

INTRODUCTION

- On my way home on Tuesday and Wednesday from Africa, I first heard about horrible news that took place less than a week ago when a college student at Virginia Tech, in a rage of insanity, opened fire on his fellow students and faculty which resulted in the death of over 30 people with many others wounded.
- I also learned that, as the war on terror continues, and a video was released of a boy of about 12 years old beheading a man which is claimed to being a Taliban traitor.
- Also on the plane flight home I watched a movie which has as its backdrop the diamond wars which have taken place in Sierra Leone, and tells the story of militant rebels who kidnap young boys, brainwash them, and then give them machine guns, teaching them to kill others without question. According to some estimates, there are over 200,000 such boys who are under the control of these ruthless men.
- There are many other such things which have filled my mind in the past week, including staggering AIDS statistics, the realization of the detrimental effect of American culture on other cultures.
- There is the reality of there being more slaves in the world than ever in human history, and a large portion of that being children who are kidnapped for a worldwide commercial sex trade.
- There is a part of me that wants to live as the Hobbits did in Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings, where it is said that they lived in quiet enjoyment of life, unaware of the realities of the horror that took place beyond their borders.
- As these things more and more deeply simmered in my thoughts, the question that kept coming to my mind “How long, O Lord?” In the light of such realities, in the light of events that seem to indicate that things are growing worse, and not better, what is the Christian to do?
- Are we, like so many in the world, to hope against hope and vainly believe that there is an essential goodness to humanity? Are we to ignore such things and simply go on with our life and pray that such things don’t touch our own lives? What hope is there? What confidence can we have?
- I would like for us to look to God for answers as we turn to His Word this morning, particularly to Psalm 4.

EXPOSITION

- By way of introduction to the Psalms, we find in them the widest variety of circumstances, moods, and subjects. It is a collection of prayers, praise, and truth about God and His Word. They are often a kind of prayer journal of the writers, and were used in the public worship of God in the temple. I would encourage you to make it a regular part of your Scripture reading.
- In this specific Psalm the writer, David (according to the ancient title), is keenly aware of a world in which things are not what they should be. He is aware of evil men who are doing wrong, and moves between calling upon the Lord, speaking to Himself certain foundational truths, and even addressing evil men. We don’t know the specific occasion, and the commentators speculate that it is either under the persecution of Saul or the rebellion of his son Absalom.

I. HIS PETITION TO GOD – v.1

- This is an introductory section, and foundational to all that he will write.
- **Hear me when I call** - In these kinds of cries to God, it is more than that God would hear, for He knows all things even before the word leaves our mouth. It is a request that God would hear favorably, and act on the request. It is no consolation for us that God merely knows our desires, but that He is a God intimately involved with His world.
- **O God of my righteousness** - This is the language of a courtroom, with God as the supreme Judge of righteousness. It is essential in our prayers to know the character of God, and David rests on the reality that God is a God of righteousness, and will not do evil. The appeal of the child of God is not primarily that God be “on our side”, but rather that in having a righteous cause and seeking to live righteously, we are on God’s side.
- **You have relieved me in my distress** - His petition is in remembrance of what God has done for Him in the past. Short sightedness is a great weakness, and we must remember what great mercies He has worked for us. We get so caught up in the distress of the moment, that we forget the many mercies of God from the past. One way to help us to remember could be a journal in which we write down those things which God has done in our life.
- **Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer.** – Though he is aware of God’s mercy in the past, he realizes that he must receive new and fresh mercies from the Lord.

II. HIS COUNSEL TO THE SONS OF MEN – vv.2-5

- He turns from speaking to God to men. In one sense, this is the way it should always be. This will give us courage to speak those things which should be spoken.
- **2 How long, O you sons of men** – When he addresses the “sons of men”, he is speaking to people in general, and to wicked men causing the trouble specifically. His essential question is “how long?” In the light of a world full of wickedness and trouble, this is frequently the question. It is the expression of a longing for things to be made right. It is also a gracious call for people to consider their ways and repent from wickedness. He then addresses the specifics of what grieves him as a godly man.
- **Will you turn my glory to shame?** – The question here is what the “my glory” refers to. It could refer to his glory in God. God is his glory, his honor, his delight. It could also be those other things he glories in, like justice,

righteousness, goodness, and truth. The wicked take those very things and make them an object to be trampled under their feet. The ungodly mock such things, and mock the godly man or woman who wishes to live in this way.

- **How long will you love worthlessness And seek falsehood? Selah** – The things they glory in are worthlessness and falsehood. The word “worthless” means things that are worthless, vain, empty, or idle. They are things that do not have eternal value. They are the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. In pursuing such things there is a life of lies and falsehood to gain them. Again he asks, “how long?”
- **3 But know that the LORD has set apart for Himself him who is godly** – As he addresses men, he turns them to the character of God. There is a God before whom they live, and he injects a God-consciousness. God is not pleased with the seeking of worthless and vain things, and is angry at falsehood and lies. In contrast, He has a special eye towards and care for the one who is godly. This is not, as David is well aware, one who is perfect or sinless. Rather, it is the one who lives with a sense of God’s presence, with an ongoing battle against one’s own sin and love for righteousness.
- **The LORD will hear when I call to Him.** – As their wicked deeds are against David, he reminds them that he has the ear of God, who is righteous and involved with his life. He has the support of the great, powerful, and majestic God. They should not think that in opposing him as he seeks the glory and honor of God that they are against a mere man, but are opposed to the one who will judge them both now and in the end.
- **4 Be angry, and do not sin.** – In light of this reality, David calls them to do several things. The first is to tremble before this God. The NKJV has “be angry”, but the word means to be agitated or inward trembling (which is an accurate description of anger). In light of their standing before the righteous God who is keeping account, they are to fear the Lord with the result of ceasing their sinful life.
- **Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah** – He further calls them to take time to think about their lives, to examine themselves, to take time in the quiet of the bedroom to be still and give serious consideration of themselves. One of the most serious problems we have in our culture is of constant input and lack of reflection. The constant presence of TV, music, entertainment, Internet, and even company steals away those moments when we should sit before the Lord and consider our lives.
- **5 Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, And put your trust in the LORD.** – In doing so, the response should be very different than the lives they are living. They should respond with the recognition of their wickedness, and instead offer to the Lord the sacrifice of righteousness. Rather than trusting in the uncertainty of riches and temporary pleasures, they should trust in the LORD.

III. HIS CONSOLATION IN GOD

- At this point the Psalmist turns from addressing other to himself and his own life.
- **6 There are many who say, “Who will show us [any] good?”** - This is the struggle of unbelief. When we see a world in which God often seems absent, and in which so much which is wrong happens, this question arises. Who will fix it? Who will make things right? Who will intervene and make a change by doing good?
- **LORD, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us.** – Here is the ultimate answer. While there certainly should be a striving after doing good and right things, the child of God recognizes there is but one foundation for hope, and that is that the LORD himself will bless with His countenance. This means that God will turn Himself to such things, and work. It is that God, in His goodness, will work powerfully and righteously. If He does not do so, all is in vain. This is a plea that God would send forth His Holy Spirit to change the hearts of men and move for the glory of His Name.
- **7 You have put gladness in my heart, More than in the season that their grain and wine increased.** – Here David expresses the reality of what knowing God has done for him personally. Those who have a mind only for this world find their chief delights and pleasures in temporary things. When their fields are fruitful, when they have plenty to eat and drink, when comforts and pleasures are known, then they are satisfied and made glad. But He has known a greater gladness and delight, to know God. While he doesn’t despise, and is actually thankful for those things, they are not an end of themselves. They are some of the means by which He is satisfied and made glad in God because they come from Him.
- **8 I will both lie down in peace, and sleep** – Even though David’s realizes the evil that yet remains in the world, these truths bring comfort and peace to his soul. Though his life is threatened, he lives with a good conscience before the Lord. This has the benefit of lying down in peace, and sleeping peacefully.
- **For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.** – It isn’t because things are easy in this world, but because David knows that his life is in the hands of the Lord. The safety that he knows is not accidental. It isn’t, as I heard this past week from one of the survivors of the shootings at Virginia Tech, because of “luck.” It is because God has his life in His hand, and there David safely leaves it in trust of His loving God.

APPLICATION

For the Christian – (1.) Focus on the character of God. (2.) Remember God’s past mercies. (3.) Remember God’s future promises. (4.) Live righteously (5.) Be glad (6.) Sleep in peace

For the non-Christian – (1.) Be still before God and think seriously about your spiritual condition. (2.) Look to Christ (3.) Put off worthless things and do not sin.