

MORNING AND EVENING, CRY OUT IN PRAYER TO GOD!

Psalm 3: 1-8 and Psalm 4: 1-8 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

In 1810, a young mother struggled in childbirth to bear a son, and she died, leaving behind to her widowed husband an only baby boy named Henry Alford. It was the only son for Henry's father, a pastor and curate in Wiltshire, England. Henry's father home-schooled Henry. Henry was a genius. By age 6, he wrote his first manuscript called, "The Travels of St. Paul." By age 7, he wrote a collection of odes (poems he set to music) in Latin. By age 9, Henry wrote a compendious "History of the Jews," and he drew out a chronological scheme for tabulating all the events of the Old Testament. Before he was 10, Henry produced a series of sermons in a sermon book entitled, "Looking Unto Jesus." By age seven during a time when Henry's father was abroad as a traveling chaplain, Henry learned an astonishing number of lines written in Greek, Latin and English by his favorite classic authors. As a boy before he was 10, he engaged in what was then called versification. What he did was to write poetry of all the Bible stories. As an adult, He became a musician who constructed his own personally made organ that he played on. He wrote hundreds of hymns including # 111 in our hymnal, "Come Ye Thankful People, Come." Strikingly, as a theologian, he spent 20 years producing his Alford's Greek New Testament still used today. What has led me to speak of Henry Alford is that his last sermon ever preached in 1871 was on Psalm 3 and 4. In his journal written for New Year's Day, 1871, this Dean of Canterbury, Pastor Henry Alford wrote in his journal, "I preached on Psalm 3: 5 and Psalm 4: 8 today. They are morning and evening prayers of thanksgiving. God only knows whether I shall survive this year. I sometimes think my health is giving way, but Your will be done, Lord!"

Most of us have heard of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, and some of us even have his mighty "Morning and Evening" – a book of devotionals for every day of the year. Long before Henry Alford's last message, or Charles H. Spurgeon's devotional book, David, the psalmist was compelled to write his own morning prayer and an evening prayer that both appear back to back in the Psalms and they appear to have the same occasion. These two psalms, 3 and 4 were occasioned by the blackest night and darkest spot in David's life. You know about this dark page in his life, his adultery with Bathsheba, and then his murder of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, the Hittite—and David's unsuccessful effort to hide his sin of adultery. Later, in conviction, remorse, and true repentance, David cried out to God and the Lord forgave David, as Nathan the prophet announced to David God's forgiveness. It is all written down in II Samuel 11-19. Yet, despite God's forgiveness of David, Nathan thundered to David as a fearful consequence of His

sin in II Samuel 12:11-14. Listen! And as you listen, beloved, remember that though God will and He does forgive even the blackest of sins, the consequences of our sins are often trials we have to face for many years. Consequences of sin are not a lack of forgiveness, but are rather the direct result of sequences in life that are similar to a multi-car pile-up. There is a domino effect with sin. Sin can leave terrible consequences, even after we are totally forgiven by God. I read Nathan's prophecy to David, "Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he (and we know he is Absalom, David's son) he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.' David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die."

Beloved, these two psalms were written after the death of David and Bathsheba's son and David's days of tears. They were written after David reaped in his family the awful consequences of his terrible sins. The consequences were a long and bitter harvest. David's daughter, Tamar was raped by her brother, David's son, Amnon, who was in turn murdered by his brother Absalom. Absalom led a rebellion against his own father, David, and for a few short days, Absalom stole from David, his kingly throne. In the rebellion, troublesome things occurred as some of David's men and his most trusted counselor, Ahithophel defected from David. This utterly broke David's heart. Added to the heartbreak, in the rebellion, a battle ensued and Absalom was killed by Joab with darts to his body as he was caught in a great oak tree by his hair. Oh, the terrible consequences of sin! When David heard the news, he cried out over and over, "O my son, Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Between the initial rebellion that followed Absalom, David left his throne in Jerusalem and fled for his life. Let me take up the story of the time during which these two psalms were written. Turn with me to II Samuel 16: 15 and I am reading to II Samuel 17: 23. Now you know the rest of the story.

Now notice the title of Psalm 3—"A psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son." We might well title this Psalm 3, "Save me, O my God." We can surmise from Psalm 3: 5 that this is a morning psalm, the night after David fled from Jerusalem for we read, "I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me." This is a morning psalm and prayer. Psalm 4 has the title, "To the choirmaster with stringed instruments, a psalm of David." It appears to be the same setting only now David is awaiting the battle with Absalom. It is an evening psalm for in Psalm

4: 8, we read, “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” Each of these two psalms has 4 stanzas or strophes. My reason for preaching them together, which has stretched me much, the reason is because they appear to be the morning and evening of one awful day in the life of the man after God’s own heart, David, God’s forgiven son, but nevertheless, the man who was facing the consequences of his awful sins, though he was forgiven. These two psalms teach us four vital lessons when we are facing the consequences of sin in our own lives, but we know we have repented, and we know we are forgiven by the Lord. These lessons are practical lessons that should help every single one of us, because at times, each of us face consequences we have set in motion by our sins, but we know we have also been forgiven. The question I pose to us all is, “What does God want to teach us when we are already repentant and forgiven, but yet we are experiencing the consequences of our sins? Four lessons:

GOD WANTS US TO REST IN HIM WHEN WE FACE SIN’S CONSEQUENCES, BUT WE KNOW WE ARE FORGIVEN. (I.)

Notice this morning psalm, Psalm 3: 1, 2. We read, “O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God.” Have we been where David was? Have we done it again to ourselves at home, in the family with our husband or wife, with our parents or with our children? Has it happened at work? You ask what. You each know as well as I do what happens when we have sinned, not on purpose, but it has happened. We have gotten angry and said hurtful, accusing, judgmental words. There is an icy silence, cold and sullen, cold as a man fallen through the ice. We have asked God to forgive us. I John 1: 9 declares to us that God is immediately faithful and righteous to do so. Now we are forgiven, but the climate of our world, at our house or at work is either on fire, hotter than a baker’s apron, or it is as cold, cold as the Polar Cap. Now it is our job to work our way through the fire or the ice back to a rhythm in life, and this interim of feeling like the world is against us is tough. And we say, “Many are my foes. Many are rising against me.”

Beloved, please know that people have faced hard times before we have. People that have sinned greatly, like David, yet forgiven men and women, young people and children whom God has forgiven, yet folk who are facing hard times. So what did David mean when he said, “Many are my foes?” Well, his own son Absalom claimed the kingdom. Absalom had stolen the kingdom with his lame promises of “If I were king, I would do a better job.” Turn to II Samuel 15: 1-6. Absalom was riding high and out to kill his dad. But there’s more to the story. Even as David fled out of Jerusalem, he faced an evil man, Shimei. Turn to II Sam. 16: 5-14.

How did David face the terrible consequences of his sin? After verse 2, we read, “Selah.” It is a musical pause in the singing of the psalm, but it also means to the reader or singer, “Pause and reflect.” This Selah sign is here like a number of crosses on the side of the road. What do you think when you see them? “Some folk died here in an automobile accident. Slow down.” As David took the cursing without retaliating, we see he was resting in the Lord. Did you realize that a repentant person who is truly repentant is not an attacker or an accuser. Why? The reason is--when we repent, we don’t need to justify ourselves. We stand accused, but now we are forgiven. We don’t want to take off the head of our foes. No, we conclude that attacks on us just may be one of the consequences of our sin. How did David face the terrible consequences of his sin? Remember our first lesson. He rested in the Lord. Listen to his words in Psalm 3: 3-6. We sang these words this morning. “But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the Lord, and He answered me from His holy hill. Selah! This is pause of Pause and praise. Now notice the rest in God in verses 5, 6. “I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.” We sing, “Jesus, I am resting, resting, in the joy of what Thou art, I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart. So what is the first lesson we need to learn when we face sin’s consequences but we are forgiven? We must rest in the Lord. 2nd lesson:

GOD WANTS US TO TURN OUR STRUGGLES OVER TO HIM FOR SALVATION BELONGS TO THE LORD. (II.) Notice Psalm 3: 7,8. “Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God! For You strike all my enemies on the cheek; You break the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to the Lord; your blessing be on your people!” Selah! Again, pause and praise the Lord. As David rests, knowing the Lord is, v. 3, a shield about him—that is a shield on every side of him, what did David want more than all sided protection? Notice, David wanted more than defense. He wanted God to take up his cause and go on offense. David is humble when he is asking for salvation from the Lord. Notice back in v. 3,4, that he calls the Lord his glory. David the one who kills his 10 thousands, is saying, “Lord, You are my only glory. You alone even lift up my weary head.” David now is ready for the battle that will come as all Israel from Dan to Beersheba had been summoned by Absalom to come and go after David. And David is resting in the Lord and turning the battle over to the Lord. We sing, “The battle belongs to the Lord.” We sing, “Salvation belongs to the Lord.” But I ask you, beloved—if we mean that, why do we want to throw stones back at our Shimei’s? Why do we want Shimei’s head to roll? As long as you have venom, anger, and retaliation in your heart, the battle is not the Lord’s. The battle is yours, not the Lord’s and there is no Selah in your life.

It was David's habit to pray. God had always answered him—remember the slaying of the lion, the bear, Goliath and 10 thousands of Philistines. David, after his sin, its forgiveness, and after even facing grim consequences, David was once again becoming the man he had been when he slew Goliath. He was boasting again in the Lord. He is speaking here in a time when his days left may have been few for rising from sleep after a night of refreshing sleep. And he wasn't sleeping on a Serta-perfect mattress. No, his bed on that first night on the run was out in the open sky, beneath the stars, hunted by his foes. We read in v. 5, "I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me. This is not the sleep of exhaustion, but the sleep of trust in God. Numbers aren't everything. Absalom had the crowd, but David had God. One with God is a majority. Notice, David ends this first morning psalm not only with a prayer in verse 7—saying, "Lord, save me, but he moves on as a king to pray for God's blessing on His people, a people now who had been duped into following a rebel who stole the kingdom. We read, "Your blessing be on Your people! Selah!—Take that in. David wasn't harboring a grudge against his own duped people. When we are repentant, grudges are gone. We are praying for God's blessing on others. There is a third lesson: The psalm ends with Selah, so take a breath now before we go to finish with Psalm 4. The "Selah" connects the 2.

GOD WANTS US TO CONFIDENTLY SPEAK WITH HIM BEFORE WE SPEAK TO OTHERS. (III.)

Notice verse 1. This is David speaking to God in strophe # 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!" You may think David is resting on his own integrity, but I beg to differ. David has been forgiven, and his only integrity is that He is trusting in the God of his righteousness. God's mercy to him has made room for David to start over again. David's rebellion against God could not last for good. It was vain, false, and it was short-lived, because God calls us up short. And to add to God's conviction, even rebellious believers keep being called by God, haunted by His goodness and grace, we are forever being called back to His love. David is speaking of God's love in verse 1 saying—"You have given me relief when I was in distress. Now, remembering God's forgiveness in the past, I hear this evening prayer saying, "Lord, do it again. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer! In the strength of a new start, David, a forgiven sinner, is now God's spokesman to speak to others. Listen to him in verse 2. He says, "O men, and I add, ladies and gentlemen, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?" He is praying his heart to God but in the prayer, he is speaking to men as his heart feels him drawn to speak to his flock of Israel, his people over whom he is king. He is also saying to them, "How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah. This means, "Pause and be convicted, duped people in Israel. Don't listen to my son Absalom who has stolen

your hearts with lies. Then David goes on to call to his people in his prayer saying, in v. 3, “But (rather) know that Lord has set apart the godly for himself. Notice—David never said the perfect, but the repentant, the forgiven, the godly. David continues, “I have the ear of God. The Lord hears when I call to Him.” When we are forgiven by God and speak with Him confidently, we may plead with men and women confidently, not from the platform of perfection, but from the confident platform of forgiveness and renewed rest, peace, trust and confidence in the Lord. Lastly, # 4 lesson is:

GOD WANTS US TO STOP SINFUL ANGER, PONDER ON HIM, BE SILENT, OFFER RIGHT SACRIFICES, TRUST IN HIM, AND JOYFULLY EXPECT GOD TO LIFT UP THE LIGHT OF HIS FACE ON US SO WE MAY PEACEFULLY SLEEP, IN THE PRESENCE OF OUR ENEMY. (IV.)

Notice verse 4. We read, “Be angry and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds and be silent.” Selah. Pause. Meditate. Reflect on this. Paul quotes Psalm 4: 4 in Ephesians 4: 26, saying “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down upon your anger.” It is fine to be angry, if we do not sin with it. Most of us fail in that attempt. Holy anger is against sin, wickedness and evil, never directed at the sinner. We are to hate sin and be angry when we see it, but we are to pray for the sinners who, as we have been, are duped by sin. When we have a guilty conscience, when bedtime arrives, there’s no rest. To be silent in meditation is God’s call here. Read Psalm 32. It tells of God’s hand being heavy on us day and night when we do not confess. When we have repented and are forgiven, we can get silent before the Lord. Then v. 5, we can offer right sacrifices and put our trust in Him. When we trust in the Lord, it won’t matter what the world says. I read, v. 6, “There are many who say, “Who will show us any good?” We now can ignore the naysayers and those who would rob us of our trust, if they could. Then we can break out in joy—v. 7—for, “You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.” This 4th lesson is a building on the first three, “Resting in the Lord, (1) Turning our struggles over to Him, (2) Speaking confidently to God and to others. (3) When these first three lessons are learned, watch out—repeat # 4. The waterfall of God’s grace pours out. And we put our head on our pillow, v. 8 and not without avail. “In peace, I will both lie down and sleep; For You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” In 1555, Nicholas Ridley, a pastor or bishop in London faced martyrdom for Jesus the next day. His brother offered to spend the last night with him, but with David in Psalm 4: 8, he said, “I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest. For it is Thou, Lord, only, that makes me dwell in safety.” The next morning, chained to the stake in the town ditch, the flames rose as he cried, “Lord, receive my spirit.” Beloved, lie down in peace tonight and sleep. Pray to God. He’ll garrison your hearts in Christ Jesus. Amen.