

Safety in Distress

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[0 : 00] Psalm 4, verses 1 to 8. Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness.

You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?

How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah. But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. The Lord hears when I call to him.

Be angry and do not sin. Pondering your own hearts on your beds and be silent. Selah. Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord.

There are many who say who will show us some good. Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord. You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

[1 : 14] In peace I will both lie down and sleep. For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. So once again, in this psalm, the psalmist is in some kind of distress, as we've seen several times already.

And I think this should be a source of encouragement for us because often we can think that as Christians, now that we have God as our Savior, the creator of the universe, as our Lord, that maybe our life should be a little easier, a little better.

It's much less difficult. But the truth is that believers across every generation have experienced a lot of pain and suffering. And psalms, more than a third of the psalms are lament psalms like this.

And the psalms, I think, that's why I think they're particularly helpful for us. It helps us to feel. It helps us to make sense of our pain and to respond to God and to respond to our situation in a helpful way.

So this psalm is like that. And in this case, it seems like the primary issue that the psalmist is facing is slander of people. Because it says in verse 2, So it seems that they are damaging the psalmist's reputation through their words.

[2 : 48] They're defaming him. And it's not just any old men that are doing this. It's just not any men, random men. They're hurting the psalmist. But the men here are distinguished men.

They're influential men. Because the Hebrew phrase, son of a man, refers to the men of note, significance, influence, as opposed to the more common phrase, son of a human, which just refers to any man.

So here the expression refers to the influential people. And so these people, and because of their influence, their words have more weight, and they're doing damage to the psalmist's esteem and reputation.

And so that's the occasion for the psalmist's prayer to God here and lament in verse 1. Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness. You have given me relief when I was in distress.

Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. And as the psalmist begins to utter this prayer of faith, the psalm kind of transforms into a declaration of faith.

[3 : 52] Prayer turns into a declaration of trust in verses 3 to 6. And this is the key to the joy and peace that states that the psalmist experiences even in the midst of difficulties.

And he's able to respond confidently in verse 3. He says, But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. The Lord hears when I call to him.

The psalmist is not saying here that God loves him, has set them apart because he is godly, unlike his adversaries. Because the word godly here can literally be translated, it comes from the same word that refers to God's grace and steadfast love, his covenant love.

And so it literally means something like those who have been loved, the godly refers to those who have been loved. And so it refers to people who have been loved by God's covenant affection, by covenant love, and therefore are able to love him and to love others.

And that's truth. It is later reflected in 1 John 4, 19, which says, We love because he first loved us. So the godly are godly because of God's grace, because of God's love for them first.

[5 : 07] And knowing this, knowing that he has been set apart by God by his grace, the psalmist is able to remember that the Lord hears him. So in verse 1, he had cried out, Hear my prayer.

And then in verse 3, he declares with faith that the Lord hears. So same word. So it goes from asking God to hear him, and then with the assurance that now he has been heard, that God does hear him.

And this kind of change, transformation, as he prays, happens throughout this psalm. And having been reassured in his faith in God, and he begins to speak to his adversaries, people who have been slandering him.

And so far, these men have been talking. They've been trash-talking, slandering, maligning the psalmist. And so far, the psalmist has really endured this verbal abuse, but now he speaks back in verse 4.

He says, Be angry and do not sin. Ponder in your own hearts on your beds and be silent. Now, this verse is not condoning anger in any way.

[6 : 10] Rather, it's referring to the fact that when people are angry, they're more prone to excessive, excess in words or in the heat of the moment, doing things that they would regret, so speaking rashly and sinning.

So he's saying that instead of following that course, as people normally do when they're angry, be angry, but don't sin in the midst of it. He's saying, go ponder it in your own bed, in your hearts. And don't be rash in walking into sin and speaking against me.

And the psalmist continues in verse 5, not just the negative thing, but also a positive remedy. He says, offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord. That's what he enjoys, these adversaries. And we are to offer right sacrifices to God because God is the God of righteousness, as it says in verse 1. And that means not just proper rituals followed for a sacrifice, but that it's rightly motivated. And it comes from genuine repentance and faith. And then finally, in verse 6, the psalmist quells the doubts of those around him. He says, there are many who say, who will show us some good?

[7 : 18] Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord. So in biblical Hebrew, there's no quotation marks. So you have to kind of, translators have to infer from the context to figure out where the quotation begins and ends.

And here they seem to have made a mistake because the quote ends after, O Lord, but really should end after some good. So who will show us some good? That's what the doubters are saying. And then psalmist is responding in intercessory prayer. Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord. That's in fact how most of the other translations have it. So this is, it's unusual for the ESV to get it wrong.

But, and so what, that psalmist is offering a prayer to, on behalf of these doubters, fellow people who are doubting, is God going to show us any good? But he's praying to God, lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord.

And that prayer is based on the priestly blessing of Numbers 6, 22 to 27. And that's a promise that the Israelites often refer back to, the benediction of Aaron, the priest.

[8 : 27] And because, and that's important, this benediction is not a prayer. It's a, it's, it's, it's a declaration of God's promise. It's the assurance of what is, what is in fact true.

And so by recalling that blessing, that the light of God's face, which represents his presence is with Israel, they're, they're basically recalling God's promise and building up their faith and saying that, but you might not see any good around you, but remember that promise, remember that covenant and pray to God to lift up his light face upon us.

And this is how we are to trust in God as well. When we are in distress or when we're stressed or suffering, we do so by looking back to our covenant blessing, as the psalmist is doing, looking back at Israel's blessing.

And, and, because if we, but, but, I mean, we'd be deeply insecure if we thought that our place in God depended on our own performance. But, and that's in fact what happens to Israel, right?

They sin, they break the covenant, and the covenant curses instead of covenant blessings come upon them in their exile from their land. And that's what we ought to fear if Jesus hadn't come, right?

[9 : 40] To fulfill that covenant for us. And, and because he fulfilled that covenant, that promise that we have of God's presence is, is securely ours. And that's what the New Testament talks about when it's the light of God's face we used here.

It refers to his presence. In Hebrews 1, 3, it says that Jesus Christ is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. And then 2 Corinthians 4, 6, God says, let light shine out of dark, the God who said, let light shine out of darkness has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, right?

So in Jesus Christ, his face, we see the fullness, the most ultimate expression of God's presence and glory. And, and so this promise that had been given to the Israelites through the Aaronic benediction, the blessing is fulfilled in Jesus and we have that access to him because he died for our sins and brought us into God's presence.

And that's what ultimately guarantees our security and safety in the midst of distress. So in verses seven to eight, the psalmist concludes, you have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

In peace, I will both lie down and sleep for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. And there's several words here that mirror the words in verses four and six.

[11 : 10] So for example, the word heart is in verse four and it's repeated here in verse seven. And the word bed in verse four is a form of the same word that means, that says lie down in verse eight because bed literally means a place of lying down in Hebrew.

And then finally, the word trust in verse five comes from the same root as the word safety in verse eight. And so all these kind of verbal parallels in Hebrew poetry function kind of like a rhyme in English and to emphasize and to make a certain comparison or contrast more accentuated.

And so the man who deride the psalmist and therefore the psalmist exhorted them to ponder in their hearts, the anger in their hearts, instead of letting it spew out in sin against others.

And then he had told them to do that in their bed, right? Ponder your own anger in your heart in your bed. But in contrast, David has joy in his heart and he's able to lie down and sleep.

So there's a contrast of the men in anger in their bed, the place of lying down, but David having joy in their heart and able to lie down and sleep in peace. And the reason for this contrast ultimately is David's trust.

[12 : 21] It's because David trusts in God that he's able to dwell in safety, which comes from the same word as well. There's a direct connection there of our trust in the Lord and of our dwelling in security and safety, even in the midst of distress.

And what's amazing about this psalm, unlike the ones we've seen so far in the book of Psalms, is that the conflict doesn't get resolved. In the other ones, God responds in a dramatic way and there's an answer.

But here, the conflict doesn't get resolved. It doesn't say that the men stopped slandering him, that the psalmist stopped suffering. But even though circumstances have not changed, in the course of his prayer, his heart has changed.

And he is able to have joy and peace because he has renewed and reaffirmed his trust in the Lord. And that's what I hope we can do as well this evening as we think about the difficulties in our lives, in our circumstances, the sin that we battle, and anything that might be happening, that we can dwell in the security and safety that comes from God.

We renew our trust in him and trust in his son, ultimately, who fulfilled all the requirements of the law for us. So with that, let's pray.

[13 : 42] You can sing a song, Jimmy.