

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

PSALM NUMBER: 38

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;*
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER : 38

*A just man's peace and patience in his sufferings:
considering the vanity of the world, and the providence of God.*

1. I said: I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue. I have set a guard to my mouth, when the sinner stood against me.
2. I was dumb and was humbled, and kept silence from good things: and my sorrow was renewed.
3. My heart grew hot within me: and in my meditation a fire shall flame out.
4. I spoke with my tongue: O Lord, make me know my end, and what is the number of my days: that I may know what is wanting to me.
5. Behold, thou hast made my days measurable: and my substance is as nothing before thee. And indeed all things are vanity, every man living.
6. Surely man passeth as an image: yea, and he is disquieted in vain. He storeth up: and he knoweth not for whom he shall gather these things.
7. And now what is my hope? Is it not the Lord? And my substance is with thee.
8. Deliver thou me from all my iniquities: thou hast made me a reproach to the fool.
9. I was dumb, and I opened not my mouth, because thou hast done it.
10. Remove thy scourges from me. The strength of thy hand hath made me faint in rebukes:
11. Thou hast corrected man for iniquity. And thou hast made his soul to waste away like a spider: surely in vain is any man disquieted.

Continued >

(continued from the preceding page)

12. **Hear my prayer, O Lord, and my Supplication: give ear to my tears. Be not silent; for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner as all my fathers were.**
13. **O forgive me, that I may be refreshed, before I go hence, and be no more.**

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 38

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "I said: I will take heed to my ways that I sin not with my tongue. I have set a guard to my mouth, when the sinner stood against me." David, in his solicitude not to lose true happiness, deliberated and firmly resolved to use great circumspection in all his acts, so that, if possible, he should not sin, even by word, as if he heard the apostle saying, "walk with caution;" or another apostle, "He that does not offend in word, he is a perfect man." He commences, then, "I said." I resolved with myself, made it a law, determined "I will take heed to my ways;" that I will most cautiously walk in the way that leads to life, that I will take great care where I put my steps, for fear of falling into a pit, or knocking against a stone, or choosing the slobbery instead of the clean path, or the crooked instead of the straight road; in one word, I resolved and determined to consider and reflect upon all my actions. And, as nothing is easier or more dangerous than to fall into sin through our tongue; for from the inconsiderate use of it, arise "strife, contentions, quarrels," and other evils, so numerous, that St. James said, "the tongue is a world of iniquity;" the Prophet, therefore, emphatically says, "that I sin not with my tongue;" that is to say, in this respect especially, "I will take heed to my ways," "that I may not sin with my tongue," for thus I will escape in calculable evils. "I have set a guard to my mouth, when the sinner stood against me." There is no time we are in greater danger of transgressing through our tongue than when we are provoked by detraction or by insult; and, therefore, the Prophet says, "I have set a guard to my mouth, when the sinner stood against me;" that means, when any ill-conditioned person should irritate me by detraction, reproaches, or injurious language of any sort, then, especially, "I set a guard on my mouth," for fear of giving expression to anything I may afterwards regret.

2. "I was dumb, and was humbled, and kept silence from good things: and my sorrow was renewed." He tells us what guard he put on his mouth. "I was dumb," I was as silent as if I had been dumb, "and was humbled;" kept my patience in the greatest humility, "and kept silence from good things," forbore even my just defense, and

12. "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and my supplication: give ear to my tears. Be not silent; for I am a stranger with thee, and sojourner as all my fathers were." He concludes the Psalm by praying to God with great affection. The matter of his prayer will be explained presently; but we have to remark here, that by the word "prayer" is meant the simple petition; and by "supplication," earnest, vehement, loud petition; by "tears" are meant the affections, that had more effect with God than any words. "Be not silent." He again demands to be heard, without telling what he wants; but he speaks to him who knows what the spirit desires. "Be not silent." Answer your petitioner, despise not his entreaties; for he who is silent on hearing a petition, is supposed thereby to refuse to grant it. He assigns a reason why he should be heard, "for I am a stranger with thee and a sojourner, as all my fathers were." For you know that I do not belong to this world, that I am "a stranger and a sojourner" in it, and, therefore, a citizen of Jerusalem, the city above, though I may wander here for a while. You have, then, a right to hear one of your own citizens, in his exile, crying to you from his wanderings. St. John Chrysostom remarks how great and spiritual a man David must have been, when, at the head of a kingdom, and abounding in riches, he so truly avows he is nothing more than a stranger and an exile.

13. "O forgive me, that I may be refreshed, before I go hence, and be no more." He now explains what his prayer is, that of which he says in Psalm 31, "for this shall everyone that is holy pray to thee in a seasonable time." He asks, then, "with a strong cry and tears," for pardon of his sins, that, his conscience being at ease, he may return in joy from his wanderings to his country: and, in fine, he asks for grace and glory; a petition put up to God, by those alone who seek him with all their heart, and despise the world and its vanities. "O forgive me;" be not a harsh creditor; press me not for payment of the debt; seek not to recover what I have foolishly squandered; "that I may be refreshed before I go hence;" before I leave the world; for, if you do forgive me here, I will not go to rest, but to prison; therefore, "say to my soul, I am thy salvation," before you order it to leave my body, "and be no more" "a stranger or a foreigner," but "fellow citizens with the saints, and the domestic of God."

END OF PSALM 38

10. "Remove thy scourges from me. The strength of thy hand had made me faint in rebukes." "Remove thy scourges from me." I willingly submit to the scoffs and reproaches of the fool, knowing them to proceed from your fatherly correction, for my humiliation; but I cannot stand your scourges, and I beseech of you dispense with them. By his "scourges" he means the racks and torments which God, in his anger, has recourse to; not as a father or a physician, but as a judge, in the spirit in which David already said, "Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger." Such scourges of blindness of intellect, hardness of heart, a reprobate sense, and damnation itself, to everlasting fire. "The strength of thy hand hath made me faint with rebukes." The reason he is so extremely anxious to escape the scourges of God is, because he has had experience, both in himself and in others, of their severity. As to himself— I have felt the force and "the strength of thy hand," blighting and withering me, so "that I fainted" in thy rebukes, when you cruelly and fearfully "rebuked me in your anger." That he did when he suffered him, for his sin of adultery, to fall into the greatest sin of murder; and into such blindness, that he did not come to himself for many months; nor know his state, that is, the loss of his soul: for no punishment is more grievous than when one sin is punished by the commission of another. The apostle, Rom. 1., teaches us that sin is sometimes punishment of sin, and a dreadful punishment; more to be feared than any other known punishment. "Because that when they had known God, they have not glorified him as God. Wherefore God gave them up to the desires of their heart, to uncleanness, to dishonor their own bodies;" and again, "for this cause God delivered them up to shameful affections;" and again, "and as they liked not to have God in their knowledge, God delivered them up to a reprobate sense, to do those things which are not convenient." The Prophet then says, that in addition to such cruel punishment, "thou hast corrected man for iniquity; and thou has made his soul to waste away like a spider." For the sins just named you have corrected the sinner in your wrath, and wasted away his soul like a spider, whose whole time is taken up in weaving webs to catch flies, and is, in the meantime, itself dried up and perishes. Thus the souls of the carnal, by the just judgment of God, are perpetually laboring in acquiring the things of this world, and in such labor waste all their understanding and intellect, whence the soul becomes so dried up and exhausted of the moisture of divine grace, as never to think of its salvation, or to be moved by the slightest desire of eternal happiness; as an antidote against which aridity the Prophet asks, in Psalms 62, "let my soul be filled as with marrow and fatness." He concludes by saying, surely in vain is any man disquieted. Any man whose soul wastes away like a spider, is disgusted without cause, labors in vain, is needlessly troubled, for "what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his soul?"

11. "Thou hast corrected man for iniquity: and thou hast made his soul to waste away like a spider: surely in vain is any man disquieted."

equally just reproof of those who offended me; "and my sorrow was renewed," because I did not defend myself. Such is the explanation of St. Augustine.

3. "My heart grew hot within me: and in my meditation a fire shall flame out." He tells us the effect of the sorrow so renewed. "My heart grew hot within me;" from the sorrow so conceived, my heart began to warm into love, and then I began to meditate on the misery of man, the mercy of God, man's ingratitude, and the overflowing love of God towards all classes, even towards the ungrateful and the wicked. "And in my meditation a fire shall flame out," such a fire as that of which the two disciples said, "was not our heart burning within us whilst he was speaking in the way, and opened to us the Scriptures?" Careful and attentive meditation on spiritual matters is the ordinary way to light up within us the fire of the love of God.

4. "I spoke with my tongue: O Lord, make me know my end; and what is the number of my days: that I may know what is wanting to me." In consequence of that internal heat, "I spoke with my tongue," not with the tongue, as we understand it, but in the tongue known to myself. "O Lord, make me know my end, and what is the number of my days;" we are not to imagine, for a moment, that he asked to know how long he had to live; that would have been a sinful and an idle curiosity; and, therefore, he prefaced it by saying, "I spoke with my tongue," in language of my own, with a meaning of my own. He meant then to convey that the life of man is extremely short, and next to nothing. But as very few seem to know such truth, however clear and confirmed by experience, he prays to God not to let him fall into the error so many have fallen into, of looking upon that to be lasting that was so very transitory. For why are the greater part of mankind so intent on amassing riches? Why do they fight and contend for them so fiercely? Why do they neglect and despise the future so entirely, but because they either do not think, or do not believe that the present life will fly away like a shadow? He says, therefore, "O Lord, make me know my ends." By thy grace enlighten me, that I may know the end of my life cannot be far away; "and what is the number of my days," that by deep reflection I may see how few they are, and how short is my term here below. The following verses will prove this to be the true explanation. For though he was heard by the Lord, he does not say how long he had to live; but he endeavors to prove, in various ways, that the term of human life is very short, especially when compared to eternity.

5. "Behold, thou hast made my days measurable: and my substance is as nothing before thee. And indeed all things are vanity, every man living." Having got the knowledge he asked from God, he states "his days are measurable," so short that they can be easily measured; and, not satisfied with telling that so plainly, he adds, "and my substance is as nothing before thee." What signifies the shortness of my days, when "my substance," my very essence, my existence, is nothing in thy presence. It may be something in the sight of man, who sees the present only, but "before thee," who beholdest the future, who seest eternity that hath no bounds, it is absolutely nothing. For, what are a few years, that glide away so quickly, compared to boundless eternity? "And, indeed, all

things are vanity.” He explains more fully, and endeavors to persuade us of the truth he saw himself so clearly, not only in our life extremely short, but even “every man living,” be he king or monarch, whom all admire, and to whom all look up, he too, is all vanity, for, whatever health, strengths, beauty, riches, dignity, or power he may be possessed of, is all frail, fragile, and passing.

6. “Surely man passeth as an image: yea, and he is disquieted in vain. He storeth up: and he knoweth not for whom he shall gather these things.” The Prophet, seeing mankind buried in such a profound sleep, in spite of the forcible language he had hitherto used, has now recourse to more forcible language, in the hope of rousing them. As it may be objected to him that man’s life, after all, cannot be said to be nothing, when we see so many abounding in wealth, honest, health, strength, and the like; the Prophet now asserts that such things are not real blessings, but the image and the shadow of true blessings; and, therefore, that men are fools in being troubled at not having them, or in losing them when they have them; just as a king who would fret and grieve for the loss of a toy kingdom, while he had his real kingdom. “Surely man passeth as an image.” Man walks and passes through life in the image, not in the reality of things, having before him on his journey, not the realities, but the images and the shadows. This life is but an image of the happy life that alone is the true one; the health of this life is only an image of the immortality that alone deserves the name of health; the beauty of this world is only the shadow of the beauty with which we will be clothed when “the just shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” The riches of this world are no riches, they are merely the image of the riches we shall have when we shall need nothing; for then God will be all unto all. The same may be said of wisdom, glory, grandeur, and everything else we call blessings. “And he is disquieted in vain.” Man, in his anxiety for keeping what he has, or for acquiring more, is troubled. In vain does he rejoice when he gains, and deplore when he loses, as if all those things were valuable, solid, and permanent; while they are but imaginary, frail, and perishable. “He storeth up, and he knoweth not for whom he shall gather these things.” By one argument, he proves how idle men are in laboring to acquire, increase, and protect the wealth of this world. People think they are storing up for their children and grandchildren, who will greatly revere the memory of their parents; while it not infrequently happens that those children die in early life, and the inheritance passes to a stranger or to an enemy. Often these very heirs, in a few years, squander and dissipate the savings and gatherings of the long life of the parents. Often an ungrateful heir comes in, who, instead of revering the memory of his parents, never ceases to damage and vilify it; and had all those things been foreseen, the owners would have sought to lodge their treasures in heaven, and certainly would have had a happy life of it here. See Ecclesiasticus, chapter 2, 4, 5 and 6.

7. “And now what is my hope? Is it not the Lord? And my substance is with thee.” Looking at the shortness and the vanity of this life, so clearly demonstrated, the Prophet determines on putting his hope in God alone. “And now,” in this state of things, “what is my hope?” What do I hope for, ask for, wish for? “Is it not the Lord?” Is he not my hope, my desire. Turning to the Lord, then, he says, “and my substance is with thee.” My life, my riches, are with you; I hold all things created as nothing, I desire you alone beyond everything, because in you alone is everything.

8. “Deliver thou me for all my iniquities: thou hast made me a reproach to the fool.” As he said he despised all things earthly, looked to God alone, and “put all his hope in him;” he, in consequence, adds, that his only trouble is for his sins, and not for the reproaches of men, “deliver thou me from all my iniquities.” They are the only things that can come in the way, and keep me from you; and, therefore, I earnestly pray you deliver me from them, from all of them; the past as well as the future, by blotting out the one, and preventing the other. Here we must remark, that the most perfect, though they despise the world, and seek God with their whole heart, have always something to ask forgiveness for; and, therefore, that they should be always sure to pray to God daily for pardon of their daily sins. “Thou hast made me a reproach to the fool.” This part of the verse has reference to the following verse, and is thus connected with it. Thou hast made me a reproach to the fool, and I was dumb, and open not my mouth. He means to convey, that by reason of his having said that all things earthly were vain and despicable, and that we should put our hope in God alone, he was derided by the fools, who did not understand the things that pertain to God. As the Gospel says of Christ our Lord, “the Pharisees, who were all avaricious, heard those things, and scoffed at him.”

9. “I was dumb, and I opened not my mouth, because thou hast done it.” When I heard the fool reproach me, I neither answered nor defended myself; “I was dumb;” as if I had lost the use of my speech, nay, more, “I opened not my mouth.” I behaved as if I were deaf, and heard none of their reproaches, for those who are dumb, without being deaf, open their mouth, and attempt an answer; but those who are deaf and dumb, neither speak nor make an attempt at it; and he assigns the reason why he did so, “because thou hast done it;” it was you who caused those reproaches to be cast upon me; it was you who held me up for derision. He assigns the very same reason for bearing the railing of Semei with so much patience, 2 Kings 16; “let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bid him curse David: and who is he that shall dare say, why hath he done so?” It must, however, be noted that God did not command Semei to rail at David, so as to make his obedience therein a meritorious act; for we know that Semei grievously sinned by so persecuting David, and that he was severely punished by Solomon fought it afterwards: but God is said to have commanded Semei therein, because he saw his bad and evil dispositions, and made use of them to punish and correct David.