

## Psalm 4—A Plea to God with a Critique of Men

David wrote Psalm 4 under adverse circumstances that appear to be the same as Ps.3 when Absalom revolted against his father, King David. Try to put yourself in David's place of shock and surprise at his ingrate son sneak attacking him. Absalom and his allies were saying terrible lies about David, and making outrageous promises to the people that they could never keep. Consider that Absalom for months had been hanging around the courthouse telling everyone that had a case that he was on their side. Only a politician can be on two opposing sides at once. In 2 Samuel 15:3, Absalom said "See, your claims are good and right, but no man listens to you on the part of the king. Oh that they would appoint me judge in the land...I would give justice." Absalom went about kissing and hugging until "Absalom stole away the hearts of the men of Israel." Then in v.12 we read that "the conspiracy was strong, for the people increased continually with Absalom." David was going about his business working hard and serving the people when out of nowhere he was blindsided by the slander, the intrigue, and then the rebellion.

Within this context of heartache, shock, and distress, David wrote Psalm 3-4 as a plea to God for help, and a plea for justice to prevail. As David pleads with God, he also gives a scathing critique of the nature of man. David's good reputation has actually become a liability. The worthless and deceptive men actually appear to be winning, and God doesn't intervene---they are getting away with it. Nevertheless, in spite of appearances, David knows that God will honor the godly man, and that God actually hears his prayers even though for a little while the wicked seem to prevail. Therefore David's advice is to meditate on the Word of God, do not sin, and keep the faith. The majority will go with whoever promises them the most, but eventually the light of God's truth will break through the darkness. The thought of this put gladness in David's heart, gave him peace, and made him feel secure even in an insecure situation.

### Take It to the Lord

Like all of us, David has some enemies and some grievances that were unresolved. In Ps.4:1, David takes his case directly to the Lord. David believed that God alone is truly righteous and unbiased. God is above partisanship—even immune to influence peddlers and lobbyists. We never know why people make the decisions they make. Who can forget the juror who voted for OJ Simpson because the accusing witness snapped her fingers? I remember she said, "I didn't like her. I thought, don't be snappin your fingers at me!" God alone is above all that, therefore He knows the psalmist's heart, and He will answer his prayer. David wrote that God had relieved his distress. The Hebrew phrase indicated that his distress was restricting him, or he felt pressure---circumstances were closing in on him. He felt trapped, surrounded, and as if there were no way out. In those circumstances, David prayed for God to "Be gracious to me". Who among us doesn't need more of God's grace? We need God's generous provisions to us as we struggle in a hostile environment called life on planet earth. It is not as if David, or any of us, deserves it, but we believe that God loves us, and He is generous with His gifts. This is a good principle to remember, always make your requests based on God's attributes. If you want

to make God laugh, just pray that God should grant your requests because you are a good person and you deserve it. All of the awesome prayers of men like David, Daniel, and Hezekiah that were granted by God, appealed to God based on God's attributes.

### Critique of Human Nature

In Ps.4:2, David cries out to God with a question that is asked by most of the authors of the Bible, "how long?" How long will God allow evil? How long will crooks prosper? How long until depravity is punished? The prophet Habakkuk asked, "Why don't you do something?", and to his amazement God answered, "I am doing something that you wouldn't believe if I told you." When God told Habakkuk that He was raising up the fierce army of the Chaldeans to come and destroy Israel, Habakkuk said, "I don't believe it!" My point is that God is doing something huge that is way over our heads, and has eternal significance. David's comments express his dismay at God's delay in judging leaders who seek false gods. These followers of Absalom "love worthlessness and seek falsehood". This is the vanity of selfishness that provokes only self interest over justice. In contrast to these selfish men, the Lord has set apart some for Himself to serve the Lord instead of themselves (obviously David has in mind himself). David has faith that in spite of the current situation, the Lord hears his prayers and will soon respond with justice(v.3).

To all believers who find themselves in adverse circumstances, David offers the advice of v.4, "Fear God and do not sin; meditate on the Lord when you lie down...and trust in the Lord." Since God's Word promises that in the future God will bring justice, meditate that justice is coming and rest in your faith.

### Pragmatism

In v.6, David is saying that the "many" are making their decisions based on selfish reasons of what leader will do them the most good (sounds like our elections). In David's historical struggle with Absalom, this is precisely what happened. The majority went with the pragmatic view that Absalom would do them the most good. I remember that great line in the movie "Jerry McGuire" when the sports agent asked his pro football client what he wanted him to do for him. His answer expressed the view of most of humanity in a very simple four word sentence, "SHOW ME THE MONEY!"

In contrast to the above world view, David appealed to God in Ps.4:6 to reveal the truth, or lift up the light of God's presence and nature to them. In answer to this request to reveal Himself, God put "gladness in my heart". While the materialistic followers of Absalom were awash in "grain and new wine"(v.7), David was more than satisfied with the internal spiritual joy in the Lord. I think we all know that even if we have all the stuff in the world, we are poor without the One True God that we were created to love and experience. My favorite passage about riches is the example of Jesus that Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich (in heaven), yet for your sake He became poor (the incarnation), that you through His poverty might become rich."

## The Peace That Surpasses Our Understanding

When we consider David's situation when he wrote this Psalm, it becomes very difficult to understand how he could have any peace, much less restful sleep. He, the King of Israel, had been run out of Jerusalem. Many of his closest friends and advisors were now against him. His own son whom he loved was trying to kill him. Everything he had worked for, even the fate of the entire nation, hung in the balance. To make matters worse, Absalom occupied David's house and co-habited with David's concubines "in the sight of all Israel." (2 Sam. 16:22). This was particularly interesting because Nathan the prophet had predicted years earlier that there would be evil from within David's own household to the extent that someone in his family would take his wives and lie with them in broad daylight (2 Sam. 12:11). Absalom did just that. How did Nathan know? As Daniel said, "There is a God in heaven that reveals mysteries." Within this context, David had a supernatural peace---the peace of God, a spiritual peace that only God can give. He was not talking about an absence of conflict, there was conflict all around. He was expressing the faithful assurance of God's presence, favor, and the fulfillment of God's promises.

### Show Me the Money !

Many of the characters in the Bible struggled with the same issues that David struggled with in Psalm 4. One character trait of fallen human nature is that they view religion as a vehicle for material blessing. We can't help but feel that if we obey God and "do the right thing", then we will naturally be blessed (materially). Then, when calamity comes our way, we say or at least feel, "What did I do to deserve this?" This reminds me of Satan's claim on Job. God had said "Consider my servant Job". Satan's response was to say that Job followed the Lord because of what he got out of it. Satan then asked a question we should all ask about ourselves, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" By this he meant that Job expected material blessings from God, and this was his motivation for serving God. It is a valid question, "Will a man serve God for nothing?" If everything goes against you, if your health and wealth is taken away, will you still be able to say what Job said, "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him." What we discover in adversity, as Job did, is that God deserves to be served and worshipped just because of Who He is and for no other reason.

While the Absaloms of this world are yelling "Show Me the Money", David and Job believed in God, and held on to their faith not because of the benefits, they lost everything, but because He is the One True God, the Creator who deserves their worship strictly because of Who He is. SELAH

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