



Songs in the Night Psalm 38

What Is Your Biggest Problem?

When I was a kid, like today we had fire drills at school. Over time they have become more specialized and practical. We also in California had earthquake drills which I am sure were very useful although in my lifetime I have never experienced an earthquake that caused school buildings to collapse. We also had nuclear war drills which I am sure an important and intelligent group of people planned and organized. Yet even at my young age, I remember thinking that they were a waste of time. If a nuclear attack really did happen, I wondered what good it would do to hide under my desk and cover my head with my arms. At the time, we were all very concerned about nuclear war, but I am not so sure school desks provided much hope of surviving one. There are many global problems today. You probably have a number on your mind. Yet, it seems to me that when we think of problems, we tend to fuss more about the ones that are personal. The spot on your hand that might be cancerous. The son or daughter who is unemployed. Your ability to make your house payment, the argument you just had with your spouse, mice who are getting into your kitchen, trouble you are having with your child's teacher, ongoing depression, dealing with the insurance company over your stolen car. The possibilities are endless when it comes to problems. We all have them. Some you share with others; some are unique to you. Today we will be looking at a song that talks about problems and what it is like to face them.

Psalm 38 is a song David, the king of Israel wrote that described a problem we all face, one that is not just humbling and debilitating, it is in fact deadly. In a sense, it is a confession of a sort. The first four verses reveal the issue. **O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me. Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.** (Psalm 38:1-4 NIV) Most would not see it as David did but at the center of all his difficulties, David put sin. Some would argue its God who is the source of all his issues and theirs. David describes God's arrows striking him, the Lord's wrath attacking his body and ruining him much like Job's friends contended was happening to Job. The problem with all core issues, whether it is why your car won't start or how come you are so miserable is finding out what the root cause is. You can not really do anything with your problem unless you know what is wrong, what the source of the problem is. Was it God or David's own sinning that was brought on his issues in life?

Consider Verse 3. **Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin.** (Psalm 38: 3 NIV) Now this is a serious issue, perhaps the most important one you are facing. Why do you suffer? Why is there so much pain? There are here two different explanations: God's wrath and my sin. It is almost two sides of a coin. On one side is God's wrath and on the other is my sin. Notice that David does not do what Adam did when God confronted him, blame his problems on others. He spun no list of excuses; David freely admitted that he sinned, sinned enough to make life miserable for himself. Yet, there was God's wrath barreling in on him. Sin in many circles is made to be so incidental, so insignificant. I didn't mean anything by it. It was an honest mistake. Why would anyone care what I do in my private life? What does it matter? I must admit that I have often taken this approach to sin, paid it little attention. Is that how it is though...how we should see it?

There are three distinct components to the impact upon us of sin and the wrath of God. The first is the physical component. Verse 7 spells this out. **My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body.** (Psalm 38:7 NIV) We know that God warned Adam and Eve that if they ate of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die and eventually they did. Immediately the body began to wind down to an ending point. We are sadly mistaken if we don't think that our physical ailments.... whether it is a bad back or chest pains are rooted in our sin. That does not mean a sprained ankle is not due to tearing ligaments or high blood pressure is not the result of some physical cause. It simply reminds us that sin impacts us physically in real and specific ways. There also is the emotional component to sin. It damages you psychologically in the deep parts of your personality. Verse 9 points to this. **All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you.** (Psalm 38:9 NIV) Do you remember how Adam and Eve responded emotionally to the impact of their sin. They hid from God because they were afraid. Never before that was there the hint of fear in Adam in particular in his interactions with God. Sin brought chaos to the pair emotionally. And of course there is the social component to sin. It damages our relationships with each other. We have this spelled out in verse 11. **My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away.** (Psalm 38:11 NIV) Consider carefully how Adam threw his wife Eve under the bus when God confronted him about eating the forbidden fruit. He blamed his wife for what he had done. **The man said, "The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."** (Genesis 3:12 NIV)

There are four phases to sin and if you recognize them, you can stop a sin before you start. Admittedly this is easier said than done but it can be done, thus preventing some of the wreckage of sin to you. Phase one is when God says do something or don't do something. "Don't eat the fruit." "Love your wife as Christ loves the Church." You know God has said this is the way you are to live. It is clear in your mind this is a command. Phase 2 is the desire to disobey God becomes overwhelming and at the same time your loyalty to God becomes underwhelming. These two go hand in hand. When you sense this is happening, quickly renounce your desire to sin and turn to God for strength and commitment. Phase three, you break from God. At this moment, God is no longer Lord over you, at least in your view of things. Again, when you realize you are here, reaffirm God, bow before Him in some way, say it to Him that He is in charge. Phase four is of course when you sin, and sin's impact begins to hit you. This can be devastating. You go out drinking and crash your car. You commit adultery and get caught. You lie and feel the guilt. Remember, sin always impacts you, always damages you somehow. You may not realize it for a while, but it changes you, damages your relationships, costs you physically and emotionally in some way. It always holds. The wages of sin is death.

There is much more that could be said about this, hours spent on the psycho/social effects of sin but for now we must turn from how sin impacts you to its effect on God. There are two points that must be made. First, God is love. Beyond all else, He is love. It defines His personality, how He thinks and what He does. So, when we consider each and every command of God, "do this" or "don't do that", they are due to His love for you and His knowledge of what you need. No command is arbitrary or contrary to what is best for you. Second, the Scriptures are filled with statements indicating God's love for you. Many times He refers to Himself as a groom and us as His bride. Both in the Old and New Testaments the same point is made. God loves you as if you were newlyweds. It is crazy to think but you are His beloved and the Bible is clear on that. What takes this to the next level as a point is that not only has He chosen to love you and take you as His precious love, He died to take out of you the sin that makes your life so broken and corrupted.

Isaiah 53 is perhaps the most understated verse found in the Bible. **But he (Jesus) was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.** (Isaiah 53:5-6 NIV) Let it sink in for a moment. Jesus was wounded so the damage sin has caused you can be healed. He was punished so that every bit of guilt you have accumulated over the years of sinning will be removed. All the sin that was your fault is no longer yours because it was placed on Jesus to bear. He loves you. Stop sinning.