

Inner Peace #7

The problem of Mistreatment by others

Psalm 4

Intro: If our peace of mind is destroyed by selfishness and the anger it creates, then it may also be destroyed by legitimate wrong and the indignation it creates. Probably everybody here has had an experience in which it was clear that someone was out to harm you. The motivations might have been envy and jealousy or resentment that grows out of a different viewpoint. Surely such moments can be wrenching emotionally and produce in us strong feelings of insecurity, fear, and uncertainty. At the same time, there may be strong feelings of anger or righteous indignation.

What do you do when your peace is disturbed by the hostility of others? For an answer let's turn to Psalm 4.

Peace threatened (Why David needed peace)

It appears that the circumstances of this psalm are the same as those that prompted the writing of Psalm 3. There we are told in the accompanying notes (which do appear to be inspired but have an ancient origin) that the psalm was written during the rebellion of Absalom.

For those unfamiliar with David's life, in the later years of David's life, one of his sons, Absalom led a rebellion against his father that sought to remove the throne from him. It was a very difficult time for David and those around him. You can imagine the hurt that David felt:

In being betrayed by his own son,

And the anguish of knowing that what he thought were loyal friends had turned away from him (some of whom were more interested in their political posture than being true friends) and thus had been deceptive in their attitudes toward him (pretending to be friends when in reality they were being subversive)

And the fear of not knowing what the future held (the possibility of death and the destruction of those loving and loyal people that remained true to him)

It would have been enough to keep anyone awake at night and to destroy all peace.

But this psalm is in the form of an evening prayer in which David faithfully speaks to God about this trying time in his life. In God's presence in prayer, he speaks to or about the varying groups that surrounded him and how even in the midst of such turmoil and external conflict, he could find inner peace!

Peace sought (How David found peace)

His appeal to God (v. 1)

Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! Thou hast relieved me in my distress; Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4:1)

David's quest for peace begins with a prayer to God.

It is a prayer with passion—answer me!

It is a prayer based on an understanding of God's justice—"God of my righteousness".

It is a prayer based on past deliverance—"You have relieved me in my distress".

It is a prayer of reliance on God, not self-righteousness entitlement.

His response to the hostile (v. 2-3)

O sons of men, how long will my honor become a reproach?

How long will you love what is worthless and aim at deception?

It is as if David in the conversation with God, turns away for a moment to speak to them in God's presence. In David's words you can hear the anguish of a man betrayed.

His "honor" as king had become a "reproach" by the rebellion of Absalom.

David had been "sold out" by his friends whose "love" for "what is worthless" power and position had caused them to "aim at deception" (become two-faced and hypocritical).

Yet even so, David understands that their victory is short-lived!

But know that the Lord has set apart the godly man for Himself; The Lord hears when I call to Him. (Psalm 4:2-3)

What the man hostile to truth never quite gets in his self-seeking zeal is the fact that God has a special place in his heart for people like David who are "godly" (that is, who are motivated by genuine love for God). No matter what humiliation they may experience, they will ultimately be victorious; for the Lord hears their prayers!

But in addition to enemies, there are loyal friends who are infuriated at his mistreatment. They want to do something about it; they want to get even. They may even be tempted to do wrong things to right the mistreatment David has experienced. To them David speaks the following words:

His exhortation to the indignant (v. 4-5)

Tremble, and do not sin; Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the Lord.

(Psalm 4:4-5)

These words appear to have been spoken to the loyal and faithful servants of David and of God who felt a deep righteous indignation about the whole matter (Delitsch thinks the words are to the evil doers; Kidner to the loyal). They were so upset that they virtually shook with anger. They would lie awake at night and think about what those wicked men deserved and perhaps how they could have a part in

repaying them for the mistreatment of their friend David. But David urges them to have a different spirit:

Tremble and do not sin! Do you recognize this verse?
Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.
(Ephesians 4:26-27)

How tempting it is at times to resort to the evil of evil doers to repay them! But David says we must not do that! Instead, Offer the sacrifices of righteousness and trust in the Lord. David's concern may be that their worship never be hypocritical by offering sacrifices while living in disobedience to God. Instead David urges keep doing the right think and let God's justice be done! Keep trusting in Him!

His plea for the doleful (v. 6)

Now David thinks of others whose reaction to it all has been quite different. They are sad and discouragement by the whole sordid mess. They just feel its all hopeless. And it comes through in their language:
Many are saying, "Who will show us any good?" (Psalm 4:6)

In behalf of these David prays:

*Lift up the light of Thy countenance upon us, O Lord!
So often when we are hurting and feel wronged we just want to give up! We want to quit! But we must not; instead we must look to God in the words of the Aaronic blessing "make his face to shine" upon us!*

Peace attained (How David experienced peace)

Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than when their grain and new wine abound. In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for Thou alone, O Lord, dost make me to dwell in safety. (Psalm 4:7-8)

These are truly remarkable verses in view of David's circumstances.

David found a joy that superceded what is one of the happiest times in the life of the carnal minded (when the crops have been good and everyone is celebrated a great harvest). His joy is in His relationship to God.

David found a peace that enabled him to go to sleep at night; not in the comfortable quarters of his kingly palace; but even in a place of refuge and danger. He would not lie awake at night fretting about what might be; instead he put it all in God's hands believing that God would take care of Him!

We too can have the peace David experienced in the midst of mistreatment.

When our peace could be taken away by anger, resentment at the legitimate wrongs, instead we can find peace and safety in faith.

Pray to God for His help!

Affirm your faith in the justice of God to take care of His godly ones and to vindicate their cause.

Encourage those around you to keep doing right even when they are upset and hurting.

Support those whose hearts fail because of disillusionment and discouragement with the hope that God will make all things work out!

Receive from God the spiritual joy and peace that comes through trusting in Him!

Conclusion: It is a great comfort to know that no matter what others may do to you, they cannot take away what is most important to you! Absalom and his helpers removed David from his palace, from the convenience of his belongings, from the security of his routine. But they could not remove David from the most important thing of all—His God, His faith, His loyal friends, His hope of God's help.

Do you have that kind of relationship with God that will give you peace?