

The Rock: 01-10-2021

Reflections in the Psalms

First reading: 1 Peter 2:19-25

Title: Finding peace

Scripture: Psalm 4

Theme:

David, in the middle of family and kingdom turmoil, finds peace in God. Knowing what God has done in the past, gives David the assurance that God will always be with him.

Introduction:

I often wonder if King David kept a journal. I write a lot, as many of you do too, I am sure. Just dumping onto a page all of my private thoughts.

Things I'm struggling with, angry about, and dealing with on a day to day basis. Sometimes we write in a positive way, an excited, "this is what happened today. God did this or that, my prayers were assured and answered."

"My family, my relationships are growing and are blessed because of..." and you fill in the blank.

Then there are times when you fill three or four pages with things you pray just get burned when you die so no one sees the words written there, the thoughts, the turmoil, the anger and self-doubt.

I sometimes think that many, if not all of the Psalms were a part of a journal that David kept, that Heman or the sons of Asaph kept as a reminder of things God had done.

Or of the struggles and thoughts on how they felt at particular moments in their lives.

Remembering from last week that "All Scripture is profitable", yes that means even the book of Leviticus is good for us to read.

The Psalms are as well. For me I read two or three every morning after my standard devotions. Really, they are a book of short meditations and insights into the hearts and minds of the writers.

I think it is good to know that they are all here, preserved in the Bible, and in a particular way purposefully so. They are not just randomly thrown together.

The Story:

Psalm 4, coming directly after Psalm 3 for obvious reasons, is in many ways the

continuation of David's thoughts surrounding an event that we find in the Old testament writing from the books of Samuel.

Second Samuel chapters 15-18 actually. They tell us of David's son Absalom and his conspiracy and short success of taking the kingdom away from his father.

A very unsettling event that we find King David in. Yet, here in the Psalms it seems quite clear that even though his own son has turned on him, and he is now fleeing the capitol in disgrace, he has a settled peace before God.

It is strange, I know, because for many of us a settled peace in God is not what we have when our world turns inside out. That is why the Psalms are so helpful to us.

For even in concern and complaint, as well as the great unknown that lies ahead, David sleeps in peace, and has joy in the Lord. These are a great couple of lessons for us this week.

Just what happened to David anyway?

At the very least, we know that in this crisis moment of his son taking away the throne through con-jobs and deceit, David puts his trust in God and leans on His sovereign, providential care.

I find it very helpful to see the reality here in David's viewpoint. Both from Psalm three and here in Psalm four. Because it helps me in my reality, and I hope it will you as well.

Being honest about our struggles and fears, our unsettledness and inability to control circumstances and the day to day frustrations we find ourselves in.

I am reminded of songs. If you haven't figured that out yet, I love a good lyric and a good tune. Although based on comments from my wife and kids, that too is a matter of perspective when it comes to what is good.

I learned Psalm three as a young Christian through a timely song we used to sing here. "Many there be which say of my soul, there is no help for him in his God. But thou O' Lord art a shield for me, the glory and the lifter of my head. No, I will not be afraid of ten thousand, that have set themselves against me round about. For thou oh Lord art a shield for me, the glory and the lifter of my head."

A timely tune, remember. Not a timeless one. But still, I find it comforting to sing it in my head, because it reminds me of what Jim Elliot, that great missionary said:

"The Saint who advances on his knees never retreats."

That was just what David was doing in the third Psalm, and continues to do here in the fourth Psalm.

Learning to focus on Him and not our circumstances. That keeps your heart steady and settled. It allows us to see our circumstances in the right frame of mind.

You are empty perhaps, worn down, tired, and perhaps even angry. Improper focus rails against the darkness, seeing only our inability to change our situation.

God however, wants us to see and understand what he is doing in it all. David understood this very well, more perhaps than we do.

God, through His Holy Spirit, has provided us encouragement and direction here in His word, and by the pen of David.

You see, how our hearts are turned and focused in times of trouble makes all the difference in the world. That stability is borne out of how we are focused and function in the good times.

If we recognize God's hand of goodness when we are in the "palace places", we

will be far less apt to get unsettled when we are sleeping on the ground in the "desert places".

Spurgeon, in his Treasury of David puts it this way:

"This is another instance of David's common habit of pleading past mercies as a ground for present favor. Here he reviews his Ebenezers and takes comfort from them. *It is not to be imagined that He who helped us in six troubles will leave us in the seventh. God does nothing by halves, and He will never cease to help us until we cease to need."

-The treasury of David Pg. 34

I want to encourage you to remember, God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. He has always been, and will continue to be faithful. He is never late with an answer, or an encouragement.

Even in our struggles.

How many of us have been placed before God daily because of the prayer of those in your life? How many have you been bringing others before God? He answers those prayers, and through His people He brings encouragement and speaks peace into your turmoil and unsettledness.

Take care that when you tell someone you will pray for them, that you do. Sometimes we forget, that is understandable, but to be remembered before God by someone else in my life is a great comfort.

David wrote in the 56th Psalm one of my favorite lines:

"You have kept count of my tossings (wanderings); put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?"

-Psalm 56:8 ESV

God remembers every tear shed, every anxious thought and fearful moment. To have a friend remember them also before God for you in prayer is a huge comfort.

It strengthens me when I stumble to get a text that simply says: "I'm praying for you today." I am then reminded that God cares for me that much, he has placed me on someone's heart and mind to pray for.

Why? Because he has kept account of my tossings and struggles and my tears. That settles me out as Spurgeon said -God won't miss the mark on the seventh time He delivers you.

That's David. In the middle of a total collapse of family, say nothing of

confusion and deceit within his kingdom,
he gives us these lines:

"Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. - Selah- Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord."

-Psalm 4:4-5 ESV

If anyone has a right to complain, to question -it is David. And, he actually does, but he does so in the right way and by example for us.

He is not looking to be right here. Although, he will prove to be, he is looking to God and His purposes in it all. In other words: What are you doing God, and what do I need to learn? I trust you, even in my anger and confusion. What do I need to learn?

What a picture of Jesus here in Psalm four, seen in King David. John the Apostle tells us:

"He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him."

-John 1:10-11 ESV

Rejected by his very own, yet He stays focused and looks to God. He has a task,

and mission. The Garden of Gethsemane too.

Jesus, before God the Father knowing His time had come, pleads His case.

"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

-Matthew 26:39b ESV

Jesus knows it is not about Him, but rather God's purpose and plan for Him. David too, recognizes God in this way. In 2 Samuel 16, Shimei is insulting the King, and cursing him.

Confronted with this by Abishai, with the encouragement to off the traitor for his words toward the king, David says:

"...Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. It may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing today." So David and his men went on the road, while Shimei went along on the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went and threw stones at him and flung dust. And the king, and all the people who were with him, arrived weary at the Jordan. And there he refreshed himself."

-2 Samuel 16:11-14 ESV

That's a man after God's heart, and in his actions, we see the actions of Jesus. It's not about him, but rather about what God is doing.

I am very certain, as much as I would like to say otherwise, I would not have responded in that way. All that means is that I have much to work on.

Not that I have lost the battle, but rather, I need to re-tool, re-focus, re-engage in the right way. That is God's grace on all of us, isn't it?

Maybe you're feeling the same way. 2020 perhaps has shined a light on a good many things which would have preferred to remain in the dark. Things God is driving you and challenging you to work on, to confront.

Our first reading from the Apostle Peter, later in life wrote, and I am confident drawing from his past prideful boasting and failures as a lesson to pay forward to us, writes:

"For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a

gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

-1 Peter 2:19-25

Jesus is seen here in Psalm 4 -through what David writes. All as a result of what he is going through with his son Absalom.

His perspective and his heart are right. He is entrusting himself to God, which has been the pattern of his life -even in his mistakes.

There is a lot of encouragement there, and it shows the deep, deep love of God in Christ for us.

David encourages those with him with what he closes this Psalm with. And all these

Millenia onward, we can and should benefit too:

"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."

-Psalm 4:6-8 ESV

Verse eight in particular strikes me. Why? Because it is hard to sleep sometimes when your heart is heavy and troubled.

Your mind races and wrestles with all of the things in front of you. You try and solve all the world's problems as if they were your own, while sleep is stolen away hour after hour.

We all know we are told not to be anxious, to not worry. But let's be honest, it is human nature to worry and wrestle with our issues. So we struggle, and the first way to fix that struggle is to admit that you actually worry more that you should.

Let's not just quote a verse from the Bible and think that will fix things. Let's own the fact that sometimes we

struggle to even believe what we read can come to pass in our lives.

Yeah- God says don't worry, but I've lost my job, we have no food in the fridge, my mother is sick or dad has left us. I worry!

Recognizing that in honesty will put us on right ground and good footing before God. Why? Because we are honest with ourselves.

David in verse seven here speaks of joy, and then again verse eight of peace. Really!? How? He's on the run, sleeping on a river bank with no clue what tomorrow is going to look like.

Well, think again of Spurgeon. He has helped David "six times, what makes you think He won't on the seventh?"

Part of that, if not all of it, comes from our perspective on suffering and trials. A couple of weeks back I said that exile is always purposeful.

I am not a negative person, always focusing on the bad, so don't think so. I am however a realist and understand what the Bible says about this and how clear it is about these things.

To pretend otherwise is what actually makes us unsettled when they happen

because we can't imagine God ever allowing such things.

It is also why I am so adamant against the nonsensical prosperity preaching and hyper-faith stuff that if you just believe hard enough, your present reality won't be real, it will all just go away.

Life is hard enough for the Christian in this world, let's not complicate it more by poor theology.

For you see, it is clear from David's predicament that God does not save us from trials, tribulation, suffering and even exile at times.

Yet, it is also very clear that he saves us through it!

Understanding that, actually causes us to see our current situations whatever they may be, as an opportunity for God to shine in and through us.

David said God granted him relief and heard his prayer:

"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!"

-Psalm 4:1 ESV

Even though David was still running away, sleeping on stones by the river, he could say that because in any and all things, God would and always did keep him safe.

One last observation and with this I am done.

In what was a very dark moment in the garden for Jesus, He was met with silence from God as His answer to His prayer.

The road to the cross was the way. Death needed to be defeated once and for all time. And it would be, through His death on a tree.

His confidence as Jesus the man, came from knowing the very truth David knew. That God has it all under control.

Jesus the Messiah God Himself) laid down in the sleep of death -but He knew something the enemy didn't:

Sunday was coming -and death itself would be defeated for all time.

Where are you most unsettled as we start this brand-new year? I know where I am, so let's promise to pray together and for one another as well as our community where God has us to serve.

Let's pray together that He will strengthen us and prepare us for what He

has next. Our present predicament will not last forever, even if it seems so.

And if you are watching and listening today and you don't know Jesus as Lord and Savior -I offer Him to you.

Come to Him you who are wearied and carrying heavy loads right now. He promises you rest in the middle of the chaos. Perhaps not a deliverance from, but a guaranteed strength and help in your need.

Come to Him: Jesus, I am not even sure I believe, but I am struggling right now, help me to believe.

I promise you; In Him you will find peace...