

Joy

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- [0 : 0 0] So, like this morning, to look back, Psalm 4, the Psalm that we read together from the Old Testament, the book of Psalms, the Psalms, mainly Psalms of David.
- And it's quite a reflective Psalm, so I think it's significant to have a bit of self-reflection, but prayerful as it were, spiritual self-reflection on the last day of the year.
- And despite, if you read through that, you might not immediately, the theme might not immediately strike you as being one of joy. That's really the theme that we're looking at.
- It does speak about joy, and we're going to look a little bit at that theme today at the end of the year. We don't know really, we know very little about the background of the Psalm.
- We're not sure. No one's really sure what the background of the Psalm is, which is great in some ways, because it stops us from narrowing it down too much into a specific historical situation.
- [1 : 0 4] But we know that David was inspired by the Spirit of God to give this Psalm, and so there's a broad application to us as his living word today.
- And as part of self-reflection, what's really significant and important in our spiritual lives, if we are Christians, is prayer. Prayer is absolutely crucial and central to our understanding of ourselves and a meaningful self-reflection in the company and the presence of our Creator and our Savior.
- And it's something actually that we sometimes struggle with in our Christian lives is prayer. And yet, what we're encouraged to do and think about and consider all the time in our struggles is to take our struggles to God in prayer.
- Maybe as you look back in the years, you've been, you recognize you've been afraid of maybe sharing your faith with other people. You're concerned that your faith is weak or is misunderstood by yourself or others.
- We struggle with following Jesus in that society, which is so counterintuitive to do that and which is not interested in the gospel. And you've got a million other concerns potentially that impress in on your faith in Jesus Christ.
- [2 : 3 1] And if you have all of these things, they can sometimes take an attention away from our walk of faith and from our relationship with Jesus Christ. But if there's one thing that I would ask you to take away from this look at Psalm 4, is the utter significance and vitality and importance of developing, maintaining, maintaining, developing and maturing a life of prayer.
- Talking to God is fundamental. It's absolutely crucial to us. You know, we do things together. It's great to worship together. It's great to be in community. It's great to learn.
- It's great to worship. But ultimately, this walk that we have needs to be a walk of prayer, needs to be a relationship with God through prayer primarily.
- And we see that in the Psalm as it starts, you know. That's the whole focus and centrality of it. Answer me when I call, oh, God, my righteous, a prayer is so vital.

You know, as we think about communication, as we think about the times we spend talking to one another, talking to our family, communicating with it, whether it's face to face or even on social media, I'm not going to bash social media today.

[3 : 51] I'm going to be nice. We'll not bash social media. But nonetheless, we communicate and we talk together through social media, through texts and through WhatsApp and through whatever else it might be and also through individual interaction.

Think how many hours we spend doing that. And think of the intentionality that we put into that, the focus, the deliberate work that we put into that.

And the challenge is to put that same level of intentionality into our conversation. And I'm using that in an old-fashioned way. They used to use that word conversation as this, meaning the same way as walk, your walk or conversation.

Find your prayer life with the living God, you know, growing the life of faith. Over the last six months, we've spent a lot of time, didn't we, thinking about Jeremiah 17 and discipleship and having that living relationship with like a tree planted by a living stream, which roots were being sent out into the living water and recognizing that as being the key to our growth and development as Christians is the roots being firmly grounded in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

There's, that's when we bear fruit. And that's where we experience joy as part of that fruit because we know the fruit of the Spirit, don't we, from Galatians 5 to 22. The fruit of this, the singular fruit of the Spirit involves all these, love joy, peace, patience, gentleness, weakness, self-control.

[5 : 21] Love joy, joy is the second mentioned fruit of the Spirit. And I think that's significant. So we're going to look at that theme of joy through this Psalm and rightly understood when the Bible and the Spirit of God, or the characteristic of having the Spirit of God in our lives is joy.

It's a spiritual joy, it's when our relationship with Jesus Christ is such that we understand who He is and what He's done for us and how much He loves us.

And it's a reason for real joy. And glad tidings if you want to use the language of this time here, celebration of gladness. And it's so significant.

It's a crucial part of life. Celebration and joy is a really important part of life. And we know that idolatry and sin seeks to mimic that joy by giving us joy without a relationship with God, which is ultimately hollow.

It's not desperate, it's not terrible at a human level, but ultimately it's hollow.

[6 : 32] And sin either seeks to imitate the joy that we have in relationship with God or it eliminates it altogether. Misery, unhappiness, depression, sadness.

And the intention either way when we leave God out of the picture is to keep God out of the picture, is to keep your distance from God who's the author of joy.

So every joy we seek away from God or every sadness that we experience away from God seeks to distance God from our experience, from the Satan who's the author of lies.

So can I just look at this, Sam, for a minute this morning. Sam 4. The interesting thing is David starts off absolutely struggling, okay? That's how he starts off. Answer me when I call, oh God of my righteous, you've given me relief when I was in distress, be gracious to me and hear my prayer.

He cries out to God, that's what He does. He's not happy, He's not joyful, He's in distress and He's pleading for mercy. Whatever else He's experiencing in life, He can't stand in His relationship with God, He can't stand divine silence.

[7 : 42] And there's a real passion here in His prayer. There's a real energy and a real reality about His relationship with God here in prayer.

You know, be gracious to me and hear my prayer and answer me when I call. This is not perfunctory to use that word.

It's not just going through the motions. It's not ritualistic. This is someone who desperately is looking for God's conversation and God's communication in his life.

And I think that's a great thing to seek to mimic in our lives that same kind of spiritual intensity in our prayers. That we, you know, if the great C.S. Lewis quote, which I'm going to get wrong because I haven't written it down, but it's something along the lines of, I don't pray, I don't pray because it's nicer because it's ritualistic, I pray because I have to.

I pray because I'm in absolute need every day of prayer. That's very broadly paraphrased. But there's this great need in His relationship with God, David here, for answers.

[8 : 50] He needs God to, He's calling on God because He needs to hear and needs to know that God cares and God is interested in His life. And that's significant for us, and with all our battles and struggles and difficulties and reflection over the last year, take it into the presence of God as we pray.

And pray through these things. Pray through our battles and struggles, not to some kind of genie, not to some kind of Santa Claus figure, but to the living and true God.

David's faith and reputation seem to be being questioned in the Psalm in verses 2 and 3. Well, man, how long it turns from speaking to God to kind of speaking as it were to the people around Him, whoever they are.

How long shall my honour 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 from the Lord, hears when I call to Him.

Now, we don't know the situation here, but obviously His character has been called into question, His honour has been questioned here, and lies seem to be being told about Him, whether it's in His position as King, have other people rejected Him, maybe it's when Absalom seeks to take over His Son, His beloved Son, seeks to usurp Him from the throne and get rid of Him, whether it's idolatry and people are worshiping idols instead of worshiping the living God.

[10 : 15] But whatever they seem to be listening to lies about Him and maybe about His Lordship and His kingship and the Lord Jesus, the Lord God over Him.

And that can also be for us a different level of real challenge in our own spiritual lives, that when our faith is challenged in the same way that David's relationship and faith and character has been challenged, and maybe you sense that and feel that in your life as we go into the end of the year, maybe being challenged by those around you who are maybe selling you something that is much more attractive apparently on the surface, much easier to follow, much easier to live by rather than the living God and by faith in Jesus Christ, who are teasing us sometimes with delusions of lasting happiness and joy by following the crowd or by putting other things before Christ in our lives.

Or maybe it's fellow believers who we once loved and trusted, who have turned our backs on us or who themselves have turned their backs on Jesus and who are following another way that is not life or joy at all.

And the challenges we feel against our own lives and against our own faith and our walk of faith. And these challenges and these questions are very real for us in our Christian life.

And what's significant and important is David's advice to them and to us is very good in verses 4 and 5, be angry and do not sin, ponder in your own hearts, in your own beds and be silent, offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord.

[11 : 57] It's great that because what he's doing is he's taking his own situation and the fact that he's been challenged and he's not sure what's going on and he's not aware of why these things are happening.

And he's kind of angry about what's happening and he feels injustice about what's happening. And yet he says kind of in a soliloquy to himself but to all who will listen and by the Spirit of God does, be angry, do not sin, ponder in your hearts, in your beds, offer right sacrifices to the Lord.

Deal, he says, there may be right reasons for feeling that we've been dealt a bad blow. We may feel great injustice welling up in him, it might be a national level, it might be a very personal level that we've been treated and we might be rightly justly angry and frustrated by other people's behavior or other people's lies or what is happening in the world around us.

And he says, take that anger, don't sin, think about these things individually and before the living God but most of all look into your own heart and your own motives.

And that's the great challenge for us is that we always are wanting things to change around us. Many times that's justly so, we feel a sense of injustice and we feel a sense of things not being fair to us personally or maybe to the world around us.

[13 : 20] But ultimately what's so significant is not the circumstances we have but the way that we deal with them before the living God and David saying, God is saying through him, look deep into your own heart and into your own motives and into your own thing and make sure that in your heart and your life, my heart and my life, we're offering right sacrifices and putting our trust in the Lord that we're seeking mercy and we're wanting to renew our heart before God.

In other words, we're recognizing what he's done for us and the great sacrifice of Jesus for us and that ultimately Jesus will put all injustices right.

He will right all the wrongs. We don't need that weight in our shoulders. We don't need everyone around us to be perfect and to be treating us in the right way. We don't need everything to be...

And I'm not saying by that... By that I'm not saying it doesn't matter and I'm not saying to be careless and happy, go lucky. I don't mean that at all but I mean that we recognize our own guilt and need before the living God.

We're grateful to him for his sacrifice and we recognize that we're not God. We can't put all injustice right. We can't right all the wrongs but he will do.

[14 : 37] He will return and he will put all injustice to bed. He will deal with it in a right and in a good and in a perfect way and we trust in him when we don't understand.

We trust in him when we don't know. We trust in him when we would want things to be different. That's what trust's about. It's easy to trust when everything's going well.

It's easy to trust when everything is brilliant for us. It's much harder to trust when we feel all these injustices or we feel God isn't dealing with us fairly or others aren't dealing with us fairly or we're being the subject of abuse or lies or vain words from others.

So as advice to whoever he pens this to and to us is good, hugely significant for us. In our self-reflection, don't bear the weight of guilt.

Don't think we put the world to rights but go back to the living God and His grace and His goodness and His generosity and trust in His sovereign justice and love and mercy.

[15 : 44] And He knows therefore we're true prosperity lies. Verses 6 and 7, there are many who say, who will show us any good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord.

You have put more joy in my heart than they when they're... I'm really struggling with a sentence, by the way. It's a badly constructed sentence in English. So the translators note, they than they have when their grain and wine abound.

In peace I will both lie down and sleep for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. So He knows where His true prosperity lies and He recognized that people around Him, for whatever reason, will say, well, who's going to show us any good?

You know, who's going to show us the right way? Because they were searching in all kinds of places for goodness and joy and happiness and vitality, but they were searching in all the wrong places.

They were really looking away from maybe David as God's representative and King and from David's God who was their God, who was their covenant God.

[16 : 53] And they were looking in the darkness. They were looking away from the light of His face. They were looking away. And they couldn't find any good and they couldn't find any prosperity and joy.

And they were maybe looking to false gods around them, which we know happened continually among the people of the Old Testament. They were looking maybe for peace and safety away from the living God or for satisfaction and abundance, that reference to grain and wine, abounding, referring to the whole kind of material prosperity that sometimes people would look for, maybe away from the living God.

And they were looking for joy and satisfaction and peace in all of these different things, in all of these different areas. Away from the living God.

And that's not much different from the world in which we live, is it? It's not really that different, is it? Circumstances, cultures, very different. But people, and all the people that we know and love, and sometimes ourselves, we're looking for joy and peace and prosperity spiritually and, well, maybe not spiritually, but maybe materially in other ways, away from the light, away from the living God.

People are looking for meaning and for love and for permanence in all the wrong places if they're turned away from God. It may seem that that's where these things lie.

[18 : 23] But David and God, and as believers, we recognize that unless we are back in relationship with our Creator God through Jesus Christ, from whom sin separates us, and the idolatry that we often engage in, in putting other things first, usually ourselves, if the truth be told.

And we lose that channel of love and grace and wholeness and joy that He brings into our lives.

So, the gospel of Jesus Christ in our final application is the gospel that David knew about in the Old Testament, and that is progressively revealed until Jesus.

And then we have the New Testament teaching. The gospel offers real joy and prosperity in relationship with Him. Jesus in John 8.12 says, I am the light of the world, and that reminds me, it reminds us of verse 6 where David also recognizes that light as a picture of truth and of honesty and of integrity and love, lift up the light of your face upon His own Lord.

And Jesus comes as the light of the world and says, you know, I am the light of the world, you will always be in spiritual darkness and all the consequences of that, including death and separation from Him eternally, unless we wrestle with Jesus Christ and recognize His claims in our lives and put our trust in Him, as David put your trust in the Lord, the covenant saving God.

[20 : 08] He gives meaning, direction, identity, and hope. He is the light of the world. That is who is coming, and He as the light of the world, we know at Calvary that we were singing about, was plunged into darkness.

Literally midday, when the sun is at its brightest in Jerusalem, the world went dark for three hours as He suffered on the cross.

And that was literally speaking of a metaphorically also and spiritually of the darkness that He went through as He takes the wrath and takes the just punishment of God on Himself as our substitute, what is due to us, so that we can live in the light.

That's the gospel message, so we can be reconciled to Him, so we can know relationship with Him, and so that we can wake up in the morning and say, answer when I call, oh God of my righteousness.

Speak to me. You've given me relief, you're my redeemer, my Lord. It's a living relationship we have. You know, we'd have service here last Friday for my mum who passed away, and a lot of people commented who are maybe not Christians or who didn't know her.

[21 : 32] It wasn't a perfunctory service. It wasn't just going through the motion. It wasn't just a religious service. But a living relationship was very evident in all that was spoken about her.

And people noticed that. People noticed that about your life and my life as Christians, that we're not religious. We're not just going through the motions. We have a living relationship, especially when things are difficult, with a living God in whom we trust, who gives us hope and a future, and who transforms our experiences.

We're reconciled to our Creator who knows us better than we know ourselves, who was plunged into darkness so that we could be in light.

So that we can live, as David says here, face to face with Him. Okay, living in the light of your face upon us, oh Lord. Now that's a picture, I know, because we can't see Jesus.

We've known that, don't we? We can't see Him. He's in heaven. It's a picture of spiritual intimacy. Now if you're a visitor here today and I've not met you before, and I came and went right face to face with you, eyeball to eyeball, nose to nose, you'd think it was a bit creepy, you know?

[22 : 48] If not a bit creepy, it would certainly be a bit awkward to do that. Because we generally don't do that with people we don't know, particularly in our culture. And it would feel a bit odd and strange.

However, when I lie in bed with Katrina, I can look at her in the face, face to face, eye to eye. And we can talk face to face.

Or with someone that you know very well, you can look at them in face to face, eyeball to eyeball. Because that is a picture of honesty and openness and integrity and being unashamed of each other's faces in each other's company.

But if you've got something, if you're guilty before that person, if you've done something wrong, if I'd slept with another woman, I couldn't look Katrina eyeball to eyeball, face to face.

And you know that. You know you can't look someone in the eye if there's something that is unrecognisable in your relationship with them.

[23 : 53] If you've cheated them, or if you've lied about them, or if something you have done is not right, you know that. And that's what David's speaking about in a relationship with God.

He's saying, we need that honesty. We need that integrity. That's what he's doing at the beginning of the Psalm. He's crying out to the living God because he knows God knows his heart.

And he knows God knows exactly his confusion and his struggles. And he's talking to him with that level of integrity, sharing his doubts and his fears and asking for rescue.

And we need the same relationship with the living God. Set aside all the fancy words, eh? And cry out to the living God in honesty, in your relationship with Him.

Share your fears and your doubts and your struggles and your battles. Take it to Him because that's the only place you will end up finding heart joy when you learn not to bear these burdens and continue in that guilt yourself.

[25 : 03] But that's where deep-seated joy comes from. David can go and say, you've put more joy in my heart than they which who are rich and doing great, and in peace I will lie down and sleep for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

There's a brilliant testimony there, tremendous testimony of someone who's wrestled through difficulties and battles and struggles and come to this place of great, deep-seated joy.

And that's the deep-seated joy that Jesus Christ offers us and that you and I know if we are Christians, to greater or lesser degrees as we are committed to Him.

It's life joy from knowing your Maker who has gone to the extent of sending His beloved Son to the cross to put the wrongs right in our lives.

You know, so that our joy doesn't need to be found in random sexual encounters that are devoid of soul. We don't need to be found in drinking too much to cover up for the emptiness in our soul and give you that guilty short-term pleasure.

[26 : 05] It's not the joy that comes from abandoning your faith in order just to have friends, but finding only abject loneliness when you turn in for the night alone.

It's none of these things. It's the joy of wrestling with and knowing the love of the living God, knowing that you are loved more than you could ever dream of, that you are forgiven, that you are safe in absolute terms, whatever circumstances, and I'm not, I please don't think I'm trivializing anyone's circumstances.

It's knowing that He has our back, that we have His identity, past, present and future, that we are safe in Him. We should and can be much more joyful in our Christian life, celebratory, glad and positive, even in the battle, even in the struggles, and even in our losses.

It's knowing that Christ through His Word is, as David says in verse 1, my righteousness. Does anybody else really matter in our lives than being able to say that Christ is my righteousness, that I'm right with God who one day I will face and who will decree my eternal destination because of what Jesus has done, not because of anything in my soul.

It's a great call, it's a great name to be able to call God, isn't it? My righteousness, it's my hope and my righteousness, and as we cry out to Him, we come round to joy.

[27 : 45] That's really, in a sense, what the psalmist is reminding us. It's coming round to joy, it's not slapstick, we don't flick our fingers, we say, wee, I'm joyful, it's not like that.

And it's not that kind of joy anyway, which can be just irritating and annoying, especially for people who are battling and struggling. But it's a deep seated inner peace, an ability to sleep, to know protection and safety, content with what we have or what we don't have.

And it's heart joy. And it's because we look into our own hearts as He says in verse 6, silent in a sense before the living God and we trust in Him.

It's a really great foundation for both reflection and for looking forward to the new day. It enables us, I think, to move from struggling to singing as we wrestle with God in prayer.

And that's, is that often the way for us? It comes through the scars being healed, first sometimes being exposed and then healed by His grace and knowing that He will never leave us or forsake us.

[29 : 04] So as we reflect on our lives in 2019 and look forward to 2020, may it be that we, whatever else you do, can I just say whatever else you do in 2020 of God allows and grants you time next year, don't neglect prayer.

Whatever else you do, you can neglect your garden, I don't mind. You can neglect lots of things, but please don't neglect your prayer life with the living God.

If you're not a Christian, can I ask you just to wrestle with God in prayer? I've never spoken to Him before, but just wrestle with Him verbally and tell Him that you don't believe, tell Him you don't understand, tell Him you would love to understand but you can't.

But just keep speaking to Him because He's more real than any of us are here, absolutely more real. And don't neglect prayer. We spend lots of time thinking about the lovely relationships we're going to want in 2020.

Whatever, that might be family, friends, whatever level. Make Jesus your fundamental and basic relationship that you develop through prayer.

[30 : 17] He's the rock that alone enables us to dwell in safety. He's your life, He's your joy for now and for eternity. Whatever happens, that is the key.

And this prayer is a great reminder that that's where we'll find our joy. We'll lots of people looking for joy in the next few days in lots of different ways. Very often in Scotland it'll be through a bottle, but that isn't lasting joy.

And we recognize and know in much deeper, more spiritual joy in knowing Jesus is the great vine, the great wine, the great celebratory King of Kings.

So may we worship Him and enjoy Him and be joyful in 2020 as Christians, even when we're battling. That's power of heads in prayer. May our God help us to rejoice in you and help us to love you and battle with you.

We pray, Lord, that we would not give some kind of whitewashed view of Christianity, which is trouble-free or a slapstick, simple happiness and joy and a trite and frustrating and sometimes annoying way.

[31 : 33] But may it be evident from our lives, a deep-seated joy that like when it's so calm under the water, even when there's a huge storm on the surface of the water, there's that deep, silent peacefulness under the water.

And may that be what people see in our Christian lives, whatever the circumstances, there's a solid, joyful, peace-filled, contented happiness that is also visible.

Sometimes Lord, forgive us for being grumpy and unhappy and trying to persuade people that actually were joyful deep down inside, which probably just sounds hypocritical and probably is.

So help us to both reflect that joy in a meaningful and sensitive way and in a celebratory way also and may it be full of integrity and genuineness because we have that walk with you because of your grace and goodness to us.

So help us and guide us and protect us and love us and forgive us and renew us and help us to cry to you in the privacy of our own lives and hearts today.

[32 : 57] Thank you.