

Coach House Church

BEACONS

BUT A BREATH

23 APRIL 2021

Psalm 39

"I said to myself 'I will watch what I do and not sin in what I say. I will hold my tongue when the ungodly are around me'

But as I stood there in silence – not even speaking of good things – the turmoil within me grew worse. The more I thought about it, the hotter I got, igniting a fire of words.

'Lord, remind me how brief my time on the earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered – how fleeting my life is.

You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand. My entire lifetime is just a moment to you, at best each of us is but a breath'

We are merely moving shadows, and all our busy rushing ends in nothing. We heap up wealth, not knowing who will spend it. And so, Lord, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in you. Rescue me from my rebellion. Do not let fools mock me. I am silent before you; I won't say a word, for my punishment is from you. But please stop striking me! I am exhausted by the blows from your hand. When you discipline us for our sins, you consume like a moth what is precious to us. Each of us is but a breath.

Hear my prayer, O Lord! Listen to my cries for help!

For I am your guest – a traveller passing through, as my ancestors were before me. Leave me alone so I can smile again before I am gone and exist no more"

Do you ever feel frustrated with the behaviour or attitude of others? Do you ever feel that you suffer somehow and that this suffering is disproportionate? Is it unfair that you have to suffer when others don't? Why does bad stuff always happen to me?

This Psalm was written by King David. Surely he didn't have to suffer as much as me, after all, he was a king with wealth and servants and security! What would he now about true suffering? Well it seems he knew enough about it to write this Psalm. You see David wasn't always a king. He was born as the youngest son in a large family and spent much of his younger days tending sheep. Later, when he was serving the then king, Saul, the king fell out with David and pursued him with a view to killing him. God kept David through that, but later, when David should have been doing Gods will, he sinned with another man's wife. From this point on David's life fell apart, his child died, he had to deal with civil war and threats to his throne and, on top of this, he had some really difficult issues with his own family. Perhaps David did know a few things about suffering.

Well the result of all this seems to be that David began to question the meaning of life. Twice in the Psalm he notes that "Each of us is but a breath" Even for those of us lucky enough to live to be 100 years old, life is still but a brief moment in the bigger picture. David notes that "We are merely moving shadows, and all our busy rushing ends in nothing. We heap up wealth, not knowing who will spend it." Within that brief period David suffers from what he describes as "Blows from God's hand" He feels as though his suffering is somehow punishment for what he has done. Sometimes we can feel the same way. We know what we have done, we said sorry, maybe we even made some form of restitution yet still we credit our sufferings as being a punishment from God. David was fully aware of what he had done, he had repented of his sin and God even credits David as being a man after his own heart. What this means is that David's heart, his desires and plans, were aligned with what God wanted him to do. It doesn't mean that David was infallible, we all are, but that he wanted to do the right thing even when he didn't.

In this Psalm David's desire to do the right thing is demonstrated by one quality. Despite his frustrations and anger he eagerly desired to hold his tongue. He had no desire to air his views to ungodly people. He recognised that complaining about how God had ordered his days would not give glory to God. This lesson is applicable to us today. People outside of the church love to hear Christians complaining about things, they take it as justification for why they don't believe. In his second letter to Timothy Paul says "A time is coming when people will no

longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths"

I know that for myself I do like to have a moan about things. Somehow moaning about things seems to make us feel better, but I feel challenged by this Psalm to ask myself "What effect is this having on other people?" Perhaps I should "hold my tongue when the ungodly are around me" and for good measure maybe extend that to the godly as well. If holding back makes me get hotter inside then the answer is to ask the Lord the same question David did "Lord, remind me of how brief my time on the earth will be"

One person who was silent at the right time in the presence of the ungodly was Jesus. Under questioning from the high priest the gospel writers tell us that Jesus said nothing. This fulfilled one of the prophecies written about Him in the book of Isaiah. "He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth"

Jesus had already said what He needed to say before being led to the slaughter. To those who were willing to listen He had told them that they could be saved, that this life would not be meaningless, nor would death be the end. To those who believed in Him, he would give eternal life; to those who would not listen, there was no point in saying any more.

The psalmist, King David, was at a disadvantage here, because he did not know who Jesus was. He knew that his saviour was coming, so in one sense he did know about Jesus, but living when he did, he had to rely on sacrificing bulls and goats and his faith in God the Father. We however have the security of knowing that faith in Jesus alone is sufficient.

One thing that has not changed though is that this life is still "but a breath", it is brief, whether we are godly or not; so we should take note of David's advice and Jesus example in the presence of the ungodly. Keep our thoughts to ourselves, then we will know that we have not led anyone astray. Perhaps, as it says elsewhere in scripture, by our good example, we might win some of the lost for Christ. Life is indeed too short to spend it getting angry. It is far better indeed to use what little time we have wisely, by accepting what God has given us, rather than what He has not, and to serve Him faithfully until He returns or calls us home.



STEVE ADSHEAD



Coach House Church

leadership@coachhousechurch.org //

0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn