

TRUTH B-P CHURCH
Adults Sunday School

PSALM 4 – LOOKING UP TO GOD IN TIME OF DISTRESS

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Title

“**To the chief Musician on Neginoth, A Psalm of David**” is the title of the psalm. “**To the chief Musician...**” occurs at the beginning of 55 psalms as follows.

(Psalm 4:1; 5:1; 6:1; 8:1; 9:1; 11:1; 12:1; 13:1; 14:1; 18:1; 19:1; 20:1; 21:1; 22:1; 31:1; 36:1; 39:1; 40:1; 41:1; 42:1; 44:1; 45:1; 46:1; 47:1; 49:1; 51:1; 52:1; 53:1; 54:1; 55:1; 56:1; 57:1; 58:1; 59:1; 60:1; 61:1; 62:1; 64:1; 65:1; 66:1; 67:1; 68:1; 69:1; 70:1; 75:1; 76:1; 77:1; 80:1; 81:1; 84:1; 85:1; 88:1; 109:1; 139:1; 140:1)

This psalm is to be handed over to the chief Musician in order to regulate the manner of playing with the music that accompanied it. And the musical instrument used in this psalm is “Neginoth” which is in the plural referring to instruments with strings.

B. Author

“**A Psalm of David.** David is undoubtedly the author. He composed this psalm not for private use but for the purpose of temple worship. There is a strong reason for this since it was handed to the chief of Musician for this purpose. If it is meant for private use, David might regulate on his own since he is also knowledgeable in music (eg. playing the harp – see 1 Samuel 16:23).

C. Context

From the tone of David from beginning to the end, it reveals the distress which he was in. It was not identified who these “sons of men” were. However we know they were responsible for the distress caused to David. There is progression when David called upon God in time of distress. From out of desperation, David called out to God leads to him having confidence in Him until finally experiencing the peace of God in his heart.

II. CALLING TO GOD IN TIME OF DISTRESS

Verse 1, “Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me *when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.*”

Hear me when I call – The psalmist is pleading to God for His attention when he prays. The word “hear” in such cases is always used in the sense of “listen to,” “hear favorably,” or “attend to.” In the literal sense, it is always true that God “hears” all that is said. However, it is more than just hearing but with the desire to “hear and answer me,” or “grant me what I ask.”

O God of my righteousness – The psalmist is addressing God as his righteous God. This is a common mode of expression in Hebrew. The psalmist here appeals to God as “his” God - the God in whom he trusted. As a “righteous” God – He is a God who would do that which is right, and on whom, therefore, he might rely as One who would protect His own people. The appeal to God as a righteous God implies a conviction in the mind of the psalmist. But it is not without any reason why the psalmist chose to address this part of God's attribute and nature. He is implying that God will “right” in his case. It is because he was wrongfully persecuted or accused of some wrongdoings which he had not done. Because God is righteous, he is asking Him to ensure justice is to be done. This is a proper ground of appeal to God.

Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress – This was by experience. It means this is not the first time that the psalmist had gone through in distress. He has experienced God's deliverance in past experiences. The psalmist remembered God's goodness and help in the past. He now pleads for the same mercy again. He believes that the God who had done it in all his past troubles could do it again. Here it expressed the experiential knowledge that the psalmist had towards God. This is having confidence in the in the power and the unchangeableness of God, and proves that it is right in our prayers to recall the past mercies of God that He would show again.

Have mercy upon me – The psalmist is not arguing on the ground which he deserved to be delivered. He pleads for God to show His pity and compassion upon him. Such tone certainly is formed in the spirit of humility, not pride nor having the attitude that he deserved to be saved. And he calls upon God to hear his prayer again. Twice he asked God to hear his prayer. This shows how the psalmist is not leaving it to chance but is serious in pleading God in time of his distress.

Verse 2, “O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing? Selah.”

O ye sons of men – the psalmist turns his prayer to address his enemies. He turns from God to men. It is not in a literal sense that his enemies were present when the psalmist uttered this psalm. It is as if they are present.

How long - This might refer either to "time" or to "extent." How long in regard to "time," - or to what "degree" or "extent" will the persecution be carried? I believe the psalmist is stressing on the time instead of the degree. No one would love to continue to endure but desire that any form of persecution should cease immediately. It is not that the psalmist is getting impatient but perhaps it has affected him so much that it is draining out his strength and energy that he became wearied of it.

Will ye turn my glory into shame – This could refer to the psalmist's position, probably as a king, or the honour he received after killing Goliath. His enemies were endeavoring to rob him of the honour and privilege he is enjoying. They were probably jealous of his achievement due to his inexperience and youth.

Will ye love vanity – Which means that they are engaging themselves in doing something that has no value at all. If the psalmist is guilty for what he is accused for, then it justifies the persecution or accusation. But if it is out of jealousy or some form of unjust hatred, then it is a total waste of time. There are better things to do than this. Moreover, they should not be doing all these as if God is dead. God is watching. They should stop all this nonsense.

And seek after leasing - The word "leasing" is the Old English word for "lie." The idea here is, that they were pursuing a cause which is based upon a lie. They are acting upon a false premise. It is totally meaningless. How blind can they be!

Selah makes a musical pause for the purpose for reflection of all that has been sung. This could also allow what has been sung to sink right into the heart. There is time to absorb the lesson learnt and understood. Since this is a short psalm of only 8 verses, there are only 2 selahs for pausing.

III. HAVING CONFIDENCE IN GOD IN TIME OF DISTRESS

Verse 3, “But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him.”

But know – The psalmist continued to speak to the sons of men as if they were present. He wanted them to know that God is watching and is very much active in his life.

That the Lord hath set apart – The psalmist is stressing the fact that God is working. He is not far away that He is not involved in his life. He is testifying that God has called him and for the work he is now doing. In other words, to attack him is to attack God. And God will defend him.

Him that is godly for himself – In other words, the psalmist is testifying that God is the One who has assigned him to do what he was supposed to do. And if he is being hindered from doing the work for God, God will not sit by and do nothing. And since the work to be done for Him is being hindered, God will surely call those who are responsible to account for what they had done. It is for His own purpose and will. To go against the psalmist is to go against God. The word rendered "godly" denotes one who loves God, or one who is truly pious towards God.

The Lord will hear when I call unto him – Since the psalmist is obedient to the call of God and is faithful to the task that he undertook, God will surely be on his side. And the confidence of the psalmist is that God will hear him when he needs help.

Verse 4, "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah."

Stand in awe – To the sons of men, the psalmist is hoping to instill the fear that they should have towards God. For what they are doing, the wrath of God is definitely burning against them. It is here that many commentators believe that this psalm is a follow up of the previous psalm. The occasion of the previous psalm is David's son Absalom was trying to usurp his throne. And many of his "trusted" men had stood on Absalom's side, and therefore David is imploring them together with his son to fear God and stop sinning. God is on the psalmist's side and therefore will definitely prevail.

And sin not – The enemies must stop all their wickedness in all their plan to destroy the psalmist. It is an attack not just upon the psalmist but God as well. And who can go against God and win? No one absolutely. The only way out is to stop sinning.

Commune with your own heart – In other words, this is a call for self reflection. Check your conscience. Search your heart and evaluate all that is happening. This could be a wake up call for them. It could be they have been so blinded by greed and jealousy or whatever is capable of blinding them in their conscience. It is a call for them to wake up to their spiritual senses.

Upon your bed – The bed would indicate that one would have withdrawn from all activities when it comes to sleep. That would probably be the best time for reflection when the mind is still and at rest. There are no more activities, coming to sleeping or resting time.

And be still. Selah - When you are thus quiet, reflect on your doings. What a beautiful call for reflection to set the mind and the heart on course to do the right thing.

Verse 5, "Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD."

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness – Again, this is a strong indication that the psalmist is dealing with the enemies who are his own people, the Jews. Who can offer sacrifices except God's people? And of course the sacrifices here may not refer directly to the physical sacrifices of oxen and lamb. The psalmist is calling them to offer sacrifices of righteousness. And what these could mean is they are to offer to God by making right with Him and repent and do right again. This is also calling for worship when one has to come before the Lord with clean hands and a pure heart in order for their worship to be accepted by Him.

And put your trust in the Lord – Which means to turn from all your evil ways, and submit to God in all His plan and will for your life. It is a total forsaking of whatever wickedness ambition found in the heart. And then a total surrender unto God to do whatever He desire and command.

IV. EXPERIENCING THE PEACE OF GOD IN TIME OF DISTRESS

Verse 6, “There be many that say, Who will shew us *any* good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.”

There be many that say – Who are these “many”? It is highly possible that these are the people who stood faithfully with the psalmist. However, due to their lack of faith and ignorance, they begin to question that is indirectly attacking God knowingly or unknowingly. Oftentimes it is the outside influence that is the culprit that tried to discourage us. As such, we must be discerning and be fully aware that the evil influence outside can be strong because of numbers. An outright lie that is told many times over, or have been endorsed by majority can be regarded as 'truth.' Who will want to believe a lie and act upon it? Unless that 'lie' has become so convincingly the truth, is this not true?

Who will show us any good? - Whether this is a sincere question or not, it is hard to tell. This could be a lie in the form of a question. But at least we know clearly that these many who ask the question are having doubt upon the One who has the power to do good or simply ignorant of God who is able to do good to His own people. And this group of people is not few or some, but many of them. This tells us not to look at numbers. Many may be doing the wrong thing and the fact that many are doing it does not necessary tells us they are doing the right thing.

Surely it is the Lord who has the power to do good. When this question is asked, what goes on in the mind and heart of these many? Are they really that ignorant? It could be seen as a sarcastic remark made. 'Surely and absolutely, God has all the power to do good but He is not doing anything. God, what are you doing? Why are you not doing anything to help us?' In any case, this question should not be asked in the first place especially for a child of God. No matter how young and weak his faith is, let us forget there is an indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to give understanding to know the power of God's goodness upon His people. Perhaps a more logical response would be a question pleading God for help as what the psalmist has done.

Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us – The psalmist is not going to be swayed by the question asked. He is not going to doubt Him who can do good. He has all the confidence in Him and he believed in Him who has all the power to do good. This is in contrast to the many who doubted. And for the psalmist to say these words, it does indicate the intimacy that he is enjoying with his God. What does the psalmist mean in these words? The light of God's countenance means the face of God to turn towards them in favour, not in anger. This is speaking in the language which can be easily understood by human terms. It is not as if God has a physical face with eyes, nose, mouth and ears. God is a Spirit. We are not to conform Him into an image like His creatures. Yet, in order to help us understand better the way God works in us, the use of human terms is employed. For God's face to be lifted up towards us means to show His delight and favour towards us. This is in contrast when God turned His face away from His people because of their sin and wickedness (see Isaiah 59:2). The function of light is to shine. And this means that the psalmist desires that God should look upon them with great delight continuously and never to let this 'light' be dimmed or put out.

Verse 7, “Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time *that* their corn and their wine increased.”

Thou hast put gladness in my heart – Gladness means happy. The psalmist testified that it is God who has given him the happiness in his heart. There is an inner joy which God has put inside his heart. It is not due to the circumstance or anything that makes him happy. It is God and Him alone. It is interesting that God is willing to make us happy. It should be the other way round. We should be the ones who ought to make Him happy. He is not obligated at all to make His people happy. And yet He did, as in the case of the psalmist. In other words, the God whom we believe is a God who wants His people to be happy. Clearly He does not want us to be sad. And we can be happy when sin is no more our master both in name and in deed. We can be happy when God is happy with us for putting Him first in everything we do and say. It is absolutely possible. It is when we failed and sinned against God, the

happiness is taken away from us. But let us know that this happiness can be found again when we choose to repent and return to God again. He is more than happy to receive us and make us the happiest people on earth.

More than in the time that their corn and their wine increased – Truly there is happiness when there is a bountiful harvest. In general harvesting is made once a year. A lot of hard work must be applied first before the harvest can come. And so when the harvest arrived, there is great rejoicing even though there is just one harvest. What about other times? Sweat and labour, patiently waiting for the harvest to come. In other words, no time to be happy yet. And what the psalmist is saying over here is there is no need for God's children to wait to be happy. We can be happy all the time. And this is what God wants for us. Even in time of distress, we can experience His peace in our heart and for that, we can be happy. This is the meaning here. There are many people who think of God as a harsh and selfish Master simply because He deprived them of the fun and pleasure of this earth. Is this true? What a lie! In order to justify the lust of the flesh and covetousness of the heart, the hidden reason behind this lie is because they love to drink, have unlawful sex and satisfied the covetous heart through gambling or other vices. One should not find pleasure in these things. And more important God knew that these things are not good for us, and therefore He does not want us to find satisfaction in them.

Verse 8, “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.”

I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep - The word "both" here means "at the same time or together." This is the peace of God that passeth all understanding which will guard our heart and mind through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7). I will have a mind at peace or, in tranquility when I lie down to sleep. Though dangers surround me in reality, I will still be able to sleep calmly. This is said in view of his confidence in God, and of his belief that God would preserve him. He had put his trust in him. He had sought his happiness in him, and now he felt assured that he had nothing to fear. And having the peace of God because of the peace with God (this is based upon the relationship he had with God as a child of God), he would lie down peacefully to rest. This is not self-deception. This is the promise of the Almighty God who has all the power to keep His children safe and sound in His loving hand.

For thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety - There are two important points here: (a) God is the only One who can guarantee his safety (b) God ensures he is safe.

The psalmist acknowledged that he had no power to defend himself, and yet he had the assurance that he would be safe. This assurance comes from above. And he puts his trust entirely in the Lord. The whole language implies unwavering trust or confidence in God, and is thus instructive and useful for all. It teaches us that in the midst of distress we may put our trust in God.

V. CONCLUSION

If we look upon this psalm as a follow up from the previous psalm that both psalms are the same in terms of its occasion and context, then the former would be seen as a 'Morning psalm' and the latter 'Evening psalm.' What a comfort to know that we can be found at peace in the midst of distress. This is God's work. It does us good whenever we remind ourselves that God is still with us.

The problem with us is oftentimes we are too engrossed with the problem that we are facing that we lose touch and failed to look up to God who wants us to depend on Him. To depend on ourselves is saying to God, I don't need you! We need God all the time. Even in things that we are most familiar with and skilled in, we must learn to trust in God and depend on Him because that is the right thing to do. We must not wait until we become helpless and desperate, then we turn to God for help. Turning to God begins now, not when distress comes. May God help us. Amen.