**If God is for me, who can be against me** 28/11/21

Read: Psalm 4, Ephesians 4

Text: Psalm 4

Psalms: 97, 4, 119:9-16, 117

The apostle Paul knew this Psalm well because he quotes from verse 4 in his letter to the Ephesians: ‘Be angry, and do not sin’ (Eph 4:26). The verse I find most helpful, and frequently quote, is the closing verse of the Psalm: ‘I will both lie down in peace, and sleep’. Actually, I quote this verse along with verse 5 of the previous Psalm: ‘I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me’ (3:5), because they are very similar. Scholars refer to that Psalm as a morning Psalm, and to this as an evening Psalm. The similarity of the two verses points to David being in the same situation in both Psalms, although this Psalm has no historical note in the title.

The title of this Psalm names David as the writer, and also gives instructions to a choirmaster regarding the use of ‘stringed instruments’, presumably the harp and lyre. There are other similarities between these two Psalms, as listed by Harman and others, but some, including Boice, insist we cannot be certain as to the historical setting of this Psalm.

You may recall that the previous Psalm was written as ‘David fled from Absalom his son’. Absalom murdered his half-brother and then fled, fearing the justifiable response of his father, King David. Absalom was allowed to return to his home in Jerusalem but not see the face of his father (2Sam 14:24, 28). Absalom set fire to Joab’s wheat crop to make him come to his house. Joab arranged for Absalom to meet his father, but still Absalom went off to conspire against his father and plot a *coup d’etat*. After some years Absalom told his father he was going to Hebron to offer sacrifices, when in fact he was going to rally troops ready for his coup. When David learnt of his son’s conspiracy, he immediately fled the palace. It was at this time that he wrote Psalm 3, and probably Psalm 4.

Psalm 4 again has eight verses with a couple of ‘Selahs’ which, as we previously noted, refer to a pause, possibly for reflection upon what was just said. We will look at this Psalm in three unequal sections, and under three subheadings: ‘Hear my prayer’, ‘Heed my words you men’, and, ‘Help, and peace and joy from the Lord’.

**1. Hear my prayer**

David was humiliated and distressed at having to flee from his own son. He left the city barefoot, head covered and weeping (2Sam 15:30). He was the innocent victim of his son’s conspiracy but, as when suffering from King Saul’s attacks, he did not take revenge; he committed himself in to the hands of the Lord. David knew the Lord to be ‘a righteous God’, as in most translations: ‘O God of my righteousness’ (4:1). God always does what is right or just, and acts according to his covenant promises. David therefore prayed with confidence or boldness that God would deliver him.

David’s confidence was also based on the Lord’s previous acts of ‘relieving me in my distress’ (4:1); we just mentioned his narrow escapes from King Saul. Distress has the sense of being under pressure, of being confined in a corner with no way out. The relief that God gives is that of being brought into a wide place, and being given air to breathe. ‘Boldly, yet humbly, he [David] casts himself on the mercy of God who covenanted to be loving and faithful to his own’.

In prayer we cast ourselves on the mercy of God. David was not claiming any merit of his own as he cried to the Lord in prayer, and nor should we. He was not deserving of the threat of his own son, although he was not altogether innocent. So he was down on his knees crying for the Lord to be gracious or merciful, and hear his prayer.

**2. Heed my words you men**

David turns his attention to those coming after him with evil intent. He has some words of advice for, ‘you sons of men’- some translations have ‘men’ or ‘brave men’ (4:2). His own son and those with him were probably the focus of his advice. He is calling upon them give up their rebellion because it is destined to fail. Certainly they had succeeded in humiliating David and forcing him to flee his throne in shame. But David ruled as the anointed of God, and to the glory of God, and this had not changed.

Besides, these men were listening to vain words and chasing after worthless things; their whole rebellion was sham (4:2). Like most rebellions, even today, no thought was given as to the outcome. See how the Taliban are ruling Afghanistan, or the generals are ruling Myanmar. Any fool can fight and overthrow a legitimate ruler but can this fool rule? The other thing about Absalom was his deceit and his lies. Remember him standing at the palace gate flattering all who came. He was a handsome fellow, as well as a smooth talker, as in a liar. His case for overthrowing his father was built on lies and deception, not on truth and righteousness. Verse 2 is followed by a ‘Selah’, a pause to allow these words of advice to sink into the minds and hearts of the men attacking David.

David’s criticism of those rebelling against him without a valid reason continues, with a warning that God will hear and answer when he, as a godly man, calls upon Him (4:3). They were taking up arms against the Lord’s anointed, against a godly man whom the Lord had set apart for Himself. David did not need to fight against his son or any other rebels because God was on his side. He was confident that the Lord would come to his defence because by the word of the Lord he sat upon the throne of Israel, and God’s word had not changed. Gamaliel’s warning to the men of Israel regarding the preaching of the disciples of Jesus is pertinent: ‘Beware lest you be found to fight against God’ (Acts 5:39).

Another point of warning comes in verse 4: ‘Be angry, but do not sin’. Scholars point out that the word ‘anger’ should be translated ‘tremble’; maybe it could be ‘tremble with rage’. But Paul chose to translate ‘anger’, maybe via the LXX. Paul brings this warning to the church, a warning too often ignored by Christians today (Eph 4:26). Paul adds his own advice about not carrying anger or bitterness into the next day, although he may have picked this up from the second part of this verse which mentions ‘your bed’, or indeed the last verse about sleeping in peace.

It all comes down to forgiveness, to forgiving one another as the Lord has forgiven you (Matt 6:14, 15). Absalom had been carrying a grudge against his father for years, a not uncommon sin even among Christians. Frustration, disappointment and even righteous anger are not sin, but they easily lead to sin.

Anger can lead to an outburst of verbal abuse or physical violence, both of which are sinful. These days the former is more common because of social media. Sadly, this medium operates 24/7 and some people engage in online abuse 24/7. Wise parents of course, tell their teenagers to turn it off and go to bed. They could tell them to turn it off and meditate for a few moments on the word of God. If only we would read out Bibles more and ‘chat’ or gossip less, we would be happier people! David tells his son, and maybe all who are rebelling with him against the God-appointed king, to search their hearts while on their bed and be silent. Again we find a ‘Selah’ in the hope that his words sink in. Anger, says Paul, gives opportunity to the devil, so deal with anger before the devil steps in. Even if you are innocent, go to your room, lie on your bed, calm yourself and ask the Lord to help you act wisely.

David has more advice for the rebels, advice fitting for his son in particular. Absalom told his father he had to go to Hebron to offer sacrifices (2Sam 15:7-9). This may have been true but it was not the whole truth; he was going to Hebron to declare himself king of Israel. His sacrifice was not that of the righteous. He was trusting in the power of men, not God (4:5). This goes back to the lies and the sham of verse 2 because in this case the lies and sham included sacrifices to God. Clearly the rebellion of Absalom was not pleasing to God and it was destined to fail, unless he repented and put his trust in the Lord. Whether or not Absalom heard this advice we do not know, but his tragic end shows he failed to heed it.

**3. Help, peace, and joy from the Lord**

“There are many who say, ‘Who will show us any good’?” (4:6). Who are the ‘many’ saying these discouraging words? Among those who supported David and fled with him there may have been many who felt they were on the losing side. It certainly was a dismal scene with the king of Israel barefoot and weeping as he fled the city. ‘Where is God in all this?’ they were probably asking. The ‘many’ may have extended beyond this group of supporters to those who had gone over to Absalom. By flattery and lies he had gathered a large following of obviously fickle people. So many people ‘blow with the wind’ and follow the crowd. If one person or idea gains popularity they ‘go with the flow’. It takes a strong person, a godly person, to hold to the truth. David was holding to what he knew to be the truth about the Lord, refusing to listen to detractors and doubters alike.

Even as David heard these words, ‘Who will show us any good?’ he turned to the Lord and the Scriptures. He appears to hear the Aaronic blessing given in the words: ‘The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace’ (Num 6:26). What David prays after hearing the discouraging words of ‘the many’ is, ‘Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us. You have put gladness in my heart’ (4:6, 7).

The gladness and joy he prayed for, and received, was more than the joy of a harvest and vintage. David knew that if he was walking according to the commands and the covenant God had made with him he had nothing to fear. The Lord had delivered him before and he could, yes would, do it again. His heart was at peace, peace with God, and with such peace he felt joy and gladness.

Peace in one’s heart is the subject of the last verse, so if your heart is troubled because of things people around you have said or done, listen carefully. Having considered the taunts and threats of his foes, even from a member of his own family, in the light of God’s covenant promises, David concludes that he can lie down and sleep in peace.

David had placed all his problems in the hands of almighty God, the God whose covenant love was upon him. Therefore he can sleep peacefully, knowing that the Lord alone ‘makes me dwell in safety’ (4:8). What an amazing trust in the Lord this man had! His trust in the Lord was not in word only; it was for real. Not only did he lie down but he slept in peace, despite the mob of rebels pursuing him (cf. 3:6). You may only have one or a few people against you but just like David you can trust in the Lord. Remember that fellow believers in other countries who do have thugs and armies pursuing them. And finally, be prepared for opposition and attacks simply because you do trust in the Lord, and seek the glory of His name always.