

PSALM 4

David was a preacher, a royal preacher, as well as Solomon; many of his psalms are doctrinal and practical as well as devotional; the greatest part of this psalm is so, in which Wisdom cries to men, to the sons of men (as ~~2084~~ Proverbs 8:4, 5), to receive instruction. The title does not tell us, as that of the former did, that it was penned on any particular occasion, nor are we to think that all the psalms were occasional, though some were, but that many of them were designed in general for the instruction of the people of God, who attended in the courts of his house, the assisting of their devotions, and the directing of their conversations: such a one I take this psalm to be. Let us not make the prophecy of scripture to be of more private interpretation than needs must, ~~6020~~ 2 Peter 1:20. Here

I. David begins with a short prayer (v. 1) and that prayer preaches.

II. He directs his speech to the children of men, and,

1. In God's name reproves them for the dishonour they do to God and the damage they do to their own souls (v. 2).
2. He sets before them the happiness of godly people for their encouragement to be religious (v. 3).
3. He calls upon them to consider their ways (v. 4).

III. He exhorts them to serve God and trust in him (v. 5).

IV. He gives an account of his own experiences of the grace of God working in him,

1. Enabling him to choose God's favour for his felicity (v. 6).
2. Filling his heart with joy therein (v. 7).
3. Quieting his spirit in the assurance of the divine protection he was under, night and day (v. 8).

~~6001~~ PSALM 4:1-5

EXPOSTULATION WITH SINNERS

To the chief musician on Neginoth. A psalm of David.

The title of the psalm acquaints us that David, having penned it by divine inspiration for the use of the church, delivered it to the chief musician, or master of the song, who (according to the divine appointment of psalmody made in his time, which he was chiefly instrumental in the establishment of) presided in that service. We have a particular account of the constitution, the modelling of the several classes of singers, each with a chief, and the share each bore in the work, 1 Chronicles 25. Some *prophesied according to the order of the king*, v. 2. Others *prophesied with a harp, to give thanks, and to praise the Lord*, v. 3. Of others it is said that they were to *lift up the horn*, v. 5. But of them all, that they were *for song in the house of the Lord* (v. 6) and were *instructed in the songs of the Lord*, v. 7. This psalm was committed to one of the chiefs, to be sung on *neginoth* — *stringed instruments* (^{<3189>}Habakkuk 3:19), which were played on with the hand; with music of that kind the choristers were to sing this psalm: and it should seem that then *they* only sung, not the people; but the New-Testament appoints all Christians to sing (^{<4189>}Ephesians 5:19; ^{<5186>}Colossians 3:16), from whom it is expected that they do it decently, not artfully; and therefore there is not now so much occasion for musical instruments as there was then: the melody is to be made in the heart. In these verses,

I. David addresses himself to God, v. 1. Whether the *sons of men*, to whom he is about to speak, will hear, or whether they will forbear, he hopes and prays that God will give him a generous audience, and an answer of peace: “*Hear me when I call*, and accept my adorations, grant my petitions, and judge upon my appeals; *have mercy upon me, and hear me.*” All the notice God is pleased to take of our prayers, and all the returns he is pleased to make to them, must be ascribed, not to our merit, but purely to his mercy. “Hear me for thy mercy-sake” is our best plea. Two things David here pleads further: —

1. “Thou art *the God of my righteousness*; not only a righteous God thyself, but the author of my righteous dispositions, who hast by the grace wrought that good that is in me, hast made me a righteous man; therefore *hear men*, and so attest thy own work in me; thou art also the patron of my righteous cause, the protector of my wronged innocency, to whom I commit my way, and whom I trust to *bring forth my righteousness as the light.*” When men condemn us unjustly, this is our comfort, *It is God that justifies*; he is the God of a believer's righteousness.

2. “*Thou has formerly enlarged me when I was in distress, enlarged my heart in holy joy and comfort under my distresses, enlarged my condition by bringing me out of my distresses; therefore now, Lord, have mercy upon me, and hear me.*” The experience we have had of God's goodness to us in enlarging us when we have been in distress is not only a great encouragement to our faith and hope for the future, but a good plea with God in prayer. “*Thou hast; wilt thou not? For thou art God, and changest not; thy work is perfect.*”

II. He addresses himself to the children of men, for the conviction and conversion of those that are yet strangers to God, and that will not have the Messiah, the Son of David, to reign over them.

1. He endeavours to convince them of the folly of their impiety (v. 2). “*O you sons of Men*” (of *great* men, so some, men of high degree, understanding it of the partisans of Saul or Absalom), “*how long will you oppose me and my government, and continue disaffected to it, under the influence of the false and groundless suggestions of those that wish evil to me?*” Or it may be taken more generally. God, by the psalmist, here reasons with sinners to bring them to repentance. “*You that go on in the neglect of God and his worship, and in contempt of the kingdom of Christ and his government, consider what you do.*”

(1.) “*You debase yourselves, for you are sons of men*” (the word signifies man as a noble creature); “*consider the dignity of your nature, and the excellency of those powers of reason with which you are endued, and do not act thus irrationally and unbecoming yourselves.*” Let the *sons of men* consider and show themselves men.

(2.) “*You dishonour your Maker, and turn his glory into shame.*” They may well be taken as God's own words, charging sinners with the wrong they do him in his honour: or, if David's words, the term glory may be understood of God, whom he called *his glory*, ^{<HRB>}Psalm 3:3. Idolaters are charged with *changing the glory of God* into shame, ^{<HCB>}Romans 1:23. All wilful sinners do so by disobeying the commands of his law, despising the offers of his grace, and giving the affection and service to the creature which are due to God only. Those that profane God's holy name, that ridicule his word and ordinances, and, while they profess to know him, in works deny him, do what in them lies to *turn his glory into shame*.

(3.) “You put a cheat upon yourselves: *You love vanity, and seek after leasing, or lying, or that which is a lie.* You are yourselves vain and lying, and you love to be so.” Or, “You set your hearts upon that which will prove, at last, but vanity and a lie.” 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. “How long will you do this? Will you never be wise for yourselves, never consider your duty and interest? *When shall it once be?*” ²⁴³⁷Jeremiah 13:27. The God of heaven thinks the time long that sinners persist in dishonouring him and in deceiving and ruining themselves.

2. He shows them the peculiar favour which God has for good people, the special protection they are under, and the singular privileges to which they are entitled, v. 3. This comes in here,

(1.) As a reason why they should not oppose or persecute him that is godly, nor think to run him down. It is at their peril if they *offend one of these little ones*, whom God has *set apart for himself*, ⁴⁸⁶Matthew 18:6. God reckons that those who touch them touch the apple of his eye; and he will make their persecutors to know it, sooner or later. They have an interest in heaven, God will hear them, and therefore let none dare to do them any injury, for God will hear their cry and plead their cause, ⁴²²³Exodus 22:23. It is generally supposed that David speaks of his own designation to the throne; he is the *godly man whom the Lord has set apart* for that honour, and who does not usurp it or assume it to himself: “The opposition therefore which you give to him and to his advancement is very criminal, for therein you fight against God, and it will be vain and ineffectual.” God has, in like manner, set apart the Lord Jesus for himself, that merciful One; and those that attempt to hinder his advancement will certainly be baffled, for the Father hears him always. Or,

(2.) As a reason why they should themselves be good, and walk no longer in the counsel of the ungodly: “You have hitherto sought vanity; be truly religious, and you will be truly happy here and for ever; for,”

[1.] “God will secure to himself his interest in you.” *The Lord has set apart him that is godly*, every particular godly man, *for himself*, in his eternal choice, in his effectual calling, in the special disposals of his providence and operations of his grace; his people are *purified unto him a peculiar people*. Godly men are God's separated, sealed, ones; he knows

those that are his, and has set his image and superscription upon them; he distinguishes them with uncommon favours: *They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels. Know this;* let godly people know it, and let them never alienate themselves from him to whom they are thus appropriated; let wicked people know it, and take heed how they hurt those whom God protects.

[2.] “God will secure to you an interest in himself.” This David speaks with application: *The Lord will hear when I call unto him.* We should think ourselves happy if we had the ear of an earthly prince; and is it not worth while upon any terms, especially such easy ones, to gain the ear of the King of kings? Let us know this, and forsake lying vanities for our own mercies.

3. He warns them against sin, and exhorts them both to frighten and to reason themselves out of it (v. 4): “*Stand in awe and sin not*” (*be angry and sin not*, so the Septuagint, and some think the apostle takes that exhortation from him, ⁴⁰⁵Ephesians 4:26); “*commune with your own hearts*; be converted, and, in order thereunto, consider and fear.” Note,

(1.) We must not sin, must not miss our way and so miss our aim.

(2.) One good remedy against sin is to stand in awe. *Be moved* (so some), in opposition to carelessness and carnal security. “Always keep up a holy reverence of the glory and majesty of God, and a holy dread of his wrath and curse, and dare not to provoke him.”

(3.) One good means of preventing sin, and preserving a holy awe, is to be frequent and serious in *communing with our own hearts*: “*Talk with your hearts*; you have a great deal to say to them; they may be spoken with at any time; let it not be unsaid.” A thinking man is in a fair way to be a wise and a good man. “*Commune with your hearts*; examine them by serious self-reflection, that you may acquaint yourselves with them and amend what is amiss in them; employ them in solemn pious meditations; let your thoughts fasten upon that which is good and keep closely to it. Consider your ways, and observe the directions here given in order to the doing of this work well and to good purpose.”

[1.] “Choose a solitary time; do it when you lie awake *upon your beds*. Before you turn yourself to go to sleep at night” (as some of the heathen moralists have directed) “examine your consciences with respect to what

you have done that day, particularly what you have done amiss, that you may repent of it. When you awake in the night meditate upon God, and the things that belong to your peace.” David himself practised what he here counsels others to do (¹⁵¹⁶Psalm 63:6), *I remember thee on my bed*. Upon a sick-bed, particularly, we should consider our ways and commune with our own hearts about them.

[2.] “Compose yourselves into a serious frame: *Be still*. When you have asked conscience a question be silent, and wait for an answer; even in unquiet times keep you spirits calm and quiet.”

4. He counsels them to make conscience of their duty (v. 5): *Offer to God the sacrifice of righteousness*. We must not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well. Those that were disaffected to David and his government would soon come to a better temper, and return to their allegiance, if they would but worship God aright; and those that know the concerns that lie between them and God will be glad of the Mediator, the Son of David. It is required here from every one of us,

(1.) That we serve him: “*Offer sacrifices to him*, your own selves first, and your best sacrifices.” But they must be *sacrifices of righteousness*, that is, good works, all the fruits of the reigning love of God and our neighbour, and all the instances of a religious conversation, which are better than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices. “Let all your devotions come from an upright heart; let all your alms be sacrifices of righteousness.” The sacrifices of the unrighteous God will not accept; they are an abomination, ¹⁵¹⁷Isaiah 1:11, etc.

(2.) That we confide in him. “First make conscience of offering the sacrifices of righteousness and then you are welcome to put your trust in the Lord. Serve God without any diffidence of him, or any fear of losing by him. Honour him, by trusting in him only, and not in your wealth nor in an arm of flesh; trust in his providence, and lean not to your own understanding; trust in his grace, and go not about to establish your own righteousness or sufficiency.”

In singing these verses we must preach to ourselves the doctrine of the provoking nature of sin, the lying vanity of the world, and the unspeakable happiness of God's people; and we must press upon ourselves the duties of fearing God, conversing with our own hearts, and offering spiritual

sacrifices; and in praying over these verses we must beg of God grace thus to think and thus to do.

~~1006~~ PSALM 4:6-8

THE GOOD MAN'S DESIRE

We have here,

I. The foolish wish of worldly people: *There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Who will make us to see good?* What good they meant is intimated, v. 7. It was the increase of their corn and wine; all they desired was plenty of the wealth of this world, that they might enjoy abundance of the delights of sense. Thus far they are right, that they are desirous of good and solicitous about it; but there are these things amiss in this wish: —

1. They enquire, in general, “Who will make us happy?” but do not apply themselves to God who alone can; and so they expose themselves to be ill-advised, and show they would rather be beholden to any than to God, for they would willingly live without him.

2. They enquire for good that may be seen, seeming good, sensible good; and they show no concern for the good things that are out of sight and are the objects of faith only. The source of idolatry was a desire of gods that they might see, therefore they worshipped the sun; but, as we must be taught to worship an unseen God, so to seek an unseen good, ~~1008~~ 2 Corinthians 4:18. We look with an eye of faith further than we can see with an eye of sense.

3. They enquire for *any* good, not for the chief good; all they want is outward good, present good, partial good, good meat, good drink, a good trade, and a good estate; and what are all these worth without a good God and a good heart? Any good will serve the turn of most men, but a gracious soul will not be put off so. This way, this wish, of carnal worldlings is their folly, yet *many there be* that join in it; and their doom will be accordingly. “*Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, the penny thou didst agree for.*”

II. The wise choice which godly people make. David, and the pious few that adhered to him, dissented from that wish, and joined in this prayer, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.*

1. He disagrees from the vote of the many. God had set him apart for himself by distinguishing favours, and therefore he sets himself apart by a distinguishing character. “They are for any good, for worldly good, but so am not I; I will not say as they say; any good will not serve my turn; the wealth of the world will never make a portion for my soul, and therefore I cannot take up with it.”

2. He and his friends agree in their choice of God's favour as their felicity; it is this which in their account is better than life and all the comforts of life.

(1.) This is what they most earnestly desire and seek after; this is the breathing of their souls, *“Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.* Most are for other things, but we are for this.” Good people, as they are distinguished by their practices, so they are by their prayers, not the length and language of them, but the faith and fervency of them; those whom God has set apart have a prayer by themselves, which, though others may speak the words of it, they only offer up in sincerity; and this is a prayer which they all say *Amen* to; “Lord, let us have thy favour, and let us know that we have it, and we desire no more; that is enough to make us happy. Lord, be at peace with us, accept of us, manifest thyself to us, let us be satisfied *of* thy loving-kindness and we will be satisfied *with* it.”

Observe, Though David speaks of himself only in the 7th and 8th verses, he speaks, in this prayer, for others also, — *“upon us,”* as Christ taught us to pray, *“Our Father.”* All the saints come to the throne of grace on the same errand, and in this they are one, they all desire God's favour as their chief good. We should beg it for others as well as for ourselves, for in God's favour there is enough for us all and we shall have never the less for others sharing in what we have.

(2.) This is what, above any thing, they rejoice in (v. 7): *“Thou hast hereby often put gladness into my heart; not only supported and refreshed me, but filled me with joy unspeakable; and therefore this is what I will still pursue, what I will seek after all the days of my life.”* When God puts grace in the heart he *puts gladness in the heart;* nor is any joy comparable to that which gracious souls have in the communications of the divine

favour, no, not the joy of harvest, of a plentiful harvest, when the corn and wine increase. This is gladness in the heart, inward, solid, substantial joy. The mirth of worldly people is but a flash, a shadow; *even in laughter their heart is sorrowful*, ^{<14B>}Proverbs 14:13. “Thou hast given gladness in my heart;” so the word is. True joy is God's gift, *not as the world giveth*, ^{<14C>}John 14:27. The saints have no reason to envy carnal worldlings their mirth and joy, but should pity them rather, for they may know better and will not.

(3.) This is what they entirely confide in, and in this confidence they are always easy, v. 8. He had laid himself down and slept (^{<14D>}Psalm 3:5), and so he will still: “*I will lay myself down* (having the assurance of thy favour) *in peace*, and with as much pleasure as those whose corn and wine increase, and who lie down as Boaz did in his threshing-floor, at the end of the heap of corn, to sleep there when *his heart was merry* (^{<14E>}Ruth 3:7), *for thou only makest me to dwell in safety*. Though I am alone, yet I am not alone, for God is with me; though I have no guards to attend me, the Lord alone is sufficient to protect me; he can do it himself when all other defences fail.” If he have the light of God's countenance,

[1.] He can enjoy himself. His soul returns to God, and reposes itself in him as its rest, and so he lays himself down and sleeps in peace. He has what he would have and is sure that nothing can come amiss to him.

[2.] He fears no disturbance from his enemies, sleeps quietly, and is very secure, because God himself has undertaken to keep him safe. When he comes to sleep the sleep of death, and to lie down in the grave, and to make his bed in the darkness, he will then, with good old Simeon, *depart in peace* (^{<14F>}Luke 2:29), being assured that God will receive his soul, to be safe with himself, and that his body also shall be made to dwell in safety in the grave.

[3.] He commits all his affairs to God, and contentedly leaves the issue of them with him. It is said of the husbandman that, having *cast his seed into the ground, he sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed springs and grows up, he knows not how*, ^{<14G>}Mark 4:26, 27. So a good man, having by faith and prayer cast his care upon God, sleeps and rests night and day, and is very easy, leaving it to his God to perform all things for him and prepared to welcome his holy will.

In singing these verses, and praying over them, let us, with a holy contempt of the wealth and pleasure of this world, as insufficient to make us happy, earnestly seek the favour of God and pleasingly solace ourselves in that favour; and, with a holy indifferency about the issue of all our worldly concerns, let us commit ourselves and all our affairs to the guidance and custody of the divine Providence, and be satisfied that all shall be made to work for good to us if we keep ourselves in the love of God.