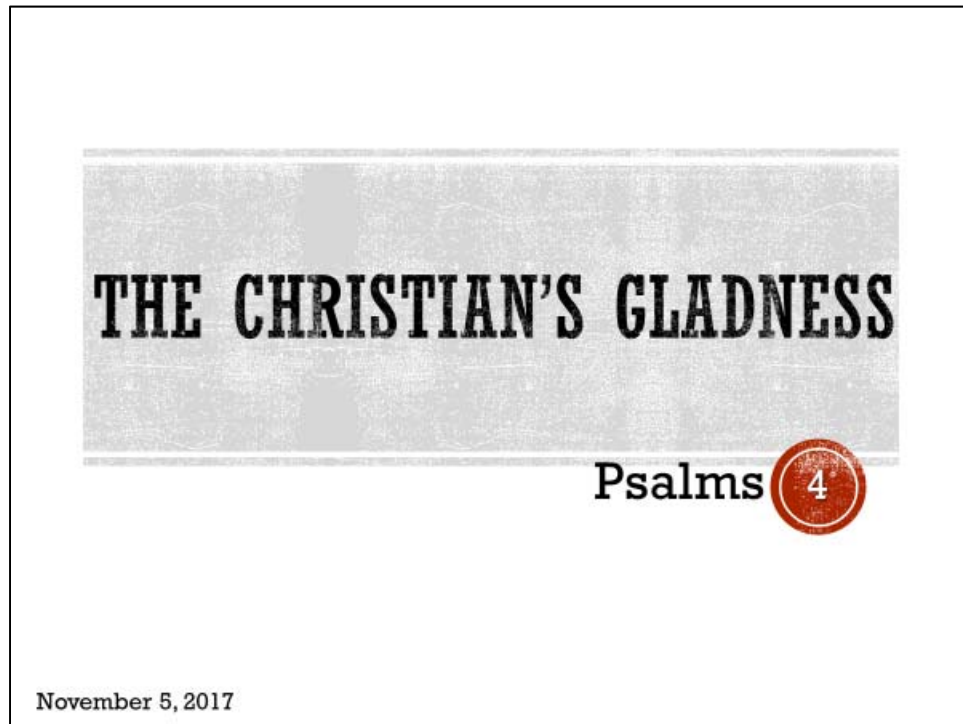


## Psalms – The Christian’s Gladness

Psalm 4

Nov 5, 2017 AM

Speaker: Pastor Mark Schindler



This morning we pick up again in our series on Psalms. We will be taking a look at the fourth chapter. In each of the previous messages we have reflected on the amazing experience of worshipping and glorifying God in whatever life circumstance we find ourselves in. In the first chapter Pastor Michael showed us how God deals with both the believer and the unbeliever. In the second chapter, Michael reminded us that our Lord is victorious over the rage and rebellion of the nations around us. And in the third chapter, Pastor Jason reminded us that Lord brings rest and salvation even when our circumstances seem overwhelming.

## INTRODUCTION

# Words Can Hurt

## Where is God?

The Christian's Gladness – Psalms 4



Similarly, this morning we come to Chapter 4 where we will see that the Lord answers our prayers with gladness and peace when life brings those who would slander and malign our character. This is a passage we can all identify with. Words can hurt. We may not have ever experienced someone who is plotting to take our life, but I think we've all received insults and opposition at some point in our life. Perhaps it was someone who lied about you and tried to make others think poorly of you. Or could have been someone who enjoyed making you feel bad and used words to wound you or pay you back for some perceived wrong. What do we do in these and similar situations? Where is God when people make unjust accusations and try to harm us with hurtful words?

It's kind of funny how wrong some of the things we learned as kids were. How many of you remember this little verse we would repeat when someone teased us? "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but..." But what? "But words will never hurt me." Really? Did that actually work for any of you? Did repeating that phrase somehow make it true or make us feel better. Whether the hurtful words came from people we called friends or from someone we hardly knew, carrying the ache of accusations, insults, and lies was hard; no matter how much we pretended they didn't matter.

And it's not just that words can hurt us. Words can also be used to undermine our confidence or cause us to lose our sense trust or confidence in others. How many of you can remember a supposed friend who said untrue things of another person that caused you to have doubts or think poorly of them? How many of you can think of a time that someone said something that caused you to doubt God's faithfulness and goodness? Unfortunately, this is the sinful, messed up world we live in. And it can cause us to doubt God's care, sink into despair, and fill our hearts with bitterness. Here in Psalm 4, David, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, addresses these types of situations, by reminding us that God is not absent in the middle of this kind of distress. Even

when others would use words to harm or hurt us, God can turn the believer's distress into gladness.

[opening prayer]

Please open your bible or your bible app and turn to Psalm 4. This Psalm was written by David and was meant to be sung with stringed instruments. We aren't given the occasion for the Psalm, but knowing David's life from other parts of the Old Testament, we can imagine any number of days where the cruel and spiteful words of others brought David great discouragement and pain. And I have no doubt that there are days when each of us feels this way and we need to hear the truth of this Psalm. Please follow along as I read God's word to us this morning.

*"1 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! 2 O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? **Selah** 3 But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him. 4 Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. **Selah** 5 Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD. 6 There are many who say, "Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!" 7 You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. 8 In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety."*

## PSALMS 4

- A – Our plea to God (v 1)
- B – When others slander, God hears us (v 2-3)
- C – Respond rightly and trust in God (v 4-5)
- B' – When others doubt, God gives us joy (v 6-7)
- A' – Our peace from God (v 8)

In preparing for this message I read Psalm 4 nearly every day for over a month. Over this time a chiasmic structure emerged which I believe is helpful in understanding what God has for us to see in the passage. I am grateful to Pastor Russ who confirmed and clarified this structure as I was

beginning to have second thoughts. The structure here is fairly simple. We have two sets of parallel points that work toward bracketing the main point in the center of the text.

The first set of outer points are found in verses 1 and 8. In verse 1 we have our plea to God which is closed in verse 8 where we have our peace from God. Moving in we have the next bracket of points which are found in verses 2 and 3. These verses remind us that though distress may be caused when others slander us, God is near and hears us. This thought is paralleled by verses 6 and 7 where David tells us that when others doubt, God gives us great joy. The inner thought and the main point of the passage is found in verses 4 and 5. Here we are called to respond to the slander and doubts of others in a Godly way and to continue to trust in Him.

Let's look at the first verse. Notice the personal nature of David's plea to God. David writes, *"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!"* There are two parts of this plea that we should note. First, there is the call to God to turn His ear and to be gracious in hearing David's prayer. Second, David remembers that God is the source of righteousness and relief. We are to have a confidence in the One to whom our plea is being made.

It may seem obvious here, but it is important to note that in the face of distress David calls out to God. As we read through the Psalms, it's what we expect of David. But let's also reflect upon our own lives this morning. Is this where we first turn when we face the hurtful and destructive words of others? In the face of distress, are we absent of any plea to God? Do our actions seem to say, "God I got this one." My stubborn pride tells me that I can handle it all by myself and in my own way. And rather than a plea to God for relief, we come to our own defense.

How many of us are more likely to respond in the same or worse manner than those who insulted us? We can all think of times when our response to the wounding words of others is to release our own verbal barrage in an attempt to give back what were given. And while we may think of these words as "suffering", the opposition we face does not come even close to what David and many others faced for the sake of God's name. In fact, if we are honest with ourselves, it probably doesn't take much opposition for us to be quick to defend ourselves and fail to call out to God.

Not only do we forget to make a plea, but we also forget that God is near and is never failing. We forget that God has provided us with righteousness and has promised to be faithful in our time of need. David not only calls out to God, but he remembers that it is in Him where he will find refuge and relief. David calls out with a confidence that God will rescue him from this distress. How much more should we who have the whole of scripture and the story of the Gospel remember all that we have in Christ? How much more should we who have found salvation in Christ, find joy and peace when we trust Him to defend us?

In verses 2 and 3 we find the next thought. David writes these words for us. *"2 O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah 3 But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him."* In these verses, David reveals the first part of his distress. Those who opposed David were dishonoring him by making empty charges and false accusations. They were undermining his

character and using lies to harm him. But David trusts in what God, as he remembers what the Lord has done in the midst of turmoil, uncertainty, and discouragement.

These two verses provide a contrast between listening to the lies and manufactured charges of others and listening to the truth of God and His word. The sense here is that David is speaking to “men of rank” or those in powerful positions who were trying to ruin him by attacking his reputation. Perhaps David was resented by some as God’s choice as King of Israel. Whatever the reason, they were spreading lies and half-truths to subvert David’s honor and authority.

We may not be in the same position as David, but we can relate to having others speak unkindly to us or unfairly about us. At work, in our neighborhoods, and unfortunately, even in the church, others gossip and spread stories that are not true as a means to gain position and power by putting down others. Our experience may be even the less malicious words of those who simply deny us what we deem to be our rights. Just like a child who chafes against the word “no”, our flesh struggles when others fail to treat us the way we think we should be treated.

You see, in our self-centered world we forget that there was one who endured the unjust accusations of others and bore them with silence, trusting in the plan and providence of the Father. Ironically, it is we who act as if we are somehow innocent, and cannot bear up under persecuting words. It may be that our present persecution is unfair and unjust. But in the larger scale of justice and without the righteousness of Christ, we deserve a terrible judgement. Such a thought should humble us so that our hearts would gladly endure suffering for the glory of our Lord. As 1 Peter 3:13 says, *“But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled”*.

In verse 3 we see that the example David provides for us is one of turning to God with an open and honest plea rather than listening to the voices of others. David reminds himself of two unwavering truths. The first is that God has set apart the godly for His own purposes. We can confidently rest in assurance of God’s blessing and protection. Second, David remembers that God will hear his plea. He will never abandon His children. Brothers and sisters, do not falter when you face the hurtful or unjust words of others who seek to harm you or bring you down. Remember that God has called you to Himself and will always be near to you in your time of distress.

Let’s move on look at the main point of Psalms 4 found in verses 4 and 5. Verse 4 starts, *“4 Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah 5 Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD.”* Here we are given two principles for dealing with slander and words that would harm us. The first of these is a warning not to be controlled by our anger. The second of these is a command to controlled by our trust in God.

Those of you who are familiar with Ephesians Chapter 4 are probably thinking this verse sounds a lot like verse 26 which says, *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger”*. Paul was probably thinking of Psalm 4 and possibly Psalm 37 when he wrote those words. David probably understood himself all too well. In the flesh we tend to react to unfair and unjust words directed at us with sinful anger. In fact, we can get so angry that our body reacts to the strength and power of the emotion. Our face turns red. Our hands begin to shake. We raise our voice

and attack back. We counter the lies by telling everyone how unfairly we were treated. We lie in bed at night with our minds going over and over what was said and plan how to make our defense. And secretly, we entertain hopes that evil will come to those who speak against us.

So how do these verses instruct us? First, they say we are to ponder in our beds and be silent. I think the idea here is that we are to control our thoughts in way that chooses not to respond unkindly. In other words, we are to be like Christ who like a sacrificial Lamb suffered the jeers of the soldiers in silence. Second, in the system of the Old Covenant, David says we are to offer right sacrifices. Sacrifices were for what? Sin. Taking this to the New Covenant, we could say that we are to deal rightly with our sin. Do we need to confess it before God? Do we need to confess our hateful and angry thoughts to another and seek forgiveness? Is so, then we are to do it. Third, we are to trust in God. Our hearts are to rest and find our refuge in God alone. It is only there that we will find peace and joy in the power and love of our God.

As we back out to the second level of our chiasm, we move back to consider another type of words that others can use against us. Let's look at verses 6 through 7. Here we read, "*6 There are many who say, 'Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!' 7 You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.*"

In verse 6 we have many around David who attempt to undermine his confidence by using scripture against him. Note the words in quotes in the last part of this verse. These people are quoting Numbers 6:24-26 which says, "*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.*" In essence, they are mocking David, questioning how he could trust in the goodness of God. How could he place his confidence in God when his life was falling apart? Where was the Lord's blessing upon His Anointed King? Their words attacked David's confidence to tempt him to doubt the goodness and purposes of God.

Is this not our own temptation when we are reviled by others? We begin to doubt God. We forget His blessings. We become discouraged and dwell on our suffering. If we continue down this path we start to drift from God and His word. And finally, we give in to anger, bitterness, and despair. But this is not where those who have been given victory in Christ are to dwell. If He saved us to be overcomers and victors in the face of doubts, we can find gladness.

Verse 7 takes us to David as he finds great joy in remembering the faithfulness of God. David is filled with the abundant gladness of a full harvest and the joy of celebration with a good wine. You see God delights in filling His people with hope and joy in midst of persecution. He gives peace and strength especially under the assault of words designed to make us doubt Him. Let us always consider the goodness and favor of a God who has poured out his love and mercy upon those who were lost in their sin. Such thoughts will humble proud hearts and bring gladness to weary souls.

At the end of the chapter we come to verse 8. The bookend of David's opening plea to God is David's peace from God. Let's look at this final verse. "*8 In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.*" David finds peace and rest while life is full of turmoil and distress. For in the Lord, there is refuge and safety as we trust in His care.

When we call out to God we can be assured that he hears our pleas and cries for wisdom and strength. No matter where we are or what words are used against us. No matter how we are tempted to doubt. God provides peace. Listen to Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT) and see if you hear the echoes of Psalms 4. *“6 Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”*

When we trust God, we avoid self-focused worry and sinful anger. Instead, He brings a peace that is beyond us or own ability. It is the kind of God-given peace that allows us to rest and sleep without dwelling on our distress. We stop listening and responding to lies of others and listen the truth about God and His faithfulness. Our God is near. Our God is faithful. He alone is our refuge and our defender. In these truths we find true and lasting peace.

## REFLECT AND RESPOND

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- **What is it that keeps us from gladness?**
- **When we face opposition and distress will we make our plea to God?**
- **Do we care too little about our sin?**
- **Do we care too little about hearing and heeding God’s word**

As we close out and reflect on this passage, I’d like us to consider the kind of words it takes to cause us to react in anger or to doubt God’s power and provision rather than to find gladness in Christ. I doubt that many of us are in the same situation as David facing the false accusations of powerful men who were trying to ruin the reputation of their King. But I am pretty confident that most have faced lies, hurtful words, or insults that have wounded our hearts.

What is it that keeps us from gladness? If you are like me, it probably doesn’t take intentionally harmful words to become angry or doubt God. I am often so prideful that any words of opposition or inconvenience that would get in the way of what I want, cause me to sin. And my flesh is not inclined to lean towards trusting the situation to God. In fact, all it can take to push me to self-centered sinful thoughts is as trivial as a fast food drive-thru cashier getting my order

wrong. Or a coworker that makes fun of me because of a silly text I accidentally sent him instead of my wife. I quickly turn to handle these situations my own way, and I turn away and doubt God. And in my own strength, I am unlikely to respond in a way that pleases my Lord.

The odd thing about us is that the new person Christ has made us to be wants gladness. In our hearts we long for peace and joy. So we battle with our flesh to rest in our Lord. Let us be encouraged and strengthened by the words of David in this Psalm. When we face opposition and distress let us make our plea to God. Let us remember to pray. Let us remember that He is near and that we can trust Him. If not, then we often fail to control our thoughts or anger. And when we fail to trust and believe, we cannot experience the peace and gladness that God has given to us in Christ.

Just a few more important thoughts before we close. As I consider my own heart and what I see in the world around me, I wonder, do we care too little about our sin and too much about our selfish desires? Do we care too little about hearing and heeding God's word and too much about our hearing and heeding the selfish words that rattle inside our heads? And having failed to mature and grow in these areas we wonder why we struggle with sin and fail to trust God we hardly know. Brothers and sisters, may God cause us to hate our sin, whether in the world or in our own lives. And may God cause us to deeply love Him and His word in way that draws us with a passion and desire to know Him more. For it is only in Christ that we find gladness and peace in the middle of opposition and distress.

[closing prayer]

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