

Psalm 4: Greater Joy

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[0 : 00] So we're looking at Psalm 4 this week, Psalm 5 next week, and then the last week of May, we will have a guest preacher here. I'll be here, but we're going to have a guest preacher here, a missionary who's coming to preach to us and share with us from God's word over what God has to say about taking the gospel to the nations.

And so he'll be here the last week of May, but this week we're in Psalm 4, next week Psalm 5. So I want you guys to stand. If you've gotten there to Psalm 4, I want you to stand as we read through these eight verses together.

Begins with the inscription, to the choir master, with stringed instruments, a Psalm of David. Answer 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. O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?

How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. The Lord hears when I call to him.

[1 : 08] Be angry and do not sin. Ponder in your own hearts, on your beds, and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord.

There are many who say, who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord. You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

In peace I will both lie down and sleep. For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. Father, may your spirit now take the words that he has inspired and open our hearts to receive them and be changed by them.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. I don't know how many times I've heard the statement or read it in books that God is more interested in your holiness than he is in your happiness.

I've heard that statement from a number of preachers. I've read that statement in a number of books. In fact, I saw in a book about marriage that I was perusing through recently where it stated that in regards to your marriage, God is more interested in using your marriage to make you holy than he is in using it to make you happy.

[2 : 27] That God's concern, his chief concern in your life, is with your holiness rather than with your happiness. Here's the only problem with that statement.

It doesn't fit with what we find throughout the Bible. It doesn't fit in particular with what we find throughout the book of Psalms. This dichotomy, this difference between our personal holiness and our own personal happiness, this war between these two things does not exist in the Bible.

It's not there. God doesn't pit our own ultimate, final fulfillment and joy against our own holiness and righteousness.

It's just not there in the Bible for us to see it in that sort of a way. The Bible never tells us that. So what does the Bible have to say to us about that issue?

Well, this psalm addresses it towards the end. It deals with the issue of our happiness, our joy connected in relation to, in the rest of the psalm, to our righteousness or, as it says here, to godliness.

[3 : 34] Take a look at what David says in verses 6 and 7. He says, There are many who say, Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord.

He's saying here that there are a lot of people who will call out to God for His good gifts. There are many people who will ask God to shower them with all sorts of blessings.

Give them good things. More specifically, verse 7 tells us the wine and grain, the abundance of wine and grain, a good crop, good material blessings.

Many people will ask for those sorts of things and call out to the Lord for them. And then David says, In contrast to that, you have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

So for David, joy is something that the Lord has put into his heart. It's not something that David has to choose whether or not he will pursue in contrast to whether or not he will pursue righteousness and holiness.

[4 : 43] It's the Lord himself who has put joy into his heart. And here, this joy exceeds all the temporary fleeting pleasures and joys that we can have in this world.

Even the temporary fleeting pleasures that we can have that come at the hand of God as he gives us good gifts and good things that we might have in this life. How often do we confuse the gifts that God gives us with the real deep abiding joy that can be had in him alone?

There's a whole theology that has sprung up around the idea that God's great desire is to give us gifts here and now and that our joy primarily consists in the receiving of the gifts that we get here on this earth.

And yet, for David, joy is far more than that. Real happiness, delight, and pleasure are not something that are limited to the good gifts that God gives us.

For David, they come directly from the hand of the Lord. You have put more joy in my heart than those who cry out to you for blessing, those who have material prosperity, those who have abundance of grain and wine.

[6 : 04] You have given me more joy in my heart than they have when those things abound. When they have all the physical blessings that they've asked for. When they have everything that they think that they need and want.

My joy, David says, is greater than theirs. David does not say, sure, they've got happiness. Sure, they've got joy.

But I've got something better. I've got holiness. That's not what David says. David says, sure, they've got good stuff. Sure, they have things to enjoy. But I've got something better.

Greater joy. You don't fight against the temptations of sin in this world. Or you don't fight against the temptation to delight yourself in the gifts of God by refusing those gifts or by thinking that you can pursue something better by means of simply self-effort, self-exertion, ignoring those things, ignoring pleasure altogether.

No, you trump those things. You find something greater in the Lord Himself. The joy that the Lord Himself gives. And so all I want to do this morning is something really simple.

[7 : 15] I want us to ask two questions. Number one, what's the root of that kind of joy? How does David arrive down here near the end of this psalm in verse 7? How does he arrive at this kind of thinking?

What's the root of it? And then secondly, what's the fruit of this kind of thinking? If this is how you view life, not a dichotomy between happiness and holiness, but happiness as the supreme expression of holiness, if this is how you view life, then what's the fruit of that?

What's the fruit of that kind of joy? So what's the root of this kind of joy? And what's the fruit of this kind of joy? Well, we see the root of it in verse 1. Take a look. He says, Answer me when I call.

And it's important to recognize how he addresses God. O God of my righteousness, hear me when I call out to you, Lord, the God of my righteousness.

Now, there's two ways you could take that phrase. You could take it to mean that David is saying, You are the God who recognizes my personal righteousness and holiness.

[8 : 23] You could take it in that way. In other words, David could be saying, I'm a righteous person, Lord, and you know it. You are the God who recognizes and sees my righteousness. Therefore, because of that, answer my prayer.

I ought to be answered. I deserve to be answered because you, God, see and know my righteousness. That's one way to take that phrase. O God of my righteousness. Or it could mean, You, O Lord, are the one who gives me righteousness.

You are the one who makes me righteous. You are the one, in Paul's terms, You are the one who declares or justifies me. You declare me to be righteous. It could mean that. It could go either way. But I think the context, and I think the rest of this verse, tells us that it's the latter. That David is not appealing to his own righteousness in order to get a hearing from God. He's simply calling out to God as a merciful and gracious God.

A God who has declared David righteous. Provided him with righteousness. Here's why I say that. Because the rest of verse 1 says this. You, God of my righteousness, You have given me relief when I was in distress.

[9 : 34] Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. Two things that he says here. Number one, You've given me relief literally means You have given me room. You have expanded me.

You have enlarged me. You have blessed me as a way of saying this. You, Lord, have blessed me even when I was in the midst of trouble and distress. My goodness, we saw that in Psalm 4 last week.

David was on the run from his son Absalom with his life threatened on every side and yet David's confidence was fully in the Lord. He said, You are a shield about me.

Now he says in Psalm 5, You've given me relief. You've made room for me. You've expanded me even when I'm in trouble. Even when I'm in distress.

Even when tribulation is right now upon me. And then beyond even that, then he appeals to him.

So, Be gracious to me. Hear my prayer. What is the basis upon which David appeals to God to hear his prayer?

[10 : 38] Two things. Hear me when I call. Why? Because you're the God of my righteousness.

And then, Hear me when I call in your grace. Or, in your mercy is what the word really means here.

So that for David, David's entire hope that God will hear his prayer and answer him is that God is both gracious or merciful and that God is in fact the God of his righteousness.

Which tells me that the righteousness here is not David's own personal righteousness. The righteousness here is the righteousness that he has as a gift from God. God is the God of his righteousness because God is the one who has declared him righteous.

He has indeed expanded David, made room for David, blessed David in times of distress and he has given David grace and mercy. And the only, the only foundation that David can stand upon here in hopes that the Lord will now hear his prayer in another time of distress is that God is in fact merciful.

That God is indeed the God of his righteousness. And out of that, later in the psalm, flows this confession.

[11 : 52] You have given me greater joy in my heart than they have when their wine and their grain abound. That kind of real, deep, lasting joy does not come from the heart of someone who is constantly working to try to earn God's approval.

There are few things in life more miserable than an approach to spiritual life or to religion in general that views it as a pursuit of God in which we try to earn God's favor, in which we try to get his attention, in which we try to make ourselves good enough to be accepted in his sight.

There are few things more miserable than that in this world. Don't try to live your life trying to earn God's approval because you will always fall short.

And even if for a time you manage to convince yourself that you've become a really decent and good person and God ought to accept you because you're so good and decent, you will know in your heart there will be times when you know it and you see it and you feel it.

You're not good enough because you're not good enough. You're just not because I'm not good enough because none of us are good enough.

[13 : 18] And any kind of religion that is based upon the attempt to earn God's approval is one that is doomed to failure and one that is bound to bring you misery.

And yet David doesn't describe misery in this psalm. He describes overflowing, abounding joy that comes from the Lord.

The root of that kind of joy is knowing, knowing with your whole heart and mind that your standing before God does not depend upon your own performance.

It just does not. It depends entirely upon the performance of another. In fact, Jeremiah the prophet would speak of a descendant of David who would be called the Lord our righteousness.

And I think David oftentimes in the psalms has in mind that descendant. He knew that God would send a seed. He knew that God would send someone in his line who would one day not only reign supreme as king but who would take upon himself the sins of his people who would perform our righteousness in our place.

[14 : 35] I think David is aware of a coming one. And David is certainly aware that his right standing before the Lord is not based upon his performance.

It's not based upon his personal righteousness. It is based upon the righteousness of another. The Lord our righteousness. righteousness. And the apostles tell us they tell us over and over that Jesus has come the descendant of David has come and he has become for us righteousness. He has become for us life and sanctification. He has become those things. In fact the apostle Paul says he has become sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. You want a real lasting delight and pleasure and joy in this life? It begins by abandoning all attempts to earn God's favor and merit.

It begins by simply trusting in a gracious and merciful God. What a load that lifts. How light does that make your shoulders feel to know that your destiny your eternity is not determined by your performance but by the performance of another who's already done it perfectly for you in your place.

[16:06] All our confidence all our hope all our joy all our lasting happiness find their root in Christ our righteousness.

All of it. And David wants us to know that from the very beginning of this psalm. He cries out to the God of his righteousness who has been gracious to him. And then out of that understanding out of knowing that that's how we enter into a right relationship with God and that's the basis upon which we can appeal to God.

We don't say God listen to me because you ought to listen to me. We say God listen to me because that's the kind of God you are. You're merciful. You hear sinners when they cry out to you because they trust in you.

When that kind of a heart begins to actually call out to God in dependence and need upon him then he begins to produce certain things in both our minds and hearts as well as in our actions.

Take a look at what much of the rest of this psalm is devoted to. It is in the face of opposition again just like Psalm 4. Verse 2 tells us David cries out, O men how long shall my honor be turned into shame?

[17:22] How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? We don't know all the details of David's circumstances when he wrote this psalm. We know them for Psalm 4 we know them for a number of other psalms but this psalm doesn't tell us the inscription to this psalm just tells us that it's a psalm of David it doesn't tell us the circumstances in which it was written.

All we know here is that David was being slandered by people. his honor into shame they were lying about him for their own gain and their own benefit.

We don't know what those lies were. We don't know who was telling those lies. We don't know how bad things got but those are the circumstances. That's the situation in which David writes this. And it's probably good that we don't know all the details because it means that we can take what David says here and apply it to many different situations.

Many different circumstances. In fact I think you can probably even move beyond the issue of being mocked and lied about. I mean that's a terrible thing. Nobody wants to experience that.

Have you ever been in a place where you've heard that a friend or family member or former acquaintance has said something to someone else about you? It's not true.

[18:37] You know it's not true but even though you know it's not true it just digs at you. It just bothers you over and over. That's what David's dealing with here. It's painful.

Painful circumstances in which he writes this psalm. But even beyond that we face all sorts of moments of distress as David calls them.

We face all sorts of times of tribulation. All sorts of manner of things are going to happen and if our confidence is rooted in Christ's righteousness regardless of those circumstances as we can expect to see the kind of fruit that David begins to describe in verse 3.

Notice what he says. In contrast to those who would lie about him he says this but know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself.

The Lord hears when I call to him. So one of the first bits of fruit that's going to come out of this is confidence that God is a God who will hear and answer you.

[19:40] He is a God who will take care of you in the midst of trouble and distress. He will do that. David says that. Know this that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. He's not simply going to let us fall by the wayside.

He's going to set us apart, care for and protect us. Now that doesn't mean that he's going to give us ease and comfort all of our lives. I mean the context here is suffering.

The context here is being mocked and made fun of and lied about. So it's not as if God is removing all of those painful circumstances from our lives. He never promises us that. He promises us the opposite.

Jesus says that all who seek to live a godly life will suffer. That is plain as can be in scripture. But David's point is that in the midst of it, you can trust that God ultimately will protect you, protect your heart, protect your mind.

He will be there for you, a shield about you as he says in Psalm 4. And he will hear when you call to him. Knowing that he has already justified you, declared you righteous, not on the basis of what you've done, but on the basis of Christ's work, knowing that already gives you confidence that in the midst of the trouble, he's going to hear you.

[20 : 58] Why? Because you have a mediator now. Because you're no longer a sinner in his sight. He views you now as righteous. Of course he's going to hear you. Of course he's going to hear you. He sees you covered in the righteousness of his own son.

And so now he hears and we are imbued with confidence in the Lord that no matter what's happening around us, no matter what they may be saying, no matter what may befall us in the midst of it all, he will hear us when we call out to him, he will guard us and protect us in the midst of it.

But it's more than just that. It's more than just trust that it's going to be okay in the end, that Lord's going to hear me and he's going to take care of it in the end. It's more than just that. It's in the midst of it.

It's in the thick of it that the fruit begins to bear. Look what he says in verse 4. Be angry and do not sin.

Ponder in your own hearts on your beds and be silent. And then he follows it up in verse 5. Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord.

[22 : 05] So he's concerned with two things here. In verse 4 he's concerned with the inner life, the life of your mind and your heart, what you think and what those thoughts begin to produce. And then in verse 5 he's concerned with what you actually do.

So he says in verse 4 it's okay to be angry. It's okay to be agitated, irritated, bothered by the things that are happening around you. We're not stoics, okay?

We're not emotionless robots. That's not what God intends. We sometimes think that holy people, genuinely holy people, are people who are able to go through life without being affected by the negative circumstances around them.

They can just sort of walk right through it all. Never bothered. No problems. They just walk through it. It doesn't affect them. That's not realistic and that's not what the scriptures say.

In fact, in response to the troubles that David is facing, his advice to others when they face similar circumstances is be angry, be agitated. It's okay.

[23 : 17] The apostle Paul even quotes this verse. Be angry, but don't sin in your anger. The apostle Paul then goes on to say that we ought not to allow the devil to get a foothold into us.

In other words, it's okay to be angry when genuine godly anger is called for. When people actually do things to harm you, it's okay to get mad about stuff. That's alright. The Bible never says you can't do that.

But Paul cautions us and says, but don't allow that anger to produce sin by which Satan will then get a foothold into your life, and then you'll begin to work more sin into it.

David says something similar, but he says it in a different way. Be angry and do not sin. Ponder in your own hearts, on your own beds, and be silent. In other words, in your anger, it's okay to feel it and to know it.

And think about it. Meditate on what's making you angry. Think about why you're angry. It's alright. Ponder it in your hearts, on your beds, that is, when you're away from everyone, when things are calm, when you can deal with it, think about it, give it thought, do that.

[24 : 30] That's okay. Do that. And then what? Be silent. In other words, people are going to do stuff to us.

They're going to say things about us, circumstances are going to befall us, and you can, in the moment, respond immediately, out of your anger, and fight back.

Or, you can, in your anger, step back, ponder it, get away, think about it, and make a choice. Don't sin. Rather, be silent. Don't lash out. Be silent. How does that happen?

That's, I mean, that's not, I mean, it's one thing for me to say, hey, it's okay to be angry, just don't sin when you're mad, you know, it's okay. You can get mad at the guy who cuts you off in traffic, you know, but don't try to run him off the road, it's one thing to say that, it's another thing to actually carry it out.

[25 : 36] It's hard to at least not yell at the guy, I mean, it's not like he can hear you, right? I mean, your windows are rolled up and his are rolled up, hopefully he can't hear you because he might be bigger than you and then you're in real trouble. But, I mean, it's one thing to say, it's going to make me angry, it's another thing not to cuss the guy, right, in your car.

I mean, that's really the kind of stuff we're talking about here. It's not always these big, complicated conspiracies where the world is all against you. Sometimes it's something simple. Somebody does something that's genuinely wrong, it affects you, it makes you mad, and in the moment you could respond in any number of ways that would be sinful.

It's easy to do that. It's easy for me to say, don't do that. It's hard to not do that. It's hard.

So, how? How, how can that be? I said that these things are the fruit of joy that comes from the Lord.

A joy that is rooted in trusting in Christ and His righteousness and a joy that produces this kind of fruit. How does that work? Remember, there's a contrast down there in verses 6 and 7.

[26 : 50] And the contrast is between those who only want the immediate physical blessings from the Lord versus David who wants to receive deep, lasting, abiding joy in the Lord.

That's the contrast. If your happiness, if your pleasure and joy are founded upon a joy that comes directly from the Lord rather than your external circumstances, be they blessings from Him or bad things that happen to you, if that's really the case, then in those moments where it's tempting to lash out, you have a greater emotion in you than the anger of the moment.

You have a superior feeling than the anger of that moment. And that superior feeling is the joy that comes from the Lord.

Your joy in the first place was not rooted in these temporary external blessings that you can receive. It was not rooted in the fact that you were making good time that morning and everything was okay as you went down the road.

That's not why you were happy. That's not why there was a smile on your face. You're happy, you're content because your contentment lies in the Lord. So a guy cuts you off but he hasn't cut you off from the joy of the Lord.

[28 : 17] You're going to be late to work now, right? You're going to be late. You're going to miss the meeting, you're going to be late, you're going to look like an idiot because you've come in late to a meeting that you're in charge of. All that might be true but you weren't excited that morning because you were on time for your meeting.

Your pleasure was found in the Lord himself. So, circumstances arise, bad things happen, frustrations occur, you're genuinely angry about it but there's something else in the heart unaffected, unchanged, deep abiding joy that comes from the Lord.

and in that moment, when that's true of you, it is entirely possible to be angry and not sin.

It is entirely possible to take a step back, think about it, really be mad and then do nothing because in your pondering, in your meditating on it, that the anger is overcome by the joy that cannot be dampened by the circumstances that surround you.

This is not just about how to deal with frustrating times and moments. This is a blueprint for how you deal with temptation and sin in your life.

[29 : 49] It's a blueprint. How do you overcome the temptation to sin? Superior pleasure. It would give you delight to tell off the guy.

It would give you a moment of happiness and joy to tell off the guy who's cut you off in traffic. It would make you happy for a moment, would it not? I mean, isn't there a sense of satisfaction? I got him back. I did it. He'll never, he will never overcome my wit that he didn't hear. There's no way in the world. It was the wittiest thing I've said in a month.

He didn't hear it. Even if he did hear it, there's no comeback for that. There's a, there's a, there's a modicum of genuine happiness in that. I know. I have felt it on many, many occasions.

There's a kind of happiness that comes from that and yet it's sin. So how do you overcome that? How do you overcome the temptation to grab on to that pleasure in that moment?

[30 : 55] You have a hold of a superior pleasure, a greater pleasure. Nobody, nobody gives away the thing that they've wanted most in all their lives that they've finally got a hold of, their lifelong dream.

Nobody lets go of that so that they can have a popsicle. Nobody does that. Right? Even though popsicles are good things.

Nobody does that. When you've got your hands wrapped around superior joy that can be yours in the Lord and come directly from Him, not merely the things that He gives you, but really in Him, when you've got your hands on that, How great of a temptation is it to let go and grab hold of this temporary, fleeting pleasure for just a moment?

You don't, you don't fight against temptation with self-control. You don't fight against temptation on a routine basis with simple self-discipline.

I think of self-control and self-discipline kind of like I think of a spare tire on a car. Sometimes you need the spare tire, right? Occasionally you're going to need it because for whatever reason, your grasp, you're hanging on to the joy of the Lord that day is weak.

[32 : 26] You may have even hands off temporarily. And temptation will come along in those moments. Satan is smart. He will send temptations at you in those moments.

When you've let go, when you've backed off from the joy that David describes here, that's when temptation is really going to rush in on you. And in those moments, it's helpful to have a spare tire. It's helpful to have some self-discipline. It's helpful to have self-control in that moment and just by sheer willpower saying, uh-uh, not going to do it. I know it's wrong. I'm not going to do it and walk away from it.

That's helpful. But if you try to drive across the state of Texas on a spare tire, you're not going to make it. It's not going to happen. Those little donuts are not made for that kind of trip.

And self-determination, self-control is not a gift that God gives us to make it through life. It won't work. You cannot fight against, over and over and over, against the temporary pleasures of sin with self-control.

[33 : 29] You defeat temporary pleasures with superior pleasures. David says, that's possible. That's real.

Not just in the life of the mind, but verse 5, even in the things you do, offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord.

peace. All of that rooted and grounded in knowing and being satisfied in all that Christ has done to be your righteousness in your place.

Bearing forth the fruit of victory over sin even in the midst of struggles and trials. And then ultimately, verse 8, peace.

In peace, I will both lie down and sleep for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. in peace, I will lie down and sleep.

[34 : 34] Second time so far here in the Psalms that we've come across this idea, we saw it last week, of lying down and sleeping signifying our trust in the Lord.

Actually, yeah, look down in Psalm 3, verse 5. David was in the midst of this trouble from Absalom. I, he says, lay down and slept.

I woke again for the Lord sustained me. Now, verse 8 of Psalm 4, in peace, I will both lie down and sleep. Why? For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Real, lasting joy rooted in all that Christ has done for you and bearing the fruit of practical holiness and righteousness in your life, enabling you to overcome temptation and sin results in peace.

Not fretting. Not worrying. Not constantly concerned that everything is going to fall apart or go sour any minute, but simply peace because you know the Lord makes you to dwell in safety.

[35 : 57] The Lord is your righteousness. The Lord is your superior pleasure. And the Lord is your safety.

Let's pray. God what a comforting thing it is to know, Father, that regardless of what temptations we face, regardless of what troubles befall us, there can be such a joy in you that we can overcome the odds stacked against us.

it is entirely not only possible, but likely that many of us have just blown it this week.

We said the thing we shouldn't have said. We went where we shouldn't have gone. We did what we shouldn't have done. We know it.

And our prayer is not merely that you would forgive us. Oh, that you would forgive us by the blood of Christ to wash away our sins. But more than that, that you would direct our gaze toward Christ so much so that he is such a superior pleasure to the temptations of this world that they would appear as trash and rubbish next to the satisfaction of knowing him and being in communion with him.
[37 : 35] Help us and strengthen us and direct our eyes to him, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.