

Psalms 39:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good;
and my sorrow was stirred.

Analysis

I was dumb with silence ('illamti dūmiyyāh, אָלַמְתִּי דוּמִיָּא)—David employs two Hebrew words for silence, intensifying the image. 'Illēm means mute, unable to speak, while dūmiyyāh suggests the silence of death or the grave (Psalm 94:17). This wasn't peaceful quiet but forced muteness, the silence of someone choking back words.

I held my peace, even from good—The Hebrew ḥāsîthî (חָשִׁיתִי, restrained/withheld) suggests painful restraint. David censored even **from good** (miṭṭôḇ, מִטּוֹב)—possibly meaning good speech, praise of God, or beneficial words. His self-imposed silence prevented not just complaint but any verbal expression. **And my sorrow was stirred** (ūḵə'ēḇî ne'kār, וְכָאֲבִי נֶעְכָּר)—the verb nā'ḵar means to be agitated, troubled, or roiled up like turbulent water. The attempt to suppress grief only intensified it.

David's experience reveals the futility of bottling up lament. Suppressed grief doesn't dissipate; it festers. The Psalter gives permission to bring unfiltered emotions before God—not irreverent complaint but honest wrestling. Jesus Himself would later express deep sorrow (Matthew 26:38) and cry out in anguish (Matthew 27:46), validating human emotion in relationship with God. Silence before the wicked (v. 1) is wisdom, but silence before God denies the intimacy He invites.

Historical Context

David wrote this psalm "to Jeduthun," one of his appointed worship leaders (1 Chronicles 16:41-42). The context suggests David's later reign, possibly during Absalom's rebellion when speaking freely could have been dangerous. Physical illness (vv. 10-11) compounded his distress, creating a crisis of both body and soul.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What emotions or struggles are you trying to suppress instead of bringing honestly before God in prayer?
2. How does distinguishing between silence before enemies (wisdom) and silence before God (relational distance) guide your speech?
3. In what ways might your attempts to 'hold your peace' actually be preventing the healing that comes through lament?

Interlinear Text

נָאֵל מְתִי

I was dumb

H481

דּוֹמָה

with silence

H1747

הִחַשׁ יָתִי

I held my peace

H2814

מִטּוֹב

even from good

H2896

וּכְאֵבִי

and my sorrow

H3511

נִעְכָּר:

was stirred

H5916

Additional Cross-References

Acts 4:20 (Parallel theme): For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

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