

Closing Our Eyes In Confidence

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[0 : 00] Well, welcome again if you've tuned in since the start of the service. I don't know if there's anyone who's joined. We're going to be looking at Psalm 4 now. If you'll turn with me to Psalm 4. While we do that, let me just pray for God's help as we read and study His Word. Heavenly Father, we can pray that as we come to Your Word now You'd give us ears to hear, hearts to understand. We'll pray that it would be Your Words that we'll hear.

Not mine. Lord, may I thank You that Your Words are like pure gold. They're sweeter than honey. Please feed us on the bread from heaven that comes from You. That is Your Word. That is Christ. I'll uplift us now by Your Word. We pray. Let me read Psalm 4 now to us. To the choir master with stringed instruments, a Psalm of David. 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. Oh man, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will You love vain words and seek after lies? But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for Himself. The Lord hears when I call to Him. Be angry and do not sin, pondering Your own hearts on Your beds and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and put Your trust in the Lord. There are many who say, Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of Your face upon us, O Lord. You've put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine are bound. In peace, I'll both lie down and sleep. For You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. Well, our question this morning is why call on God? Why call on God in distress? A couple of years ago, there were posters on buses throughout the UK saying, Try praying. Well, our question this morning goes back one level. Why bother praying at all? Why call on God? Why call on God when we're in distress? And many in our society would say, It's a waste of breath. God doesn't exist. God doesn't hear prayer. And He certainly doesn't seem to answer. And some people, you know, they might still at the same time pray when they're, when things are really bad, when things seem hopeless. And maybe you're in person or listening online and you've just started thinking through things of Christianity in the person of Jesus.

[2 : 52] And you're thinking exactly that. Well, let me just encourage you that Sam 4 is a really good place to ask those questions more. So please do keep listening. I wouldn't be surprised though, if many of us who call ourselves Christians will still ask that question. Why pray? Why call on God in distress? Well, in Sam 4, King David, who is the writer, we can see that it's a Sam of David, just before our little verse one in our Bibles. David says in verse one, he says, Answer me when I call, then hear my prayer. That's his, that's what the Psalm is about. It's him calling on God to answer his prayer. But why would God hear? That's what verses two to five will address. Then verses two to five are almost like David. And speaking back, you see it up there.

Verses two to five is David as if he's answering his opponents, those who say, Well, why on earth would God hear? And then verses six to eight seems to be David answering his godly, his friends, but God does God really answer? It's both both those questions that really come to come into our question this morning. Why call on God? Does he really hear? Does he really answer? Those are crucial questions that all of us need to ask and answer. Maybe you've asked them before at different times in your life. They're crucial questions, especially if like David, we're in distress. We want to call on God. Is there any point in calling on God then? Does God hear? Does God answer? They're crucial questions as well at the beginning of the book of Psalms.

I don't know whether you notice this is the Psalm four. And if God doesn't hear, well, there's no point in praying the rest of the Psalms with any hope is there. If God doesn't answer, there's no point seeing them with expectation. We need to know we need to have confidence that God hears and answers if we're going to be able to pray these Psalms for ourselves.

So that's our question this morning. Can we have confidence to call on God in distress? We're going to think of that under two headings. First of them is that the Lord hears his chosen King.

And second, that the Lord answers his chosen King. So first thing the Lord hears his chosen King. That's David's trial for declaration, you might say in verse three. At the end of verse three, the Lord, David says, the Lord hears when I call to him. He says this in response, you might notice to his opponents in verse two, these people who are called O men, or helpfully you might see in the ESV footnote, they're called men of rank. Whether they're the nobles, elders, military commanders, we don't know. They're like, they're like though the rulers of Psalm two, remember, who set themselves up against God's anointed. These are the people who are saying God doesn't hear. These are the people who David is responding to saying, God does hear. We read in verse two that they turn David's honor into shame. Maybe they're mocking him saying God doesn't answer.

[6 : 04] There's no point. This Psalm could have very easily been written in the same context as Psalm three, as some people think, when David is forced to flee from Absalom, his son who was led a rebellion against him, and David's leaving Jerusalem. And you can read in 2 Samuel how David is mocked and slanted as he leave. He's cursed. I said, as people mock him as you are you are you really God's king. Look at this, God's abandoned you. And yet here, like in that place in 2 Samuel, we see that David is confidence. David calls on God and he calls on confidence. He calls with sorry, calls with confidence on God. The Lord hears me when I call to him. And he's confident first of all because of what God has done. Do you notice in the beginning of verse three, David says, but know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. Now God has set apart Israel by rescuing them from Egypt and he called them to be a kingdom of priests. The holy nation read that in Exodus 19. More importantly for David, God has set him apart and as God's anointed king. In 2 Samuel 7, God made promises to David saying that he would, excuse me, establish David's royal line and from his descendants raise up the eternal king. And so

David knows that God has set him apart as an Israelite and as God's king. And David knows that he has this privilege then to call on God in prayer. You know, it's just you can go back to Psalm 2 again. When God says to his anointed king in Psalm 2, ask of me and I'll make the nations your heritage. David would have taken those words for himself that he could call on God because he was God's anointed king. However, David isn't writing these words just for himself to assure himself. He's writing these, you notice it's to the choir master. This is a Psalm meant to be sung at the temple. And this Psalm is not just a reminder for David, it's a challenge to David's opponents. You know, as it was sung in the temple, it was a challenge to all those who came in with self confidence, who came in with anger or an opposition against God's king, God's anointed king and God. Let's think of it like a shot across the bow. David is saying that no, God has set apart the godly for himself. It's like a warning shot.

David's saying, do you realize how you've picked a fight with these men are saying, oh, you know, God doesn't answer your prayers. And David says, no, the God has set apart the godly for himself. He has set apart his anointed king. How should they respond? Verse four is the risk. How is David telling them how they should respond? He says, we have a translation I think, be angry.

NIV says tremble and do not sin. I think either of those are helpful. But maybe maybe the tremble helps to kind of put it put it better. It's not just it's in your anger, don't sin, but the tremble, it's trembling before God's king in light of the fact that God has set apart the godly for himself, tremble before God and tremble before his king. David's saying to his enemies, do you realize who you're picking a fight with pondering your hearts pondering in your hearts and be silent, offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord versus four and five as it were on.

He's telling them, look, you have no hope unless you put your trust in the Lord. Even in your even as you tremble, know that God has set apart the godly for himself. Three choices, you might say, if you take the three imperatives and verse three, four and five, know that God is set apart the godly for himself, tremble verse four and trust. Know and tremble and trust.

[10 : 16] I don't know whether where you instinctively read yourself though into this song, because when we read this, we want we read ourselves into it automatically. The truth is though that by nature, we aren't the godly of verse three. We often want to read ourselves into it like that though.

By nature, we are the men of verse two. We are the enemies of God's king. Because by nature, we have rejected the king. We've rejected Christ. We've rejected God's anointed. We've puffed ourselves up with with vain words and lies and set ourselves up against God's king. So actually the first instance, we need to read this Psalm as a warning to us to know that Jesus's gods anointed king, to tremble at his feet and trust in him as Lord. Because only in him is there refuge. And maybe this is the first time you've come to church or maybe you've been to church many times. You might

be someone who doesn't believe in God or maybe you're listening online and you believe in another God. But the challenge of verse of Psalm four first of all goes out to all of us.

Know that the Lord has set the godly for himself. Put your trust in the Lord. Because we can't have any hope that God listens to our prayers if we're enemies of God. That's what David's telling his enemies first of all. The wonderful news of the gospel though is that if we trust in Jesus, all that changes and that's where I want to move us on to now. See David had confidence in God. We can have confidence as well in and through Christ. Because he supremely fulfills the Psalm on our behalf. You see when Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us, he made the words of Psalm to his own.

So Jesus when he was despised and rejected, he wasn't worshiped as king, but rather his honor was turned into shame. He would have been able to say the words of some of verse two himself, wouldn't he?

As the crown of thorns was twisted onto his head as soldiers mocked hail king of the Jews. He wasn't raised up on a throne. He was raised up on a cross.

[12:41] Jesus could have well said the words of verse two. And he said them. Jesus said verse two so that we could say verse three. Jesus was despised and rejected. Jesus said how long, long enough to take our shame, to take those vain words and lies that separate us from God. He suffered the wrath of God so that we could receive his righteousness. He took, he said verse two so that we could say the Lord hears when I call on him. He was cut off from God so that we could, we could not be. So that we could know that God hears us when we call on him. He cried verse one in anguish, you might say, so that we could cry it with hope and with confidence.

Just to complete that turnaround, the apostle Peter quotes Isaiah saying whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. The honor is for those who believe. Jesus was put to shame so that we don't need to be. We can have honor in Christ. We can in Christ have got call on God. And instead we Peter writes that in one Peter chapter two he says you are a chosen race of royal priesthood, a people of his own possession. We can know that the Lord has set us apart for himself in Christ if we trust in him. It's through Jesus' blood that we can have confidence to come into God's presence. Yeah, by nature we don't have any right to call on God. Yeah, we have no hope of God listening to us. But it's in Christ that we have that confidence and that's far better than having any confidence in ourselves because otherwise our confidence that God listens to us would change day in, day out, week in and week out. Rather our confidence can be in our king.

God listens to us because he listens to Christ and Christ is God's anointed king. And can I just say if you're not trusting in Jesus do you realize what you're missing?

Do you realize the access that you're missing? Thank God that we can say if we're in Christ. You could say if you're trusting in Christ the Lord hears when I call on him. Those are amazing words to be able to say. I know many of you have trusted in Christ like me and we need to be reminded as well of the privilege that we have. You know there are lots of things that will leave people feeling distressed like David this morning. You know maybe some of you do face hostility and shame for following Jesus. You know we're living a society where our greatest honor of trusting in Christ is turned to shame on a regular basis and whether personally to us or on the media or whatever. But distress is broader than that though isn't it? Some of us are swamped with work, others of us are without work. Some of us are trying to frantically trying to juggle family, others are feeling lonely maybe without family. We're keenly aware of what it means to be in distress.

[16:10] And whether our situation maps directly onto David's or not we can, we need to know that we can have confidence too that in distress we can call on God because in and through Christ and his work we can know you just to take those in those words again no tremble and trust. We can know that Christ is on the throne and that in and through him we have access to God. And when we are wronged and when we are slandered and when our honor is turned into shame we don't have to take matters in our own hands. In our anger we don't need to sin we can cast everything on to his hands knowing that the judge of all the earth will do what is right and we can trust in the Lord. You know David models that even as he just prays verse one he says call answer me oh Lord oh God of my righteousness. He's trusting in God as the author of his righteousness.

He doesn't have to justify himself. He doesn't, while people might strip him of his honor David says you are the God of my righteousness God who upholds his righteousness even when people drag his honor through the mud. He says you've given me relief when I was in distress that's literally you've given me a room when I'm in tight places. God is the one who gives him room to breathe.

He says be gracious and hear my prayer. You know that language of being gracious it's like you know when a grandparent stoops down to hear a little child who's whispering in their ear they don't have to listen but God gently stooped and listens to us. He graciously stooped to hear our prayers when we're in Christ. He graciously hears the people of his kingdom of the king.

So first we said why call on God in distress first because he hears his chosen king and in and through him he hears us but second the Lord answers his chosen king. God isn't just a God who hears he is a God who answers and David now turns to the second group of people in verses six and seven who read there are many who say who will show us some good lift up the light of your face on us oh Lord. Now this could be David's enemy speaking but I think it's probably his friends you notice in end of verse six they're calling on the covenant name of God Yahweh we've got oh Lord Lord in capital letters they're probably friends of David maybe those who are fleeing with him from Absalom and they're wondering why on earth doesn't God answer. We're sticking with God's king and yet it looks like everything's gone pear shaped and they're saying they're praying to God who will show us some good God doesn't seem to be answering maybe some four partly is in response to them maybe that's part of what inspired I don't know what we do know is that David gave this again to the choir master of the temple because he knew that all Israel needed to hear this they need to be reminded of how God answers in distress and the answer isn't necessarily what we want the answer isn't that he'll answer in exactly the way in which we call out for but first of all look at David's answer first we'll get answers by giving joy in verse seven and that might make some of us inwardly groan we think oh dear that's not the answer we want what we need and I certainly felt that way before and maybe that's how the first heroes this Psalm would have felt they would have heard this Psalm maybe as they were entering the temple courts and they were coming to pray that God would bless their harvests and all other and all other maybe material needs that they had and actually it's a reminder that actually David says you've put more joy in my heart than they have when grain and wine are bound now don't get me wrong David isn't saying don't call on God for physical deliverance or for blessing he did that many times but his point here is that even when God doesn't answer in that way the absence of an answer in that way doesn't mean that God isn't answering that God can even give joy while distress continues and that can be God answering prayer and actually look at how David ranks it he says you put more joy in my heart than they have when they're grain and wine about he's saying the true and lasting and most precious response is actually joy from God regardless of whether the grain or wine about us

I mean we often sing of that even when we sing Psalm 16 don't we in your presence there is fullness of joy what is the joy that David's talking about I think he's talking about relationship with God relationship with God himself true joy is found in and through God it's found in and through Jesus Christ I mean Jesus says that in his gospel in John's gospel um he says on the eve of his death I've told you these things that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full true joy comes from a deep and intimate relationship with God whether in comfort or in distress the apostle Paul clearly took this to heart we read in that that part in Philippians he says whether he is in prison whether people are slandering his name as we read in chapter one whether he's in comfort or in want he can rejoice always how on earth can the apostle Paul say that what does he know how is it how is he able to rejoice in every circumstance it's because he rejoices in the Lord the Lord is the source of his joy and as you read that out of Philippians you see you see how Paul knows his God and I've been asking myself just as going over this why do we not seek joy and see joy from the Lord as an answer to prayer I think I often don't we often answer the prayer often tied to the thing I ask for and I think you know maybe it's partly because our concept of joy is fixed somewhere else other than Christ our concept of you know I have joy when I'm comfortable I have joy when life is easier when I don't know when some relationship is easier I don't know what comes to your mind when there's peace at home when there's all kinds of things when health is better but what constitutes an answer to prayer is it just solely when it's when God answers a need I have what does answer does God answer as well when he gives us something that we don't even realize we need when we give us joy in him I won't be surprised if many of you've been praying for relief from distress for many years and you'll know you'll know this challenge in a way that I don't but can I just encourage you that sometimes God answers in a manner of verse seven it's not that

[23 : 46] God hasn't been listening it's not that God hasn't been answering if he hasn't answered in the way that you've been praying God does answer by giving us joy in every circumstance and if that sounds glib coming from me can I just quote you something from the Scottish missionary John Payton because he faced this trial in a way that I can't even understand he was John Payton was a

missionary to the New Hebrides and that's in the Pacific you can find it on the map at the back after if you want but he spent his first four years overseas on the island of Tanner and there his wife and his child died there he faced the most constant threats on his life he was eventually driven away from the island and he saw no fruits for his missionary labor there and he prayed many times for the Lord to bring the people of Tanner to Christ and the God didn't answer him by doing that but we do read in his diaries that God did answer by giving him tremendous joy in the Lord even in distress let me just read that quote you probably read it by now at the time I've been talking he writes we have in our dear Lord Jesus grace for peace and joy in all circumstances oh that the pleasure seeking men and women of this world could only taste and feel the real joy of those who know and love the true God a heritage which the world cannot give to them for which the poorest and humblest followers of Jesus inherit and enjoy those who have tasted this highest joy the joy of the

Lord will never again ask his life worth living yeah we we can we can pray and it's good to pray that God will provide and protect but can I just encourage you that above all let's ask that God will give him give us his joy in him and just finally before we close God answers David not just giving him joy but peace David says in peace I will both lie down and sleep for you alone alone make me dwell in safety I just love that verse it gives so much comfort doesn't it peace so that David can both lie down and sleep I think it's good that he's include both of those sometimes we can lie down and not fall asleep at all what a wonderful answer to prayer this is as well David doesn't say that the situation that causes him distress is finished you know for all for all we know that um David you know this is David after I don't know a day of running going into a cave go day of running from absent going into a cave and falling asleep his men are probably thinking well how on earth can you sleep while stuff is while you're still in distress how on earth can you sleep when the world seems like it's about to crumble around you I wonder what David would have responded

I can lie down and sleep because I know that God has heard my prayer for relief and however he answers it he has given me peace in all circumstances I know that he will keep me safe I'll you alone alone make me dwell in safety now we might not be promised the same safety that David was as as God's came there but God does promise to give peace to all those who ask it Jesus says to his troubled disciples in the eve of his crucifixion my peace I leave with you my peace I give you and we read of again Paul's memorable words in Philippians do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus I must really helpful word will guard your hearts and your minds our hearts and minds can wander we can we can they can just take us into dark places as the concerns of the world just mount up on us can't they but the peace of God guards our hearts and our minds God still answers our prayer our cries of prayer by giving us help in times of distress but he also answers by giving us peace sometimes that's exactly what we need in the time sometimes sometimes we wait days for I don't know the turmoil of some fallout in a relationship or some bad news we wait days for any answers to prayer for that kind of thing but in the meantime we do need to sleep and God does give us that God does give us peace in those times and we can know as we were saying to the kids that because God doesn't sleep we can we are in under his sovereign care I don't know whether you've whether you found yourself lying awake unable to sleep like we're chatting to with to the kids verse 8 encourages us at that time to remember that the Lord makes us dwell in safety that we can cast all things on him in our distress

God answers by giving peace let me just mention John Peyton again because it's obvious now I've been just reading about him and his life just captures this again so well there's one night he spent the night asleep in a tree because guys were hunting to kill him I don't know whether he wrote this at that time but this quote came soon after he says this is strength this is peace to feel an entering on every day that all its duties and trials have been committed to the Lord that come what may he will use us for his own glory in our real good we can cast everything on him God at the beginning of the day at the end of the day and he will give us peace and if you ever felt that kind of peace you'll know how precious it is the burden that it lifts off your shoulders the peace to endure whatever shame and suffering we might face in that day it's a peace that doesn't come from instant relief but from knowing the God but from a knowledge of God a peace that the God who is good and wise and omnipotent and in control who never slumbers nor sleeps is watching and that we can know him and he will do all things well well as we close then can I just encourage us that we can close our eyes in trust you know closing our eyes to go to sleep is one of the biggest acts of trust that we

can do it's saying that all those things that are that to do less that we've got actually we're going to close that we're going to give that over to God in prayer all those things that are causing us to be anxious we're going to give that over to God in prayer all those all that hurt that we might be bearing and give that over to God and go to sleep closing our eyes and sleep there's a great act of trust and we can trust and we can cast that on God in our distress because in Christ we are his chosen people in Christ God answers what we call on him he hears our cries and he answers according to his good wisdom and whether our source of our trouble goes or remains we can trust that he will give us fullness of joy and peace for all who ask of it let's pray that

Heavenly Father thank you that in Christ we have relief from the greatest distress that is being enslaved to sin Lord thank you that even as you have given us all things all the blessings in the heavenly places in Christ thank you that even as you have rescued us from death to life Lord we pray that you would grant us relief from distress in every other area and Lord we know that might not come immediately that might not come at all in this life but we thank you that we can have confidence still to be able to call on you in all times and so Lord just pray for everyone this morning who is weighed down that they would know that they can call out on you please give them your peace that surpasses all understanding please fill them with the joy of knowing you give us all a great joy thank you so much that you are our Savior and our God we pray of this in Jesus name