

Psalm 4 • The Peace Provided by Righteousness

Introduction

So often the context by which we approach God is when we are in trouble, mostly as the direct consequences of our own sin. Much of our “prayer life” is seeking to diminish, if not avoid altogether, the inevitable onset of our own choices, behavior or actions. We seem to request a “peace” from our own unrighteousness. But in this Psalm we are encouraged with an example of what it is like to approach God from a position of obedience. Biblical righteousness is never a “get out of jail free” card which automatically keeps us from experiencing hardship, trials or persecution in the course of this life, but it certainly places us in the best position to handle it properly. And when the issue of sin is not involved, we find that biblical peace is not the absence of conflict, but the assurance of God in spite of and through it.

For the choir director; on stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.

¹Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!
You have relieved me in my distress;
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer.

[Read v.1]

Q: How does this appear to be both an acknowledgment of God’s working and a call for further aid?

A: David acknowledges, “You have relieved me in my distress” while asking God to further hear an additional prayer.

Application: God’s answers to previous prayer reinforces our faith that He will so work again.

Q: But to what particular aspect of God’s working does David specifically appeal?

A: “O God of my righteousness”.

Q: What is meant by this acknowledgment of God as the source of righteousness?

A: It is a way of stating that apart from following God’s Word and ways alone, it would be impossible for David to achieve biblical righteousness. It is only achieved in the course of an obedient relationship with God.

Q: Why would this be especially important in the greater context of prayer?

A: Instead of approaching God in a fallen state which must first address the issue of sin, it is much better to approach Him while living a lifestyle in compliance with His Word and ways.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. — James 5:16

Application: The best position of strength we can achieve when approaching God is that which comes from consistent, personal obedience to His Word so as to be biblically qualified as “righteous” by God’s standard.

²O sons of men, how long will my honor become a reproach?
How long will you love what is worthless and aim at deception?
Selah.

[Read v.2]

Q: How has the subject changed? Of whom is David speaking here?

A: He began by addressing God, but now is speaking to “O sons of men”.

Q: How does this phrase, “sons of men” contrast to the previous verse?

A: It identifies someone not qualified to claim that God is their righteousness—in other words, that they are sons of God, but rather follow the world’s ways so as to be “sons of men”. From a spiritual point of view they are worldly.

³But know that the LORD has set apart
the godly man for Himself;
The LORD hears when I call to Him

⁴Tremble, and do not sin;
Meditate in your heart upon your bed,
and be still. Selah.
⁵Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,
And trust in the LORD.

Q: What are the three worldly behaviors David identifies in them?

1. They make a reproach of David's honor. They attempt to disgrace or insult one's spiritual integrity—that is, they dishonor what is honorable in God's sight.
2. They "love what is worthless". Not content with just dishonoring the honorable, they actually esteem what is complete void of value in God's economy. These two aspects show how they are completely opposite of God's Word and ways.
3. They "aim at deception". They take their activities to the extreme of achieving not just being deceived themselves, but deceiving others.

Q: What is the implied target of these specific activities?

A: The righteousness obtained by following God's Word and ways.

Application: *The world will do what it can to undermine the spiritual standing of the biblically righteous.*

[Read v.3]

Q: But what does God's righteousness work in such individuals?

A: It not only sets them apart from the world, but shapes them so as become qualified in God's eyes as "godly".

Q: How does this both expand upon and reinforce what was stated in the opening verse?

A: Just as in v.1 God's response was connected to the issue of righteousness, so it is further reinforced here for the godly man set apart for God, "The LORD hears when I call to Him".

Application: *The result of biblical righteousness is evidenced by someone living IN the world but not OF the world—they live exclusively according to His Word and ways.*

[Read v.4-5]

Q: How is this list of characteristics a contrast to those previously given in v.2?

A: Whereas v.2 addressed the actions of "the sons of men", these are those associated with "the godly man" set apart for God.

Observation: *The way v.1 parallels v.3 and v.2 parallels v.4-5 is an example of the way Hebrew poetry works differently than Western literature. Comparisons and contrasts are often presented in this parallel manner in alternating verses or sections.*

Q: What does the "godly man" do?

1. "Tremble..." This is another way of saying such fear or properly revere God.
2. "...do not sin..." Keep one's self free from the pollutive effects of sin, a prerequisite which will be needed to offer the sacrifices about to be stipulated.
3. "Meditate in your heart..." Maintain a personal spiritual dialogue with God. Mediation in Scripture is most often associated with contemplating God's Word in the course of prayer.
4. "...be still." Not doing all the talking ourselves, but open to hearing back from God.
5. "Offer the sacrifices of righteousness..." This is best expressed in Romans 12:1-2 when we present ourselves as a "living and holy sacrifice" so as to "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed".

6. "...trust in the LORD". Not engaging in any of these practices or conditions for any personal benefit, but so as to result in the faith which places the outcome in His hands.

Q: How does the reference to "the sacrifices of righteousness" also connect back to v.1?

A: It reflects the dual working of God's righteousness in us which shapes the proper way we in turn approach and live for Him.

Application: *Biblical righteousness is visibly proven by one's corresponding behavior both outwardly and inwardly.*

⁶Many are saying, "Who will show us any good?"

Lift up the light of Your countenance upon us, O LORD!

⁷You have put gladness in my heart, More than when their grain and new wine abound.

⁸In peace I will both lie down and sleep, For You alone, O LORD, make me to dwell in safety.

[Read v.6-8]

Note: *The parallelism commonly found in Hebrew poetry is here connecting back to the various verses and topics touched on to this point as a final kind of summary.*

Q: Although in Western literature we usually begin our writing by stating the subject at the beginning, what does v.6 reveal to us as the main question David is addressing?

A: It's actually a worldly consideration, "Who will show us any good?" which is simultaneously directed at both God and man.

Q: Does David treat this as a sincere question? How does the way he handle it show why it is not stated until near the end of the Psalm?

A: David treats it as a rhetorical question, and therefore can place it near the end because he already knows, and has provided, the answer.

Q: How does the "light of Your countenance" work something greater in the biblically righteous person's life than the "sons of men"?

A: In the righteous, "You have put gladness in my heart"—that is, all the benefits are spiritual. The fact that the "sons of men" are glad with the temporary things of this life—"their grain and new wine", alludes to temporal and at best seasonal satisfaction.

Q: What is the dual reward for the biblically righteous?

A: Not just literal, physical peace as in, "I will lie down and sleep", but even greater spiritual peace "to dwell in safety".

Application: *Whether by day or night, whether in the course of sleep or awake and living, the biblically righteous experience God's peace in spite of all that is taking place in the world and by the world.*