

MAKE HASTE TO HELP ME

PSALM 38

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Our text for tonight is Psalm 38, which we prayed earlier in the service. We will also be examining the explanation of the Office of the Keys as we prayed from the catechism earlier as well.

Last week we heard about some of the harm to the soul that does not confess its sin. This week we have a flood of problems that weigh us down. No health to the body, overwhelmed by guilt, festering wounds, bowed down, searing pain, feeble, crushed, failing strength—the list could go on and on. Our psalm presents the picture of a man who has been deeply wounded and crushed by his sinfulness. But David’s problems (and ours) get worse: his friends abandon him, and his enemies use David’s weakness to try and destroy him.

What a true picture of life under sin! Sometimes with sin, it sticks out like a festering sore that the entire world can see, except for yourself. Your pride won’t let you see the plank sticking out of your eye. Peter could not see that his pride led him to a great fall by denying Christ to the world. In the same way, we are all by nature spiritually blind and dumb and incapable of seeing our sin for what it truly is.

God then has His way with us through Law and Gospel. David, in our psalm, has God’s Law heavy upon him. The arrows of God’s Law have pierced him. The Law has awakened in him the knowledge of his sinfulness. As Paul said, “through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20b). David finally sees how his sin has destroyed his life. His health his gone, his friends have abandoned him; his enemies are at the gate.

Yet at the bottom of all of this is the reality of sin and forgiveness. Saint Augustine once said regarding this psalm, “But happy he is who is wretched after this manner!”¹ Augustine echoes the words of Jesus, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). David mourns and laments his sins. He recognizes the depth of his sinfulness and the harm that his sinful nature does to him in both body and soul.

So the question tonight is this: do you? Do you see yourself in this psalm? Has God’s Law had its way in your heart, so that you mourn your sinfulness and fear God’s just wrath? We live in an age where no one is responsible for anything. It’s my parent’s fault. That’s the way I was raised. It’s in my genes. Whatever. But God’s Law will not let you or I pass the buck. As David prays, “I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin” (Psalm 38:18). Confession is saying the same thing about yourself that God says about you. You are a sinner. Notice in this psalm that David never tries to pass the blame. These troubles of body and spirit weigh heavy upon him because of his sin, not someone else’s.

This is what the catechism has in mind when we speak of the office of the keys. Hear again the explanation from the Small Catechism:

What do you believe according to these words?

¹ Saint Augustine, *On the Psalms: Psalm 38* in Philip Schaaf, ed. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 8:103.

I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.

Notice the two sides to this coin. God's Word has two sides, Law and Gospel, and therefore the called ministers of Christ must deal with God's flock by Law and Gospel. God crushes with the Law, but builds anew with the Gospel.

Through the lens of the Law you see yourself in this psalm. Crushed, broken, alone, forsaken, apart from God. You have only the cry of the beggar: "Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!" (Psalm 38:22).

Now look at this psalm through the eyes of Jesus. Look at this through the eyes of the Gospel. Isaiah said of the Suffering Servant that "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5). And again Paul wrote, "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ cried out from the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Psalm 22:1). This same Jesus who shed tears of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane prays this psalm for you.

So pray this psalm again in light of Individual Confession and Absolution. Remember what Jesus gave up for you. He took your sin upon Himself. He groans, He suffers, He bleeds, He has no health in His body, He is abandoned by His friends, betrayed by His disciples, His enemies rise up around Him. His back is filled with searing pain. His strength fails. The light left His eyes in death. The One who had no sin bore that sin, that wretched pain and death for you on the cross.

This is the gift of Holy Absolution, of forgiveness. When you come before the pastor and confess your sins, all of Christ's work on the cross comes to bear for you, personally and individually. The Words of Absolution ring out with words of sweetest Gospel:

In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. (*LSB*, p. 293)

Today you still suffer the earthly consequences of sin. You still hurt. There are still aches and pains and even worse consequences for our sins. But those consequences have no teeth. Ultimately, they cannot harm you, for you are in Christ, and His words of forgiveness release you from your debt.

Those words of forgiveness were bought with a terrible price: the death of God's Son. But God gives this forgiveness to you freely with joy! While Peter denied our Lord three times, He claims you as His own every time. You are not abandoned. You are His.

So we pray with David, with Jesus, and with all the hosts of heaven: "Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!" (Psalm 38:22). We pray this with repentant joy because we know that God comes, and He forgives your sins and makes your life anew. In the strong name of Jesus. Amen.