

An Evening Prayer of Trust

Psalm 4 (KJV)

1 Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer. **2** O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing? Selah. **3** But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the Lord will hear when I call unto him. **4** Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah. **5** Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord. **6** There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. **7** Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. **8** I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.

Looking Back to Where We Have Been

There is a richness in the word of God that comes to those who desire to know it and understand it. The Psalms, the prayers of Israel, and the praises of Israel, all pour forth from the various writers in this book.

There are more than seven men who composed the Psalms. Some of those men are easily identifiable, while others are hidden to us and will only be known to us when we get to heaven.

David—Wrote at least 73 of the Psalms.

The sons of Korah—Accounted for ten of them (42; 44-49; 84-85; & 87).

Asaph—Wrote 12 of them (50; 73-83).

Solomon—Wrote two (72, 127).

Moses—Wrote one (90).

Heman—Wrote one (88).

Ethan—Wrote one (89).

The remaining fifty psalms remain anonymous to us, although Ezra is thought to be the writer of some of those.

What makes the Psalms even more compelling is when you consider who the author was and what the conditions were that surrounded the writing of that psalm.

An Evening Prayer of Trust

This psalm introduces us to the first of fifty-five assignments to the director of the worship. We find that in the superscription of this psalm. To the chief musician. There is also another word that is noted there, the word is Neginoth. It literally has the meaning of "smitings." There are other Psalms that relate to this word also: 4; 6; 54; 55; 61; 67; and 76.

There is also a connection with Psalm 3 and Psalm 4. Psalm 3 is a morning psalm (3:5) and Psalm 4 is designated as an evening psalm (4:8). In Psalm 3, David is running from his own son, Absalom, and is in physical danger. The character of Psalm 4 changes a bit in that David is now in a place where there is malicious slander and lies being thrown at him. It is his reputation that is under fire instead of his physical person.

All of us have been in situations before where our character was being maligned. Real enemies were using their tongues on us to destroy us. James 3:1-12 is the place in the Bible that tells us of the deadly nature of the tongue. If ever there were a time that we needed sanctified, holy, restrained, and guarded tongues it is now. Look at what James had to say about the tongue:

A little member
Boasts great things
Can cause a great fire
A world of iniquity
Defiles the whole body
Sets on fire the course of nature
Set on fire by hell
It cannot be tamed
An unruly evil
Full of deadly poison

A rumor can wipe out a person's reputation and that is what David is contending with in Psalm 4. David will pour out his lament to the Lord about what they are doing to him with their vicious gossip, caustic rumormongering, and destructive words.

There are untold masses of people who have been destroyed by tongues of unscrupulous and uncaring people. That is what David was crying out to the Lord for. He needed the presence and approval of God more than physical deliverance.

"It is a psalm which reflects the anguish of the innocent and oppressed, or of the righteous sufferer... Thus it is a particularly important kind of psalm, for it addresses a fundamental human experience, the experience of injustice, suffering, and oppression." – P. C. Craigie

These kinds of attacks can be summed up in this way:

Injustices that heaped on that are undeserved. False accusations that have no basis. Slandering words that hurt the heart. When someone seeks to advance their own cause, and seeks to get us out of their way. Your reputation comes under fire.

I am borrowing the outline by John Phillips from his commentary on the Psalms. This psalm can be divided up some key words... Salvation... Sanctification... Sacrifice... Song... Security...

Salvation

Psalm 4:1-2 (KJV)

1 Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer. **2** O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing? Selah.

Often we have been in places at work, at school, at home, and even at church when someone may ask us, "Do you know what so-and-so said about you?" Then they tell us the words that were used to tear down our reputation and our character. Generally, we feel anger and are eager to mount our defense at the

accusations. That is not what David did. Instead of going on the attack he went to a place of prayer for salvation.

The salvation that David needs at this moment is not that of an eternal nature, but rather from the circumstances that he finds himself in. That is reflected in the cry of the first two verses.

Hear me! Have mercy upon me! Hear my prayer!

The Hebrew word for “distress” means a tight place. It can also mean that there is an opponent crowding him into a narrow place. But David reaches into his past somewhere and stirs his faith, because he reminds God, “You have enlarged me when I was in distress.” This kind of prayer builds our faith... One of the avenues of our prayer ought to be the times we can remind God of past victories, deliverances, and needs that were met.

The Hebrew word for “enlarged” means that God had widened out the tight places in the past and he knows that God can do the very same thing again for him.

David makes his cry known for the mercy of God in his prayer. The word “mercy” appears 276 times in 261 verses in the KJV. In the book of Psalms, mercy has some great associations:

A multitude of mercy—5:7

Mercy and weakness—6:2

Mercy and trouble—9:13

Mercy and rejoicing—13:5

Mercy and anointing—18:50

Mercy and goodness—23:6

Mercy and truth—25:10

Mercy and help—30:10

Mercy and grief—31:9

Mercy will surround—32:10

Mercy and hope—33:18

Mercy and lovingkindness—51:1

Mercy is great—57:10

Mercy in the morning—59:16
Mercy and defense—59:17
Mercy that is plenteous—86:5
Mercy built up forever—89:2
Mercy and the faithfulness of God—89:24
Mercy is everlasting—100:5
Mercy endures forever—106:1
Mercy that will cut off God's enemies—143:12

David realizes that only God could help him... he reflects that in verse 8... for thou, Lord, only...

He tells the Lord that his enemies are attacking in a certain way:

Turning his glory into shame. They dishonor him by ruining his reputation. They love vanity... They love lies and delusion and are opposed to his righteous life and his godly convictions.

He appeals for relief from God, however he is very clear in his understanding that even he is not a perfect man. Therein is his appeal for the mercy of God... God have mercy on me, you see me as I am and what motives I have in my heart... but despite my own humanity, I need for you to help me!

That is the attitude that we must have as we make our appeals to God.

Sanctification

Psalm 4:3-4 (KJV)

3 But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the Lord will hear when I call unto him. 4 Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.

We see David's appeal for salvation in the first two verses, but now David places prayer into a conditional realm. He talks about sanctification or holiness. Note in Psalm 4:3 where the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. Because that man has been set apart in a place of holiness, God will hear the prayer of that man.

Holiness and prayer... There is nothing mysterious about holiness. It is just the practical fruit of a man's life who has been Spirit-filled and Word-filled. Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be ye filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)... Let the Word of Christ dwell richly in you (Col. 3:16)...

There is a pattern in that verse... Sanctification is separation from ungodliness and separation to God. The Lord makes a person godly and then He sets that person apart from Himself. Being set apart for God makes us love the things we once hated and hate the things we once loved.

Once Jesus Christ gains the pre-eminence in our lives we can understand these matters of holiness like never before. People who have given the Lord complete control in their lives never quibble and chafe at holiness. In fact, their whole life is intent on doing things that will please the Lord.

Those who love the world will always be at odds with holiness. If you are having problems with holiness, then you might want to consider to whom you have given your allegiances to. The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself... the Lord will hear when I call unto him...

Those who are always saying that God does not answer prayer might want to check to whom they have been set apart to.

Sanctification is loving the things of God... the prayer meetings, the worship services, the Word of God, the songs of Zion, the mid-week Bible studies, and the fellowship of the saints. Personal godliness will always be linked to personal goodness!

There is an outflow of holiness that specifically follows in Psalm 4:4, Stand in awe, and sin not...

However, these two verses are being addressed to the enemies of David. He tells them that they need to be aware of the man whom God has set apart and that they need not to vent their anger toward him.

David tells these enemies of God that they are not to fall to their anger and go after him. Anger can ruin the best of men. When we are making application to

this verse, even though it is for the enemies of David, there is solid truth here for the saint also.

We may turn it around and say to ourselves that we ought not to give in to anger at our enemies who are trashing your good name and reputation.

There are times that anger pulls at every saint of God, but there is nothing like anger that impales us in areas of personal holiness.

“He that would be angry and not sin, must be angry at nothing but sin.” - William Secker

“Quick, angry motions of the heart will sometimes force themselves into expression by the hand, though the tongue may be restrained. The very way in which we close a door or lay down a book may be a victory or a defeat.” – Frances Havergal

“Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.” – Anonymous

Proverbs 29:11 (KJV) A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.

Sacrifice

Psalms 4:5 (KJV) Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.

This is a matter of worship. True worship is always accompanied by righteous sacrifices. There were two basic kinds of sacrifices the people of the Old Testament could bring to the altar. It was a sweet savor offering or a sin offering.

The sacrifice of sweet savor was what came from a righteous saint. The sacrifice of a sin offering was what accompanied a repentant sinner. David was encouraging the sacrifices of righteousness:

The Burnt Offering—It was all for God. The type was that of suffering of the Lord. Obedience unto death even the death of the Cross (Php. 2:8).

The Meal Offering—An offering of flour which was smooth and pure. The type was that of the perfection of the Lord. The flour had been ground to perfection until it was flawless in texture. His life was a sinless, perfect life.

The Peace Offering—This offering brought the worshipper and God together in the communion of a ceremonial meal. The peace offering is a type of the presence of the Lord.

David pulls all three of these together and tells us that we are to live a life that exalts and honors God.

Through the Lord's Suffering—In the shadow of the Cross we are to live a crucified life.

Through the Lord's Perfection—We are to live a parallel life of holiness and allow the indwelling Holy Ghost to guide us.

Through the Lord's Presence—We are to live a life that is in constant communion with Him. Not only taking part in communion at the Lord's Table but in our everyday life.

You can now see a picture of what Psalm 4:5 means when it tells us to offer up sacrifices of righteousness. Our trust in the Lord is strengthened by our commitment to this kind of living.

Song

Psalm 4:6-7 (KJV)

6 There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. **7** Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.

We have had David's Salvation, Sanctification, Sacrifice, and now the Song.

David's heart has started to turn from the attacks of those on him to the power of the Lord. That same pattern at some point must be learned by all of us who serve the Lord. We must turn our eyes and ears from the accusers and turn our hearts and minds to the One who rules the universe.

David repeats the question of those who are under the siege of the enemies... Can God still show us favor again? Here is where David's remembrance of Scripture proved to be his great encouragement. He remembered something from the book of Numbers.

Numbers 6:24-26 (KJV)

24 The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: **25** The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: **26** The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

You can count on the Lord to help you always! No matter the circumstances, God's will and purpose will always prevail.

The result of David's prayer was that the Lord had put joy into his heart again. Before David's prayer had changed his circumstances, it had changed him. That is one of the benefits of prayer.

How many times have we limped into our personal closet of prayer and God has changed us before he changed our situation? How many times has just a feeble prayer changed our heart before the trial got better? How many times has the Lord answered a prayer in the heart before it ever came to pass in front of your eyes?

David thought of the times of harvest and plenty when the corn was overflowing the barns and the wine was overflowing the vessels. He said the Lord had put more joy in his heart than those times of victory.

Some commentators connect Psalm 3 and Psalm 4. They say that Psalm 3 was the morning after David fled Jerusalem and was running from Absalom. They say that Psalm 4 was developed in the day as he ran from Absalom and in the flight, God began to build his faith up again. If that is the case, then here is what we must understand:

David's spirit soared after he lost the palace, a full table, and his money—material things. David's spirit soared because he had God—his joy was in God and not in his goods.

That is when the song can work in your soul, when you are freed from your dependence on the trappings of this world!

Security

Psalm 4:8 (KJV) I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.

David could sleep in peace. There had been a time that he could sleep in the security of his palace, because there were armed soldiers who patrolled the courtyards and kept the gates. That was no longer available to him.

Now he was in the sleeping in the countryside. But he was safer here than he had been in the palace. Soldiers watched there... God was watching here!

If you can leave your prayers to the Lord in your evening of trust, He can take care of you. Not only does he take care of them, He allows us to sleep in peace.

No One Is Immune from This Kind of Trouble

Even though you may serve the Lord, no will be immune from the attack on their reputation. But instead of attacking, make it a matter of prayer. That is the most effective and spiritual way to deal with the matter.

Call on the name of the Lord. When we call to the Lord with a life that models holiness, He will hear us. You will discover that it is in the painful moments of life that God will provide you with the necessary support to fight one more day... to take one more step... and to do the will of the Lord.