

Psalm 4

The God Who Hears

August 6th, 2023

1. Intro

a. The Thundering Legion

- i. In the year 174 AD, the emperor of the Roman Empire, Marcus Aurelius, led a battle against a Germanic tribe known as the Quadi
 1. As the Roman troops pursued the Quadi, they moved farther and farther from their water sources, and the soldiers quickly became exhausted
 - a. Just as the battle was about to turn, and the Roman Legions were about to be decimated by the Quadi, the 12th Legion, made up of mostly soldiers who had become Christians, began to pray
 - b. Both Christian AND non-Christian historians confirm that, within moments of the 12th Legion's prayers, a massive thunderstorm rolled over the battlefield
 - i. What's interesting about this thunderstorm is that the rain fell in a steady, refreshing shower over the Roman Legions, but the Quadi experienced a terrifying hailstorm, full of lightning and thunder
 1. The Legions were reinvigorated by the rains, and they soon defeated the Quadi, who were fleeing from this inexplicable storm
 - ii. Tradition holds that, after the battle, Marcus Aurelius recognized that this was a miraculous event brought about by the prayers of the Christians in the 12th Legion, and he soon issued a decree ending the persecution of Christians in the Empire

1. And this 12th Legion of Christian soldiers became known in history as the "Thundering Legion"

- a. Sadly, whether or not the issuing of the edict by the emperor truly did happen, we know that not only did the persecution of Christians NOT stop, but it actually would get much worse in the following decades
 - i. But that doesn't change the HISTORICALLY VERIFIED fact that the prayers of 12th Legion brought down the storms of God Almighty that day on the battlefield!
- b. We hear of stories like this happening in biblical times, and even sometimes in our own history long ago, but surely these things couldn't happen today... could they?
- c. James, the half-brother of Jesus, seems to say, "Well, yes, actually they CAN happen today!"

i. In James 5:13-18, he says this:

1. *¹³Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.*

ii. Isn't that amazing?!

1. James talks about Elijah's prayers shutting the heavens from rain for THREE AND HALF YEARS, and then opening them again with a single prayer
 - a. And his whole point of sharing that story was what he wrote in verse 17... "Elijah was a man WITH A NATURE LIKE OURS!"
 - i. In other words, Elijah was a normal, fallen, human being - JUST LIKE US
 - ii. The soldiers of the 12th Legion in Rome were normal, run of the mill Christians, JUST LIKE US

2. As James said in verse 16, "The prayer of a righteous person has GREAT power as it is working."
 - a. This is one of those verses where I kind of like the way the old King James says it better, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth MUCH"
 - d. As we turn to Psalm 4, we see this theme of the prayer of the righteous man running throughout David's words
 - i. Many commentators believe that Psalm 4 is meant to be a companion song to Psalm 3, the Psalm we looked at last week as David was on the run from his son, Absalom
 1. Charles Spurgeon called Psalm 3 David's "Psalm of the Morning," as he wrote about how he lay down and slept, and then he woke again...
 2. And he called Psalm 4 David's "Psalm of the Evening," as David says at the end, "In peace I WILL both lie down and sleep."
 - ii. We'll see many similarities today between Psalm 3 and Psalm 4, but where the main theme for last week in Psalm 3 was "Salvation comes from the Lord," our main theme for Psalm 4 will be, "The God Who Hears"
 1. For, if the prayers of the righteous man are truly going to avail much, they must FIRST be heard by the God who supplies the power!
 - e. Let's look at Psalm 4 together...
 - i. *(To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.)* ¹Answer 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! ²O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? *Selah* ³But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him. ⁴Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. *Selah* ⁵Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD. ⁶There are many who say, "Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!" ⁷You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. ⁸In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.
 - f. As we look at the 5 stanzas of this Psalm, we see five themes that are intimately connected with the larger theme of "The God who hears." These are:
 - i. The GRACE of the Lord
 - ii. The PEOPLE of the Lord
 - iii. The SACRIFICES of the Lord
 - iv. The JOY of the Lord
 - v. The PEACE of the Lord
2. First and foremost, the GRACE of the Lord
 - a. In Psalm 4:1, David writes...
 - i. ¹Answer 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!
 - b. As we think about the Christian idea of prayer, the first thing we MUST acknowledge is how incredibly amazing it is that God hears our prayers, AT ALL!
 - i. And when we say that He "hears our prayers," we need to understand that in the Scriptures, God's hearing of our prayers is intimately linked to His ACTING in response to our prayers
 1. So it's not JUST that He hears – He also acts!
 - a. And David rightly sees that this in itself is an act of GRACE, as he prays to the Lord, "Be GRACIOUS to me and hear my prayer."
 - c. It would do us well to stop for a moment and reflect on who God is
 - i. God is the Ancient of Days, the Alpha and the Omega
 1. No one created God – He simply has always existed
 - a. And He has always existed in absolute perfection, absolute goodness, absolute holiness
 - i. Not for even one millisecond of His existence has there ever been even a hint of sin or imperfection or evil in His being

2. Not only has He existed in such unimaginable holiness, but He has also existed in perfect fellowship and perfect unity... with Himself!
 - a. For our God is a Trinitarian God – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit have ALWAYS lived in perfect unity with one another
 - i. Not once has the Son bickered with the Father
 - ii. Not once has the Spirit resented the Son
 - b. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have ALWAYS existed in an untarnished relationship, overflowing with love for one another, and not lacking in ANYTHING
 3. THIS is just a clouded glimpse of who our God is
 - a. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12 that we can only see these things like we were looking in a hazy mirror, with only a dim light to see by
 - i. But my goodness, isn't this enough?!
 1. The Bible has revealed to us the splendor, the majesty, the absolute perfection of our God, as much as our finite minds are able to comprehend Him
- d. But now, think for a moment who WE are
- i. From the moment we were conceived, we have been in rebellion against God
 1. For the sin that was in Adam when he disobeyed the commands of God in the Garden reside in ALL of us
 - a. There is no escaping the genetics of our family tree
 - i. It doesn't matter how good you think you are
 - ii. It doesn't matter if you grew up going to church
 - iii. It doesn't matter if you're at the church every time the door is open, you tithe every month, and you've never said a bad word in your entire life
 1. The Bible is unapologetically clear on this – you still fall FAR short of the glory of God... EVERY. SINGLE. DAY.
 2. But it gets worse!
 - a. The Bible not only says that you fall far short of the glory of God every single day, and that there is NO ONE who does good on the earth... that would be bad enough
 - i. No, Isaiah takes things up another notch (or maybe DOWN another notch) when he says in Isaiah 64:6 that even our attempts to do good are no better than filthy rags before the Lord
 3. Paul says in Romans 5:10 that we are enemies of God
 4. In Ephesians 2:1 he says that we are dead in our trespasses and sins
 5. And in Ephesians 2:3 he says that we are “by nature children of wrath, JUST LIKE THE REST OF MANKIND
 - a. There is no one good... no not one
 - e. So, when we think biblically about who God is, and when we think biblically about who we are, we are forced to ask the question:
 - i. Why in the world would THIS God choose to hear the prayers of such a wretched and wicked people?
 1. And even more so, why would THIS God choose to ACT on our behalf??
 - a. My friends, the ONLY reasonable response to these questions is GRACE!!
 - i. David was SPOT ON when he sang to the Lord in verse 1, “BE GRACIOUS TO ME and hear my prayer!”
 - ii. There is NO other hope for us outside of the GRACE of our God
 1. This is a foundational truth of our faith
 - ii. But note how David opens this hymn...
 1. “Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness...”
 - a. Elohim Tsidche
 - i. God of my righteousness
 - b. Of this title, Matthew Henry says, “David is pleading to the Author of ALL his righteous dispositions, who has BY GRACE wrought ALL that is good in him”

i. Which leads us to our second point...

3. The PEOPLE of the Lord

a. In verses 2-3, David writes...

i. *²O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah ³But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him.*

b. Why does David say that the Lord hears when HE calls to Him?

c. Why does David say against his enemies that their words are VAIN?

i. The answer is at the beginning of verse 3...

1. The Lord has set apart the godly for Himself

a. And it is those who are set apart whose prayers He hears

ii. In the New Testament, the idea of those who are "set apart for God" is conveyed by the word, SANCTIFIED

1. This word can be defined as, "to make holy, to set apart as holy, to sanctify"

2. This is the word Jesus used when he saved and commissioned the Apostle Paul, as Paul recounts in Acts 26:18

a. Paul says in his trial before King Agrippa that Jesus told him he would send him to the Gentiles, *"to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."*

i. Jesus sent Paul to open the eyes of the Gentiles

ii. He sent Paul so that they might receive forgiveness for their sins

iii. He sent Paul that the Gentiles, US, might receive their place among all those are SANCTIFIED by faith in Christ

1. The Lord has set apart the godly for himself

3. As Paul concludes his first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, he writes in 5:23-24, *"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will SURELY do it,"*

a. The Lord has set apart the godly for himself

iii. HE is the one who will sanctify us completely

iv. HE is the one who keeps our whole spirit and soul and body blameless

v. HE is the faithful one

1. The Lord has set apart the godly for himself

d. And in the wisdom of his perfect plan from the foundation of time, he has accomplished our sanctification through the consecration of His only begotten Son

i. Look with me at John 17:14-19... Jesus says as he prays to his Father,

1. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

a. Literally, Jesus says in verse 19, "For their sake I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth

b. How did Jesus sanctify himself?

i. How did he set himself apart to the Lord as holy?

1. By living an absolutely perfect, absolutely sinless life

2. And then by going to the cross on our behalf, satisfying the debt that OUR sin had racked up

c. And Jesus says, "For THEIR sake, I sanctify myself, THAT THEY ALSO may be sanctified in truth

- ii. The godly, the sanctified, the righteous have been set apart for God – not because of anything WE’VE done, but because of EVERYTHING Christ has done!!
 - 1. And for all those whom God has set apart for Himself, He mercifully and graciously and compassionately stoops down, and He hears OUR prayers
 - a. What an INCREDIBLE promise He has given to us!!
 - i. And this leads us straight into our third point

4. The SACRIFICES of the Lord

- a. In verses 4-5, David writes...
 - i. *“Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah ⁵Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD.*
 - ii. That is the way the ESV translates verse 4, “Be angry, and do not sin...”
 - 1. I’m not sure that is the most helpful way to word that
 - a. I think the King James and the New American Standard say it a little more clearly when they say, “TREMBLE and do not sin”
 - i. David is again speaking to his enemies, those who love vain words and seek after lies, and he is saying to them,
 - 1. “BE QUIET! It would be better for you if you would stop your vain talking, and instead tremble on your beds, as you think deeply about your own condition before the Lord”
 - iii. And then he tells them to “offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.”
- b. SO what are right sacrifices?
 - i. Are we to tell the lost to bring their bulls and their goats to the church so we can sacrifice them here on the stage, and their sins can be forgiven?
 - 1. Thankfully, the answer to that is a definite “NO!!”
 - a. Christ has ALREADY shed the ONLY blood that could ever TRULY make us clean – HIS OWN blood
 - i. His body has been broken, his blood has been poured out
 - ii. He has no need, like the high priests of old, to offer sacrifices daily
 - 1. For the Lamb of God has been slain
 - a. And not a single drop more of blood is required
- c. So what then are the right sacrifices we are to offer in light of all that Christ has done for us?
 - i. Psalm 51:17 tells us where we must start:
 - 1. *¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*
 - 2. My friends, this MUST be our first response to the grace and mercy of our God, poured out to us through His Son
 - a. We MUST come to Him with a broken spirit
 - b. We MUST come to Him with a contrite heart
 - i. If we offer ANYTHING else, God will DESPISE our sacrifice!
 - 3. This was why Jesus opened his Beatitudes in Matthew 5 with verse 3,
 - a. *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for THEIRS is the Kingdom of heaven”*
 - i. You simply cannot enter God’s Kingdom with a prideful heart
 - 1. Blessed are the poor in spirit
 - 2. Blessed are those with contrite hearts
 - 3. For these, the Lord will not despise!
 - 4. But Jesus keeps going, doesn’t he?
 - a. For in the next verse he says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”
 - i. We come to God with a broken and contrite spirit, mourning over our sinful hearts, but the promise is that we SHALL be comforted!
 - 1. And how are we comforted?

- a. We are comforted when THE Comforter – the very Spirit of God Himself – speaks to our own spirit, and assures us of our salvation in Christ

2. What greater comfort can God give us than THAT?!

5. So, what then?

- a. After we have offered to God the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit
- b. After God has brought us into His Kingdom and comforted us in our mourning
- c. What THEN is the right sacrifice His people are to offer to Him?

d. Paul answers that question for us in Romans 12:1 with the simple answer: EVERYTHING!!

i. Romans 12:1

1. *¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

- a. This isn't just an external call to live a good, moral life
- b. This is a call to sacrifice EVERY aspect of your body to God
 - i. Your body, your heart, your soul, your mind – EVERYTHING!!

2. We have this misguided concept in our day that "worship" means the three or four songs we sing before the sermon

- a. Or that "worship" is what you are doing in your car as you listen to Christian music and sing along

3. Friends, those are just tiny snippets of what TRUE worship really is

- a. TRUE worship is when we offer our bodies and our hearts and our minds WHOLLY to God
 - i. For did not Christ offer HIS body FULLY for US?

ii. Paul continues this line of thought in Romans 12:2, as he says,

1. *²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

- a. As we offer our bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord, the promise is that we will be transformed by the renewing of our mind
 - i. And as our minds are made new, we will be able to better discern the will of God

e. There's an important shift here, isn't there?

i. For our focus up to this point has been on the amazing reality that, because of Christ, the God of all the cosmos hears us

1. But now, Paul turns things around and says, as our minds are made new, WE will be able to hear GOD!!

- a. We will be able to discern HIS will
- b. We will be able to look deeply into His Word, and understand all that it is saying to us

2. And as Paul says, knowing the will of God will inevitably lead us to what is good and acceptable and perfect

- a. Knowing the will of God leads us to our fourth point, the JOY of the Lord!

5. The JOY of the Lord

a. In Psalm 4:6-7, David writes,

- i. *⁶There are many who say, "Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!" ⁷You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.*

b. This question in verse 6 is one of the pressing questions of our culture today, isn't it?

i. Who will show us some good???

1. In our age of 24/7 news channels, we have become inundated with bad news after bad news

- a. Some of the news stations and radio stations have recognized that all this bad news is wearing their audience out, so they have tried to make an effort to have "good news" stories

- i. Stories about people saving animals in the wildfires in California

- c. As we pray to the Lord, will He answer us as He did for the 12th Legion, the “Thundering Legion,” by sending mighty storms of hail and fire upon our enemies?
 - i. According to what James told us about Elijah, God very well might answer in such a way!
 - 1. But that wasn’t the point of David’s prayer, was it?
 - a. For David didn’t seem too concerned about the fact that his enemies’ grain and wine abounded
 - i. HIS joy was found in the fact that he knew God had been gracious to him
 - ii. HIS joy was found in the fact that he knew the Lord had set him apart for himself
 - iii. HIS joy was found in the fact that God’s face had graciously shone upon him
 - 1. And in THAT, David found PEACE
 - 2. The peace of knowing that the God of all Creation HEARS his prayers
 - 2. My friends, do you know this peace this morning?
 - a. Have you experienced the grace of God in bringing you your salvation?
 - b. Have you experienced the assurance of His Holy Spirit, as he affirms with your own spirit that God has set you apart for Himself?
 - c. Have you begun to experience the renewing of your mind, as you offer up your body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God?
 - d. Have you experienced the joy of the Lord’s salvation, a joy that is only found when the light of Christ shines upon your heart?
 - i. These promises can be yours, if you would but come to the Lord with a broken and contrite spirit
 - ii. These promises can be yours, if you would but surrender to Jesus Christ
 - 1. For the Lord hears the prayers of the godly
 - 2. The Lord hears the prayers of those who come to him with a broken and contrite spirit
 - ii. We’ll close this morning by reflecting again upon the words we sang earlier in the hymn, “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” (2nd verse)
 - 1. Praise to the Lord, who over all things so wondrously reigneth,
shelters thee under His wings, yea, so gently sustaineth!
Hast thou not seen how thy desires ever have been,
granted in what He ordaineth?