

Martin Luther, the famed Reformer, wrote: “None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to effect, but those who have learned it by experience. It is a great matter when in extreme need, to take hold of prayer. I know whenever I have earnestly prayed I have been amply heard and have obtained more than I prayed for; God, indeed, sometimes delayed, but at last he came” (*Table Talk*, p. 201).

We may recall from Psalm 3 that David had many (3:1) who hated him and wanted to destroy him. **One of the things that many enemies did for David was to cause him to go to God in prayer**. Time and time again we discover that when David was surrounded by obstacles, he was praying and he was talking to God and **one of the key themes about which David prayed was for deliverance**.

Now let us think about this point for a moment. If God answers David’s prayer, then his enemies will need to be destroyed. If David is praying for God to deliver him from his enemies then if God chooses to answer the prayer something must happen to his enemies. **It is a very serious thing when a faithful, chosen servant of God prays and asks God to remove his enemies.**

That is precisely what this Psalm is all about. David is once again praying with full confidence in God and he also warns his enemies that they had better turn from their attack against him because when God answers his prayer, they will be destroyed.

This is the first Psalm that was written for “the choir director” or “chief musician.” We know from I Chronicles 16:4, 5, 7 that the man’s name was Asaph. Apparently this particular Psalm was to be accompanied with a stringed instrument, such as a harp and not with trumpets. David wanted the background music soft and the message clearly understood. What David writes in this Psalm is that:

GOD WILL ALWAYS PRESERVE AND PROTECT THOSE GODLY AND HE WILL LISTEN TO THEIR PRAYERS FOR DELIVERANCE, SO THOSE WHO ARE AGAINST THE GODLY HAD BETTER TURN FROM THEIR EVIL BEFORE GOD ANSWERS THE PRAYERS AND DESTROYS THE ENEMIES.

This truth was to be sung in the place of worship. God’s people were not only to know this, but they also were to sing about this. **It seems to me that one thing the church has almost stopped doing is warning the enemies of God’s people that vengeance is His and He will repay.**

Many have developed such a “politically correct” mindset that many are afraid to herald the truth because it might offend someone. David wrote this very Psalm specifically to offend the enemies of God’s faithful people and he wanted it sung at worship services. David did not want everyone to feel good about themselves; he wanted his enemies to realize they were all on dangerous ground.

There are three main parts to this Psalm:

PART #1 – David appeals to God. **4:1**

The thing that stress always did for David is that it drove him to pray. God wants to take His chosen people to deeper levels in their relationship with Him and prayer is one of those deeper levels.

The particular word David uses for “distress” is one that means to cut off or cut away (*Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 134). What this word tells us is that David was facing all kinds of pressure from all kinds of people who wanted him cut off or cut away.

So what David does in this context of distress is pray to God and there are three realities about God that prompted David to pray:

Reality #1 - God was David’s righteousness. **4:1a**

Now David is calling out to God on the basis of the fact that he is righteous. However, he does not believe it is his righteousness that permits him to do this. He believes it is God’s righteousness. God is the one who had given David the righteousness necessary to have a relationship with God. David was not righteous because of himself, but because of God.

Now since God is a righteous God, He will always do what is right and righteous for His people. So when one who has God’s righteousness is attacked, the attack is against God and therefore that becomes a great motivation for praying to God.

Reality #2 - God was David’s relief. **4:1b**

The fact that David could cry to God and expect God to answer was not due to theological theory, but to practical experience. David had faced many enemies and he had experienced God’s delivering power many, many times.

In fact the word “relief” means that when David had been boxed in and surrounded by enemies, who wanted to cut him down, he had seen God give him a wide open space (*Ibid.*, p. 764). In other words, God opened the way for David to escape the pressure. The perfect tense of the Hebrew “relief” means that David had seen God relieve him from many distressful things many times.

When God’s people find themselves under great pressure, instead of running to pills, they need to run to God. He is the one who can give true relief.

Reality #3 - God could give David grace. **4:1c**

David did not believe he deserved to have God do anything for him, but he did believe in the grace of God. Even though he did not merit God’s help, he could ask God for it because he knew of God’s unmerited, unearned, undeserved favor.

The fact that David was appointed King was due to the grace of God and the fact that he remained King was due to the grace of God.

It was these very realities that prompted David to appeal to God. God is a God of righteousness, of relief and of grace.

PART #2 – David gives warnings to men. **4:2-5**

There are four key references in Psalms that help us define “sons of men”—Ps. 31:19; 57:4; 58:1; 145:12. From these passages we may conclude that the “sons of men” are those who are not right with God or with David. So in these verses, David aims his communication straight at those who are not right with God or with David.

Communication Point #1 - David describes what the sons of men were presently doing. **4:2**

In this one verse David mentions three actions his enemies were presently involved in:

(Action #1) - They would not give David honor. **4:2a**

(Action #2) - They loved what is worthless. **4:2b**

(Action #3) - Their aim was deception and lies. **4:2c**

Martin Luther once said, “A liar is far worse, and does greater mischief than a murderer on the highway; for a liar and false teacher deceives people, seduces souls and destroys them under the color of God’s word...” (p. 299).

David was surrounded by enemies who not only refused to give him honor, but they made up lies about him. What they loved to do was “worthless” in the sight of God.

When David adds “selah,” God wants all to stop and think about this.

Communication Point #2 - David describes what the sons of men should presently know.
4:3

There are two critical realities David presents to these sons of men:

(Reality #1) - God was the one who set David apart. **4:3a**

Their refusal to honor David and their demeaning of David was a refusal to honor and demean God, Himself. David’s enemies were mocking God.

(Reality #2) - God was the one who would listen to David's prayers. **4:3b**

David was praying for God to deliver him from his enemies and he knew God would answer his prayers for he had seen God do that time and time again.

The obvious implication is that when God would answer his prayers, these sons of men would be destroyed.

Our prayers for deliverance may not be immediately answered, but they will be eventually answered.

Communication Point #3 - David describes how the sons of men should presently respond. **4:4-5**

In view of the fact that David had prayed to God specifically about taking care of his enemies, they needed to think very seriously about how they should respond. There are four responses:

(Response #1) - They should tremble and not sin. **4:4a**

These sons of men should stop chasing David and should start shaking before God. To persist in hostility against him was sin and was a dead end street. Since David was praying for deliverance, they needed to tremble at the thought of what God might do to them.

Charles Spurgeon said most reverse this verse—they sin and do not tremble when in all reality what they should do is tremble and not sin.

(Response #2) - They should shut their mouths and meditate in their hearts. **4:4b**

Instead of speaking against David, they ought to be analyzing their own hearts before God. They had better meditate on the fact that they are speaking against and hating a leader who had been raised up by God.

Notice David includes the word “Selah,” which means stop, pause, rest and think about this.

Those right with God do not just fly off the handle with their mouths. They think before they speak.

(Response #3) - They should offer sacrifices of righteousness. **4:5a**

The people who were against David were religious people, but they were not righteous people and one of the key tip-offs was their attitude toward David, who was God's chosen leader. Had they been right with God, they would not have lashed out against David.

David is basically saying that God will not accept their offerings, their prayers or their religious worship until it is righteous, and it will not be righteous until they stop sinning.

(Response #4) - They should trust in the LORD. **4:5b**

These enemies of David needed to start trembling, stop talking, stop sinning and start trusting. Obviously their faith was not in God; their faith was in themselves and their own cause which was against God's Word and will.

In the context of this Psalm, trusting in God would mean recognizing that honor and glory did belong to David and it would mean to cease from worthless ways.

PART #3 – David has confidence in God. **4:6-8**

There are three descriptions of the confidence David had in God:

Description #1 - David's confidence in God was individual . **4:6**

Many of those who were for David had lost or were losing hope. The people who were with David were very depressed, not knowing if they would ever see any good again. David had an unshakeable faith. He stood all alone and asked God to light them up once again. He asked God to shine His blessings on them again.

Description #2 - David's confidence in God was joyful . **4:7**

David had his joy back in his heart once again. Carefully notice who put that joy back into his heart; it was God. You cannot get this joy except from God.

Now this is critical—when a believer sins, he will be miserable and depressed. A believer who sins will be very low. But notice, when the believer faces the sin and confesses the sin and gets clean of the sin, God can put the joy back into the heart and that is exactly what he did for David.

David was so sure of his relationship with God that he was happier than people at the peak of their prosperity. This is remarkable considering the fact that “ten thousands” (3:6) were against him. He had joy in his soul because he was right with God.

Description #3 - David's confidence in God was peaceful . **4:8**

David was at such peace that every night he could go to sleep, no matter how many troubles surrounded him. J. Vernon McGee said this Psalm is better than any sleeping pill. Some people cannot sleep because they have a guilty conscience so they take some pill to help them. Not David. He had a good, clean, clear conscience and he could go to sleep, knowing he was so right with God that God would protect him all through the night.

Charles Spurgeon told a story of Bishop Ridley who was to be martyred for his faith. The night before his martyrdom, his brother visited him in jail and offered to stay the night with him. The bishop declined and told his brother that he intended to go to bed and sleep as quietly as ever. He had a peace and tranquility that only comes from God.

PARTING THOUGHTS:

- 1) When we are surrounded by enemies, we should not worry about them, but be working on our relationship with God.
- 2) When we are right with God and praying to God, our enemies should be very afraid because when God chooses to answer our prayers, they will go down.
- 3) God's timing to destroy enemies is rarely instant, but it is always definite.