Opening Words

When you find yourself in tight spots, temptation to do the wrong thing will be greater. Today I will share with you what you must do when you find yourself in difficult situations.

Psalm 4 –

Today we find ourselves in Psalm 4, another psalm of David and another psalm where he experienced difficulties because of his enemies. If you remember, in our previous messages, we talked about Psalm 3 and the foes David faced and the lies they were telling to David or about David. In Psalm 4 we are going to find something similar but we will see new responses that David has toward his enemies and new truths about God. These are truths all of us must know and can apply. Let's listen to David cry out to God in Psalm 4.

1 Answer me when I call to you,
my righteous God.
Give me relief from my distress;
have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

2 How long will you people turn my glory into shame?
How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?
3 Know that the LORD has set apart his faithful servant for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.

4 Tremble and do not sin;
when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent.
5 Offer the sacrifices of the righteous
and trust in the LORD.

6 Many, LORD, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?"
Let the light of your face shine on us.
7 Fill my heart with joy, more than
when their grain and new wine abound.

8 In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for you alone, LORD,
make me dwell in safety.

What is the difference between this Psalm and Psalm 3? In Psalm 3, as David faced his troubles, he prayed about his problems and meditated upon truth. But in Psalm 4, he goes beyond speaking to God and he speaks to others. He speaks to his enemies and he speaks to God's people.

There is a lesson here for us – there is a time to pray and speak to God alone. That should be our first response. But after prayer, there is a time to speak the truth to our foes and there is a time to speak to God's people.

David begins with prayer to God. He says, "Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer."

I want to point out a few things to you. He calls God "the righteous God." When we see a phrase like this we normally think of righteousness as an attribute of God. God does what is right all the time and he only does what is right. There is no wickedness in him. Those are true statements.

But the idea of "the righteousness of God" is larger than that. Because he is the righteous God, we can be assured that he will set things right for his people and for his creation. The New Revised Standard Version translates this, "Answer me when I call O God of my right." The thought in this translation is that God will bring about what is right for us. We can count on him. We can rely on him to maintain our just cause. We find this emphasis in Psalm 9:8 which says, "God will judge the world in righteousness. He will execute justice for the people with equity." This is the basis for effective prayer. We can call upon God with confidence because he is a righteous God who will maintain our rights.

The Hebrew text also has something interesting for us in verse 1 when David wrote, "you have relieved me in my distress." The word for relief is literally "wide" or "to make room" and the word for distress is "narrow." What he was saying is that he was in a tight spot, a tight situation and God made room for him. We might say, "I was in a tight situation, and God gave me some space." You ever feel that way? I'm sure you have been in tight spots, and God delivered you and made room for you. It feels good, doesn't it, to experience deliverance in this way. This is what led David to pray, "Have mercy upon me and hear my prayer." It should cause us to do the same.

But now we come to the part of the Psalm where David does something that he did not do in Psalm 3, he speaks to those who are causing trouble.

> 2 How long will you people turn my glory into shame?
> How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?
> 3 Know that the LORD has set apart his faithful servant for himself;
> the LORD hears when I call to him.

There is a time to pray and there is a time to speak the truth. David here speaks the truth to those who are causing trouble, and he tells them what they are doing wrong. First, he says they are turning David's glory into shame. What does this mean? David's glory was his God. David's glory was the fact that he had a relationship with the living God who created the heavens and the earth. But David's enemies were attacking his beliefs. They may have been blaspheming God or saying that God was not going to come through for him.

David's glory was also that God had exalted him to be king. Others did not want him to be king. Others wanted to bring him down. But this was not going to happen and David says, "how long will you love your delusions? And how long will you seek your false gods?" Great questions! David turns the tables on them. In Psalm 3, they were saying, "David, God is not going to come through for you." But here in Psalm 4 David says, "You people are full of delusions and you people are serving false gods! How long are you going to be this way?" David then says, "Here is something you people in your idolatry and false ideas need to know, God has set me apart for himself. God is going to hear

my prayer. Do you think God is going to let me down? Do you think God is going to abandon me? No way!"

This is the kind of confidence we must have which will enable us to stand up against what is wrong – a confidence that we belong to God. God has set us apart for himself. God does hear our prayer.

David will do another thing in Psalm 4 that we did not see in Psalm 3. David will address the congregation. He says in verse 4, "In your anger," or, "in your trembling when you are disturbed by people who attack you, don't let it lead you to temptation. Don't let it lead you to sin."

That's good counsel for the people of God. When you find yourself in tight spots, you must realize that temptation to do the wrong thing, to lash out in anger will be greater and more intense. But don't let troublesome people or troublesome situations lead you to do the wrong thing. Instead of lashing out, search your heart, ponder the things of God. Be still, be silent.

Paul quotes this verse in Ephesians 4:26-27 he says, "In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." Paul recognized that God's people go through difficult, trying times, just like King David. These trying times may lead to anger or to being deeply disturbed in our hearts. Paul says, "Don't let it lead you to sin. Don't open your heart to the devil. Don't give the devil a foothold in your soul."

Instead, do what David did – spend time meditating. Spend time reflecting. And what should you reflect on? Reflect on the fact that God will be your shield, God will be your glory, God will lift your head. He will answer your prayers.

David then says we are to do two more things. We are to offer the sacrifices of righteousness and we are to trust in the Lord. In the Old Testament, as you know, the people would offer many kinds of animal sacrifices. Some of them were for sin and guilt but others were to show their dedication to the Lord or their thankfulness for his provision.

The one-time sacrifice of Jesus Christ has rendered animal sacrifices obsolete – so what can we can do? The author of Hebrews tells us. In chapter 13:15 we read, "Through Christ then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name." The sacrifice God is looking for now is not an animal sacrifice. He is looking for a thankful heart.

This is our response, then, when we are in trouble – our first step is to avoid anger or a violent response or any kind of retaliation. Instead, get quiet, get still, meditate upon the truth of who God is, meditate on your relationship with him. Give thanks to the Lord for all his blessings. And put your trust and your cause completely in his hands.

David has something else to say to the congregation. Some were doubting and some had the wrong perspective. They were asking, "Who is going to show us prosperity?" Sounds like a lot of Christians and a lot of preachers today who preach about prosperity all the time. But David shows us this is not the right question. This is not the right response.

The right prayer is not to ask for prosperity. The right prayer is to ask for God's face to shine upon us. And the result of this kind of praying is that our hearts will be filled with greater joy than when

others do prosper. David said, “I have more joy in my heart than they have in theirs when they have a bumper crop of grain and wine. I am not looking to physical prosperity. I am looking to your presence and your joy.”

What is the result of this? It is the same as in Chapter 3. When David was surrounded by enemies he found rest. He found sweet sleep that refreshed him. David says the same here. “I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”

May God bless all of you with such peace and rest in your lives as you trust in him. This is what we call Soul Satisfaction!