

The joyful heart

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[0 : 00] Okay, so we're reading from Psalm 4 and we're going to read the whole thing. 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. O men, how long shall my honour be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies?

But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. The Lord hears when I call to him. Be angry and do not sin. Ponder in your own hearts, on your beds and be silent.

Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord. There are many who say, who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord. You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

In peace I will both lie down and sleep. For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. Well, question. I like to start with questions.

[1 : 05] How would you rate your typical response in times of crisis? Or trauma? Or disappointment? Or disorientation?

Or a time of loss? How would you rate your response? I think so often we default to a surface response.

Allowing our hurt or our circumstance to set the agenda for us. That is, we just want immediate relief. We want to return to happiness.

Yet, even as we do that, we know deep down that happiness is a very, very unpredictable beast. It disappears as quickly as it comes. It requires constant feeding. To maintain happiness, you have to feed it with entertainment.

[2 : 11] You have to feed it with even pretense sometimes. And so, even in our default sort of setting of looking for happiness, I think deep down we're longing for something a bit more stable, a bit more substantial, a bit deeper, a bit more satisfying as an anchor point in those tough times of life.

And aren't there plenty of those tough times of life? Friends, what we're looking for when we're yearning for that and craving for that is what the Bible calls joy.

But too often, we settle for joy's appealing but shallow, warm, fuzzy cousin called happiness.

Happiness is primarily a short-term emotion. And we can get happiness from a whole range of actions, from watching the TV to eating ice cream.

But joy is something a lot more substantial. Joy is an orientation. A state of being expressed in a deep contentment, a calm.

[3 : 30] A feeling safe and secure. A feeling safe and secure. A feeling safe and secure. A feeling safe and secure. And that's what we're looking for, isn't it? When life gets tough.

In fact, joy is an orientation that transforms all feelings, I would argue. All emotions. Even anger. Joy.

Joy. Joy. Joy. And the Bible tells us that joy is not found in things, but in relationship. Particularly a relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And here's the thing. Joy is never without emotion. But it is much more substantial than just happiness. Joy. Joy. Joy.

Joy. Joy. Now, most people in our world would not link God and joy except as opposites. Christians are considered killjoys.

[4 : 32] Have you heard that term before? Yeah, lots of times. Christians are considered killjoys. Why is that term used? Because people think that to be in relationship with God is to forfeit all joy.

But C.S. Lewis, a case in point, was surprised by joy when he became a believer. The reality of his newfound life of faith in Jesus was what he describes as a deep joy.

Something he had been searching for all his life. And if you read C.S. Lewis, he lived through two world wars. Served in both. Was wounded.

And that deep joy of relationship with Christ sustained him through those awful dark years of two world wars. This rare jewel of contentment or joy surfaces in Psalm 4 as David writes against the same dark circumstances as Psalm 3.

Two Psalms are connected. The back story is in 2 Samuel 15 through to 18. You can read it if you're not familiar with it. And as Bo said earlier, the back story is Absalom, his son's coup d'etat. [5 : 54] His decision that he would take the throne of his father and to do so, he had to dispose of his father. He had to kill him. Dark days indeed for a father.

Now, if you read the back story, what we can say is that happiness was in real short supply in David's life at that particular time.

And yet, in this psalm, he talks about his joy increasing. David had a joyful heart.

A joyful heart, as we'll see as we work through these verses. A joyful heart that delivers an inner disposition of calm, of peace, of patient trust in the Lord in the grimmest of times.

So, the first heading I want to use, and if you're visiting, then there is an outline of the sermon. If you haven't got it, there'll be one up in the back table there.

[6 : 57] The first heading I want to use is that King David leans into God, longing for even greater joy. It's really interesting when you look at verse 1, that in the midst of crisis and incredible personal suffering, King David doesn't run from God as though somehow or other God was the problem.

No, he doesn't question God's faithfulness. He doesn't question God's word. He doesn't question the value of having served God for so many years to end up in a crisis like he was in.

No, he turns towards God. He leans into God with a confidence that's quite remarkable. What's a confidence based in? Well, he knows God.

He knows God well. So, in verse 1, when he says, answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness, we're not hearing the words of an arrogant, demanding person just clicking his fingers and expecting God to respond.

We're hearing the confident expression of his past experience of God. You have given me relief when I was in distress. God, this is the way I've known you in the past.

[8 : 10] And so I ask for future grace. I anticipate future grace. I'm confident to ask for it. David's confidence, ultimately, then, is in God's character.

My righteous God, or God of my righteousness, is in the ESV. In circumstances that David was experiencing, circumstances that were shaped by disloyalty, lies, deceit, injustice.

David's confidence is that his covenant God. My covenant God is faithful, truthful, upright, and just.

And from there, David is quite confident that the Lord will vindicate him and his position. And his prayer, therefore, is not a box-ticking exercise, but an expression of his relationship with God.

Everything he is as king, he knows, is from God. So, David commits himself into the powerful, caring, loving hands of the God who has appointed him to be king.

[9 : 41] Trusting in God's actions. Trusting that God will do what he alone can do for King David, his appointed servant.

And verse 8, if you click to the end, and we're just sort of book-ending thing at the minute, and then we'll jump into the detail. Verse 8, the joy mentioned in his heart in verse 7. You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

And then verse 8, in peace, I will both lie down and sleep. For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. The joyful heart was an inner peace, calm that allowed him to sleep.

And here's how it works. His immediate external circumstances suggested he should be on the alert. He shouldn't close his eyes for a moment. He should be in panic mode. He should be in protection mode.

But his inner circumstances say, I can lie down and sleep. The Lord has this under control. In his heart, at heart, he was joyful.

[10 : 55] Physically, emotionally, and spiritually content in God's hand. I said at the start, it was a rare jewel of Christian contentment.

And indeed it is. It's a beautiful one to aspire to. So David's leaning in, longing for even more joy. But then secondly, he longs that all those people might experience the same joy as he knows and lives by.

And that's the detail of these verses 2 through to 7. So I want you to notice the structure of the poem. That there's three sets of two verses. Each represents a group of people King David had in mind as he writes his poem.

Now, I've spent a lot of time working on this, trying to work out who he's actually addressing. And I've come to the conclusion that most likely he's addressing both his enemies, that is, those who are overtly rebelling against King David and against the Lord, those on Absalom's side and Absalom's rebels, but also his own loyal servants who had fled Jerusalem with him.

And they also would be responding to the whole situation. And perhaps some of them were full of inner or hidden rebellion. Absalom, it's out there, it's in your face.

[12:27] Perhaps some of their retinue with David was suffering from an inner rebellion, unhappy with the way David was handling things. Perhaps given, sort of being a little bit suspicious, well, maybe the things that Absalom's saying about David is correct.

And I sense each group then displays a form of rebellion, not just against David, but ultimately because David's God's appointed king, then the rebellion ultimately is against the Lord.

And each group's attitudes and actions were taking them away from the Lord. And I think the force of this psalm then is that David called them all to repent.

Those who are overtly in rebellion and those who are covertly in rebellion. He calls them all to repent, to turn back to the Lord, to run back to the Lord, to lean into him as a source of inner peace and joy and contentment.

And so verses 2 and 3, the first group, he urges them then to cultivate, as he wants them to know this joy, he urges them to cultivate God's character over worldly character.

[13:38] Look at verses 2 and 3. O men, and that can be O men of rank, I'll speak to that in a minute. O men, how long shall my honour be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words or empty words and seek after lies?

But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. The Lord hears when I call to him. The word men is specialised, it means men of rank.

And I think what David's doing here is he's addressing all God's people, addressing them as men of rank, men and women of rank. Why? Because they're God's set-apart nation.

And by virtue of being God's set-apart nation, therefore they're people of rank, people of distinction. They're people of privilege.

And he speaks to these people of privilege and exposes their sinful hearts. Sinful hearts expressed in self-interested actions, disregard for the truth, even preferring lies.

[14:53] Loving political spinner, vain words, to justify their actions. Commitment to living outside God's structure and commands. We'll decide what's going to happen and how best to make it happen and what's best for God's people.

Even when that pathway brought shame upon God's appointed king. And with that, you'll notice at the end of verse 2, David puts in one of these little notations that we think just means pause and reflect.

And there it is again. David's just written down this situation. And he inserts Selah. He thinks, whoa, this is so awful.

We just need to stop and consider this before we rush on. Stop and reflect on the hypocrisy of it all. Men of rank, men of privilege, as God set apart people.

And yet look at your character. Look at the way you're acting. Look at your thinking. Look at the way you're treating God's appointed ruler. Selah.

[16:00] Selah. Selah. David calls out their hypocrisy.

Verse 3. Claiming to be set apart from the nations as God's special people, yet refusing to pursue the character categories that God desires in his people.

God has set apart his people for himself. That is, to reflect his own character of truth and justice and righteousness and peace and faithfulness to God's covenant purposes.

See the contrast? And you see why his people aren't experiencing joy. David calls them back.

David calls them back. Repent. Lean into the Lord. Seek his character on your way to a joyful heart. Because David desperately wants to see a real change of heart in his people.

[17:09] And so he calls them to repent. And demonstrate that you truly are God's set apart ones in God's nation Israel by reflecting God's righteous character and submitting to God's appointed king.

Verses 4 and 5 then. Patiently trust in God's vindication over self-vindication. Be angry and do not sin.

Pondering your hearts on your beds and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord. Well, it's very clear, isn't it?

God's people were angry. Angry for different reasons, depending which side of the divide you were on. Angry at the failures of David if you're on Absalom's side. And perhaps angry at David's lack of response if you're on David's side.

Absalom's followers were angry because they had their own ambitions to build a better life under a king of their own choosing. David's retinue were just after revenge.

[18 : 21] Kill the lot of them. That's what they deserve. Both sides revealed restless, self-interested hearts.

Sinful hearts. And again, David injects or inserts a silah. Pause and think about how awful this is for those who claim to be God's people.

These are not joyful, restful hearts. These are restless, turbulent hearts. And again, verse 5, David offers a correction, calls his people back to true worship.

Proper sacrifice, proper trust in God's good purpose and God's king as the achiever of God's covenant promises. And perhaps here, you can go back and check in 2 Samuel 15, 12.

Absalom began the whole coup d'etat with a very public, box-ticking sacrifice. The sacrifice wasn't about confessing his sins and seeking forgiveness before the Lord.

[19 : 34] It was about getting the people on side and convincing them that God was inside. It was creating a validation, a legitimization of his actions.

Perhaps that's what David has in mind when he calls them back. Come back to your right sacrifice. It focuses on your sins rather than just using sacrifice as a platform to promote your own interests. David then knows how easily all God's people could use sacrifice as a box-ticking exercise because those on David's side would want to say, well, yeah, God's on our side. And you notice that more, don't you, that both sides want to say God's on our side.

God's on our side. God's on our side. And David calls all his people to examine their own guilty, restless, rebellious hearts before the Lord.

He calls them to true worship. What is true worship? Delighting to trust the Lord and delighting to do what is right because it's right.

[20 : 54] How that would have changed the circumstances that David was facing. And the final thing then he pushes them to say is find your deepest satisfaction in God himself over the things that God gives to you.

Verses 6, 7, and 8. There are many who say, who shall show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord.

You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. In the mess of life, God's people were expressing their restless hearts in a very familiar way.

Verse 6, at one point in a sense of despair, who's, you know, things are never going to turn out well. Who's going to fix these problems that we keep on having?

Another point is a longing for happiness, hoping that tomorrow will be better. Who'll show us some good? Who'll turn things around for us? Who'll bring us back into a bit of plain sailing, clear sailing again?

[22 : 15] Longing for a change of circumstance, leaving all the mess and the hurts behind. Well, people, those people were longing for that. But what was David longing for?

David was longing for more joy in his heart. Such a sharp contrast. David is craving closer and closer relationship with God more than he craves a change in circumstance.

He prays using Numbers chapter 6, verse 24 to 26, back in the time of the Exodus, where God himself said to his people through Aaron and Moses, pray this for your people, say this to your people.

And it's that quotation. In other words, the Lord himself has declared that the most incredible, the best blessing imaginable is that the Lord would lift up his face upon his people.

So David isn't going to settle for less than, he's not going to settle just for happiness. He's not going to settle for a change of circumstance. He's not going to settle for a political reunification. He wants the Lord to look on his people and God's character to sort of burn into them and renew them.

[23 : 40] He wants his people to have the joy of connection with the Lord, the ultimate blessing of life. And how good is that joy for David?

Well, verse 7, far better than a great harvest. Remember, this was an agrarian society, so harvest was the peak time of the year.

So David is saying, look, this is joy. A joyful heart is far better than a terrific harvest that brings wealth, that promises endless feasting, and vintage wines that gladden the heart.

Joy, a joyful heart, is beyond all of that. So how can David maintain such joy in times of crisis and personal suffering?

Well, very simply, my friends, because his joy is not about his position. It's not about his possessions.

[24 : 52] It's not even about his location. Remember, he's hiding in a cave in some remote part of the wilderness. His joy is not in his circumstances.

His joy is in his relationship with the Lord. And all those other things can be taken away. And what's left after all they're taken away is his relationship with the Lord.

And so his heart remains joyful. And here we have it. And this lines up. I'm really thankful that Bo and I actually lined up when Bo was talking about sleep because I knew he was going to do it.

I wasn't sure whether I'd get found out. But I think we're on the same page here. So my point here is that David was able to sleep as restfully and securely in a cave in the wilderness as he could in his palace, in all the splendor of his palace.

Why? Why? Because he was already resting in the Lord. That's a really important point here.

[25 : 58] His sleep did not produce rest in his heart. But the rest in his heart, the joy in his heart, opened up the possibility of sound sleep.

Pulled apart those two. Pulled apart those two. Pulled apart those two. Pulled apart those two. So King David longs for his people to have joy, joyful hearts, but he knows that ultimately this request requires renewal that only God can deliver.

So I say again, as I say each week when I'm talking about the Psalms, as we move from this to the Lord Jesus, which we need to do. David's longing for his people makes us listen again for the whisper of Jesus.

The longing is a great longing, isn't it? We can tap into that. David knew what he wanted for his people, but David knew he couldn't deliver it to his people.

Only the Lord could do that. Verse 8, For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. You alone, O Lord, give me the joyful heart. It can't be created.

[27 : 15] It can't be manufactured. It's something the Lord gives his people. It requires inner renewal. And it is a whisper of Jesus because that's exactly what Jesus longed for his people.

Turn with me to John chapter 17. A very interesting verse in the middle of Jesus. It's called the High Priestly Prayer. It's the night before Jesus dies on the cross to deal with the sins of his people.

And he's praying to his Father and one of the things he says is that, verse 13, he says, Now I am coming to you and these things I speak in the world that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

It's like King David, isn't it? The Lord Jesus wants his people to experience the joy that he has with his Father. The difference?

Jesus, within that very 24-hour period, was going to deliver it in real time through his death and resurrection.

[28 : 29] He was going to deliver, in fact, what David could only long for with a passion. So he's praying, Jesus is praying for a set-apart people, for those for whom he's about to die.

And he wants them to experience the joy that he himself knew. What is that joy and how does Jesus intend to deliver it? It's the joy of personal relationship with God, of enjoying God and finding total satisfaction in him, total identity, total fullness.

and it will be delivered through Jesus because of his death for his people. And again, picking up the line from verse 6, lift up your face, light up, give us the light of your face.

John chapter 1, verses 1 to 6, Jesus comes into the world and how is he described? The light and the life. Jesus illuminates, shines broadly on his set-apart people from the inside out.

And what does illumination do? Well, illumination, when you shine a light, it dispels darkness, it dispels hostility, it dispels fear, it dispels guilt.

[30 : 02] All of these things are the things in which God's people are trapped. That's what David saw of his people. And he longed for them to be freed from that so they might know true joy in their hearts.

That's what Jesus does. He replaces all that with peace, renewal, and rest, and security, and freedom from fear. My friends, it's a massive movement.

Jesus moves his people from living restless lives on the surface to living restful lives, joyful lives at a very deep level, satisfied in relationship with himself.

Let's start together. Let's start together. Let's start together. Jesus transforms his people from living in lies and deception, discontented heart, committed to self-salvation, measured by outside happiness.

He transforms them to a life of worship, joy, delight, contentment in any situation. And as I just wrap up now, I want to draw your attention to the thief on the cross.

[31 : 20] I think it's a wonderful case study of joy coming to a restless heart of a man being surprised by joy in real time.

You remember the story? Here he was a guilty rebel hanging on the cross, a cross beside Jesus.

And what was the situation? He was a guilty rebel, a man with blood in his hand.

He was about to experience God's full righteousness or judgment for his lifetime of rebellion. But unexpectedly, undeservedly, he gets a very personal experience of joy even as he breathed his last in this world.

What is that joy? Jesus says to him, today, you will be with me in paradise. We could add our own Selah in there, couldn't we?

Today, you will be with me in paradise. What a movement for that man. What a transformation.

Enjoying, there's the word enjoying God forevermore.

[32 : 45] Worshipping, resting forever, safe and secure in Christ, even as the life blood, that life drains out of him as he suffocates on that cross.

There's a joyful heart. So, what will drive you this week? will you lean into Jesus longing to be surprised by joy or will you continue to try and create your own sort of joy which inevitably means you'll slide off into the cheap cousin warm and fuzzy happiness?

Jesus is not the killjoy our world believes.

Quite the opposite. He is the life joy, the true joy. And my friends, he longs to share that with you if only you will lean into it and crave it and take it from his hands.

Let me pray. Lord, we resonate with the notion of a joyful heart.

[34 : 19] It is a rare jewel. We get glimpses of it, Lord, and then it disappears again. Help us to look with unshifting eyes to the Lord Jesus Christ for our identity, our satisfaction, our delight, our standard of beauty because thereby, Lord, we will fill our hearts with joyfulness.

Help us to do that consistently. Help us not to be satisfied with the cheapness of happiness when the richness of joy is ours for the taking in Christ.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.