

March 15, 2020

**Psalm 4:
Joy and Peace in the Midst of Turmoil**

Intro:

I love the way that Jesus leads us so perfectly in His infinite wisdom. He guides us with the truth that we need at the exact time that we need it. Sometimes we don't see the wisdom of His timing, because He is preparing us for something in the future. Or, He may be dealing with something in our hearts that we aren't even aware of yet. But today, as He has providentially guided us to be looking at Psalm 4, I think you'll see a direct connection to what's going on around you and in your own heart. It speaks life-giving truth and wise direction directly to our situation in the world. Psalm 4 speaks to people in a time of uncertainty and turmoil- a time of national crisis.

The truth is, some parts of the Bible can seem very remote from our normal experience. That's because we live in a place and time where it is normal for us to go days, months, and sometimes years with a sense of safety and security. Our supply of food seems endless. Our economy is normally very stable. Many of the diseases that have devastated earlier generations have been eradicated, or at least held at bay so that they are no longer life-threatening. But this isn't the experience of most people in the world today. And it certainly hasn't been the experience of most people throughout history. And this is one reason why some of the Bible, and especially Psalms that lament catastrophes, may often seem foreign to us. We live pretty catastrophe-free lives.

Well, with the appearance of the Coronavirus, that thin facade of security has just been torn off, hasn't it? Your life is not as secure as you thought. Your health is not as secure as you thought. The stock market, and all that it affects in our economy- from retirement funds to our food supply- is not as secure as you thought. This new awareness of our fragility is a pressure test. It brings what's really inside us bubbling up to the surface: It makes us ask: "Where is my hope, really? What is my deepest source of joy? What is the real anchor of my peace? Is it in financial security? Is it in health? What if these things are taken away by the coronavirus?"

And even if this virus ends up not being a major trauma for most of us? The reality is that life is always more precarious than we think. What about the cancer diagnosis that may come tomorrow? The loss of your job that could come next year? The stock market crash that could come at any time? The election not going the way you think it should? Will your joy and peace melt away in the face of these things?

Jesus is speaking to you today from Psalm 4 today so that they *do not*. He is giving you this opportunity to meditate in your heart today- to evaluate your heart honestly, and let go of any fleeting, ephemeral things that you are clinging to for joy and peace. He wants to show you how to anchor your soul to the only rock that can give you enduring joy and unshakeable peace through every crashing wave of life.

So this is the question I want to help you answer from Psalm 4 today:
How should I respond when the world is in turmoil?

- 1. Boldly entrust your future to God because of His past grace.**
- 2. Meditate on the consequences of replacing God.**
- 3. Glorify Jesus through prayer, joy, and peace.**

Boldly entrust your future to God because of His past grace.

We know that this psalm was written by King David, because the superscript tells us that this is a “psalm of David.” Right from verse one, we see that David is anchoring his joy and peace in the *present* firmly in the grace that God has shown him in the *past*. And we see here one of the things that I love about the psalms- The psalms teach us to pray in ways that we’re often hesitant to. David begins in v.1 with what sounds like a demand “Answer me when I call!” Sounds downright disrespectful, doesn’t it? Do you let your kids talk to you like that? “Mom, I want some breakfast... Answer me when I call!!!”

In case you weren’t sure how to answer that... here’s a little sidebar on parenting... You absolutely should NOT let your kids talk to you like that! Parental authority represents the authority of God to our kids and when we let them disrespect us, we’re teaching them to disrespect God. And, when there’s a

dad in the home, you should see it as primarily *your* job to make sure that your kids don't disrespect your wife like that! End of sidebar...

Now, that's the case in *ordinary* circumstances. Kids shouldn't speak to their parents like that. But, what if mom is by the side of a crowded pool, chatting it up with some friends and her son is treading water frantically, freaking out, afraid he's about to drown and he can't get her attention!?! In that case "Mom! Listen to me! Answer me when I call!" is *totally* appropriate! And that's the kind of desperate cry that David is making here!

Listen, it *is* appropriate to talk to God like this when we're desperate. What makes it appropriate is that it glorifies God by showing that He is our only hope! He's the only one who can rescue us!

So, in our desperation, this cry comes pouring out of us Christians because God is *for us* what David declares Him to be in verse 1- He is the God of our righteousness! Christian, that means that He is the God who has *declared you* to be righteous. And this is *not* on the basis of your own righteousness. Far from it! If you make this kind of desperate, almost demanding prayer to God based on your own worthiness, then you should have ZERO confidence that He will even pay attention to you, much less answer you favorably!

This is why we should pray with confidence *only* when we pray in the name of Jesus. And that doesn't mean that we just have to be sure to tag his name on at the end of our prayers. It means that we are basing our confidence that God will hear us on this one thing: That, through faith, we have received the righteousness of Jesus. So that, even if our own personal righteousness has been lousy that day, or if we aren't sure if we're using the right words and addressing God politely, we can still be *absolutely certain* that God won't turn a deaf ear and let us drown in life!

David expresses this kind of confidence again at the end of verse 3: "the LORD hears when I call to him!" Believer, you should have this same kind of boldness! God sees you clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, He has *declared* you to be righteous, and you can be absolutely sure that He WILL answer you when you call!

So, King David is bold in his prayers because he is coming to God based on God's declaration about him, not on his own, personal moral goodness. And David has even more confidence that God *will* answer when he calls because God has rescued him in the past. He says "You have given me relief when I was in distress." The Hebrew word translated "distress" here has the idea of being "hemmed in." In our lingo, we might say "God, you've gotten me out of tight spots before!" "I was backed into a corner and You broke down the wall behind me!"

There were plenty of situations in David's life that he could be referring to. He had faced down bears and lions, and a giant!- as a shepherd boy. He was cornered by King Saul a number of times and, on occasion, almost literally pinned to the wall by him! As we were reminded last week, his own son Absalom tried to knock him off. We don't know exactly which of these situations David's referring to in verse 1, but it's clear that his desperate cry to God "Answer me!" is grounded in the fact that when he had cried out to God in the past, God came through!

But it's right here that we sometimes have a hard time, isn't it? "What about those times that I prayed and it seemed like God did *not* answer me?" That can be a real issue for us, can't it? I don't have the time to give you an in-depth theology of prayer right here, but do I want to address this briefly...

First of all, what seems like a hard "No" from God in answer to our prayer may actually be a "not yet." Or, it could be a "No, because I'm your loving Father and I have something far better in mind for you!"

But, the deepest root of our confidence in prayer is that God *has* already gotten us out of the tightest spot we've ever been in! There's a corner that we were *born* backed into! That was when we were in the corner of our sin nature, and our own personal sin-guilt, with God's righteous wrath barreling down on us! We were dead from the word go, with no way out! But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love for us, reconciled His love and His wrath by putting His Son on the Cross to bear the wrath for *our* sin, so that we can now- simply by trusting in what Jesus has done- be His beloved daughters and sons! If you are a Christian, *that's* the tightest spot that you will *ever* be in and God has *already pulled you out of it!*

Since God has already done this- given us His own Son- the Apostle Paul asks in Romans 8:32, won't He also give us EVERYTHING else that we truly need!? It's a Captain Obvious question... Of *course* He will!

So, while the struggle to pray in the face of God's apparent silence at times *is real*, the truth is that if that struggle keeps us from praying, we have a value issue. We're not valuing Jesus highly enough. We're not rejoicing in the Gospel enough. We need to learn from King David here, and continue to call out to God, because, through Jesus, He has already given us ultimate relief from our ultimate distress! You *can* boldly entrust your future to God because of His past grace! That's the message of verse 1.

Which brings us to the second answer to that question: How should I respond when the world is in turmoil?

Meditate on the consequences of replacing God.

Now, up to this point in this message, it's not been clear how this psalm connects very directly to the coronavirus, so I want to try to make that connection before we get into verses 2-5. Let's jump to verses 6 & 7, and then we'll come back to verse 2. I think that verses 6 and 7 give us the occasion of this psalm. They reveal the reason that David was compelled to call out to the LORD in desperation. What was he dealing with that led him to write this? I think he was facing a catastrophe in the land. Specifically, a lack of rain, leading to a famine.

Here's why I think this. In verse 6, we read this, "There are many who say, "Who will show us some good?" And we're not left guessing what they mean by "good" because of the way that Hebrew poetry works. One of the main poetic devices in Hebrew poetry is parallelism, where the repetition of an idea, using slightly different words, helps to clarify or expand on a preceding line. In this case, we look at verse 7 and see that it's the "grain and wine" abounding that are parallel to the "good" of verse 6.

"Grain and wine" were often used to represent abundant food, in general. It's kind of like the phrase "milk and honey" when used to refer to the Promised Land in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Promised Land was said to be a land where milk and honey flowed. In other words, the Promised Land would

be the opposite of the desert-like wilderness where Israel wandered for forty years. Here, in verse 6, many people are asking, “When is the land going to flow again with grain and wine!?” which indicates that the land had become like a barren wilderness, not yielding any food.

So, it seems very likely to me that David is in a situation where there’s been a shortage of rainfall. Israel is a pretty arid land and without regular rainfall, famine would quickly follow. I think this was a national crisis, more severe than our coronavirus pandemic. A drought in Israel could wipe out the entire nation!

We’ve already seen David’s response of faith in the face of this crisis. He’s pleading with God! But now, going back up to **Verse 2**, we see how other people have been responding. David speaks to them, saying “O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies?” That’s the ESV translation. But there are some challenges with the translation and interpretation here.

The way the ESV reads, it sounds as though, in the midst of this crisis, David’s reputation as king is at stake, that some people are slandering him. And this wouldn’t be surprising, would it? People always like to blame the government when things aren’t going well. Nothing much has changed in a few thousand years!

But, other translations, like the NIV, translate v.2 this way: “How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?” (NIV) One of the reasons they translate it this way is that the ESV phrase “seek after lies” would be unique in the OT as a way to talk about slander. That would be unusual. But being deluded enough to start worshiping false gods... That was a common problem with Israel. So that seems like a legit translation.

Another indication that the NIV’s translation may be more accurate here is that the word translated “honor” in the ESV and translated “glory” in the NIV is “kabod.” “Kabod” is normally translated as “glory” and this term is frequently used by David to refer to the LORD himself. In fact, if we look back at **Psalm**

3:3, we see this very thing. “But you O LORD, are a shield about me, my *glory*, and the lifter of my head.”

If the NIV is more accurate here, and I think that it is, then what David is really saying is this, “How long will you continue grumbling against the LORD, doubting His ability to provide for us!? How long are you going to keep up your worship of these gods who are actually nothing but lies!? Why are you so quickly turning away from the only One who can actually help us!?”

I think that what the NIV has is *very likely* what is intended here. But even so, it may be that there is an intentional ambiguity in the Hebrew because the reputation of the LORD’s anointed *king* and the reputation of the LORD *himself* were so intimately connected that to turn against the king in this way was the same as turning against the LORD! The king represented the LORD to the people, so to reject the king, to slander the king, was to reject and slander the LORD himself!

I point this out here for two reasons... One is that this is an idea that we frequently run across in the psalms, so it’s good to know this and keep it in mind as we study the Psalms. When we hear David in the Psalms pleading for God to defend him against slanderers, we shouldn’t see it as a selfish request. He is actually asking God to defend His own glory!

Second, because King David points us towards the ultimate king, King Jesus, it reminds us that when anyone rejects Jesus, they are rejecting God’s anointed King and, in doing so, they are rejecting God himself.

And this rejection has consequences...the LORD won’t listen to you if you’re hedging your bets, sometimes praying to Him, but not really trusting fully in Him, so also trusting in other gods. **Verse 3**, “But know that the LORD has set apart the *godly* for himself; the LORD hears *me* when I call to him!” That word “godly” translates the Hebrew word “hasid” (Hasidism) and it’s related to the word “hesed” which has to do with steadfast love, with covenant faithfulness.

So, while, Yes, this *is* another bold statement of David’s confidence before God... I think, more than that, it’s intended as a warning- God listens to those who are *faithful* to Him, but not to the *faithless*! It’s a warning and an admonition

to those who are being tempted to try to keep the God of Israel in their back pocket, while also praying to other gods just in case He doesn't come through!

God requires our wholehearted trust. In the NT, James gives us a similar warning when he says, *“But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” James 1:6-8*

Well, nowadays we aren't tempted to throw in a little Baal worship with our Christianity, but we are tempted with other false gods, aren't we? Economic security. Prosperity. Money. And Jesus has a word for us on that front in Luke 16:13: *“No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” Luke 16:13*

What are you serving? Where is your trust? Where do you find your security? In God, or in your money? In God, or in your health? Times like these that we're facing right now will reveal the true source of our hope.

So David gives us wise counsel in **Verse 4**... “Be angry and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds and be silent.” Other translations say, instead of “be angry”, “tremble.” This is the more common translation of the word, and I think it fits here. Consider who it is that you're being unfaithful to! It's the God of the universe, the Creator, your Redeemer! You should tremble at the thought of sinning by turning away from Him!

In my devotional reading I've been in Numbers and just yesterday I read about two times that the Israelites grumbled against God and tried to reject His appointed leaders. Three whole families were swallowed up by the earth in an instant for rejecting Moses and Aaron, God's appointed leaders. And, right after that, 14,700 people died in a plague sent by God because of their grumbling doubt. David is reminding Israel of their history! “You should tremble at the thought of turning away from this awesome, all-powerful God!!!”

If you can't sleep at night because you're filled with anxious thoughts about the coronavirus, instead ponder the consequences of abandoning hope in God. Where else are you going to turn? All other hopes are fleeting and ultimately futile. Think about it while you lay in bed at night. If you're not crying out to Him in prayer, then it's better to just be quiet. Don't grumble against God.

Instead, (**Verse 5**) "*offer right sacrifices*"- which, as the Apostle Paul tells us as NT believers, is the *living* sacrifice of our whole lives- and *put your trust in the LORD!* It's only those who *wholeheartedly* entrust their entire lives to the Lord that He answers when they call.

The terrible consequence of not trusting in God alone is that He *will not answer you* when you call on Him. And, not only will He *not* answer your faithless prayers when you turn to other gods, but you are trying His patience and risking the kindling of His anger against you! Tremble at that thought. Don't grumble and abandon your faith in the face of uncertainty and even personal tragedy. Think soberly about where your hope is truly resting. Meditate on the consequences of trying to replace God. That is the warning here.

Glorify Jesus through prayer, joy and peace.

David urges us at the end of **V. 5** "Trust in the LORD!" This is the response of faith in the midst of uncertain times! Praise the Lord for the grace He has shown you in the past, praise Him for the grace He is giving you right now by sustaining your life and cling all the more tightly to Him! Put your trust in the Lord!

Brothers and sisters, we have a unique opportunity right now to display our confidence, grounded in the Gospel, that *our* God is both sovereign and good. We can glorify Jesus in the world by being stubbornly persistent in prayer, even in the face of a terrible virus. Even in the face of a crashing stock market.

May we not be among those who cry out, "Who will show us some good?", as if we're unsure where to turn! May we not be among those who are ready to jump on the bandwagon of anything that seems to hold out a promise of rescue! We already know the *only* One who has the power to show us true and lasting

good!

Let's not meditate on what we *don't* have, or what we think we *could* lose. Meditate instead on the immense *good* that God has already given you in Christ! Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places is yours! You are a child of God and you will inherit the earth!

In that confidence, glorify Jesus by your bold prayers! In private, with your family, and in public as God gives you opportunities, call out to God with some version of, "Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!"

And may we glorify Jesus by our indestructible JOY! I love the Psalms, and Psalm 4:7 is one of my favorite verses in the whole book! **V.7** "*You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound!*" What a glorious testimony to the power of Jesus, for us to have a real, deep, unshakeable joy during this time! Not panic. Not distraction. Not denial. Not hard-hearted self-preservation, but a clear-eyed, realistic, honest joy that leads us to joyful service and even sacrifice!

And, church, I pray that we will glorify Jesus with a Psalm 4:8 kind of PEACE! That, in the midst of this turmoil and uncertainty we would be a people who can say with David "**In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone O LORD, make me dwell in safety.**"

And peace doesn't come from the safety of changed circumstances. "Oh Lord, when this virus is gone and things are back to normal, *then* I'll lie down in peace!" No!

There is no indication in this psalm that God made it rain as soon as David prayed. The suffering of the people under this famine was still real. The pressure was still on David as the leader of the nation. And yet, having cast his cares on the Lord, David is able to say "Because I know and trust the God who is holding me, and who is holding the world in His hands, my head hits the pillow and I'm out."

Isaiah 26:3-4- I encourage you to memorize this passage- sums this up beautifully .

*You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.*

*Trust in the Lord forever,
for the LORD God is an everlasting rock.*

Is. 26:3-4

The picture that comes to mind is a rock climber sleeping peacefully in a tent hanging over a 1,000 foot drop. It's not a safe *place*, and yet he sleeps like a baby because he is confident that he is anchored securely to the *rock*.

What an incredible opportunity we have right now to glorify Jesus by having hearts that are free from anxiety! To not be anxious about anything, but in everything, with prayer and petition to present our requests to God. And (this is Philippians 4:6-7) the *peace* of God, which transcends ALL understanding will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus!

This kind of peace in the face of turmoil will transcend ALL human understanding- there will be no explanation for it but our rock-solid belief that God is on His throne, that He is still good, and that Jesus is alive!

Closing:

During this time of uncertainty and fear what do joy and peace look like for us on the ground? How do we live out joy and peace in a way that glorifies Jesus? Andy Crouch (former executive editor of Christianity Today) has written a great article about the wonderful opportunity that the coronavirus pandemic provides us to lift high the name of Jesus. I want to read a portion of that article as we close.

The Roman world was full of plagues. Epidemics regularly decimated cities and regions. Though ancient people did not understand the germ theory of disease, they knew enough to flee cities, if they had the means to do so.

*The first Christians, who saw themselves as the household of God in their cities, did not flee the plagues. They stayed, and they served. In his book *The Rise of Christianity*, sociologist Rodney Stark develops a statistical argument that this commitment to providing meaningful care to people stricken by the plague was, all by itself, **a major contributor to the growth of the church in the first centuries of the common era.***

After you had recovered from the plague, after all, where would you want to worship? The pagan temple whose priests and elite benefactors had fled at the first sign of trouble? Or the household of the neighbor who had brought you food and water, care and concern, at great risk to themselves?

When this plague has passed, what will our neighbors remember of us? Will they remember that the Christians took immediate, decisive action to protect the vulnerable, even at great personal and organizational cost? Will they remember that, being prepared and free from panic, the households of their Christian neighbors were able to visit the needy (while protecting them by keeping appropriate social distance!), provide for their needs, and bring hope? Will they remember that, having ensured safety in all the ways we could, we still gathered to worship and praise God together, week after week, celebrating the resurrection — that even as we ceased doing inessential things, we made clear that serving and worshipping God was the greatest and most essential task of our lives?”

Joy and peace overflowing in worship and service. What an incredible testimony this could be to the power of the Gospel! Not foolish... not in unloving, naive ways, but in a way that demonstrates clearly that our joy and peace don't rest in having a trouble-free life, or even in life itself!

Communion:

Every Psalm finds its deepest expression in Jesus, and Jesus expressed a Psalm 4:8 kind-of-faith in the most *ultimate* way when He lay down and slept the deepest sleep of all- the sleep of death. His life wasn't taken from Him- He laid it down in faith that His Father would raise Him up. He did it with joy in His heart- “For the joy set before Him.” And He did it in peace- “Into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Communion... weekly declaration and renewal of our trust in God. Weekly infusion of joy and peace for our souls. Tessa's song/prayer... (Ask Tessa to come up at this point)

Communion is for those who have found peace for their lives and their souls in what Jesus accomplished by His death and glorious resurrection. Our

hope as Christians is encapsulated in one question from the Heidelberg Catechism. The question asks “What is your only hope in life and death?” As a way of preparing to receive the grace of communion today, I want to invite all of you who believe this to make this joyful, peace-giving declaration aloud with me:

Question:

What is your only hope in life and death?

Answer:

**That I am not my own,
but belong with body and soul,
both in life and in death,
to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.
He has fully paid for all my sins
with his precious blood,
and has set me free
from all the power of the devil.
He also preserves me in such a way
that without the will of my heavenly Father
not a hair can fall from my head;
indeed, all things must work together
for my salvation.
Therefore, by his Holy Spirit
he also assures me
of eternal life
and makes me heartily willing and ready
from now on to live for him.**

(From The Heidelberg Catechism)