

PSALM 4

INTRODUCTION

Most Psalms do not give a specific setting for their particular Psalm. This makes the Psalm difficult to interpret, but it also makes the Psalm easy to apply. Because the Psalm can fit many specific situations, therefore it is more likely to fit your or mine specific situation. There have been some attempts to place this Psalm alongside Psalm 3, and therefore give this Psalm the same historical setting.

That may be the case, but I don't think there is anything in the Psalm to suggest it. Scholars have placed this Psalm alongside Psalm 3 by calling Psalm 3 a morning Psalm (based on vs. 3:5) and this Psalm an evening Psalm (based on v 8). There may be some substance in seeing these Psalms like that, and perhaps that is why one follows the other. I simply confess I don't know for sure.

Now when we come to Psalm 4, we discover that it doesn't really fit into neat sections, as I read a number of commentaries, I was not terribly struck by the way those commentaries split up this Psalm. So am I going to give you the definite way to split up this Psalm? No! You see the reason why the Psalm is a little difficult to follow in its flow of thought is because David the writer is in distress (v 1) people are trying to undermine him (v 2) perhaps they are spreading rumours about David and telling lies. They are deluding themselves into believing lies, and therefore are giving David a hard time.

So with that in mind David is simply expressing his heart felt thoughts (if I can put it like that), and when we are under pressure like David, our thoughts are not always well structured, with clear points etc. The main thing about this Psalm is the move from distress to real confidence in God (vs. 1 & 8)

1. LOOK AT HIS PRAYER (v 1)

He asks God to answer him, and to give him relief from the distress that is being caused by his enemies.

(a) Notice how he prays - David knows that He has no right to demand an answer from God, so he asks for mercy. For; he knows that every answer to prayer is an act of God's mercy. When we pray and God answers, He is displaying His mercy towards us. As we said the other Sunday morning, it is because of God's mercy that we are Christians, and it is because of His mercy that He answers our prayers.

If you are not a Christian then God does not owe you anything, He does not have to do anything for you and in His eyes you are not the good person that you think you are. So you need mercy, undeserved pity. Christian when you pray, ask God to be merciful to you and answer your prayer.

b) David knows He is praying to a God who is righteous (v 1). That means that He is perfect, and pure, but it also means He always does the right things. Now its good to know that when you are in a tight corner, perhaps when people are believing and indeed spreading lies about you. Perhaps people at work, at home within the family circle, even perhaps within the church. At such times its good to know that we come to our God who is righteous and therefore always acts rightly.

Our enemies don't always act rightly, David's enemies loved delusions and lies (v 2), sometimes it seems that those who love delusions and lies get on in this life, and because we as Christians try to do the right thing, it seems that we don't get on as we would like. Turn to God; leave the

situation with him, because He always does what is right. In every situation, He will always do the right thing and at the right time.

But the fact that God is righteous also means that we cannot bring an unrighteous prayer to a righteous God and expect answers. Have you ever done that? Perhaps someone has hurt you, and you ask God to do something that is really nasty to them. Well don't be surprised if that prayer isn't answered, God always does the right thing, often to our own disappointment.

2. LOOK AT HIS CONFIDENCE (vs. 3-8)

David's kingship had been brought into contempt, probably by the slander of his enemies (v 2); in verse one David expresses his concern in prayer. But we do see a real change-taking place from v 3 onwards, for here we see David's confidence in God. Whether David is speaking to His own soul or to his enemies or to God is unclear, but it seems to me to fit the context if we take him speaking here to his enemies. Whatever is the case the truth is clear. God has set apart the godly, or those He has made godly for himself. Now David knew this to be true from experience (1 Samuel 16:1-13). Wasn't he the one God choose to be king instead of his brothers? He was the most unlikely candidate in the eyes of His Father and brothers, but God sets apart the godly for Himself. A little insignificant shepherd boy, but God set him apart and he became a great and godly King.

Can you see the application of the Psalm for yourself? People may try to slander us, oppose us and hurt us in many ways, but they ought to know and we belong to God, He choose us and set us apart and therefore in opposing us, they are opposing God. Not only that but how can anyone oppose God and win? God has to defend His people for by doing so He is defending His own great name. Are you a Christian? Then remember God has set you apart. You are insignificant in the eyes of the world, nobody else would choose you, but God has chosen you, and that means he will defend you, for in doing so He will defend Himself. What does this great truth mean in practice? He will hear our prayer (v 3b); He will have mercy upon us not because of anything in us but because of what the Lord did in setting you apart, Christian, for Himself. If God loved you so much Christian, that He set you apart and then sent Christ to die and rise from the dead for you, then we ought not to be surprised that when we are in distress, that He will answer our prayer, and give us relief. This truth surely ought to encourage us to take prayer more seriously and to pray more often.

In vs. 4-5 David continues to speak to his opponents (whether he got a chance to say these things in person, I don't know). He calls upon them not to let their anger lead to sinful acts, and in order to do that they should search their hearts when they are on their beds at night. Paul uses this verse in Ephesians 4:26 when he is instructing Christians to live as children of God. We are not to let the sun go down on our anger, but are to sort it out, before we sleep. Anger can so easily lead to sinful actions, in David's enemies' case, their anger had led them to slander David. The cure is to search one's heart, and there is no better time than when you are quiet in your bed at night, and when you can gather your thoughts and be silent before God.

There is a lesson here for each one of us. There ought to be built into our lives, periods of heart searching. Our lives are so busy that we move from one day to the next and one month to the next without ever stopping for a breath never mind some heart searching. Lying on our beds at night is not a bad time to search our own hearts, to deal with that anger that has built up in us throughout the day, so that our anger doesn't lead to sinful actions.

What do we do after we have searched our hearts? Verse 5 tells us. In Old Testament language you are to offer the right sacrifices for sin, and you are to trust God. In New Testament language we would say repent of all sin and believe that God will forgive you and then trust him daily. This is what David's enemies needed to do, and surely if we are honest in our own heart searching, that

is what we need to do.

3. LOOK AT HIS COUNSEL (vs. 6-8)

David in these verses is probably now turning to those who support him but because of the circumstances that are going against David, and the slanderous accusations that are floating about, they are probably losing heart. They are asking the question; who can show us any good, or purpose, meaning or hope. In answer to this question, David turns to a well-known blessing or benediction in the Old Testament found in Numbers 6:24-26. Only the Lord can show us good, and for that to happen we need his favour to be upon us (v 6).

That is the great need of the hour that is what we must seek and pray for, for when God's face shines upon us, our hearts will be filled with greater joy than when we have plenty in material things (v 7).

Finally it means that when we put our head down on the pillar at night we will sleep in peace (v 8) because we know our hearts are at peace with God, and we will have the confidence of knowing that we dwell in safety because we have God's face shining upon us.

Our greatest desire and prayer should be that God's favour would rest upon us.

Amen