

Psalm 4

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- [0 : 00] Our reading is a scene setter for what is to follow later on. I'd like you to turn please to 2 Samuel and chapter 15.
- So second book of Samuel and chapter 15. I don't propose to read all of it, but I really want to dip into it to set the scene.
- Now in 2 Samuel 15, David is running away from his rebellious son Absalom.
- And he's fled for his life along with many of his friends. And chapter 15 takes that up.
- But I'd like to read from verse 30. And David is leaving Jerusalem.
- [1 : 02] He's going up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went. His head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up.
- Now David had been told, lithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. So David prayed, Lord, turn lithophel's counsel into foolishness.
- When David arrived at the summit where people used to worship God, Hishai the Archite was there to meet him. His robe torn and dust on his head.
- Now if we go to chapter 16, reading from verse 5. As David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from him there.
- His name was Shimei, son of Gerah. And he cursed as he came out. He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones.
- [2 : 19] Though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left. As he cursed, Shimei said, Get out, get out, you murderer, you scoundrel.
- The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you've reigned. The Lord has given the kingdom into the hands of your son Absalom.
- You've come to ruin because you are a murderer. Then Abishai, son of Zerariah, said to the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?
- Let me go over and cut off his head. But the king said, What does this have to do with you, you sons of Zerariah? If he's cursing because the Lord said to him, curse David, Who can ask why do you do this?
- David then said to Abishai and all his officials, My son, my own flesh and blood is trying to kill me. How much more than this Benjamite?
- [3 : 21] Leave him alone. Let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. It might be that the Lord will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessings instead of his curse today.
- So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt.
- The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted. And there he refreshed himself.

So if you turn over a few pages to Psalm 4. Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God.

Give me relief from my distress. Have mercy on me and hear my prayer. How long will you people turn my glory into shame?

[4 : 38] How long will you love delusions and seek false gods? Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself.

The Lord hears when I call to him. Tremble and do not sin when you are on your bed.

Search your hearts and be silent. Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord. Many, Lord, are asking, who will bring us prosperity?

Let the light of your face shine on us. Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound.

In peace I will lie down and sleep. For you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety. Distress is a very common experience in this world.

[6 : 00] Sometimes it's very severe. On occasions you'll listen to a TV newscaster warning that distressing images are going to be shown.

And then you see someone weeping over tragedy, perhaps involving war, famine, floods or terrorism. And under those circumstances we feel very helpless and probably very angry as well.

Now, sometimes distress comes much nearer home. The distresses that we experience may be less dramatic, but they're still very real and extremely painful to us.

Often someone might be blameworthy of causing your distress, but you're helpless to do anything about it.

Now, would that apply to any of you? I suspect that it would apply to each one of us in one degree or another. And very probably the distress from time to time has been so intense that we've not been able to sleep because of it.

[7 : 15] And then our distress often affects others, others in our families. And they sympathize with us and they have to deal with the things that distress us because it distresses them also.

Now, Psalm 4 is a very practical psalm because it tells us how to deal with ourselves when we are distressed.

And because it's such a common experience in life, it's a very important psalm for us to study. Now, the psalm was possibly inspired by the sort of incident that we read earlier in David's life.

And many link it to that time when Absalom, his son, rebelled against David and David had to flee from Jerusalem, accompanied by his faithful, sympathizing followers.

On his flight from his ambitious, rebellious son and his large army, this man Shimei pelted David and all his officials with stones and verbally abused the humiliated David.

[8 : 32] Remember what I read? This man Shimei abused David verbally. Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel. The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you've shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned.

The Lord has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You come to ruin because you're a man of blood. How painful that was to David and his faithful followers.

One of David's chief men called Abishai offered to go out and cut off Shimei's head for his impudence, for his hardness of heart.

That's another side to distress. The distress of David led to the anger of his friend. Now, if you're distressed, you might find a way to cope.

But what about your sympathizing family, your family members and your friends? Are you concerned to help them avoid sin?

[9 : 37] David, cope. But what about these other people? Well, Sam 4 might well be related to this time in David's life. It might relate to an earlier set of injustices that he suffered at the hands of Saul.

At that time, he was regarded as a rebel, a runaway slave almost. And David's name was Murd. Well, it might be that.

Or it might simply and probably is a distillation of all the wisdom that David had coming out of his many experiences. It doesn't really matter. The psalm is written so that we might find peace in our distresses, whatever they might be, wherever they come from, whether incidents in school, work, incidents with bad neighbors.

All these are very stressful. And it's written for those of us suffering troubles in this world. But more particularly, it's written for those of us who are Christians.

And as such, as having our faith, as serving the Lord Jesus Christ, we are misunderstood and misrepresented in the world around us. Remember the words of Jesus meant to encourage distressed Christians.

[11 : 01] This is what Jesus said to those who are going to face distress. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Now, distress can be personal or communal. This was a communal psalm. You'll notice that the head of the psalm, we're told that the director of music was commissioned to use it with musical accompaniment.

It was meant to be sung by the congregation of distressed believers. And they would sing it in order to get mutual help and warning.

It was for believers to sing. It was for believers to learn from. It was particularly directed to the believing community.

Today, we should listen to its teaching when we're distressed by disappointments, injustice, verbal abuse.

[12 : 14] We should learn to benefit from its teaching when we're tempted to anger, despair, bitterness. It's deeply personal, but it is communal in its scope.

It's sung by a variety of people, some wronged personally, and others who are angered on account of those who were directly wronged. It's meant to take distressed, angry, frightened people, and leave them in peace.

Now, it can be used as an evening meditation. It's so appropriate on an evening service to consider this hymn, this psalm, which is meant to be sung in the evening, after a day when we might have been hurt by cutting comments and bad news.

Notice how it closes. David said, I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

If you can sleep when you're distressed, you're a very unusual person. And this psalm should help you sleep tonight if you're distressed even today. And there will be times in your life when you will be distressed.

[13 : 37] It's the nature of living in this world, particularly as a Christian. And remember that this psalm is meant as a blessing for you. So we all need to get acquainted with this psalm, don't we?

So how does it bring peace and blessing to troubled minds? Sometimes distress is very difficult to pin down.

You get to the end of a day. Lots of things have been going on. And you might well feel that you've been through a washing machine. So many things perhaps have happened to you during the day.

And you haven't had a chance to unravel them. I'm sure each one of you have had an experience like that. And you think, why is it that I feel bad? I just feel bad.

Well, it's important for you to ask yourself why it is that you're distressed. And that's my first point. Identify your cause of distress.

[14 : 39] Ask yourself, why are you cast down? It's very biblical, isn't it? It's one of the psalms. Why are you cast down, O my soul? Well, ask yourself that question.

Try and untangle all the rubbish that's happened to you during the course of the day. And Psalm 4 unravels David's distress. So what were the things that distressed him?

I'm sure they can identify with many of them in one way or another. Verse 2 tells us that he'd been misunderstood and misrepresented.

How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame? Remember that David had been anointed by the prophet Samuel to be king of Israel. The Lord had spoken of him as having his own heart.

Not that he was perfect, but his general disposition was one of obedience. Unlike his predecessor, Saul. And Shimei of the house of Saul had misrepresented him as being a man of blood, who had at last been paid back for his crimes by Absalom.

[15 : 56] And then earlier in his life, David had also been misrepresented as a rebel who should be hunted down and destroyed. And his enemies refused to acknowledge him as a man of God.

How often that's true of the prophets. Now if you're a believer today and you live for the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be misrepresented and you will be misunderstood.

You might be dismissed as being a religious fanatic, even in your own family, and possibly and increasingly being dismissed as being a Christian extremist.

I read recently about a family in Norway. It's very, very distressing. Their children had been taken away from this mom and dad.

And their crime was that they taught their children about the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And they were judged as being Christian extremists in Western Europe.

[17 : 06] Elsewhere in the world today, believers are imprisoned, tortured, and executed as rebels, rebels against the state, because they don't submit to the demand to become Muslims or be Orthodox North Koreans or whatever.

They're reconciled to God. They're precious to him. They delight in the Lord Jesus Christ, serve him and his people, but they're labeled as being apostates or traitors or heretics or something like that.

If you look back in history to the old Methodists, they were called Methodists as a term of abuse. It goes on.

It's been there throughout history. So are you distressed to hear these sorts of things being said about you, being said about others?

We should weep, shouldn't we, with those that weep, those who are in those circumstances. They're one with us, they're brothers and sisters in Christ, but they suffer.

[18 : 18] We should weep with them, should we not? Verse 2 identifies another cause of distress.

Men who loved delusions and sought after false gods. Remember the Apostle Paul, when he entered Athens on his missionary journey, he arrived in Athens without his friends Silas and Timothy, and he waited for them in that city, that city of learning, that city that prouided itself on its wisdom.

And in Acts chapter 17, verse 16, we read this, while Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.

That was his Christian response to seeing the idolatry there in that city, renowned for its learning. About this time, or just perhaps a little bit later when he was in Corinth, he wrote to the Christians in Rome, and he spoke about what he saw, what he experienced.

Romans chapter 1 and verse 18 speaks about all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppressed the truth by their wickedness. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

[20 : 00] Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Now it was this sort of thing that distressed David too. Notice his distress being verbalized. How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?

So does it distress you? That men believe and trust in almost anything but the Lord. Perhaps in your family, perhaps your neighbors next door, perhaps just as you observe life in general, you see that men seek their consolation in alcohol, drugs.

Lady, look! Mother Nature speculates about the marvels of chance happenings rather than the creator, the wise God, who purposefully designed and built and sustained the universe.

Does it distress you that this sort of thing goes on and your God, the one true God, is misrepresented and abandoned by rebellious creatures?

[21 : 24] Does it distress you when you see people taking an interest in horoscopes and fortune tellers and tarot cards and touching wood?

How stupid! Man with an intelligence touching wood, thinking that's going to change anything. How utterly stupid!

Absolutely stupid as those men there in Romans 1 who build idols like birds and animals and reptiles. It's the same sort of darkness.

So are you jealous for the glory of God? It's this sort of thing that moved missionaries to God into the world, into distant places to bring the gospel of the glorious God to these people.

So does it affect you? So, in Psalm 4, David identifies the causes of his distress as those who turn his glory into shame and love delusions and seek false gods.

[22 : 34] He wasn't indifferent to these things. How could he be? Now, David's distress was compounded by his concern for other members of the congregation who sympathized for him in his sufferings.

He warns them in verse 4, In your anger, do not sin. He had a pastor's heart. He saw that the anger present in the congregation could lead to sin.

They sympathized with him. They were stirred up with him. And remember how one of them, I wish I wanted to kill off this man, shimmy eye, distress leads to anger, or very often does.

And distress very often leads to sin. Now, notice that David didn't condemn the anger. Anger is a powerful force for good.

It can be a vital, motivating force. And perhaps one aspect of our spiritual weakness today is a false attitude towards anger. Do you suppose that those who abolished slavery were not angry by the injustice of that cruel trade?

[23 : 56] Anger can be a motivating force for the good of others. David's men were moved by anger by the unjust treatment of David, the man of God, but David exalted them, in your anger, do not sin.

Many good social movements and religious movements through history have sometimes been brought into disrepute by forgetting that really important precept.

Uncontrolled anger is as destructive as the waves of the angry sea crashing against a small boat. Waves of uncontrolled anger destroy relationships within nations, families, and friends.

things. You might recognize that the apostle Paul uses exactly the same words in Ephesians 4.20, in your anger do not sin.

There was the pastor addressing the congregation in your anger do not sin. We all know that anger boils over into abusive words and behavior.

[25 : 20] Paul in Ephesians was concerned about the Ephesians and he wrote to them. He was concerned that those things that troubled the Ephesian Christians led to bitterness and clamor and vengeance brawling and slander.

He foresaw the danger of every form of malice, division and disturbance marring the life of the Christians at Ephesus. That was Paul.

David was also the leader of the people of God in his time. He cared for their unity and their happiness. He was distressed when he saw anger bubbling up among the people.

He wanted to impress upon them the danger that they faced. His distress reached beyond his own personal comfort and safety and longing for personal vengeance.

He rose above that and the psalm was composed for the peace of God's people as they sang it together. Then and later down through the generations, through the centuries.

[26 : 31] It was composed for the peace of the church. The peace of the church in the first century and today. David composed it millennia ago but it's for our peaceful unity two.

Well that was my first point. Second point, what steps did David take in order to bring about order and peace?

What do you do after you've identified the cause or the causes of your distress? What do you do to bring about peace if you and your friends about you are disturbed?

It's clearly not enough to understand what is going on, why it is that you're distressed. That understanding should lead to something occurring, something happening.

What did David do to bring about peace? Well first of all he attended to himself. he'd been maligned and spoken of badly by his enemies but found peace knowing that he had a special relationship with the Lord through his faith.

[27 : 57] Notice that he referred in verse 1 to the Lord as being his righteous God. His righteous God. Not a righteous God, not a God or something like that, but his righteous, his holy God.

And he was aware of this special relationship. We know that he spoke elsewhere of the Lord, he spoke of the Lord as being his shepherd.

He knew that personal relationship with his God, with his Lord. And we see the awareness of that special relationship in verse 3.

know that the Lord has set apart the godly, the faithful for himself. What a contrast between verse 2. Oh men, why will you turn my glory into shame?

And verse 3. The Lord, the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. It's almost Pauline. It's almost like the words of the apostle Paul, if God be for us, who can be against us?

[29 : 16] So is God for you? How did David come to know this peace with God? How did he come to know that he had a special relationship with God?

There is a hint of it in verse 1, with the words, my righteous God. They could be translated as the God of my righteousness. And indeed some versions do in fact translate it in that way.

He is the God who provides my righteousness. But whether or not that was intended, there's more than a hint of it in Romans chapter 4. Here, Paul pulls David out as an standing example of one who is justified through faith.

In Romans 4, Paul quoted a psalm of David in which David confessed his sins. In Romans 4, verse 6, Paul describes David's experience of forgiveness and spoke of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works.

What does it mean to credit righteousness? Well, it means gives or counts as being righteous. And we call that justification.

[30 : 43] If you're justified by God, God looks upon you as being righteous. No sin against you. No, that's all being blotted out. He looks upon you as being as righteous as the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because the righteousness of Christ has been given to you. and God looks at you through the lens, if you like, of the righteousness of Christ.

That perfect righteousness. No, it's not yours in a sense, but it's yours because the Lord Jesus Christ is your substitute. He lived and he died for you.

He lived a perfect life for you. He died for you that your sins might be blotted out. Now, when you come to see that, when you come to trust that, you're justified, freely, by the grace of God.

And you enter into that wonderful relationship whereby you can call God, your God. You can call the Lord Jesus Christ, your shepherd. So, Paul, in Romans 4, said that David was a man, an example of one who is justified or counted righteous, not by what he did, but by his faith in God, by his faith in the provision of righteousness from God.

[32 : 09] And he, Paul goes on to quote from Psalm 32, Psalm of David, Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never, never, never count against him. Now, David had come to God, he confessed his sins and found forgiveness for every sin.

He found righteousness from God, from the Lord, his righteousness. Now, that's an Old Testament term. Jeremiah spoke of the Lord, our righteousness.

righteousness. And if you're a believer today, you can speak of the Lord, my righteousness. Now, you don't have a perfect righteousness to yourself. You're very aware of all your sins, all your faults.

You're aware of your weakness to temptation, but wait, you have a perfect righteousness in the Lord. The Lord, our righteousness.

[33 : 17] And this is what David had. And you must have that righteousness the Lord gives you if you're to overcome distress. The key to overcoming the distress caused by the judgments of men is to know that the Lord has chosen you and accepted you in Christ.

Paul wrote, who will bring any charge against those that God has chosen? God that justifies.

And earlier in that tremendous chapter in Romans chapter 8, Paul says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

So there was a condition that David was in, it's a condition that you're in, if you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, if you trust in him, David had gone further than just having peace, mind you.

Wonderful though that was, he found the source of joy. Look at verse 6, many are asking, who can show us any good? Let the light of your face shine upon us, O Lord, you have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.

[34 : 40] joy. Yes, but joy that's even more wonderful there in his distress. Joy in the Lord.

The joy of the Lord is our strength and David had that. Now you might think that it's only prominent Christians who have that sort of experience.

Not true, not true at all because David and Paul prayed something like this, let the light of your face shine upon us.

Not just him, not just David, not just the worship leader, not just the king, King David, but all the worshippers. David knew the secret of joy replacing distress and he shared his secret with all of us.

So in our distresses we must likewise pray, let the light of your face shine upon us. But what is involved in that?

[35 : 48] I'd like to take you to the experience of the Apostle Paul very kindly shares his experience with us in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 8.

He talked about his distress, he talked about the joy that replaced it. Listen to this, Paul said, we're hard pressed on every side but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed.

So what was his secret? God who said, let light shine out of darkness made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Not just peace but joy, glorious joy. David knew that so no wonder he prayed, let the light of your face shine upon us, all of us, not just me.

David had gone a long way from being distressed to finding peace, joy, joy that comes through knowing the light of God's face shining upon him.

[37 : 11] glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ. If you're to know Christian joy in the midst of your perplexity, in the midst of your despair and sorrow, you need to know him, his person, his work, his forgiveness, his righteousness.

We need to pray that the Lord ensures that the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a thing to pray for in this coming week, that the Lord might reveal his glory to us, that we might be people not only known for our peace in the midst of difficulties, but of joy as well.

What a witness that would be to the world. They'll start asking questions then. They'll be saying, what must we do to be like you? David had found his own peace, but he was concerned for others who were distressed.

You might have found peace in the midst of your distresses, but what of those who might be sharing your distress? In a sense, the battle's only half won if your friends and family are still troubled or angry over a certain matter.

David found his own peace first, and then he was in a position to help his distressed and angry friends. He could hardly say to them, in your anger do not sin, if he hadn't found peace in his own heart first.

[38 : 56] Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, take the plank out of your own eye, and then you'll see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. David could now speak to his friends, in your anger do not sin.

He gets practical advice, when you're on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. David himself was amazingly silent when Shimei abused him, and he's telling us to follow him.

Search your hearts on your beds, in the silence of the night, examine yourself, ask yourself, why are you angry? Is it because your will is being crossed in some way?

We all have anger, we should ask that sort of question. Is it because your ambitions are being crossed or threatened? Where is your anger leading you?

Is it leading you to bad things, bad thoughts welling up in your heart? Is it leading you to bad speech, lashing out, abusing others?

[40 : 06] Is your anger leading you to do wrong things that are displeasing to the Lord? If it is, you must do something about it. David said, offer right sacrifices and trust in the Lord.

The way of peace is trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding. You've got to be right sacrifices, sacrifices that the Lord wants you to have.

Don't invent your own ways to find peace with God. People are doing that all the time. So what sort of sacrifices did David have in mind for those who were embittered, angry, and on the point of bursting out with sin.

David tells us what are the right sort of sacrifices. We can see into David's heart and into his mind. If you look at Psalm 51, he tells us the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart.

God will not despise. David himself, there in Psalm 4 said he found relief from his distress by calling upon God for mercy.

[41 : 27] The psalm reminds us that we should call upon the name of the Lord, his mercy, his grace, his faithfulness. That's what we mean when we talk about the name of the Lord.

It's the Lord's character. The Lord's a forgiving God. God's love. We find all his forgiveness, mercy, grace and peace in Jesus Christ.

His perfect, complete sacrifice for sin. So what shall we say at the end?

If the Lord keeps you awake tonight with any distress, search your heart with the light of his word, using the light of the gospel.

David will tell us if you do that, if you respond with repentance, if you respond trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, you can lie down and sleep in peace with your maker, with yourself and those who have caused you distress.

[42 : 49] Let's pray. Lord, we ask that you would help us to learn a right from this psalm. We know it's so easy to see the truths in your word and yet not obey them and not submit to them.

And so we pray that you would open our minds and our hearts to your word that we might learn a right from it. For we ask it in our great Saviour's name. Amen.