

## **PSALM 4**

### **HEAR MY PRAYER**

**BY BROTHER ROBERTS**

*“HEAR me when I call, O God of my righteousness Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.”*

*“O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing?”*

*“But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the Lord will hear when I call unto him.”*

*“Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.”*

*“Offer the sacrifices of righteousness and put trust in the Lord.”*

*“There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.”*

*“Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased.”*

*“I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.”*

It may be a little difficult to decide whether this Psalm is the expression of David's individual sentiments, or the out-pourings of the spirit of Christ which was in him in common with the other prophets. The probability is, that as in other cases, it is both.

There can be little question that when David appeared in the courts of the Most High, to *“praise him upon the harp,”* he threw intense emotion into what he did. His prayers and his praises were *ex animo*, though moulded by the Spirit dwelling in him. He was no mere automaton or inanimate instrument in the hands of the power that made his words prophetic. The spirit of God spake by him, but his own mind was in the highest sympathy with what the spirit made use of him to say, and hence there was a double influence impelling him to the composition of the Psalms; which accounts for the fact that in almost every instance, the Psalms are double in their hearing, having a primary significance as the expression of David's thoughts and experiences, and a secondary and more comprehensive reference to him of whom it is said that he is the *“root and offspring of David.”*

The first point that strikes the thoughtful reader of this Psalm, is the prayerful attitude in which it introduces the speaker. This attitude is instructive, whether in David or in David's Son and Lord, because in this matter, both “left us an example that we should tread in their steps.” By it we are reminded of the fact that prayer is a part of acceptable service to God, and prayerfulness, a part of the character which is estimable in his sight. It is important to keep this in mind, because in our search for “sound doctrine,” we are apt to allow intellectual activity to triumph over the practical use of the truth we dig out. There is a danger of the truth failing to beget the actual relationship to God which finds its natural and strengthening exercise in the act of prayer.

This danger is the greater because of the prevalence of foolish devotion among the professed Christians of the time, who seem to think, like the Pharisees of old, that they shall be heard for their much speaking, and for the vehemence and extravagance of their address. The extremes to which popular ignorance has gone in this matter, (and in this we include the college-bred, equally ignorant leaders of this ignorance, of all sects and denominations.) have driven some minds to the opposite and not less fatal extreme of abandoning prayer altogether.

This is a lamentable result, which we would fain try to mend. Prayer is the necessary act of a mind in harmony with the Father. It is a duty expected, an act which affords pleasure to God, and which reacts profitably on the mind qualified by enlightenment to engage in it.

It may not be a waste of time, to cite a few scriptural evidences on the subject. The first we have to note, is the prayerless characteristic of those who are abhorred in the sight of God. Their state of mind is represented in the following question put into their mouths — “What is the Almighty that we should serve him, *and what profit should we have* IF WE SHOULD PRAY UNTO HIM.” (Job 21:15.) This is the practical language of thousands who nominally profess a different creed, and the open blasphemous challenge of another class, rapidly increasing in all grades of society, under whose auspices, public discourses are given for the avowed purpose of establishing the doubt expressed in the words. It may suit the time of sunshine to indulge in such wantonness against God: but when God enters into judgment—when the time of his patience is past, when after long holding his peace, he breaks forth to cry and devour at once, (Isaiah 40), they will in frantic terror, feel the folly of their course, and seek too late to redeem the hours of mercy and tranquility accorded to them in these times of the Gentiles. “*Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom.*” “*Fools hate knowledge.*” (Prov 15:21) With brazen confidence, they sow their wild oats to reap a bitter harvest.

The mocking words will yet ring in their ears —

*“Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;”*

*“But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof;”*

*“I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;”*

*“When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.”*

*“Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but shall not find me:”*

*“For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD:”*

*“They would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof.”*

*“Therefore, shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.”*

*“For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.”*

*“But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.”*

—Prov. 1:24–33.

The righteous present a contrast to the ungodly in this matter. Daniel, a man greatly beloved, bent his knees three times a day in supplication before God, (Dan. 7. 10.) and that there is profit in the act, is proved by the spirit’s designation of God in Psalm 65:2. “*The hearer and ANSWERER of prayer.*” James testifies that the “*effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*”—which is in accordance with Christ’s statement, that whatsoever is asked in his name in faith agreeable to God’s will, will be granted. It is stated in Proverbs 15:8, that the prayer of the upright, is the delight of Jehovah, and in verse 19, that he heareth the prayer of such. The Temple of Mosaic times was called “*the house of prayer,*” and the sense in which this is affirmed, is evident from 2 Chron. 7:15—

*“Mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.”*

David, the man after God's own heart, says, "*I give myself unto prayer.*" (Psalm 109-4.) Coming to the record of Christ's life, we find that he frequently went apart for the same purpose. It is said in more than one place. "*He continued all night in prayer to God.*" (Luke 6:12) The disciples asked that they might be taught to pray, and Jesus gave them a model to guide them in their invocations of the Deity. He also told them that when they prayed, they were not to stand ostentatiously before men like the religious pretenders of their time but were to retire to the privacy of their closets. And said he, "*Thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.*" (Matt. 6:6.) God delights to be addressed by those who intelligently fear him and hope in his mercy and will in due time openly manifest the secret relationship they cultivate in prayer.

Example and precept abundantly shew the duty and efficacy of the act. The company of the disciples, in all about 120 persons, — "*continued with one accord in prayer*" (Acts 1:14.) when Jesus was taken from them into heaven. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians (1st Epist. 5:17.) to "*pray without ceasing,*" the practical meaning of which is exemplified in the case of Cornelius the centurion, of whom it is said "*He prayed unto God always,*" (Acts 10:2.)—not that every moment of his time was devoted to prayer; for as a military commander, a great part of his thoughts would be occupied with administrative duties, but as a matter of daily habit, he waited upon God in private prayer, which it afterwards transpired, found favour in heaven, and in conjunction with his consistent demeanour, led to an angelic visit to direct him into the way of life. He was one of those who acted on the lesson taught by Jesus, (Luke 18:1.) that "*men ought always to pray, and not to faint;*" and who acted on the apostolic injunction, "*In everything give thanks, and BY PRAYERS AND SUPPLICATION make your requests known unto God.*" (Philippians 4:6.) Paul, in almost every epistle, alludes to the observance of this duty on his part, and bespeaks the prayers of those to whom he wrote, on his own behalf.

Further testimony is at hand, but is really not needed, in view of what has already been advanced. Prayer is the reasonable and appropriate act of creatures intelligently related to the Great Intelligent Source of their being. It is a pleasure to God who delights in the recognition of his supremacy, and the acknowledgment of his wisdom and goodness; and it is a profit to those who pray, in developing practical friendship towards a Being who must otherwise remain forever as a distant majesty with whom we have no connection.

We are exhorted to "*love the Lord our God, with all our heart, and with all our soul, strength and mind.*" This in fact, is "*the first and the GREAT COMMANDMENT OF ALL.*" Now it is impossible to carry it out without prayer. It is impossible to realize the sentiment of love apart from acquaintance. Knowledge is the beginning of love. No one ever loved a person he did not know. We must know God to love him. This knowledge we cannot get by stargazing nor by the study of the sciences, though a knowledge of his handiwork greatly aids our conceptions of his wisdom and power.

We cannot get it by a pilgrimage to any spot on earth. God's presence was once manifested in Israel. In such times, a journey from the ends of the earth was rewarded with the knowledge which the devout Gentile elsewhere sought in vain.

But God's manifested presence is now withdrawn. Jerusalem is a desolation, the holy places are forsaken, and we can only make his acquaintance in the written oracles wherein the prophets and apostles—the channels of God's oral manifestations—being dead yet speak. Here we learn to *know*; and secure the first condition of love; but we must go further. We may know a person, and yet if we never have intercourse, our relations to them will always be distant. So, we may know God through his revelation of himself in the Word; but if we stop short at a doctrinal apprehension of him, we shall never rise to the point of love, which implies personal friendship.

How shall we cultivate *personal friendship* with the Deity? The answer is, that after having apprehended him by knowledge, we must hold intercourse with him by prayer, and ripen our knowledge into friendship. Our destiny in Christ, is to be eternally related in sonship to God. The present is the preparation for the relationship; and if we do not now make ourselves familiar, as it

were, with the Father by prayer, how shall we be prepared to enter a state of existence in which He will be the beginning and end of all thought and action?

There need be no want of subject matter for prayer. The incomprehensible greatness of God fully realized, will inspire sentiments that will freely find utterance from the mouth that leads from an abundant heart. The common mercies of life in a state of existence, where thousands are in circumstances of deprivation, will move the chastened mind to gratitude towards the mighty Being who has all the exigencies of life under his control, and who has intimated a special guardianship in such matters in relation to those who fear his name.

The human uncertainties with which we are surrounded, will prompt a petition for divine guidance in the walks of life, wherein circumstances are entirely at the mercy of the “chance” of popular talk. The extraordinary manifestation of God’s favour in providing a sin-covering in Christ, and inviting us through him to friendship and life everlasting, will incite to profoundest thanks-giving wherever the unsearchable riches of Christ are heartily appreciated; and the sense of present weakness and frequent shortcoming, will beget prayer for assistance and forgiveness in every mind thirsting after righteousness; while the sad spectacle and painful experience of a world in rebellion against the true source of its happiness, plunged in sin, and involved in its endless attendant train of miseries, will move the heart to pray for the consummation of God’s purpose to bring all things into harmony with himself, by the manifestation of his judgments, and the establishment of his kingdom.

Nothing will be easier for the mind given to meditation upon these things, than to frame the thoughts in prayer, and nothing more delightful. The true sons of God are men of prayer, not men of Methodistic furore and Pharasaic long-windedness, of whom examples abound on every hand, but men, who in the calm apprehension of their relationship to Deity, daily bend the knee in secret thanksgiving and request.

A prayerless christian is a man having a name to live while he is dead. In the trials of life, the real sons of God “cast all their care upon God, knowing that he careth for them.” By frequent converse, they come to mental unity with the Power of the Universe in whom all things are embraced, and experience the tranquility described by Paul as the peace of God that passeth all understanding, while those that are far from God are like a fretting sea, lashed into foamy disquietude by the storms which blow in vain over the oil-protected waters of the righteous.

The idea that there can be prayerful-mindedness without formal prayerfulness is a delusion by which the indolent mind seeks to excuse itself the duty. No man can address God in thanksgiving or request who does not turn his thoughts specially God-wards, and no man can turn his thoughts God-ward without withdrawing them for a time from everything else, and by an act of will, raising them to the throne of the Highest. The human mind is so constituted as to be incapable of thinking of two things at the same time; and where the mind dwells strongly on any one thought, its musings involuntary take the shape of words, as familiarly illustrated in persons who talk to themselves.

It follows that those who really give themselves up to “*the knowledge and love of God*”—(and this is what all the real children of God do)—will naturally seek vent for their yearnings in formal words, addressed to Him whom no distance can put beyond the reach of hearing, and whom no amount of pre-occupation can incapacitate for attending to the feeblest and most distant petition ascending to his throne.

We have left no space for the doctrinal features of the psalm standing at the head of this article and must defer the consideration of them to another time. What we have written, however, may not be unacceptable as an endeavour to follow out the important idea suggested by the first verse, since it relates to one of those spiritual accomplishments without which a man can neither be pleasing to God, nor at peace in himself. — *Ambassador, 1865*