You breathe out. David says in comparison with eternity, in comparison with our infinite God, who has no beginning and has no end, as long as our life may seem here, especially in times of suffering, it seems like we can't even get to the next day.

David says this life is just a mere breath. The fact is, church, you and I will not live forever.

I don't want to be overly morbid with you this morning. You and I will not live forever. You are not guaranteed to make it to the end of this sermon.

You are not guaranteed to come back here next week. You are not guaranteed to leave here and go to lunch. You don't know how long you have. And again, when you zoom out of your present life and you look in the scheme of eternity, what is this life?

If you have 70, 80, 90 years, my grandmother is about to turn 99. That's an old life, right? Long life. Not in the scheme of eternity. It's a breath. And it's gone.

[18:50] How would it change things for you to think and to know how short your time really is? Church, there is wisdom to be gained from measuring your days.

Now, depending on where you stand with the Lord, you're going to hear that fact very differently, aren't you? You're going to hear that truth very differently.

The non-believer, those who are outside of Christ, those who have not put their faith in Christ, they cannot take comfort in this. The perspective of the non-believer is, well, you only live once, right?

So eat and drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die. You live it up. And all you have is this life. It's this short window to have as much pleasure as you can in this life.

And then it's done. There's no hope beyond the grave for the non-believer. So you gather up as much wealth as you can and you enjoy as much pleasure as you can. You go see and you go do as much as you can.

[19:52] You have a bucket list that you want to check off before you kick the bucket. The non-believer hears this reminder how short life is, how brief our time is, and that response in their heart is one of fear.

Don't talk to me about that. They respond with this urgency to live it up before the bell rings, before the believer. The shortness of our time here, church, is a great comfort for us.

David is like a runner. He's running and he's rounding the turn and the people around him are shouting, there's just one more lap. You got this. You can do this. And he's yelling at them saying, well, tell me how much longer I have.

How much more do I have to endure? When can my lungs get a break and get some oxygen here? For David and for the believer, the shortness of our life gives us hope.

We are looking forwards to a time when we no longer have to deal with suffering. When we no longer have to deal with the wicked men and their schemes against us.

[21:01] We no longer have to deal with our own sin and the discipline of God in our life. We don't have to muzzle our mouths anymore because we won't have to worry about something sinful coming out of it.

We won't have to worry about how the wicked men around us will take what we say. For the Christian, the shortness of this life is a great comfort ahead of us. I've shared before about our friend Holly, who is now with the Lord.

You all remember Holly? But before she died, she was in the hospital very sick and I went to go speak with her and we read scripture together and we prayed together and we talked about death together and because she is a Christian, we talked about what lay ahead of her after her death. And afterwards, I think I've shared this with you before, I bumped into the doctor who was there in the room with us and he said, you know, we try not to use that D word too often around here. Makes people a little bit uncomfortable. And I said, sir, Miss Holly is a Christian and she is not afraid of death.

[22:10] We talk about death all the time. You come to our church, come on, we'll tell you about death, right? And we'll tell you about the hope that God's people have beyond the grave. It's not an enemy for us anymore.

Christ has risen. from the grave. So for us, for her, for David, death is not the end of her joy. It's the end of her suffering. It's not the exit from her best days.

It is the entrance to her best days in the presence of God for the rest of eternity. The believer hears this reminder. This life is short. This life is short.

And they take heart that this light and momentary affliction is preparing for you an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things that are seen which are hard, right?

As we look not to the things that are seen which are painful in the present, but to the things that are unseen that God has in store for us in glory. Church, this is the key to endurance.

[23:12] And this is the key to faithful obedience in this life. Do you need the strength to endure a little suffering here and now? Remember, this life is short.

Christ is coming soon. And do you need motivation to keep on running faithfully, to obey, to lay it all out and run the race that's set before you?

Christian, remember, this life is short. Christ is coming soon. Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last.

Church, the good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ has conquered the grave to give us hope beyond our suffering. And so, it's because of this that we respond third, like David, third strategy here, by hoping in God.

This is the third strategy he gives us for life in a fallen world. He says, hope in God. David says in verse 7, And now, O Lord, for what do I wait?

[24:18] My hope is in you. My hope is in you. And so he prays. He prays, deliver me from all my transgressions. Now, notice how he starts there.

Notice how he starts there. Yes, there are external enemies. There always are. But David realizes he is a sinner in need of deliverance. Yes, there are wicked men around him.

But David recognizes the first enemy he's got to deal with is his own sin. He has fallen short of the glory of God. He needs deliverance from his own sin.

And Christian, I ask you, when is the last time you called out to God for deliverance from your sin? Nonbeliever, that may be the first time you call out to God for deliverance from your sin.

Do you groan as you wait for the redemption of your bodies? Do you long to be freed from this body of death with all its sin-twisted desires and thoughts that come streaming out of your mouth?

[25 : 20] Do you long to be freed from a time when you have to muzzle your mouth so you don't have to pour out wickedness? Call out to him, God, would you deliver me from evil?

David prays, do not make me the scorn of the fool. God, keep me from being the fool. God, keep me from the foolishness of other wicked men.

Keep me from earning scorn from others and thereby leading them to scorn you. Church, do you pray, Lord, keep me from temptation? Keep me from wandering into foolishness, not for my sake, but for your sake, God, not for my reputation, but for your reputation, not for my glory, but for your glory, for the praise of your name.

He prays, God, would you remove your hand of discipline from me? He gives another reason for his silence there in verse 9. You see it? He says, I am mute.

I do not open my mouth, for it is you who have done it. He sees this suffering and this affliction ultimately as the discipline of God.

[26 : 33] And so he prays, God, would you remove your hand of discipline from me? Remove your stroke from me. I am spent by the hostility of your hand. When you discipline a man with rebukes for sin, he says, you can assume like a moth what is dear to him.

Surely all mankind is a mere breath. When God's children find themselves running after false gods and setting their hearts on the joys of this life ultimately and not on the Lord ultimately, guess what God is kind enough to do?

He is kind enough to take it away. David says, God has consumed like a moth what is dear to him. This is the severe, merciful, hard, but loving discipline of our God.

He does this not to us to afflict us but for us to train us to train our hearts to love him and to delight ourselves into him and not the cotton candy pleasures of this life.

We should ask, friend, is there anything in your life that your heart is so consumed with that if God were to eat it up like a moth you would just be completely undone?

[27 : 59] Ask it another way. Is there anything that without it life would not be worth living? If you can find an answer to those questions that's not rooted in the Lord, you may have just identified an idol in your heart and it's wise for you to pray with David, God, would you deliver me from my own sin and then remove your hand of discipline from me that I might delight in you and then rightly enjoy your good gifts?

Augustine, he says, our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee. David prays for relief but look at this. David also prays for joy.

Look at verse 12. He says, 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. I am a guest like all my fathers.

Look away from me that I may smile again before I depart and am no more. In other words, he says, I don't belong here.

I'm a sojourner. I'm a citizen of the kingdom of God. I'm not like these wicked men whose entire life and whose entire identity is right here, whose entire treasure is here and things that rust and fade.

[29 : 21] I am headed for the kingdom but even so, God, would you relieve me of this hand of discipline so that I can have some joy here and now before I die?

It's not a bad thing to pray like that, church. It is true, yes, we will suffer. It's also true there is much joy to be had here and now.

It's true that our treasure is in heaven but it's also true, guess what, we can enjoy in right perspective, we can enjoy God's gifts to us here and now.

It's true, yes, this world is quickly passing, this life will soon be passed but it is also true that when we have this eternal perspective and when our hope is in him, we of all people ought to be marked by unshakable joy in this life.

That sort of hope, church, that sort of joy, that is compelling. How do we explain a joy and a satisfaction that is not anchored to our circumstances in life?

[30 : 32] How can we explain a heart satisfaction that doesn't get rattled when things get rough in your life? That demands an explanation and when the non-believing world sees that in you, you have the opportunity to say, I have this joy because I have set my hope in Jesus because it is only in Jesus that this prayer of verses 7 through 13 can be prayed with confidence.

It is Jesus who, like David, silenced his mouth in the presence of the wicked, who, like a lamb before its shearers was silent, so he opened not his mouth, who did not take vengeance into his own hands but entrusted himself completely to the Lord, not looking at the temporary relief from his suffering but at the eternal weight of glory that lay beyond.

It is Jesus who knew all too well the shortness and the frailty of this life whose earthly life was cut short at age 33. You know, we would call that a tragically short life, wouldn't we?

Just a breath but it was no tragic accident. This was the eternal plan of God to redeem us from the vanity of life and the struggle of a life in a fallen world.

Friend, if you want to be lifted out of despair, out of the hopelessness and the struggle of living in a fallen world, the only hope is to look to Jesus and to call out to him and to trust in him and to delight yourself in him and to look forward to the day when he will come again to transform this world and usher in the age to come.

[32 : 24] He says, behold, I am making all things new. In that day he will not ignore our tears. He will wipe away every one of them from our eyes.

Friend, that day is coming soon. That day is coming soon. And then we will see just how light and momentary this present affliction is.

How worth it faithfully suffering for his glory was. I referenced the poem from C.T. Studd and I think it's worth hearing in full as we close.

He writes, two little lines I heard one day traveling along life's busy way. bringing conviction to my heart and from my mind would not depart. Only one life will soon be passed.

Only what's done for Christ will last. Only one life, yes, only one. Soon will its fleeting hours be done. Then in that day my Lord to meet and stand before his judgment seat.

[33 : 28] Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Only one life the still small voice gently pleads for a better choice.

Bidding me selfish aims to leave and to God's holy will to cleave. Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Only one life a few brief years.

Each with its burdens, hopes, and fears. Each with its clays I must fulfill living for self or in his will.

Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last.

When this bright world would tempt me sore, when Satan would a victory score, when self would seek to have its way, then help me, Lord, with joy to say, Only one life will soon be passed.

Only what's done for Christ will last. Give me, Father, a purpose deep. In joy or sorrow thy word to keep, faithful and true whatever the strife, pleasing thee in my daily life, only one life will soon be passed.

[34 : 37] Only what's done for Christ will last. Oh, let my love with fervor burn and from the world now let me turn, living for thee and thee alone, bringing thee pleasure on thy throne.

Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Only one life, yes, only one. Now let me say thy will be done. And when at last I'll hear the call, I know I'll say it was worth it all. Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Father, we pray, would we live this life in view of eternity?

Would we recognize the shortness of our days? Would you teach us to measure our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom? Lord, would you show us, Father, that there is only one life and it will soon be passed.

Would you motivate us and strengthen us by your spirit to live for ways that will last into eternity? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.