

Sep. 1, 2019

# When People Cause Your Pain

## Psalm 4

*When we are mistreated by others the Lord enables us to respond in a manner that leads us to peace.*

LTS: 2 Chron. 6:18-31

Sooner or later we all run into conflict with another people. All of us have been hurt by others, some by betrayal, some by personal attack and slander, and some by physical harm. It may have occurred at the office. It may have in your marriage. It may even have been at church. When you read the Psalms, it seems like David was perpetually under fire from others. People were always attempting to tear him down, ruin his reputation, impeach his character, remove him from the throne or drive him out of town. There were even those who were determined to kill him!

Truth be told, David didn't always respond well. Sometimes he reacted with sinful retaliation. But in the Psalm before us this morning, David offers us a model for how to respond to people who cause us pain.

I think we can all agree that the Lord never leaves us to fend for ourselves when we are unjustly treated, threatened, or oppressed. But if we are not careful to lean on God's wisdom and trust in his ways when we're treated badly, we run the risk of making matters worse rather than better and dishonoring the Lord in the process.

So, how should we respond when people cause us Pain? David counsels us with four things he did in a particular instance of being personally mistreated. First, he called upon the Lord in his distress. Then he invites his enemies to repent. Next, he delights in the joy of the Lord. And finally, he trades in his anxiety for peace.

If you have a bible with you this morning, I'd like to invite you to turn with me to Psalm 4.

Read Psalm 4

Let me make one observation before we dive into this text:

Psalm 4 is NOT a letter (like 1 or 2 Timothy), but rather a song. Songs in David's day (and in ours) are written differently than letters or narratives, or legal documents. Often a song will lack a logical progression of thought because the author intends to communicate a theme or an idea in a creative and thoughtful manner that can be sung. This will become important as we work through the structure of this song. For example, David begins (1) with something he wants to say to God. And then (rather abruptly) the lyrics of his song switch over (2) to something David wants to say to his enemies. Then (6) he switches again to a couple things he wants to say to God.

Apparently, David wanted God's people to learn something about how to respond to being mistreated. It is clearly NOT his intention to teach us everything there is to know about how God wants us to respond to mistreatment, but what he offers is rich counsel to those who suffer at the hands and mouths of others. And I think that what David wants us to learn is that When we are mistreated by others the Lord enables us to respond in a manner that glorifies Him and leads us to peace. Let's spend a few minutes together considering David's example

First, when David found himself being mistreated on this particular occasion, he responded by taking refuge in God. When we are in a similar situation, we too should...

## I. Call Upon the Lord in Your Distress:

Read v. 1

1. This is what it looks like to seek refuge in God. Notice with me that he really isn't asking for anything specific. He simply wants God to be gracious to him in his current distress. He longs for the relief (1) that only comes in the presence of the Father. In His presence anxieties fade. In his presence the enemy flees. In his presence is fullness of joy. Under his wing there is safety and peace and rest (which is what we will see at the end of this psalm).

- A. This verse reminds of a truth we already know. Namely, that hardship and pain will either drive us to God or it will drive us away from God.
- B. David doesn't enjoy suffering any more than you and I do. He wants relief - same as us. The question is, to what do we turn to find relief?
- C. Some turn to entertainment. Others turn to sex. Many turn to video games, or friends, or shopping. Some of us have known a few who have turned to pills, or alcohol, or worse. To what or to whom do you turn when you long for relief? David turned to Yahweh – the Almighty, covenant-keeping God.

2. It seems clear to me that this is not the first time David has sought God for refuge like this. There is no hesitancy in his request. His approach is straight-forward and bold. In fact, the words, “Answer me” are in the imperative, meaning David is issuing a command.

3. Now clearly, David does not believe that he has authority to command God, but he is so confident in God’s promise to hear him that he cries out with boldness. “O God, you who have promised to never leave me; you who have promised to hear my prayers, be gracious to me now. The KJV reads, “Have mercy on me.”

A. Do you detect David’s humble posture before God? Whether the appropriate translation is “grace” or “mercy,” it is clear that David understand that he does not deserve what he is asking for. (Think of his sin w/ Bathsheba)

B. This is what the gospel teaches us, is it not? Apart from His grace we would have no peace with God. He would be our enemy and we would be the just objects of his wrath.

C. But God, who is rich in mercy because of the great love with which he has loved us, even when were dead in our trespasses and sins, made us alive together with Christ. By his mercy he has made us sons and daughters of God. And as his children, we are always welcome to call upon our Daddy for help in time of need.

4. So, David prays, O God, have compassion; show pity toward me in my trouble. Be my refuge and grant me relief from my anxiety. Later in his life David would write (Psalm 145:18) “The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”

5. David IS in need. There are men of rank in Israel who are treating him unjustly. By way of contrast, observe the name by which he addresses God (1). He calls him, “O God of my righteousness.” Back in Psa. 3 the place where the ark resides is Lit. the “Hill of My Holiness” which is translated “holy hill.” Here it is “God of my righteousness” or “Righteous God.” IN other words, David is addressing the righteous God who knows he is innocent of the charges against him, and he is asking him to come to his aid.

(“It sure feels good to be innocent for a change!”)

6. This is a good model for us. When you face the mistreatment of others, you should do as David did. You should Call upon the Lord in your Distress.

Second, we should...

## II. Invite Our Enemies to Repent:

1. Now remember, what we are reading are the lyrics of a song, so we should expect the unexpected. And what we find next is truly is unexpected. In his song David begins speaking to those who are the source of his anxiety and distress. In fact, it appears to me that David is being down-right evangelistic in his address. He is not vilifying his enemies. He is NOT calling down God's curse upon them. This is not an imprecatory Psalm. No, in this song David is showing us how to love our enemies. And how does David love his enemies? He does the most loving thing he can do for them. He gently calls them to repentance. He calls them to repent of their sin and put their trust in God.

Read 2-5

2. Now, if you were a musician and you were asked to write a song that invites your enemies to repent of their sins and turn to God, what would you say in that song. And remember, the O.T. congregation you are part of is going to sing this song on the Sabbath as part of their worship. This, I think, is what David is doing. The second stanza of his song is a call to repentance and faith.

3. Notice that David begins with a question: "How long shall my honor be turned to shame?" We know that David is suffering injustice at the hands of prominent men in Israel. And now we get a glimpse of what kind of harm they are doing. They are slandering him. He is the king. He holds the highest rank in all Israel. By his appointed office he carries a magisterial glory. But they are trying their best to turn his glory into shame. So, David asks them, "How long will you keep smearing my name and my reputation? How long will you reject God's appointed king? As I see it, this is the first indication that these are unbelievers.

4. David then asks: How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Now this statement seems vague and intangible. But consider a couple possibilities.

- A. First, David may be exposing the fact that his enemies are idolaters. My first clue was that the NIV translates this verse, as follows “How long will you love delusions and seek false Gods?” I also discovered that the ESV Study notes on this verse reads, “empty things are vain idols. An idol is nothing – a vacuous entity that gives the one who trusts in it only vanity or emptiness in return.

As I dug through the O.T. I discovered that idols are often referred to as vain, empty, and useless. For example: Jer. 16:19–21 “O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble, to you shall the nations come from the ends of the earth and say: “Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies, worthless things in which there is no profit. Can man make for himself gods? Such are not gods!”

So, it may be that these men are idolaters.

- B. Second: If these men are not idolaters, they are certainly lovers of the world. Matthew Henry writes, “Those that love the world, and seek the things that are beneath, love vanity, and seek lies; as those also do that please themselves with the delights of sense, and portion themselves with the wealth of this world; for these will deceive them, and so ruin them.”<sup>1</sup>

5. In either case, whether they are idolaters or lovers of the world they are unbelievers. And it is at this point that David begins doing something remarkable. Instead of retaliating against his enemies, he counsels them on what they should do. In fact, he offers them five imperatives that strike us as somewhat of an O.T. presentation of the gospel.

6. The first imperative (3) is “Know!” David says, “But KNOW that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself.”

- A. To “set apart” means “to be distinct.” Beloved, this is one of many O.T. allusions to God’s electing grace. It reminds me of the time Jesus was being hounded by the Pharisees and he says to them (Jn. 6:24), “Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 748.

draws him.”

B. The men who oppose David may say that they like, but David warns them that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. The ungodly (it is implied) are excluded.

C. The meaning is plain, isn't it? David is saying, “Be warned. Your actions are clearly contrary to God. They are ungodly. You are in danger of being rejected by God because of your sin.

- O my friends. This is a timely message for our generation. There are many people in churches today who consider themselves in right standing with God and yet they live in blatant rebellion, immorality and open sin.
- Be warned. It is the godly whom the Lord has set aside for himself. That doesn't mean that God saves those who make themselves godly. Rather, it means that those whom God has set aside for himself are marked by the fruit of godliness. Saving grace is the root. Godliness is the fruit. We must keep things in order.
- So, the first imperative is Know. Know that God sets apart the godly for himself. And part of the privilege of being consecrated by God is that (3) “he hears when I call to him. He does not listen to the prayers of the rebellious.
- On the other hand, this verse is a great encouragement to we who believe. For if God is fulfilling his covenant with David, he will surely fulfill his covenant with us – the promise of eternal life in Jesus.

7. The Second imperative is “Tremble.” Your bible probably says, “Be angry.” But I think the NAS probably offers the better translation – “Tremble.” The word means “to be moved, disquieted, thrown into commotion.” When one gets clear vision of Holy God, he must reflect on the course he is pursuing and repent.

A. Neither in this verse nor in Ephesians 4:26 is God encouraging people to be angry (righteous or otherwise). Rather, he calls us to offer a right response to our sin. He calls people to carefully and humbly own it and deal with it. And in the case of the Ephesians text, to deal with it in a timely manner.

B. David is telling his enemies to acknowledge and deal with their sin. To own it before God. And that brings us to the third imperative:

8. The Third imperative is Ponder. David says, “Ponder in your own hearts, on your beds, and be silent.” David seems to be inviting his enemies to think carefully and honestly about their standing before God. Is their cause really just, or is it merely the pursuit of power and self-aggrandizement? He even gives them practical advice on how to ponder their standing before God. He counsels them to examine their heart in the evening when they go to bed, when no one else is around and they can think without disturbance. What is your standing before God?

9. The Fourth imperative is Offer. “Offer right sacrifices.” In the O.T. there were prescribed sin offerings which God designed to cover or atone for a person’s sins. Instead of rebelling against God, humble yourself before him and offer the prescribed sacrifices for sin and do it with the right motive – namely to own your sin and have your guilt washed away by his grace.

10. Such obedience may actually be the fruit of real faith. And that brings us the fifth imperative.

10. The Fifth imperative is Put, Namely, “Put your trust, (your faith, your confidence) in the Lord.” This is the only way to be made right with God; through humble faith in the sacrifice God has provided for your sins.

11. It’s amazing as you study the Bible how often you find the gospel. We don’t always anticipate seeing it in the O.T., but here it is in its most basic substance.

12. How do we respond when people cause us pain?

I. Call Upon the Lord in our Distress:

II. Invite (or pray that) our Enemies to Repent: and third, we...

### III. Delight in the Joy of the Lord:

Read v. 6-7

1. In this Psalm David is not really “speaking” to his enemies. He is singing what he believes God would have him say to his enemies if he had the opportunity. And while his words probably had no immediate effect on his enemies, it does seem to have influenced him.

2. When David is done rehearsing the gospel, his own heart is lifted and revived. He is reminded about what a glorious gift it is to live in a reconciled, justified, peace with God. And it occurs to him that there are many people who don't experience this superior goodness in life. He says (6) "There are many who say, "Who will show us any good?" How do believers respond to that question? To what do we point people to find goodness, satisfaction, meaning, and refuge in this life?

3. I imagine David crying out his answer as a prayer to the Lord: "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."

4. What does he mean when he says "Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord"?

A. Psalm 80:3 "Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!"

B. Psalm 119:135 "Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes."

C. Psalm 44:3 "for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them, but your right hand and your arm, and the light of your face, for you delighted in them."

D. In the O.T. when the priests were called upon to offer a blessing upon the people they would declare (Num. 6:24–26)

The LORD bless you and keep you; <sup>25</sup> the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup> the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

E. What happens when the Lord lifts up the light of his face upon us? All kinds of objective good happens!

F. And not only that, but by the light of his face we experience wonderful subjective goodness as well. David says, You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

G. . Do you know why people stuff themselves with food and drink themselves silly with wine (or beer, or scotch)? Do you want to know why college kids go to Mexico on Spring Break and spend money on the Booze Cruise. Its because they are looking for joy. But joy can't be found in these things. Real joy, true joy, lasting joy, eternal joy can only be found in relationship with God. And that enabled David to do the final thing in our study. He was able to

H. With the joy of the Lord there is no aftertaste; no hangover, no disease, no broken relationships, no addiction, no regrets as a result. Just Joy unspeakable and full of glory!

I. “Do you want good in your life? Then run to God! There is nothing in this life that can be more satisfying, more encouraging, more calming, more anxiety-killing than a living, vital, real relationship with god.

3. And that enabled David to do the final thing in our study. He was able to

IV. Trade his Anxiety for Peace:

Read 8

1. There is no time a person is more vulnerable to trouble than when he is asleep. To sleep is to be utterly dependent. You have no control over your environment when you are asleep. When you're out hiking in the deep wilderness (as my four oldest are doing up near the border of Canada this week), you are most vulnerable to the intrusion of wild animals when you are sleeping.

2. David knew this. He knew that his enemies were looking for him and his most vulnerable time was at night. But he didn't stay away and fret all night. No, he says, Because I know the face of the Lord is shining upon me, “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”

3. This has been the verse on the lips of many saints in their dying breaths. Martin Luther wanted his friend to sing this psalm as he died. He asked that a requiem be composed based on the last words of this Psalm, “In peace I will lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. This is the kind of confidence we need. We need no one to protect us but God.

How should we respond when people cause us pain?

I. Call Upon the Lord in Your Distress:

II. Invite Your Enemies to Repent:

III. Delight in the Joy of the Lord:

#### IV. Trade in Your Anxiety for Peace

##### Gospel

- Know that only God can reconcile you to Himself: “It is the Lord who sets the godly apart for himself.
- Tremble before him because of your sin.
- Lay on your bed tonight and engage in some humble, honest appraisal of your life. You know you’re a sinner. And you know there is nothing YOU can do to change that.
- Offer the right sacrifice: Or better, accept the sacrifice God has made for you in the Person of Jesus Christ who paid the debt of your sin on the Cross. Put your trust in the Lord
- And when you do, the Lord will life up the light of his face upon you and you will know the Joy of the Lord and his peace.

*When we are mistreated by others the Lord enables us to respond in a manner that leads us to peace.*