

Faith in the Face of Foes

Text: Psalm 4:1-8

Introduction:

1. The Title: The heading of the Psalm gives us a couple of details:
 - To the Chief Musician – the administrator of the Psalm. The “Chief Musician” was “the master or director of the sacred music of the sanctuary” (C.H. Spurgeon).
 - Neginoth – the accompaniment of the Psalm. The word refers to stringed instruments.
 - A Psalm of David – the author of the Psalm.
2. The Time: Whereas Psalm 3 could be called a morning Psalm, this Psalm could be designated an evening Psalm. Spurgeon notes, “This Psalm is apparently intended to accompany the third, and make a pair with it. If the last may be entitled the morning Psalm, this could be called the evening Hymn.”
3. The Theme: This Psalm is a plea to the Lord for help in the face of slander and opposition. Despite the difficulties and trials, the dominant tone in the Psalm is that of confidence in God in spite of the problems being faced. Bible commentator Allen Ross suggests the following expository idea for the passage: “The righteous can rejoice in God’s protecting grace that brings them peace and security in the face of distressing attempts to disgrace them.”
4. We will divide the Psalm into three sections for our brief expository study.

I. THE PSALMIST’S SUPPLICATION (VS. 1)

A. The Foundation of his Prayer (Vs. 1a)

David pleads on the basis of:

1. His Relationship with God – “O God of **my** righteousness”
 - a. This title of God is unique to this Psalm. God was the source of David’s righteousness.
 - b. David could approach God not on account of his own righteousness but because God was his righteousness. In like manner, we can approach the throne of grace because of the righteousness God gave us through salvation (imputed righteousness).
2. His Remembrance of God – “thou hast enlarged me”
 - a. The word ‘enlarged’ means to broaden, make room. The word ‘distressed’ has the idea of a tight, narrow place or bind. David had experienced God’s comfort and relief in past difficulties and this gave Him confidence to ask for God’s help for the present pressures.
 - b. This is a ministry God has to us when we are “**in** distress”. It does not necessarily mean the immediate removal of the distress but God enlarges us to be able to bear it; He cools the heat of our troubles spirits with His peace, love and comfort.

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- c. 2 Cor. 1:3-4 "Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in **all** our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."
- d. Remembering God's faithfulness to us in the past quickens faith and confidence to seek God for help in the present circumstances we find ourselves in. David is "pleading past mercies as a ground for present favour" (C.H.S).

B. The Focus of his Prayer (Vs. 1b)

- 1. For mercy from God – "have mercy upon me". Spurgeon writes, "The best of men need mercy as truly as the worst of them."
- 2. For an answer from God – "Hear me when I call...hear my prayer"
 - a. This is not a cry of hopelessness and of doubt like the heathen but a cry of confidence that God will surely answer His people.
 - b. Psalm 34:15 "The eyes of the LORD *are* upon the righteous, and **his ears *are open* unto their cry.**"

II. THE PSALMIST'S ADMONITION (VS. 2-5)

David now addresses his detractors, warning them to repent as God is on the side of the righteous. There are three parts to this admonition:

A. Searching Questions (Vs. 2)

- 1. How long will you shame me? "They were trying to ruin David by attacking his honour." (Ross)
- 2. How long will you slander me?
 - a. 'vanity' = emptiness
 - b. 'leasing' = old English word for lies, falsehood, fabrications. They were tearing down David's reputation with empty, baseless lies.
 - c. Clearly this Psalm, like the previous, arose out of affliction in David's life. "The Psalm...is another choice flower from the garden of affliction. Happy it is for us that David was tried, or probably we should never have heard these sweet sonnets of faith."

B. Sure Affirmations (Vs. 3)

- 1. The Righteous are God's Special Treasure (Vs. 3a)
 - a. "set apart" = the word has the idea of "marked out". God will not abandon His people to the wicked.
 - b. "for himself" = the righteous are God's special possession. We are a "peculiar people" (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9).
 - c. The ungodly are called upon to 'know' these truths in order that they might be warned about their attacks against God's people.
- 2. The Righteous enjoy God's Special Favour (Vs. 3b)
 - a. This is a statement of total confidence that God will hear the prayer of the righteous.

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- b. Psalm 34:17 "*The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.*"

C. Solemn Exhortations (Vs. 4-5)

The ungodly are exhorted to:

1. Repentance towards God (Vs. 4)

This would involve:

- a. A solemn fear of God that leads to repentance – "Stand in awe, and sin not". The phrase "stand in awe" comes from one word meaning to quiver or tremble (with any violent emotion). "In the Psalm, David was calling for his enemies to be shaken to the core so that they would stop sinning." (Ross)
- b. A solemn reflection upon one's ways in light of these truths. In light of the fact God is on the side of the righteous, they should carefully consider their ways. The word 'commune' literally means "to say". Here it has the idea of meditating or thinking during the night hours in their hearts.

2. Reliance upon God (Vs. 5)

- a. "sacrifices of righteousness" = sacrifices God would accept. There was a way back to God by sacrifice. The O.T. sacrifices pictured Christ the coming Lamb. It also points to the truth that God is more interested in genuine righteousness than empty sacrifices offered from ungodly, unrepentant lives.
- b. "put your trust in the LORD" = a call to exercise faith

III. THE PSALMIST'S EXPECTATION (VS. 6-8)

A. Request (Vs. 6)

1. The perspective of the foolish (Vs. 6a) This is life viewed from the human standpoint. It is the perspective of sight not of faith.
2. The plea of the faithful (Vs. 6b)
 - a. The Psalmist recalls the blessing of the priests at the sanctuary in Numbers 6:24-25 "The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: **The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee**, and give thee peace."
 - b. Here, the Psalmist turns this blessing into a prayer for God's favour to be upon them.

B. Rejoicing (Vs. 7)

1. The source of this joy (Vs. 7a) David again reflects on God's gracious dealings in the past. "The verb is in the perfect tense, referring to what God has done in the past." (Ross)
2. The illustration of this joy (Vs. 7b) There was great joy at harvest time in Israel but it did not compare with the Divine joy God put in the heart of David, even in times of trial and testing. "Christ in the heart is better than corn in the barn, or wine in the vat." (C.H.S.)

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C. Rest (Vs. 8)

1. "peace and sleep" = the result of knowing God and God's ways.
2. "thou only" = true safety only comes from God. David's confidence was in God and not in anything or anyone else.
3. Spurgeon: "They slumber sweetly whom faith rocks to sleep. No pillow is so soft as a promise; no coverlet so warm as an assured interest in Christ."

Conclusion:

1. Theological lessons (what we learn about God)
 - God hears and answers the prayers of His people.
 - God ministers comfort and relief to those facing trials and opposition.
 - God knows and treasures us as His children. We are His special possession.
2. Soteriological lessons (what we learn about salvation)
 - Salvation involves the fear of God.
 - Repentance involves the mind. The sinner must earnestly consider his sinful ways with a view to turning from them to God.
 - Salvation involves total reliance upon God (trust/faith).
3. Practical lessons (what we learn about the Christian life)
 - Believers can expect false accusations about them and their faith.
 - Believers need to take their burdens to the Lord in prayer.
 - Believers need to issue the call to repentance to those who oppose God and God's people.
 - Believers can expect answers to prayer.
 - Believers need to put their total confidence (faith) in God in all their trials.