Psalm 38 — Sick with Sin

1.0 Introducing Psalm 38

- Psalm 38 is one of the penitential psalms (6; 32; 51; 102; 130; 143).
- Psalms 6 and 38 have a number of similarities.
- It is a prayerful lament regarding the condition David finds himself in because of a sin he had committed.
- Scripture nowhere explicitly refers to this time of illness that David experienced.
- Compare the exhortation to “Wait for the LORD” in 37:34 with the expression of hope in 38:15, “For I hope in You, O LORD.”
- Psalms 38 and 70 both include “for a memorial” in their headings. This could be a reference to the memorial offering (cf. Leviticus 5:12-13).

2.0 Reading Psalm 38 (NAU)

A Psalm of David, for a memorial.

38:1 O LORD, rebuke me not in Your wrath,
       And chasten me not in Your burning anger.

38:2 For Your arrows have sunk deep into me,
       And Your hand has pressed down on me.

38:3 There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation;
       There is no health in my bones because of my sin.

38:4 For my iniquities are gone over my head;
       As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me.
38:5 My wounds grow foul and fester
    Because of my folly.
38:6 I am bent over and greatly bowed down;
    I go mourning all day long.
38:7 For my loins are filled with burning,
    And there is no soundness in my flesh.
38:8 I am benumbed and badly crushed;
    I groan because of the agitation of my heart.

38:9 Lord, all my desire is before You;
    And my sighing is not hidden from You.
38:10 My heart throbs, my strength fails me;
    And the light of my eyes, even that has gone from me.
38:11 My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague;
    And my kinsmen stand afar off.
38:12 Those who seek my life lay snares for me;
    And those who seek to injure me have threatened destruction,
    And they devise treachery all day long.

38:13 But I, like a deaf man, do not hear;
    And I am like a mute man who does not open his mouth.
38:14 Yes, I am like a man who does not hear,
    And in whose mouth are no arguments.
38:15 For I hope in You, O Lord;
    You will answer, O Lord my God.
38:16 For I said, “May they not rejoice over me,
    Who, when my foot slips, would magnify themselves against me.”
38:17 For I am ready to fall,
    And my sorrow is continually before me.
38:18 For I confess my iniquity;
    I am full of anxiety because of my sin.
38:19 But my enemies are vigorous and strong,
    And many are those who hate me wrongfully.
38:20 And those who repay evil for good,
    They oppose me, because I follow what is good.

38:21 Do not forsake me, O Lord;
    O my God, do not be far from me!
38:22 Make haste to help me,
    O Lord, my salvation!

For the choir director, for Jeduthun.
3.0 Understanding Psalm 38

3.1 Outline

I. Prayer for Mercy (vv. 1-8)
II. Prayer for Relief (vv. 9-12)
III. Prayer of Confession (vv. 13-20)
IV. Prayer for Help (vv. 21-22)

3.2 Notes

- v. 1 See Psalm 6:1.

- v. 3 “because of my sin”
  ■ Sin is not the cause of every illness. In this case, however, David’s illness is the result of his iniquity (cf. v. 4).
    ✓ “Have I sinned or gotten off the track of obedience to what I know I should be doing, and is this setback God’s way of getting me back on track and into fellowship with him?”
    ✓ “Is God using this to trim off some rough edges of my personality and develop a more Christ-like character in me?”
    ✓ “Is God using my suffering as a stage upon which his name and wisdom may be glorified? Is it a place for me to show that I love him for who he is, entirely apart from whatever material and physical benefits he may have given me?”

- v. 5 “my folly”
  ■ Looking at sin as folly focuses on the fact that David knew better than to sin.
  ■ His sin was the opposite of godly wisdom.

- vv. 13-14 “deaf … mute”
  ■ David feels totally isolated from everyone around him and from the comforts he once enjoyed.
  ■ Those who suffer from depression sometimes feel this isolation because they desire to be alone in their depression — they become too self-centered.
v. 15 “You will answer”
- David was deep in depression, but he still realized that his way out of depression depended upon his God.

v. 20 “I follow what is good”
- “David’s sins, however serious, were those of a man whose fundamental choice was to follow after good, …”—Derek Kidner, Psalms 1–72, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 155.

vv. 21-22 “LORD … my God … Lord”
- “LORD” focuses on God’s covenant relationship to His people.
- “My God” expresses the intimate relationship David enjoyed with God.
- “Lord” emphasizes the sovereign authority of the Master of the universe and of the psalmist.

4.0 Singing Psalm 38 (Tune: “Am I A Soldier of the Cross?”)

1 Amidst thy wrath remember love,
   Restore thy servant, Lord;
   Nor let a Father’s chast’ning prove
   Like an avenger’s sword.

2 Thine arrows stick within my heart,
   My flesh is sorely pressed;
   Between the sorrow and the smart,
   My spirit finds no rest.

3 My sins a heavy load appear,
   And o’er my head are gone;
   Too heavy they for me to bear,
   Too hard for me t’ atone.

4 My thoughts are like a troubled sea,
   My head still bending down;
   And I go mourning all the day,
   Beneath my Father’s frown.

5 Lord, I am weak and broken sore,
   None of my powers are whole:
   The inward anguish makes me roar,
   The anguish of my soul.

6 All my desire to thee is known,
   Thine eye counts every tear;
   And every sigh, and every groan,
   Is noticed by thine ear.

7 Thou art my God, my only hope;
   My God will hear my cry;
   My God will bear my spirit up,
   When Satan bids me die.

8 [My foot is ever apt to slide,
   My foes rejoice to see ’t;
   They raise their pleasure and their pride
   When they supplant my feet.

9 But I’ll confess my guilt to thee,
   And grieve for all my sin;
   I'll mourn how weak my graces be,
   And beg support divine.

10 My God, forgive my follies past,
    And be for ever nigh;
    O Lord of my salvation, haste,
    Before thy servant die.]

— Isaac Watts
5.0 Praying Psalm 38

- I have been foolish and have sinned, Lord. [v. 5]
- Behold my illness and give me relief, O God. [v. 9]
- Father, my hope is in You. [v. 15]
- Father, forgive me, because I have sinned against You. [v. 18]
- Lord, You alone are my salvation. [v. 22]

6.0 Applying Psalm 38

- Sickness can be the result of sin.
- Sin must be confessed and we must demonstrate a disposition to do good.
- Depression’s antidote or cure rests with God — we must turn to Him in prayer.