

ACTS OF WORSHIP—CONFESSION: PSALM 38

PSALM 38 (NIV)

A psalm of David. A petition.

Western individualism informs our culture, which in turn influences our spirituality, including the practice of confession as morality within our guilt-innocence worldview.

True guilt-innocence cultures rely on an internalized conviction of sin as the enforcer of good behavior. Guilt cultures emphasize punishment and forgiveness as ways of restoring the moral order. – Paul Hiebert

Proposition: The Biblical worldview is holistic. It's not primarily about behavior modification, it is about complete regeneration. The Gospel is God making all things new in Christ Jesus.

It is a death/life dialectic that is externalized to all of creation. Not just an internalized moral right/wrong dilemma within our conscience.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our sins—it is by grace you have been saved. Ephesians 2:4-5

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:23

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10

Seen produces brokenness in God's creation which leads to death. This affects all parts of who we are.

THE FOUR PLEAS OF PSALM 38

1. Plea for a Broken relationship with God (v.1-2)

Repairing what's broken starts with reconciling the most fundamental relationship in our lives, the one with our Creator. The first consequence of sin is a broken relationship with God.

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. – Psalm 51:4

2. Plea for a Broken sense of self (v3-8)

David's attention turns to himself. His identity. Who he is a person in his current condition.

"That David describes a natural disease here cannot reasonably be doubted; but what that disease was, who shall attempt to say? However, this is evident, that whatever it was, he most deeply deplored the cause of it; and as he worthily lamented it, so he found mercy at the hand of God." (Clarke)

"Because of my sin." Twice David points to the source of his brokenness. While many times the fruit of our sin is evident, we hesitate to deal with the root causes of it which lie below the surface.

David's plea is not just to medicate his symptoms, but for the cure to his condition.

3. Plea for broken relationship with others (9-12)

David's language changes. Sin's brokenness has extended to his relational self.

Peace flees while conflict draws near in a life of sin. Where once he was surrounded by friends and relatives, now he's sieged by harm, as one who feels like a prey (snare, traps).

2-sided lament. He is both the wrongdoer but also the victim of other people's sin. He gives us language to repent but also cry out for justice.

"Traditional theology has emphasized one-sidedly the sin of all people, while ignoring the pain of the victim. Its doctrine of sin must be complemented by dealing with the suffering of the victim." Soong-Chan Rah

4. Plea for a broken view of reality (13-20)

David has poetically lost his senses. Sin has disrupted his view of reality and perception of truth. He is living a deception. Truth is hidden from his eyes. His senses mislead him.

We can't really on our senses alone to discern what is "good" and "true".

A Tale of Gardens and Deserts

Adam and Eve in the Garden

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was **good for food and pleasing to the eye**, and also **desirable for gaining wisdom**, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Genesis 3:6

Jesus in the Desert

After fasting forty days and forty nights, **he was hungry**. The tempter came to Him and said, **"If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."** Matthew 4:2-3

As Christians, we are offered another epistemology. We know truth as it is revealed in Scripture, that God is faithful to carry out his purposes in the world.

He calls us to a covenant relationship with him that transcends the temporality of our triumphs or tragedies. Our consolation and desolation.

We need to discern the reality around through faith.

Transition: In the US we value positive experiences. Culturally, we prefer a liturgy of celebration. In turn, we truly lack a liturgy of lamentation, like the one in this Psalm. It's not that we can't lament, but our lament doesn't often lead to lasting change.

"The American evangelical culture moves too quickly to praise from lament. We do not hear from all of the voices in the North American evangelical context. Instead, we opt for quick and easy answers to complex issues. We want to move on to the happier message of success and triumph and cover up the message of those who suffer." Soong-Chan Rah – *Prophetic Lament*

Conclusion

This entire Psalm is written in the first person but it was used as a liturgical confession for the people of God in their congregational worship. David is a prophet-king who is leading all of God's people in a deep lament over the consequences of sin among them. This is a poem of pain and pleading, meant to give us a liturgy of lament in all aspects of life. But it's also a tenet of trust.

v. 21-22 - David uses 3 words for God in two verses. (YAHWEH, Elohim and Adonai). That repeated use is meant to add emphasis. It reads like an affirmation of hope!

So, if sin is brokenness which leads to death, then what is confession? It can't just be a heartless admission or a mindless absolution from guilt. Confession is a practice that leads to healing of what is broken by sin.

"Confess your sin to one another so that you may be healed." – James 5:16

The Gospel challenges our values and transforms our worldview. In God's story, He is making all things new in Christ. We are a hope-inspired people, humbled by the cross, made alive in Christ. This is the very hope that flows into the world through the ministry of reconciliation and restores what is broken.

"Faith sees in the resurrection of Christ not the eternity of heaven, but the future of the very earth on which his cross stands. It sees in Christ the future of the very humanity for which he died. That is why it finds the cross, the hope of the earth." Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*

Questions

1- The Bible promotes a holistic worldview that hinges on a death to life dialectic. How have you experienced new life in Christ after coming to faith in him?

2- In Psalm 38, David gives us language and space to lament/confess our sins both as the offender and the victim of brokenness. What spaces have you found that have promoted healing and reconciliation in your own life and others?

3- In life we go through gardens and deserts. What resources have you relied on to discern God's direction through times of consolation and desolation in your life? What have those times revealed to you about the character and purpose of God?

4- Confession is a practice that heals the brokenness caused by sin. Can you recall a moment where your willingness to confess brought about wholeness?