

Cry to God

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[0:00] Do take your seats, please. Well, it was a very good morning from him, and it's a good morning from me too. My name's John, and it's good to open the Scriptures together at Psalm number 4.

If you'd like to find those in your Bible, find that in your Bible, that'd be really helpful. Have it in front of you or on your phone. Can you just tell me, how many of you here last week had heard Psalm 3? Just a few, thanks. Psalm 3 and Psalm 4 go together. So we assume that the troubles in Psalm 3 carry over here into Psalm number 4.

Psalm 4 starts at verse 1 and finishes at verse 8. You might say, well, that's obvious, I can see that, but you'll see why I say that in a moment. You see, there's nothing like a good night's sleep, is there?

I don't know how easy you find it to drop off to sleep. Maybe you wake up in the night and you can't get back to sleep. Something troubles you. You can't forget about it. It goes round and round in your mind.

[1:14] It churns away at you. The troubles are huge, and your soul feels unsettled. You know, sleep is a great gift of God. The psalmist tells us that, does another psalm.

Sleep is a great gift of God. And when we are disturbed, we feel pretty rotten. Well, Psalm 4, I think, tells us how to get a good night's sleep.

It tells us about a troubled night in verse 1. Distress. But by the time you get to verse 8, the man's asleep. In peace, he's able to lie down.

It's beautifully crafted as a song. Beautifully crafted as poetry. So 1 and 8 go together, beginning and end. There's a cry of distress. Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God.

Give relief for my distress. Have mercy on me and hear my prayer. Then there's the prayer. And then it concludes with this satisfaction of peace.

[2:12] And in between, there are three paired verses. Three verses. Three patterns of twos. But in order to get from 1 to 8, from distress to peace, you've got to go through those middle verses of the prayer, face some gritty ordeals in life, to find peace.

It's a journey, in other words, from serious anxiety in verse 1 to perfect peace in verse 8. So let's see if we can unpack it and say a few worthwhile things about it.

Here is the cry to God in verse 1. David is troubled. You see that? His distress. He longs for relief. But he has to go through some gruelling prayer before he gets to the peace he wants.

In his troubles, David wants to know the righteous God. And he wants to know this righteous God will come to his aid.

You see that? Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress and have mercy on me and hear my prayer. Now, when we are troubled, we often turn in on ourselves.

[3:29] Certainly we do in the modern world. When we face hostility or we face personal sorrows or we face circumstantial problems, we often want to retire hurt.

Find a corner in which we can sulk, saying how unfair life is and wallow in our miseries. It's very British to do that, by the way. So you're in good company. Well, if you think the Brits are good company.

David is too practical to say, forget about your problems, which is what we often say. The difficulties he faces are more than minor. So he encourages us to face ours too.

And the key to unlock the distress and hurt is to think about big truths of God. And in this case, God's righteousness.

He's a righteous God. So you're feeling troubled. You take it to God. To God the righteous one, he says. That's what David does. Indeed, isn't that what Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane?

[4 : 29] Remember, Jesus could pray these. These were the prayers that Jesus would have prayed himself in the synagogues in the first century. And he acted on it. So David asked the righteous one, the righteous God, to have mercy.

Have mercy on me, he says. He knows he's God's friend because he's going to tell us in verse 3 that he's been set apart. All faithful ones have been set apart for God.

So he feels protected by God. Now, pause and think about this. What we know about God, in this case, he's the righteous God, what we know about God is crucial for our well-being.

Immersing ourselves in the great doctrines of God, his character, what he's like, does more good to us than anything else. There's a writer on the Psalms called Alec Mateer.

He says, the mind stocked with truth is the mind fortified. The mind stocked with truth is the mind fortified. Feeling troubled?

[5 : 33] Take it to God. Think of who he is before you start to pour out your troubles. Cry out to him and he can take your anger and your upset. That's the value of being God's friend.

And David feels his distress, but he knows he's talking to the righteous God. There are some people, however, who want to shame David. We think verse 2 are probably his enemies, you people.

And he's shamed by their lies. You see, those who worship false gods shame him and he feels it keenly.

His solution? To know that he's been set apart. Set apart in verse 3. Set apart as a faithful servant. He's been set apart and that the Lord, capital Lord, in the end of 3, means his personal name, the Lord will hear his servants' prayers.

Now David has faced many enemies in his time. There have been powerful people who've troubled him. There have been people like the previous king, Saul. There's been people like his son Absalom in Psalm 3 who turned against him.

[6 : 42] They tried to shame him. Jesus too understood that. He knew that there were people who tried to shame him. Indeed, if we want to follow Jesus today, we will have a triad of enemies.

There'll be the world, the flesh, and the devil. And they'll all be trying to pull us down, trying to shame us on all sides. I heard Bear Grylls being interviewed recently and asked what he thought of Christian missionaries who merely exported their religion and culture.

The interviewer tried to shame Bear Grylls. You see, to be shamed is to be insulted and to be reproached. And we hate it. We run from it.

And like David, we cry out, how long? Verse 2, how long? How long, oh Lord? How long? We want you to stop. But remember, those who oppose God are deluded.

Those who oppose God's people have misunderstood. They love their false gods. Christopher Ashe says it's an empty end looking at these false gods. Look how God has set apart his own.

[7 : 56] Look at the faithful servants in verse 3. Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant, David, for himself. The Lord hears when I call to him, he says.

Yes, God will hear us when we call to him. Why? Because of his covenant love. Because what we are to know is he loves us.

He loves us deeply. He loves us because he's been pledged to us. Nothing can beat his covenant love. Not even the slander of the opposition. Not all the shaming that goes with it. Now, it does us good to hear this, doesn't it?

Whatever gets thrown at us, however bad we feel when we're under attack, God is for his people. He's on our side. He's for us.

We used to sing a song, Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine. It's a great way to pray, isn't it? By the way, our man Bear Grylls, who wrote this fabulous book, The Greatest Story Ever Told, distanced himself in that interview from religion.

[9 : 02] And what he did is he focused on the wonderful Jesus, which is what this book does. The Jesus he admired, he said, all the more as he constantly read about him. And his book, The Greatest Story Ever Told, is one of the most powerful books you'll ever read, I think, this century.

It's a thriller on the life of Jesus. He looked at four characters, who admire Jesus and look at him and wonder what he's like. There's Mary, there's a sceptic disciple, Thomas, there's Peter, and there's John.

It's well, well worth a read and worth every penny of spending your good-earned money. But there'll always be lies said about Jesus, won't there? There'll be lies said about us. We'll feel ashamed for

following Jesus.

But to know that the Lord has set you apart, do you see that again in verse 3? To know that the Lord has set us apart, you're chosen. I hope you know that, I hope you feel that, I hope that means something to you.

God has plucked you out. You're here this morning, not by chance, but because God has brought you here. His hand is on your life. He's introduced Jesus to you. Well, having accused his enemies of shaming him, he turns, I think, in 4 and 5 to his friends because they too can be really fierce and they can act on impulse and be angry with him.

[10:25] And so he says to them, tremble, tremble, fear, but do not sin. When you're on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord.

Now here in 4 and 5 he's talking, I think, to his friends. Some think he's talking to himself, he may be. He's telling us not to sin but to trust in the Lord. And there are 6 imperatives through the verses. Look at them. There's tremble, there's do not sin, there's search your hearts, there's be silent, there's offer sacrifices and there's trust in the Lord. You see, some people seem to be spreading rumours.

Others have become what Derek Kidner calls hotheads. They act on impulse rather than call reason. Now David may be angry with himself if he's acting like this. He may be telling himself to have more faith and not to be so worried.

Yes, he says, do be agitated, do tremble, that's alright. Even get angry but don't sin. Remember the New Testament? Be angry but sin not. Rather at night what you should do is seek, search your hearts and seek God.

[11:35] That's what he's saying. Tremble, do not sin. When you're on your bed seek your hearts and shut up. You know how a parent tells a child, look, you're losing your call here, go off to your room, lie down quietly, calm down and think it over.

That's how the king is counselling his friends and counselling himself. Avoid the peer pressure, don't be distracted, sleep on it. Settle your restless rage against God quietly and eventually you'll find equilibrium and you'll find it in the death of a substitute.

I think that's what it means to offer the sacrifices of the righteous. Bring your sacrifices, trust in the Lord. You see, King David on occasions had to heed his own counsel and certainly our greatest king, King Jesus, needed to withdraw at times, calm his soul and entrust himself afresh to his father.

Well, having addressed his enemies having addressed his friends, David now turns to himself in verses 7 and 8. Notice the move here from the we and the you to the singular, the I in 7 and 8. Here is the longing for joy. Many, he say, verse 6, many, many, Lord, are asking who will bring us prosperity? Let the light of your face shine on us.

[13:05] That's part of the blessing from the end of the book of Numbers. The Jewish people want God's hand upon them. They want to see the light of his face shining on them. Light, let the light of your face shine on us.

Fill my heart with joy, my, when their grain and new wine abound. Now, many people want outward joy in their prosperity.

They want their work to be fruitful. They want their marriages to be happy. They want their children to be obedient. They want their income to be a decent level of income. But these many that he mentions at the beginning of verse 6, these many seem to be looking for material joy without submitting to Jesus, the Messiah.

And our true king wants to feel the light of God's face, the warmth and assurance that God is looking after him. He wants to feel it. He wants an inner peace, joy in his heart, joy that comes from the creator's good hand where grain and wine abound, all to be received as blessings from the hand of God.

So there's a lovely little bit in this pair of verses about joy within and joy without. And as a Christian person, you get both in the covenant of God, in a relationship with God.

[14:25] Many people only look for the outward. They hope to find happiness in outward circumstances. And to a small measure, they probably do. But this king, this king wants something more.

Listen to Christopher Ash. Distressed, constrained and opposed, feels, David feels more joy in his heart than they can ever know.

So here is this king, distressed, constrained and opposed. He feels more joy in his heart than anybody else could ever know. And that is the joy of unbreakable covenant sonship, of knowing that one is a child of God.

Do you know Jesus had this joy? Luke tells us in Luke 10 that Jesus was full of joy through the Holy Spirit. Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit. So David prays, fill my heart with joy.

And we pray the same. And yes, that joy comes often after a restless night, after the clearing out of all our troubles, maybe a rebuke for our enemies, maybe our friends have taunted us.

[15:36] Only then can we enjoy the fruit of joy in verse 7. And we might get thrown in grain and new wine. We might get the external as well as the internal.

So to the conclusion, well the conclusion of the psalm, it's not my conclusion, but it's the conclusion of the psalm. Look at verse 8. Peace at last. Peace at last. That's where we've got to in the psalm. Peace at last. Here is David now able to sleep and rest, knowing that God will look after him. This verse, as one writer puts it, is the exquisite expression of absolute confidence.

The exquisite expression of absolute confidence. Here is true deep peace. in peace I will lie down and sleep.

Why? For you alone, Lord, capital letters, so it's Yahweh, his personal name, you Lord, make me dwell in safety. That's what David is confident about.

[16:39] And the word alone is emphasised. You alone make me dwell in safety. You see, since the Lord is for him, safety is certain.

Well, now, what does this mean for us? Did you know that in the Bible, sleep is not only used for resting your head and falling asleep in your body, but sleep is used as a picture of death.

So just as Jesus, as it were, slept in the tomb and then woke up on resurrection morning, those who sleep in Jesus do indeed find true peace.

So let me suggest three takeaways for you this morning that you might like to think about. Number one, think about Jesus for a moment. As we ponder this song, as we think of the peaceful trust that David eventually found, think of the peaceful trust that our Lord Jesus had in his father.

Yes, there were times of urgent prayer when he felt troubled, troubled, but there were also times of quiet trust as he rested in his father's love, even as his honour is shamed at the cross by the lies of false witnesses and the anger and hatred from those around him.

[18:01] Yet we see he's able to lie down and sleep, whether it was during the storms at night on the boat or whether he knew he was safe in the father's love. But don't we also see him in the sleep of death because he entrusts himself to the only one who judges justly.

Think secondly of sin. Did you feel the rebuke at verse 4? Tremble and do not sin. In your anger do not sin.

Can you entrust yourself to God who does all things well, especially forgiving your sin? Isn't there more joy in God because of Jesus Christ than this world could possibly give?

Don't let sin rob you of your joy. I don't know if you're a golfing fanatic or you followed the Open recently, but Scotty Scheffler said that winning the Open does not fulfil the deepest desires of my heart.

Just because you win a golf tournament, he said, or accomplish something, it does not make you happy. Maybe for a few moments, maybe for a few days, but at the end of the day, you know, there's more to life than playing golf.

[19:20] I'm glad a golfer said that and I didn't. I go with Churchill on the game, you know. What did Churchill call it about? A long walk looking for a lost ball or something.

Think of Jesus, think of sin, now let's think of peace. Think of peace. As we lie down and fall asleep, have we learnt to humble ourselves and our restless hearts?

Peace, perfect peace in this dark world of sin, we used to ask and the answer came back, yes, such peace is found in the blood of Jesus via his death.

We realise that in Christ we have a peace that the world cannot give. Is that the peace that you enjoy? All is well between you and your maker.

People throw it to you what they might, they might try and hurt you but it won't stick because Jesus Christ has fallen asleep in your place and he's woken up to say that all is well.

[20:25] Is that the peace that you really know? You'll never find it in the night while you listen to all the chattering voices. There's one voice that you and I need to hear. It's the voice of the one who said my peace I give to you not as the world gives it so do not let your hearts be troubled believe in

me and when you know that you can sleep well.

Let's pray together. Lord how troubled we often are how often our eyes are focused downwards we don't know where to look and the pressures from all around us sometimes overwhelm us this morning we look to you once again we greatly value your counsel we take heed to what you say please Lord shine the light of your face upon us fill our hearts with deep deep joy and peace thank you that Jesus slept in death so that we might have life please grant us a good night's sleep tonight we pray in Jesus majestic name Amen