

Helpless But Hopeful

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[0:00] Please take your Bibles and open them up this morning to Psalm chapter 38. Psalm chapter 38. This is another Psalm of David, and you may have noticed a theme of this morning of lots of talking! singing about sin and confessing sin. There's a reason for that. It's because our Psalm this morning is a penitential Psalm. It's hard to pronounce, but it's a penitential Psalm, one of seven, where David is praying for forgiveness for his sins. The title of the sermon is Helpless but Hopeful, and the idea is all of us in our sin, we are helpless to deal with this problem of our sin, but the gospel of Jesus Christ makes us hopeful that there is someone who can bear this burden for us. So if you found it, Psalm chapter 38, when you found it, let's stand together in honor of the reading of God's Word as I read this Psalm for us this morning. Psalm chapter 38.

He says, There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation. There is no health in my bones because of my sin.

For my iniquities have gone over my head. Like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness.

I am utterly bowed down and prostrate. All the day I go about mourning, for my sides are filled with burning. There is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and crushed. I groan because of the tumult of my heart.

O Lord, all my longing is before you. My sighing is not hidden from you. My heart throbs. My strength fails me. In the light of my eyes, it is also gone from me.

[2:06] My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off. Those who seek my life lay their snares. Those who seek my hurt speak of ruin and meditate treachery all day long.

But I am like a deaf man. I do not hear. Like a mute man who does not open his mouth. I have become like a man who does not hear and in whose mouth are no rebukes.

But for you, O Lord, do I wait. It is you, O Lord, my God, who will answer. For I said, only let them not rejoice over me who boast against me when my foot slips.

For I am ready to fall, and my pain is ever before me. I confess my iniquity. I am sorry for my sin. But my foes are vigorous, they are mighty, and many are those who hate me wrongfully.

Those who render me evil for good accuse me because I follow after good. Do not forsake me, O Lord. O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation.

[3:17] The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever. Father God, we pray once more as we open up your word and sit under the preaching of your word.

Lord God, would you speak powerfully through this psalm to convict us of sin and to show us the depth of our sin, the ugliness of our sin, so that we might call out in desperation to Christ, who has borne our sin for us and his life and his death and his resurrection as our only hope.

We pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. You may be seated. Well, several years ago, our family had left town for a week or so to go on a trip, a family vacation.

We lived at the beach at this time, and so while we were gone, we allowed some friends to stay at our house, and we gave just a few simple ground rules for them while they were there.

Lock the doors on your way out. Eat whatever you want. Make yourself at home. Our home is your home. And, oh, by the way, please take out the trash when you leave. When we got back home, our friends were gone.

[4:32] Some of the food had been eaten, but pretty quickly we realized the trash was still there. For several days, up to a week, the trash sat there unattended to.

Naturally, whatever was there in the trash had grown ripe. It stunk worse than anything you could possibly imagine. And worse than that, when we flipped on the lights, we realized it had attracted all

sorts of bugs and roaches into our kitchen.

We were horrified when we came back into our house and saw roaches everywhere. And so we did what we had to do. We got to work killing the bugs.

We got to work freshening the air. We got to work cleaning the kitchen as best as we could. But the most important thing that we could do in that moment was get rid of the trash.

And take it outside. Because the worst thing we could have done is to let that sit there and ignore it and let it continue to sit. Because the longer it sits, the worse the problem gets.

[5:37] And church, the truth is the same is true for our sin. Our sin, if ignored or unattended to, if left unconfessed like trash that is left out in the heat, it will not just go away on its own.

Sin that is not brought to the Lord and repented of. It sits, it festers, it stinks, and eventually it welcomes all sorts of unwelcome consequences into our lives.

Here in Psalm 38 this morning, King David is dealing with the stench of his own sin. He's dealing with the painful consequences of sin in his own life.

He bears it. He sees it for as ugly and as foul as it is. And so he cries out for help to the only one who is able to remove it from him.

But he cries out in confidence to his covenant God to bear his sin for him. This is the main idea for us this morning.

[6:43] It's this. If our sin is unbearable, we must bring it to the one who is able to bear it for us. If our sin is unbearable, we must bring it to the one who is able to bear it for us.

We'll walk through the psalm in four parts together this morning. This will be our outline if you're taking notes. First, we will see the pain of bearing sin. Second, we will see the personal effect of bearing sin.

Third, we will see the picture of the sin bearer. And fourth, finally, we'll see the posture of the sinner. First, we see the pain of bearing sin.

We see this in verses 1 through 8. If you look there with me, starting in verse 1. Here in verse 1, David is pleading with God to withhold his discipline from him.

David is dealing here with the wrath of God. He says, O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath. He says the Lord's discipline is like arrows that have gone into him.

[7:46] He says his hand is heavy upon him. His whole flesh is unsound, is unhealthy, because of the indignation and the anger of his God.

He says there's no health in his bones. And some see this as a literal sickness that David's dealing with here. And it could be, or it could just be a poetic way of describing this top to bottom, inside and out, entire agony that David is in.

Either way, it's clear to me, David is totally undone because of his sin. And so he prays, God, would you give me some relief from your wrath against me?

Can you just give me a break? Can you let up a little bit? And if you stopped reading here, you might think, man, well this God is just a little bit mean, isn't he?

Why would this God do this to poor David? And sometimes that's how people think and talk about God. Why would a loving God pour out his wrath against his own creation?

[8:50] Why would God be indignant and angry and full of wrath towards his own creation? Why would he be wrathful? And I can't worship a God like that.

I want to worship a God of love and kindness and mercy who just loves us as we are, right? The modern idea of God does not like psalms like this.

God is just presented as harsh. We have to recognize two truths for this to make any sense to us here. Two truths that the non-believer just completely ignores.

One, we have to remember the holiness of our God. And two, we have to remember the horror of our sin. The God of the Bible, yes, he is love.

Yes, he is gracious. Yes, he is merciful. Yes, he is kind. And yes, he is just. Yes, he is holy, holy, holy.

[9:50] Yes, he is righteous. A righteous God can no more overlook rebellion and wickedness than a righteous judge could let the guilty go free. And a holy God can no more wink his eye at sin than a good parent can let his children go and run in the street.

Our God is holy, holy, holy. And he is right to judge sin. And he is right to discipline his children when they want to drink poison or play with knives.

God is holy. And the second truth is that we are not. Not in and of ourselves, at least.

David understands that God is disciplining him for sin in his life. This is not an act of hatred towards David. He is not being harsh towards David. This discipline is an act of love and kindness towards David.

David is a part of the sin that still remains in his heart. David sees he needs God's help to cleanse him inside and out from this weight of sin that he cannot lift.

[10:58] He says, my iniquities have gone up over my head. Like a heavy burden, they're too heavy for me. He is sinking. He's drowning in this recognition of his sin.

And several years ago, I went to dig up some hydrangeas that had been there for who knows how long. I mean, years and years and years. They were just beautiful.

They were flourishing. The owners were going to just get rid of them. And Amanda would not let that stand. And so we went with just a couple of shovels and said, we're just going to dig these things up.

And I had completely underestimated. The longer that bush sits there, the deeper and the wider and the stronger that network of roots goes, you can't just spend an hour digging that thing up.

You got to, it took all day to get that thing unrooted from the ground. The same is true with our sin. David sees and he recognizes these foul words at the surface.

[11:55] They find deep roots in the heart. These impure thoughts on the surface, they find deep roots down in the very soul. Our sin is not just things that we do on the outside.

There are roots in our inner being. It is by nature who we are, apart from the grace of God and Christ. It goes far deeper into the heart and far deeper into the soul than we can possibly begin to imagine.

David is beginning to see this and you see how he's affected by it? He is undone by this recognition of his sin. He describes it as stinking and festering wounds, like garbage that's been sitting out in the heat.

And so he says, verse 8, I am utterly bowed down and prostrate. All the day I go about mourning, for my sides are filled with burning. There is no soundness in my flesh.

I am feeble. I am crushed. I groan because of the tumult of my heart. And I wonder, friend, have you ever experienced this as you think about your own sin?

[13:04] Have you ever been this affected, the same way David is, in recognition of the horrors of your sin? Have you been undone at the recognition of your sin against a holy God?

What I'm not asking you is, have you ever not liked the consequences of your sin? That's common to everybody. Nobody wants to deal with the consequences of our sin. That's not what I'm asking. Now, R.C. Sproul, in his book, *The Holiness of God*, he says, we all want to be saved from our misery, but not from our sin. We want to sin without misery. The foremost spiritual law of the physical universe is that this hope can never be realized.

Sin always accompanies misery. My question for you, church, is have you ever tugged at the visible, external wrongdoing, the fruit that's visible on the surface, and pulled it all the way down to the roots in your heart, and been affected and undone by the horror of your sin against a holy God? David has. But his misery doesn't stop there, does it? Sin not only impacts us individually, what we see in our second point is that it also impacts all of our relationships.

[14:24] Sin separates. And so second, we see the personal impact of bearing sin. We see this in verses 9 through 14. With the anguish and this pain is enough in and of itself, but here we see that David is experiencing these consequences of sin in his personal life as well.

These are the roaches and the flies and the lingering stench that comes from not taking out the trash. In verse 9, we see his relationship with the Lord is impacted.

His relationship with God is now one of longing and deep sighing. His prayers are marked by this need for relief. I mean, these are prayers of confidence, by the way.

These are the prayers of someone who is in covenant relationship with the Lord. Notice how he calls God by his covenant name. Oh Lord, oh Lord my God. This is a prayer to Yahweh.

This is the covenant name of the Lord. David knows that this God is a God who is the Lord. The Lord slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

[15:34] He is a covenant-keeping God who will not abandon his people. And it's this special covenant relationship that bids David come in confidence to the Lord.

And church, of course, we are also invited to come and bring our burdens on him. But don't you wish that we didn't have to pray this way? Listen to how David speaks with God.

He says, Oh Lord, all my longing is before you. My sighing is not hidden from you. My heart throbs. My strength fails. The light of my eyes has gone out.

Church, of course, it is good and right for us to call out to the Lord in our misery. But how much better would it be to not have to do that at all? Now don't you long for a time when your relationship with God wouldn't be marked by these pleas for deliverance and for this sighing over evil and this groaning over all the effects of sin in your life?

Don't you long for a time when you can be driven to your knees to pray in adoration of God and not just quickly coming to him for help because of sin and all its effects?

[16:48] So often our prayers are clouded by our struggles with sin. And again, this is the impact of living in a fallen world. Romans 8 tells us this, that our experience here in a fallen world is marked by groaning.

Indeed, it says, the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Have you ever wished that your conversations with God in prayer were less about the mess of sin in your life and in this world and in your relationships?

Do you ever wish that your mind went quickly to praise and to adoration and less quickly to sighing and longing and groaning over sin in your life? The good news is, one day, we will not groan anymore.

The Gospel tells us this, but here and now, our conversations with the Lord are often marked by this groaning because of our sins. Not only this, but David's relationships with his friends are also impacted by sin.

[18:08] Verse 11, it says, My friends and my companions, they stand aloof from my plague. My nearest kin, his family, stands far off. David is experiencing abandonment and isolation and separation from loved ones.

He's experiencing loneliness. His closest companions have left him. His own family stands far off. It's hard not to think of the rebellion of David's own son, Absalom.

And church, I know that some of you can relate. Have you ever seen sin wreak havoc on the relationships in your life? Have you ever seen sin wreak havoc on the relationships with your closest family members and your loved ones?

Have you ever seen it separate you from those who you thought nothing could ever come in between us? David experiences this tension in his personal relationships.

He is abandoned. His own kin stands far off, but he's not completely alone. His companions abandon him and at the same time, guess what happens? His enemies draw near.

[19:17] Those who seek my life lay their snares, he says in verse 12. Those who seek my hurt speak of ruin and meditate treachery all day long.

He says in verse 19 that his foes are vigorous and mighty and many. It says in verse 20 that they stand to accuse him. Now this is interesting.

That same root word where we get accused is the same root word where we get the name for Satan. The accuser.

The adversary who loves to stand and accuse God's people day and night. All of this again is the impact of living in a fallen world.

Have you ever experienced the distance of friends and the nearness of enemies? Have you ever experienced the isolation and the loneliness of living in a fallen world and experienced the nearness of hateful people who want to tear you down?

[20:18] Or the nearness of your own sinful flesh and sinful desires? Or the nearness of the enemy himself, Satan, and all who belong to his kingdom who want to tear you away from the truth and rip you away from enjoying the joy of walking with the Lord?

If you are in Christ, I can assure you, you will experience all of this. You will experience the painful agony of seeing your own sin for what it is.

If you are in Christ, you will experience the pain of isolation and loneliness and betrayal. You will experience the dangers and the trials and the temptations of the enemy against you in this life if you are in Christ.

The question then, church, is where can we go with our sin? Where can we turn with our sin? We must bring our sin to the only one who is able to bear it for us.

So third, I want you to see the picture here in this psalm, and it's this. Christ Jesus is the sin bearer. Christ Jesus is the sin bearer.

[21:39] David, in his suffering, and even in the way that he handles his suffering here by silently enduring, by acting like a mute man who gives no answer back for the accusations against him, by entrusting himself to God, he is pointing us forward to the great son of David, Jesus Christ, who suffered for us.

And we've seen, haven't we, time and time again how these psalms in many ways are the prayers of Christ Jesus himself. But I want to ask you this morning, how can Jesus pray this prayer?

How can Jesus Christ pray like this? How can the sinless, perfect son of God speak as a sinner under the wrath of God enduring the agony of the full weight of bearing sin?

How can he pray as a sinner experiencing loneliness and abandonment and the closeness of his enemies? Church, he can pray like this because this is exactly what Christ has endured for us.

Jesus Christ suffered for sin, not his own, the sins of all his people. As Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, we're told that he was in so much anguish that he sweat blood as he prayed to the Lord and asked if it were at all possible, would you remove this cup from me?

[23:08] And yet, what did he say? Yet not as I will, but your will be done. He prayed that if at all possible, God would relieve him from this discipline, from the sharp arrows of his wrath and relieve him, remove this indignation from him.

But even so, Jesus knew that this was the eternal plan of God for the salvation of sinners like us. And so he set his face like flint to go to the cross.

Jesus took upon himself the full weight of all the ugliness, of all the sin, of all of his people. There is, here's a theological term for you, there is what we call a double imputation that happens at the cross of Christ for all of God's people.

Through faith in Jesus, when you put your faith in Christ, all of his perfect righteousness and all of his sinlessness, all of the blessings that he has earned by his perfect obedience, all of that comes to us by faith.

It is credited to us into our account. And, at the same time, all of our sin, all of our mess, all of our weakness, all of our stench, all of our iniquity, all of that comes to him.

[24:35] He bears it for us and takes it away. He made him who knew no sin to become sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

There is a two-way becoming in the gospel of Christ. This is what makes it such good news. We no longer bear our sin. He does. And we're not left in neutral.

We are made perfect in the sight of God by faith in Christ. And so, Jesus, he prays this prayer not because of his own sin but as the sin bearer.

He prays this prayer as the one who has endured the wrath of God for sin, not his own. But in our place, he prays as the one who endured the betrayal and the abandonment of his closest companions as Peter denies him three times as his disciples flee at his arrest.

He prays this prayer as the one who allowed his enemies to overtake him and nail him to the cross. He prays as the one who, like David, did not open his mouth to defend himself but rather silently endured suffering as he waited faithfully on the vindication of God.

[25:54] I always marvel, church, at how Isaiah talked about this 700 years before it happened. You see this glorious truth so clearly in Isaiah 53.

I want to read this long passage to you but listen, listen for those common themes here in Isaiah 53. 700 years before Jesus went to the cross, here's what he says. He was despised and rejected by men.

A man of sorrows. Acquainted with grief as one from whom men hide their faces. He was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs.

He has carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way.

[27:02] And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted. Yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shears is silent.

So he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away and as for his generation who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living stricken for the transgression of my people.

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him.

He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt he shall see his offspring he shall prolong his days the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied by his knowledge shall the righteous one my servant make many to be accounted righteous and he shall bear their iniquities.

[28:11] Do you hear the gospel church? He becomes sin. we become righteousness. He takes God's wrath so that we receive God's pleasure.

He becomes like us so that we might become like him. This is the gospel. If you have ever felt the agony of your sin take heart and know that Jesus has felt it.

If you have placed your faith in him you need not fear the wrath of God against your sin because he has born it for us. And if we suffer in a fallen world as we all do and we all will the Christian can do so in hope and confidence that we are following our Savior through suffering and into glory.

So fourth and finally let's consider then in him the posture of the secure center the posture of the secure center we'll see this in the rest of the passage.

I see four postures here in David's heart as we close that we in Christ can imitate and look there with me verses 15 through 22 the first posture of the heart is a posture of hope.

[29:32] Verse 15 David says but for you oh Lord do I wait it is you oh Lord my God who will answer for I said only let them not rejoice over me who boast against me when my foot slips.

In this moment of pain and anguish what does David do? He calls out to the Lord. He puts his hope entirely in the Lord just as Christ on the cross entrusted himself entirely to the Father and waited patiently for this moment of vindication so now all of Christ's people in our suffering and in our pain we can also endure and hope that if we're in Christ we too will one day be vindicated raised up with him the enemy will not rejoice over us because God has already triumphed over him at the cross of Christ posture number two the second is a posture of desperation desperation he says in verse 17 I am ready to fall my pain is ever before me and this is again a complete recognition of his inability and his misery and again this is absolutely crucial church

I got to ask you if you've ever gotten to this point of helplessness before the Lord do you realize God does not help those who help themselves that is not true you will not find that in your Bible God does not help those he is not favoring those who are capable and and strong and those who just need a little bit of dusting off and then they'll be good no our God raises the dead to newness of life you must recognize that you are dead in your trespasses and sins have you recognized your complete inability to climb your way out of your sin and to work your way to God into his pleasure out of his wrath that you're completely unable to do anything at all apart from his grace at work in you third posture it's a posture of repentance posture of repentance you know some of the ways that people tend to deal with their sin is either just to ignore it pretend like it doesn't exist don't tell me about that

I'm fine the way I am or maybe they minimize it it's not that bad I'm not as bad as the next guy at least my neighbor is way worse off than I am logs and specks or to blame someone else for their sin it's a victim mentality well I did that because you did this I am who I am because this system is rigged against me I hit you because you bothered me it's not my fault it's your fault at the end of the day let me just give you another option here I know that this is radical and crazy but let's just try something here it is full confession and admission and repentance look what David says in verse 18 he sees the weight of his sin he sees his total helplessness and he says I confess my iniquity he owns!

it! And he says I'm sorry for my sin this is his full commitment just to bring it all to the feet of Jesus and openly confess I can't do anything about this would you please doesn't John tell us didn't we read this morning if we confess our sin he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness the Lord is far more willing to forgive than we are to confess!

[33:33] Martin Luther says that the whole Christian life is one of continual repentance Cornelius Plantinga Jr.

he says recalling and confessing our sin is a little bit like taking out the garbage once is not enough do you have something to take to him this morning David confesses and repents and then lastly

fourth David responds with a posture of faith this is trust church and dependence and this is what it means this is what it looks like to be a Christian to be a Christian is to recognize the depths of your sin to bring it fully to the Lord to say I can't do anything about this and then in full trust and faith to hand it him and say you got to deal with it and to know in faith that Christ has dealt with it at the cross so that now in him you can call upon the Lord with confidence in any and every trial just as David does to know that nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus your Lord look how he prays! He says do not forsake me O Lord my salvation that's a prayer of faith from someone who is desperate for the help of his God church we have the privilege this morning of seeing this type of recognition of sin and repentance and faith this morning in the waters of baptism we get to see the stench of the old and dead man buried with him in baptism washed clean and raised to walk in newness of life and in just a moment we're going to get to hear James and Alyssa's testimonies I want you to listen as they share for those same common themes of hope and desperation and confession and repentance and faith in Christ and then we're going to go out and see that new life and that new joy and that new freedom from the faith as they prepare to come forward I want to ask you again is there any sin in your life that needs to be brought to the Lord this morning is there any trash that needs to be taken out Jesus Christ our sin bearer has come to take it away and we rejoice to know our sins they are many but praise God his mercy is more let's pray together Father we thank you for the good news of the gospel that starts with the bad news that all of us have sinned against you and the bad news that our sin is more than we can bear but Father the good news is that Christ has come to bear it for us and so we pray Lord would you work in us a heart of repentance and faith in Christ Jesus the only hope for sinners like us and we pray we would live in the joy and the freedom of being made new in him we pray this in Jesus name amen