

# Peace in Sleep

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 14 March 2010

Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[ 0 : 0 0 ] We'll turn to that psalm now, page 538, psalm number 4. And we'll take up the reading at verse 7, but we'll look over the whole of the psalm, psalm number 4 and verse 7.

You, Lord, he's praying, 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.

I don't suppose there's anyone here today who hasn't experienced sleeplessness at some point in their life.

You may be amongst the fortunate who very rarely experienced it, or you may not. You may be amongst those for whom it is a constant burden and a constant source of trouble and distress as you try to wrestle with it.

There are several reasons why someone might find it hard to sleep. There are medical conditions, I guess, that keep us from sleeping. You may have an uncomfortable bed and need to invest in a new one.

[ 1 : 3 0 ] But the most common reason is when you can't get peace of mind. And that's exactly the situation that we find the psalmist King David in as he wrote this psalm.

When there is something on your mind that you can't get rid of and it weighs heavily upon you, it's there all the time and whatever you do to try and evict and obliterate that thought and that circumstance, what you're thinking about, even if you're successful for a few moments, it comes rushing back.

And the more it keeps you from sleep, the worse it gets. And as the night progresses, it turns into a fearsome monster that just won't go away.

And you might read this text with some degree of yearning in peace. I will both lie down and sleep.

Your reaction to that might be, I wish. Well, who knows? But that as we follow the progress of David and as we enter into what he was surrounded by and why he found it difficult to sleep at the beginning of the psalm, who knows?

[ 2 : 5 3 ] But that we might not find some help and some encouragement as we face similar problems. Now, I'm not saying that they're the same problems, but the great thing about the Bible and the great thing about the psalms is that they bring us into real-life situations in which a person like David is facing the most horrendous circumstances and how he's able to work through those circumstances by faith and by trust in the Lord.

Now, we are in exactly the same position. Our precise circumstances may be different, but we're able, by faith in the Lord, through that same relationship that we're going to find out about in this psalm, we're able to look to Jesus, to look to God, to lift us out of even the most horrendous situations because God is in control.

The problem with distress, and that's where we find the psalmist in the psalm, and very often the psalms describe the kind of distress and fear and uncertainty that the psalmist, whoever it was, experienced.

And very often it's a working through that as he looks by faith to God. The problem with it, if you don't work it through, is that it becomes a downward spiral and it becomes all that there is and nothing else.

And that is when it gets really serious and it presents as a real problem to us. And what the Bible encourages us to do is to stop and to think of our circumstances in the light of God's overall sovereignty and care and love for us, in the light of his provision and his providence towards us.

[ 4 : 45 ] And the Bible always invites us, instead of sinking into an ever-worsening darkness, to look upwards to him who's able to help us.

Let me put it in the words of the Apostle Paul. Do not be anxious for anything. Now he's not saying do not be concerned. We're all concerned about things.

Concern is natural and it's right. But all too often concern turns into anxiety if it's unchecked. But this is what Paul says. He says, do not be anxious for anything.

But in all things, by prayer and supplication, make your requests known to God. Now you may say, well, that's overly simplistic.

No, it's not. That's God's remedy for our anxiety. Now I'm not trying to belittle the fact that some people really suffer from clinical depression and all of this kind of condition.

[ 5 : 46 ] And I'm not trying to belittle that at all. And if that is the case, it takes medical attention to help that. But I'm talking about the ordinary, regular trials of life that can really, really weigh heavily upon us and that can bring us all too quickly and all too easily into a downward spiral where there is nothing but darkness.

Paul says, don't let that happen. The Bible says, don't allow that to happen because remember that God is on your side and God is able to do in you and for you more than you can ask or even think.

So don't be anxious about anything. But in all things, by prayer and supplication, make your requests known to God. And all too often, the problem is that we've gone wrong at the very beginning and we haven't made a request known to God.

And this is, of course, where the psalm opens up because David, in his distress, I don't know what the distress was. I'm going to suggest in a few moments what it might have been, but we're not exactly sure what situation the psalmist was in.

That's hidden from us. It's not disclosed to us. But what we find right away at the very beginning is that his almost instinctive reaction to anything troubling him is to call upon God, even if it's something major or even if it's something minor.

[ 7 : 10 ] And very often, the minor things can turn into the major things. And it happens that way because we don't turn to God when the problem is minor. But in any case, here we have David setting an example, setting the marker right away.

And he's saying to the Lord, Answer me when I call, Lord. Lord, God of my righteousness, You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer.

Now, how many of us, when we're in distress, do we turn to the Lord right away? As soon as it happens, as soon as we become aware of it, do we turn to the Lord as the first port of call?

Or how many times, like myself, are we inclined to think about it, to mull over it, to allow it to get on top of us, to talk about it to other people, perhaps?

And very often, the last person we take it to is the Lord. Well, here's the psalmist setting the scene, and he's saying to us, Make sure you do what I do and call upon the Lord.

[ 8 : 14 ] It reminds me of the disciples when they were in the boat crossing the Sea of Galilee, and when all of a sudden, a storm came upon them, and the waves started coming into the boat, and they were in real danger of sinking.

The Lord, Jesus, was asleep in the boat. And when they came to him in great distress, and said, Lord, do you not care that we drown?

Now, you might think, well, that's not very much faith, is it, that assumes that Jesus doesn't care that they're going to drown. But in actual fact, that is faith, because it came to Jesus.

It cried to Jesus. It came to him asking for help in time of distress, even if the substance of their faith was misguided.

Do you not care that we drown? Well, what kind of trust is that? And yet, it was faith. Faith because it came to Jesus. And sometimes, when we come to the Lord, we come to him with all kinds of irrational words.

[ 9 : 18 ] But sometimes, but even with that irrationality, if we come to the Lord, we come in faith, and we ask him for his help and for his assistance.

Now, what does the psalm tell us, then, about the kind of circumstances that surrounded David? Well, if you move on to verse 2, you get the answer in a nutshell.

Well, O men, and that doesn't mean the male species. That means humans, the people who were around him, people who he interacted with, people who he had to live with by way of community, by way even perhaps of family.

We're not sure, but they were O men. He's not talking about the Philistines. He's not talking about the Moabites. He's talking about his own people, the people who he had to interact with.

And that's where the problems lay. First of all, in people. But then, there's another, as it moves on, there's a related problem, how long?

[ 10 : 33 ] The whole psalm is summed up in those four words. O men, how long? The problem was with people that he knew, and the problem was that it didn't seem to end.

You see, we can all, I suppose, go through pretty much anything if we know it's only going to last for a day. If we know it's going to be better tomorrow, and if the whole thing's going to be lifted tomorrow, we can put up with a lot of things.

Pain, and distress, and discomfort. But David was in a tunnel. He didn't know how long this was going to last. And his distress led him to cry to the Lord, how long?

How long do I have to suffer this? And when we're in that kind of situation, that makes, that brings on a completely different perspective altogether.

Now, there are many times, if you're familiar with the life of David, when this kind of thing could have happened. You remember, of course, when, when Saul turned against him, when he hated him, and he pursued him for who knows how long.

[ 11 : 37 ] And David, apart from the fact that God had anointed him king, all the, all the indications were that Saul was going to kill him one day. And then there were other times, like, for example, when his son Absalom turned against him.

And, and brought about a rebellion in which, in which David had to flee from Jerusalem over to the other side. And, and he was in great danger of it.

There are many times in the life of David when people turn against him. I want to suggest that perhaps what we have here is when Saul was pursuing him, and the men that he was, that were supporting him, or the men who were, who were his comrades, or his, his, his associates at that time, that they were very different to what they should have been.

And, this caused him great distress. And they would fall into three categories. First of all, there were liars amongst them. There were liars amongst them.

Verse three. Verse two. Oh, men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? That's problem number one. Problem number two is men in their anger.

[ 12 : 54 ] First of all, men in their deceit. And then men in their anger. In verse four. Be angry and do not sin. That's the second category of person he's having to deal with.

And then there are men in their dolefulness, if you like. In verse six, there are many who say, who will show us some good.

In other words, amongst those who David interacted with, were those he couldn't trust. There were also those who he couldn't predict.

But there were also those who needed some encouragement just to keep going. Because for them, everything was dark and doleful and dismal. There was no hope for these men.

Now, if you imagine it as their leader, as the one who was supposed to be giving them some guidance, this was a huge problem to him. It would be one thing if all of these men gave him unstinting support, unquestionable support.

[ 14 : 00 ] But human beings being what they are, as you and I well know, things are not always the way they should be. And the first category is very telling.

How long, he says to some of them, will you love vain words and seek after lies? He knew that amongst his associates were those who actually had themselves in mind.

They were out to advance themselves. And if that meant having to put him down, having to badmouth him, even to the point of telling lies and exaggerations, then so be it.

That's the way they were. It's strange, isn't it? Life never changes in that respect. Whenever you have human beings in every generation, you have the same kind of problems.

You have, whenever you try and bring people together in a place of work, in a community, in a neighborhood, even in a family, you have tension and you have clashes.

[ 15 : 06 ] And I'm not just talking about personal, natural bad chemistry or natural personality clashes. I'm talking about open deceit, or rather secret deceit.

People working behind the scenes, talking and gossiping with an agenda in mind in order to achieve their own objectives. What you find in verse 2, you will find in any place of work today.

Because a place of work includes lots of different individuals, sinful individuals, all after their own objectives and trying to fulfill their own self-centeredness.

That's the way we are. And that's what God people have to face in going out on a Monday morning. And God knows that. Because you're not alone. You're not the first person who have had to face that.

You're trying to plow a straight course amongst people who you can't trust. God knows all about these things. He knows what kind of world we live in.

[ 16 : 07 ] And He knows that sometimes people are not going to treat you the way you would like to be treated or the way you deserve to be treated. They're going to treat you the way they want to treat you in order to obtain their own objectives.

Because that is essentially what this world is all about. It's about self-centeredness. And if their selfishness is going to be served at your expense, so be it.

That's what we're up against in this world. Isn't it comforting to know that thousands of years ago, David faced exactly the same thing? Perhaps even worse than you and I face.

Because he felt he faced the very threat to his own life sometimes. And you say, well, where's the proof of that? I'll tell you where the proof of that. You remember when David went back to the town the Philistines gave him called Ziklag?

They were ready to stone him. That was his own men. The people he thought he could trust. They were ready to stone him and put him to death. Where now is the support that they had pledged to him?

[17:10] It went out the window when the going got tough. And that's what happens when we're in a world full of turmoil and conflict and mistrust and backbiting and niggling and putting one another down.

That's the kind of world we belong to. We're not alone in that kind of situation. And David, when he became aware of that and as he became increasingly aware of the distress that being in that position brought to him he turned to the Lord.

And his turning to the Lord was in that unique relationship that he knew he had with God because of God's covenant love.

No, he says, verse 3, that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. The Lord hears when I call to him.

What do these words mean? It was that they do not mean that David was somehow elevating himself and considering that he was better than other people. What they mean is that if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we enjoy a unique relationship with God through him in which, and we're going to see that tonight, because we're going to be looking tonight at Ephesians chapter 2 where Paul talks about our access to the Father.

[18:37] Our access to the Father. Do you have access to God this morning? If you're a Christian, you do. Open, exclusive access to God.

That's what being a Christian is. A Christian is someone who has been redeemed and brought into a unique relationship with God in which you're able to call God my Father and in which you know that God looks upon you as his child with all the endearment and the pity and the love and the affection that a parent gives to his child.

Such pity as a father hath unto his children dear, such pity shows the Lord to us as worship him in fear.

You know, that to me is the most precious thought that I have and it's the Bible that tells me it and I know it's true because God himself tells me that and it's true for you too as well.

There is no greater comfort in all the world whatever your distress is than to know that you are in, that you stand in that unique relationship to God through the Lord Jesus Christ who came to die for you and to redeem you and to buy you for God, to purchase you for God.

[19:57] So that's the first category of men then that he's surrounded with and he doesn't trust them, he can't trust them and yet he turns to the Lord and his assurance and his confidence lies in the relationship that God has established for himself in which God will work things out.

God will work things out for himself. Now, the second category is found in verse 4. Those who were angry, be angry and do not sin.

I guess like any bunch of men, you have people who, you have guys who are hot-headed some more than others.

You probably watched the rugby match yesterday between Scotland and England. You saw this breaking out on a number of occasions, a number of very ropey situations where the fists were just about there.

It's the same with any bunch of men. It's the same with any people because people are fickle and it doesn't take much to get people going and to turn them into the most irrational, unpredictable people who were likely to do anything and who were likely to say anything and that's what he was surrounded by.

[ 21 : 16 ] And he was, and I'm sure that like any leader, that he found that difficult to cope with, especially on a long-term basis. One thing, you have to put up with it for a day or two, but this was year after year.

Are these guys going to change? How can I trust these men? How can I live amongst them and furthermore, David wasn't perfect himself.

Don't assume for a moment that as we go through this psalm and as we follow his trust and his faith in the Lord that somehow we're dealing here with a perfect man. Anyone who's familiar with the life of David knows that there were several instances in the Bible in which he brought himself into disgrace and into shame.

And very often the kind of troubles that we suffer sometimes we've played a part in it. Like, for example, when Absalom rose up against David and rebelled against him.

You might quite rightly think, well, Absalom was at fault. He was at fault trying to achieve his own end, trying to get the kingdom for himself. And yet, if you go back in history, the very root of that problem lay in David's unfaithfulness and his adultery with Bathsheba and in his arrangement to put her husband to death.

[ 22 : 42 ] That's the moment when he lost the trust of his people and he lost the trust of his family. So, for the rest of his life, whatever happened to him, he knew that he had a part to play in that.

but here we find him having to face the unpredictability of people that he had to live with and it's the same with ourselves.

He knew that anger in itself is not a bad thing and perhaps as he says these things in verse 4, perhaps there's a sense in which he's speaking to himself as much as to anyone else.

be angry but make sure that if you do get angry it's for the right reasons and make sure that you get angry without sinning at the same time and that's where the difficulty is, isn't it?

Because when we do obey our emotions we find all too often that we act sinfully and we think sinfully and we end up in a worse situation than we started with.

[ 23 : 50 ] Isn't that the case? The Bible tells us, Paul himself tells us, in your anger do not sin. Make sure that we exercise self-control at all times.

Even the Lord got angry and yet the Lord never lost control of himself. He made sure that what he was angry at was the right thing, was something that really justified it in the eyes of God.

Nine times out of ten we get angry at all the wrong things and we end up sinning against God. And the answer to this, of course, to our irrationality is what he says here, ponder in your own hearts on your beds and be silent.

What does he mean by that? Well, what he means by that is don't obey your emotions, your feelings, those feelings that rise up in the heat of a situation and that take over our whole being.

Stop! Before you say anything else, stop! Very often there's a time to be silent just when you feel, I have to say something. And very often you plan to say something in the heat of the moment.

[ 25 : 08 ] And it's at these times we have to say no. I've got to stop. And I've got to train myself and tell myself to think rationally.

To ask myself what is my situation? Why do I feel the way I'm feeling? And to think about it in terms of not just what has happened and what is happening but in terms of there's a God.

I don't have to go through this by myself. There's a Lord who is bringing me and leading me and guiding me every step of the way.

So I don't need to be a slave to my own emotions. I can bring put my trust as he says in verse 5 I can offer right sacrifices and that doesn't mean of course coming to God with a sheep or a bull but it means coming in the name of the sacrifice.

the Lord Jesus Christ our saviour and putting our trust in the Lord. Verse 6 lastly a third category of men were those who saw no good anywhere and for them it was all negative and all bad and all dark.

[ 26 : 23 ] And the problem with people like that is that they very often become static and unable to do anything because they don't have any vision. They can't see how the Lord is working through this and for them their whole lives are consumed by what is dangerous and what is unsafe and what is negative and what is miserable and what is dark and the no hope that they see the no light that they see amongst us.

Now look at what David says. The answer to that is to ask the Lord once again the answer to everything is to bring all of these things to the Lord as we should be doing and he says to us ask the Lord to 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.

David as a man of faith and a man of prayer was able in the darkest days when the clouds as they very often do here at this time of year seemed to be nothing but grey and black was able to see the way that the sun shone through those clouds he saw the gaps you very often get people people here don't you especially this time of year when the weather is so mixed and when the day seems to be so grey and we very often talk about it we very often discuss how bad the weather is and how dark it is and how wet it is and how cold it is and as soon as the sun breaks through as it does it's a different feeling altogether because we're able to see the day in terms of the sun rather than the clouds these men only saw the clouds but David by faith was able to see the sun we must be the same we must know that the

Lord has a purpose and a plan that each one of us fits into that purpose and plan including the distresses and the trials and the difficulties that we go through the tensions and the conflicts the real life situations that we find difficult to face and that we're inclined to run away from and God says don't run away from them get back into them because I need you there I want you there because you are my witnesses to the end of the earth even if you feel you can't cope with it go back and be strong in the Lord because I have a job for you the Lord is saying I have a work for you to do and it is and even if that involves suffering on your part then remember what the Lord suffered for you that's the one thing that brings us through isn't it what the Lord Jesus did for us in giving himself on the cross why therefore are we so unwilling to go through times of darkness so that we may bring glory to his name let's pray a gracious and eternal God we ask that you will bless your word to us now we ask that you will bring it to us in in power and in clarity we pray that we might see our own lives in the light that your word gives and brings to us and that above all else that we will see you for what you are your graciousness and your kindness and your covenant love towards your people bless this service and forgive our sin in Jesus name

Amen