

“Praying With Confidence”

30 August 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship:

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 407 How Deep The Father’s Love For Us

Prayers of Adoration & Confession: Jonathan Wilson

Reading: Psalm 4

Sermon:

Some believe that this psalm is written in the context of David’s troubles with Absalom, his son, and the attempted coup in the Kingdom of Israel, which is the subject of Psalm 3. However, the circumstances are not specifically mentioned; indeed that is the genius of the psalm, because it can be applied to many situations of distress where urgent relief is needed. It is a prayer that has become instructive and used in the corporate worship of the Israelites. It is a prayer that shows great confidence because of the covenant love that God has for David as His anointed one, as v.3 states.

Psalm 4 teaches us we can pray with confidence because we know, in Christ, God loves us and has our best interests at heart.

Let me tell the story that Joan told me last week, which I think is just wonderful and demonstrates the immense care of God, and in a way that is wonderfully surprising. Joan contracted polio as a child and is a long-term wheelchair user. Last week, she went swimming, taking the bus to the pool. After her swim, she went across the road to the shopping centre and a man begging at the door called her over. Thinking that he would ask her for money and knowing she didn’t have much made her wary. He said to her, “You were on the bus this morning...yes... you dropped your keys on the bus and I handed them to the driver.” She checked and - yes! - her keys were missing. Thanking him, she returned to the bus stop to get the bus home. It was the same driver... who confirmed the story, gave her the number of the depot where the keys had been handed in....it wasn’t the same bus. The keys were returned to her.

Now for those of us who believe in an all seeing and loving God who promises to care for His precious children, particularly when they are weak, I have to say I was simply thrilled and encouraged by the reality behind this story. God was taking care of His child, even though she had no idea that she needed help. *Sola deo gloria* - to God be the glory.

It is when the psalmist realises afresh the care of God for His anointed one that he is confident that he can completely trust God even in his present distress. So, let us look at this prayer and delve more deeply into where this confidence comes from.

I. Based on the Character of God and Urgent (v.1)

The prayer starts with the psalmist urgently asking God for relief from his distress - some men. The Hebrew word denotes men of influence and with authority are abusing him verbally, telling lies about him. It’s obviously distressing and difficult, and we can understand the urgency of his request for God to answer.

The appeal in his prayer is to the character of God. *“O my righteous God”* - he believes God is right, in contrast to the lies of the men of influence. God does right and with the use of the personal pronoun, *my*, David is affirming that God is *his* righteousness, and even that God will show him to be right.

David does NOT depend on his own righteousness but on God's, considering his position as the LORD's anointed - chosen, redeemed, and loved. Knowing God as our righteous God is important and gives us a place of true security.

He appeals as well, though it is hidden in the NIV, to God's past actions of deliverance. *“You have given me relief from my distress.”* He looks back at his life experiences and sees God's deliverance.

He appeals to the mercy of God, His love and grace. David is thinking of his being chosen by God, anointed and called a son of God receiving the promises of God for the kingdom. For us, we remember the righteous mercy of God to us in Jesus on the cross, where He took our sin and had His Son punished for it; and He calls us into relationship. *“Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or of a husband's will, but born of God.”*

God is, and we believe Him to be, righteous and merciful. It is the contemplation of His character that allows us to come urgently to God in prayer, particularly when we are in distress. God will do what is right and He will do what is merciful and loving. He has already proven this truth for us through Jesus and the cross. *“O Lord answer me, hear my prayer.”*

II. When Accused Unfairly (v.2-3)

The psalm is instructive. It is to be part of the worship experience of the people of God and they are to learn from it - what to do when accused unfairly.

Whatever was being said about David, it is shaming, disingenuous, mocking, wrong, deluded, false, lies; it is awful slanderous nonsense. It is sadly persistent; it has gone on a long time. In the modern context, we might call it fake news, trolling, bullying, abusive, particularly for the people of God when it is related to our faith and belief in God, see the footnote of v.2a. The instruction is to remember, to know who you are.

Dale Ralph Davis tells a story about Thomas Jefferson, when he was the second Vice President of the United States of America. Arriving on his horse at a town and looking for accommodation, dishevelled and splattered with mud, he is refused a bed because the proprietor had misjudged him and he had to go elsewhere. What the proprietor of the hotel thought of Jefferson did not alter the reality of who he was.

David is God's (v.3); he has been set apart, made holy by the choice of God and by His anointing. It is an act of grace, but he is now God's son (Psalm 2). He is protected under the covenant. The same privilege is ours under the New Covenant, sealed by the blood of Jesus. In Jesus, we are loved and cared for.

Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine.
(Isaiah 43:1)

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.
(Romans 8:33)

The implications of this are wonderful. If slandered, vilified, bullied because of our race, colour of skin, religious belief, love of Jesus, even our stupidity or sin, under God's covenant, love in Christ, we are secure and heard. *"The Lord will hear when I call to him"* - I am His. That is what we are to remember when we are abused, accused, and insulted for our faith in the Lord Jesus. It is out of that security that we pray and from that position we continue to live, protest, speak up, keep silent and bear....whatever God leads us to do.

III. When Angry (v.4-5)

If you are very awake this morning and alert, you might remember that the opening statement of Psalm 4:4 is the one the Apostle Paul uses when he speaks of anger in Ephesians 4:26ff, which we looked at in more depth on 19th July 2020 (you can access on the ARPC website).

David says when you are angry keep silent, keep it to yourself, repent and trust God. This prayer is an evening prayer, they are on their beds and David encourages them to search their hearts. So at night when considering your anger, here are some questions you might ask yourself.

Why are you angry?

How long have you been angry?

Are you angry at what God is angry at?

What is the outcome of your anger?

Often in our anger when we pause (Selah) and consider the reality, we begin to see the finger pointing at the wrong which makes us angry; but then, sadly, we see the three fingers pointing back at ourselves and there is need for forgiveness and restoration. Anger is a tricky emotion and it needs to be carefully handled. The psalmist's instruction, and the people of God sing, *"Be angry, do not sin, search your hearts and be silent, offer right sacrifices and trust in the Lord"*.

IV. When Faced With Despairing Doubters (v.6)

The prevailing wind is the usual and dominant one, a south-westerly for us in Ireland, driving in the rain. The prevailing culture regarding God is negative - who can show us any good in God? God and suffering, God and Hell, God and church divisions, God and child abuse in the Church, God and marriage, God and politics - "Who can show us any good?"

So how does David suggest we deal with that? Well, his request is taken from the blessing the priests gave at the end of the service, the benediction. It is one we are familiar with because we sing it at every baptism. *"Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD."* (Numbers 6). It is a request for the true character of God to be made evident to us, that we might know and experience the light (the goodness, guidance, blessing) of God and that others would also see and believe. We pray for more of God, for deeper knowledge of Him and an experience of Him. Joan's story has been a great encouragement to me, the light of the face (character) of God has shone. Who can show us any good? Well here is a story of God being good.

V. The Blessing of Being Loved and Heard by God (v.7-8)

The story of Joan and the keys not only encouraged me but Joan as well. What is significant and important in the story is the fact that Joan was infected with the Polio virus, has lived in a wheelchair for most of her life, and finds the challenge of life generally difficult. However, we know that she has a deep joy, a great attitude to life, which stems from her saving faith in the Lord Jesus and the real and experiential presence of the Holy Spirit. The psalmist speaks of this in v.7: *"You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and wine abound."* Joy is God-given and not dependent on circumstances. The joy God gives is greater than for those who need everything to work out well and to have an abundance of good things. God-given joy is not dependent on circumstances. Inner joy, because you are a loved child of God, is secure in His covenant promises.

Believing this leads to an ability to lie down and sleep in peace. Peace and joy - what a combination?! - not dependent on circumstances, leads to us being good sleepers and not anxious worriers, because we are utterly secure.

The blessing of being loved and heard by God means that as the psalm ends, he has journeyed from lying down with much on his mind that was distressing, contemplated the character of God, God's past deeds and loving care for him as a covenant child, and the oppression and burden has been replaced by confidence and peace. It is a security in life and in death, dependent on the righteousness and mercy of God in Christ.

Psalm 4 teaches us we can pray with confidence because we know, in Christ, God loves us and has our best interests at heart.

Abide With Me, written by Henry F Lyte in 1847, educated in Trinity College, a physically weak man with a strong spirit who wrote, "it is better to wear out than rust out." The words express a great confidence in God, even when we face our greatest challenge of death and the final sleep.

Hymn of Reflection: IPH 661 Abide With Me

Prayers for Others: Ray Speer

Closing Praise: There Is A Higher Throne

Announcements

Benediction: And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now, and for evermore. Amen.