

Answer Me!

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[0 : 00] We're dealing with Psalm 4, it's the fourth in the series that we began at the beginning of the year, and it'll complete next week with Andrew doing Psalm 5.

But as I was preparing for it, in reading the online edition of The Age, the two headlines most recently have either been about the likelihood of a global economic meltdown, or the prospect of crazy heat waves for Melbourne for the future.

It's the stuff of nightmares for sure. So what is it that keeps you up at night? If it's not the state of the economy, and a fear about what a recession might mean for your superannuation or your job, if it's not about what horrible world climate looms, again, if not for you, for your children and for your grandchildren, maybe you fear the threat of a terrorist attack on Australian soil, and we've had more and more warnings of an imminent one, or possibly it's more personal, unfair treatment from your boss or their family members whose behavior is the source of incredible distress for you.

There is no doubt. We live in a world full of immense stress. And there are any number of things that could or do keep us up at night.

The wonderful thing about the scriptures, though, are that they speak into our very real life situations. And today's psalm, no differently, has a clear and relevant message for every one of us.

[2 : 00] However, before we launch into the passage, why don't I pray for us? Lord, give us ears to hear, minds to comprehend, and hearts to obey.

Make clear your message this morning and reveal some aspect of your character and your will to us. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. Amen.

As we come to the text, let's remind ourselves again what the book is actually all about. The psalms are a collection of hymns and poems which were primarily intended to be sung in public worship by the people of God.

The Hebrew title is actually directly translated praises. And even though, as we've seen in the previous weeks, there are various types of psalms, you know, lament, which Andrew will deal with next week, to prophetic words, cries for help, to songs of confidence.

When we get down to it, however, they are ultimately all articles of praise. And as such, they offer us guidelines about how to approach God in every circumstance.

[3 : 22] Turning to Psalm 4, then, you might have noticed during the reading that this psalm actually contains elements of two different types of psalms or two different genres.

It is both a plea for deliverance as well as a song of confidence in the Lord. The psalmist and the subtitle lets us know that it's David himself directly addresses an issue which is keeping the nation up at night.

Most likely, it's extensive drought or famine. And it's got Israel in dire straits. There are clues in the text, which we'll see shortly.

I should say there are some commentators who believe that this psalm is directly linked to Psalm 3. And therefore, that David is talking about the personal troubles which arose from Absalom's rebellion.

Whatever was originally the case, though, we can identify with both scenarios. And so the application is valid for all of us either way. You should have received an outline in your bulletin when you came in.

[4 : 39] And from that, you can see just how we're going to tackle this passage. The psalm starts with David confidently appealing to God for help in this time of crisis.

He then goes on to admonish those who have not responded correctly to the crisis. But he also outlines the better way to deal with such stress.

And finally, he reveals the foundation for his security and his confidence. David's confidence. To verse 1 then.

David's confidence. Answer me when I call to you, God of my righteousness. You have given me relief from my distress. Have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

David's confidence. David's confidence to address God as he does here comes directly from his knowledge and experience of Yahweh, of Jehovah, the Lord.

[5 : 42] He addresses the Lord with a degree of assertiveness. Answer me. That's the title of our sermon today. Or hear me, as he says later in the verse.

We need to see that this is not some desperate, plaintive cry into the void. No, David knows that he is addressing the righteous God.

Or the God of his righteousness. As it could be rendered. But he also knows that he is appealing from a position of vindication or even privilege.

Because he is in a right state with God. He's not addressing some God in the distance. As Bitt Midler sang. But rather the very one before whom and by whose own actions David knows himself to be in right standing.

This is the God of his righteousness. And not only this right state or right standing before God. David goes on to acknowledge his experience of other times of salvation and blessing.

[7 : 01] You know the history of David. He would have been recalling the bear and the lion. Goliath and his flight from Saul. You have given me relief.

You've come to my aid before Lord, he cries. No matter what ails David or his nation. He knows that he has been chosen by God.

Not some capricious God. But a gracious hearing and answering God. That's why he can say. With that confidence. Hear my prayer.

So with that basis established. David then turns and addresses those in his nation.

Who have not responded to the situation. In which Israel finds itself. In a way that's acceptable to God. Verse 2. How long will you people turn my glory into shame?

[8 : 07] How long will you love delusions and seek after lies? The obvious first question is. Who is this that the psalmist is addressing when he says you people?

Well working from our premise that we have a national crisis in Israel. Then we are more than likely looking at the religious and political leaders of the nation. And even if it is a personal attack.

As in the case of Absalom. It probably emanates from the same group anyway. Because they were the ones who supported Absalom. It seems that David then.

Is criticizing them. For turning away from God. To the false gods. Of the surrounding nations. Especially the fertility deities.

Makes sense of course. On one level. Pragmatic level. Famine. Fertility. Or harvest deities. And he. He says how long.

[9 : 09] Will you chase after what is worthless? You see David knows the real God. And so should the elders and prophets and priests of Israel. The other question we have to consider about this verse is what does David mean when he says they have turned my glory into shame.

So these people turned my. Fortunately we only have to go back to verse. To Psalm 3. Which we studied last week. And verse 3 gives us the answer. My glory.

The one who lifts my head high. So David's glory. Is God. Is Yahweh. And we have an unambiguous pointer.

That these people. Are shaming the Lord himself. Not David. David's Lord. And this is true. Even if our premise is rather the attack upon the king.

Because you see an attack upon God's anointed one. Is attack upon Yahweh himself. So what seems to have happened then is this. This group of leaders.

[10 : 17] In the face of this distress or this looming disaster. They've given in to finding quick fixes. And chasing after what David calls a delusion.

Lies in the NIV can just as easily be read as false gods. And this is typically the response of the lukewarm follower of the Lord.

So easily diverted by teaching which titillates the senses. Or their carnal desires. Their worldly desires. And it always.

Always leads to faithlessness. That's why David's frustration is so evident. How long? He exclaims. How long are you going to let this foolishness delude you?

And distract you? And we should feel the same way. When we see so many of our fellow brothers and sisters. Succumbing to false teaching. Or worldly diversions.

[11 : 19] David's plea is a heartfelt one. To his apostate nation. To recognize the danger.

And the folly of what they're doing. Flirting with false gods is always dangerous. They've abandoned their covenant God.

To pursue the vain promises of the Baals and the Ashtoreths. And we need to stop and recognize ourselves here. Especially our propensity during times of stress and struggle.

To look around and envy at those who are having an easy time of it. And then to be tempted to take their pragmatic approach. As the solution for our troubles.

There's a but. At the start of verse 3. Which the NIV leaves silent. That directly attaches. This verse. To those preceding challenges.

[12 : 26] In verse 2. The how longs. But know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant. The godly for himself.

The Lord hears. When I call to him. David counsels them therefore to remember. Their true status as one of God's chosen possessions.

And to recall. That he watches over them. For their good. Certainly. But also. For their chastisement. When necessary. But know.

David says. That God. Has distinguished a particular group. For his special concern. A people he has set apart. Made holy.

Is what set apart actually means. It is the same term. Used in many places in Exodus. To show Israel's distinction. From Egypt.

[13 : 23] And the other nations. A special people. And that's why David can call them the godly. Hasid. They are faithful. They serve the Lord.

And they belong to him. For his will to be done through them. In fact. Hasid. Is the adjectival form of a word. Chesed. Which you have heard Andrew read.

Use countless times. In this pulpit. It means God's steadfast love. And has overtones. Of grace. As you encountered. In the New Testament.

So then. These godly. Or faithful servants. That David is referring to. Are those who have genuinely. Availed themselves. Of God's sovereign grace. They have a special relationship.

With him. And what David is trying to get the rest of Israel. To see. By comparison. The faithless. Have forgotten. They have forgotten the mercies.

[14 : 23] And blessings of the Lord. Mercies and blessings. That have been showered upon the nation. For generations. Simply forgotten. Nevertheless. He.

And others among the godly. As I said. As we see through scripture. There is always a remnant. They know. That the Lord. Will hear them. When they call. This special relationship.

For which God. Has a declared purpose. This is the underlying basis. Of David's confidence. And it should be our confidence too. Do you believe.

Do you really believe. That God. Is at work in the world. And that he is a part for you. In his plans. And his purposes. And furthermore.

Even your struggles. Today. Are part thereof. If you do. Then the next two verses. Are especially pertinent.

[15 : 19] Because in them. David gives us some guidelines. On how to cultivate. Attitudes. Which are pleasing to God. Pleasing to him. In every circumstance.

Verse four and five. Tremble. And do not sin. When you are in your beds. Search your hearts. And be silent. Offer the sacrifices.

Of the righteous. And trust in the Lord. David goes on. To remind the people. How the faithful.

Ought to respond. In times of stress. Or crisis. And the first thing. Is not to give in. To your base response. Or your desires.

And to let them lead you astray. Our usual human reaction. To distressing circumstance. Is typically. One of fear.

[16 : 17] Or anger. Anxiety. Or flight. And very often. To take matters into our own hands. We will tremble.

Or be angry. As suggested by the translations. This is completely natural. However. We must.

We must. Even when justifiably aggrieved. Tremble. In awe. And expectation. Of our saving God. And what he can do.

Or will do for us. Furthermore. The way. David says. To avoid sin. Is in silence. And contemplation.

Take a moment. Just think about it. How often. Does our railing. Against injustice. Our rage. Against our circumstances. Lead us into sin.

[17 : 19] For me. I don't need to go any further. Than contemplating. My reaction. To other road users. To see how that works. My silence.

Is my abject shame. Don't mishear me though. I'm not saying. That we cannot be. Legitimately angry.

Or anxious. About our situation. However. What the Bible. Is teaching us here. Is that our first. Our first reaction.

Must be. To search our hearts. And be silent. This is the behavior. We have to learn. To cultivate. With the Holy Spirit's. Assistance.

Of course. I should point out. That for the ancient Hebrews. The heart is not. The seat of the emotions. As we usually think of it. But rather. The heart is the center.

[18 : 16] Of the will. That place. Where one. Deliberates. And decides. That's what the psalmist. Is really saying. Is. When you're lying.

On your bed. Thinking about the state. Of the world. At that moment. Investigate. Your own will. Think about your plans.

And where they're taking you. And reconsider. If you must. In the Bible. The bed is usually. Where the wicked are seen. To be.

Lying away. Plotting their schemes. Micah 2 verse 1. Woe to those. Who plan iniquity. To those. Who plot evil. On their beds. Or Psalm 36 verse 4.

Even on their beds. They plot evil. They commit themselves. To a sinful course. And do not reject. What is wrong. We on the other hand. Need.

[19 : 10] To be different. We must use. Our downtime. For good. Reflecting. On the right way. And what is the right way. You might ask.

Well it's revealed. In verse 5. Two things. Offer the right sacrifices. Trust in the Lord. See Israel had gone astray.

And was making sacrifices. To the fertility gods. Not Yahweh. God. And thus David warned them. Acknowledge again.

The Lord's rightful claim on you. And make the appropriate sacrifices. Demanded by him. But ritual by itself.

Without being accompanied by faith. Is never sufficient. Is never sufficient. Which is why. The psalmist. Includes that rider. Trust in the Lord. It's make the right sacrifices.

[20 : 11] And. Trust in the Lord. Going to church. Taking communion. Baptism even. These are all. Extremely worthy.

They. Commands. But they are not. Substitutes. For a direct. One to one. Faith. In the living God. Even in the Old Testament.

Acceptable sacrifice. Has never been about. Ritual anyway. Rather. It is about. Transformed hearts. Relying on a promise. Keeping deliverer. Micah again.

Chapter 6. 7 and 8. Will the Lord. Be pleased. With thousands of rams. With 10,000 rivers of oil. Shall I offer my firstborn.

For my transgression. The fruit of my body. For the sin of my soul. He has shown you. O mortal. What is good. And what does the Lord.

[21 : 09] Require of you. To act justly. Love mercy. And to walk humbly. With your God. Or David himself. In Psalm 51.

After his sin. With Bathsheba. He gets that realization. You do not delight. In sacrifice. Or I would bring it. You do not take pleasure.

In burnt offerings. My sacrifice. Oh God. Is a broken spirit. A broken. And contrite heart. You God. Will not despise. It's clear then.

The sacrifices. Of the righteous. Our contrite hearts. A love of justice. And mercy. And humbly. Leaving your situation.

Your crisis. In the Lord's hands. And with that clear understanding. Of what is required. By the Lord.

[22 : 06] What he requires. Of his faithful. David then returns. In the last three verses. To that original tone. Of confidence. The one he started. The psalm with. Many Lord.

Are asking. Who will bring us. Prosperity. Let the light. Of your face. Shine on us. Fill my heart. With joy. When their grain.

And new wine. Abound. In peace. I will lie down. And sleep. For you. Alone. Lord. Make me dwell. In safety. Even though.

There are many. Of his fellow. Israelites. Looking futilely. For answers. In all the wrong places. And who are more worried. About their material. Needs. Than their true.

Spiritual needs. David is not. Discouraged. And his words. Here. Are meant to remind us. Of the great. Priestly. The priestly. Blessing of Israel.

[23 : 02] From number six. The Lord. Bless you. And keep you. The Lord. Make his face. Shine on you. And be gracious. To you. The Lord.

Turn his face. Toward you. And give you peace. For Israel. To see God's face. Was to be in his presence.

And that's what David wants. He wants to know. And experience. God's presence. This is his number one priority. Even when those around him.

Who have followed other paths. Are enjoying plenty. He knows. That this is vain. And temporary. And ultimately futile.

So he prefers to pursue. That which is lasting. And real. The psalmist discovered the truth. And it's a truth. We need to.

[23 : 57] Hold on to. The heart. Must be filled with joy. Rather than the mouth. And the stomach. With wine and grain. And there's only one reliable source.

For that joy. David's not seduced. By the lies of this world. At another time. In Psalm 37. He would say. Better the little. That the righteous have.

Than the wealth of many wicked. The presence of God. And the gladness. That we enjoy there. Even though we be poor. And suffering.

Are always. Always. Worth abundantly more. Than the wealth of the faithless. Asaph. Another psalmist.

Says it perfectly. In Psalm 33. In Psalm 73. But as for me. It is good. To be near God. I've made the sovereign Lord.

[24 : 59] My refuge. Having heard this though. What are we then to make about. The so-called prosperity gospel. That is preached in so many of our churches today.

A gospel that says. The way to know God's blessing. Is when he gives us much. In material terms. I was watching a video.

A short while ago. It was very perplexing actually. Where two of these mega preachers. Were actually consoling one another. And rejecting criticisms.

Of their private jets. Their. Their. Their. Justification. Was that. This. These. Criticisms. Were the product of pure envy.

I think that this psalm. Illustrates the lie. Of such teaching. And I'd go so far. As to say. Those who teach. Such a false doctrine. Are exactly.

[26 : 02] The same kind. As the religious leaders. That David exposed. For their faithlessness. In pursuing false gods. False gods.

Can be. Dressed up. In a veneer. Of Christianity. We need to be very. Very cautious. They don't always have to be. The balls. And the asterisks. And we need the wisdom. To understand.

And see them. When they there. Because over. And over again. The Bible makes plain. Even in the Philippians passage. That the lot. In general. Of the set apart.

People of God. Will be struggle. And hostility. And poverty. And suffering. The Bible also makes clear.

That material gain. Is never enough. It never. Never. Satisfies. Verse 8. Reiterates. That David will lie down.

[26 : 56] And he will sleep. His repose is easy. As he lays down on his bed. Sleep comes. With ease. There's no tossing. And turning for him. With a mind.

Stirred. By every fear. And every failure. Why? Because God alone. Is his security. He's convinced.

That every other way. All other schemes. They're fleeting. They're vain. While his peers. May have broken covenant. With God. And with him.

His complete security. Is based on the fact. That God alone. Is faithful. God alone. Is able to keep.

God alone. Is the one. Who controls. The whole universe. So what's the key then. To sleeping soundly. Pragmatism.

[27 : 52] Or peace. Actually. It's not. Only about sleeping soundly. It's also about living soundly. In Philippians. Paul made that incredible statement.

For me to live. Is Christ. And to die. Is gain. If I am to go on living in the body. This will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose.

I do not know. If we're pragmatists. Like the leaders. Of Israel. Or the prosperity preachers. For that matter. Then living.

And living well. Is the obvious choice. And anything that works. Towards that end. Will be acceptable to you. But for David. And for Paul.

Living. Entails. Right sacrifice. And fruitful labor. Being found worthy. And being at peace. With God.

[28 : 51] I said. We've been here 10 years. And. On a personal note. It's been. Not all easy going. We've had times of joblessness.

We've had health issues even. And yet. I can say. That. In all of that time. We discovered. Through every circumstance.

God is faithful. Even when we are not. He is faithful. Sleep should come easily. For the faithful. Because they have the correct perspective.

Seeking God alone. And the treasure that he has promised. An eternity in his presence. If joy is in his presence. What's the greatest gift of all.

An eternity. In that presence. And that's what Paul meant. When he said. To die. Is gain. So when you go to bed tonight.

[29 : 52] Where will your thoughts go? Will you let the affairs of this life weigh you down? And trouble your mind? Or will you silence those errant thoughts?

Will you defy the temptations. That creep in. And contemplate. Consider. Meditate. Upon what it means. To truly.

Truly trust the Lord. And then leave your burdens there. For him to bear. Amen.