

Joy

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[0 : 00] Okay, for just a few moments this morning, we're going to look at Psalm 4, which Cori read to us and which was up on the screens. It's a prayer, really a prayer of David.

We don't know the exact circumstances that triggered this inspired prayer, but it's a good one. It's a good one because it speaks amid all the different aspects of it.

It speaks about joy and it speaks about prosperity. And these are good themes for the new year. There'll be lots of people who have been, would have been raising their glasses last night to a prosperous new year and would have been reveling in much joy and laughter over the course of these last few days and last night and maybe into the morning and maybe some of them have very sore heads this morning as a result of that.

But what we're looking at is the source of deeper, more long lasting, permanent prosperity and joy that we were created for, that all of these things are a shadow of.

They do point towards it. They do speak about what really are the longings of our hearts and people are looking for it all the time, but looking for it very often and tragically away from Jesus.

[1 : 26] And that's a reminder to us of our mission, our calling. Our calling is to be Christians of who understand true prosperity and also who are joyful because the word that we're given in Psalm 4 towards the end there, you have put more joy in my heart than they when they're grain and wine abound.

It is just gladness. It's celebration. It's deep seated joy and that is to be a great focus for us as we move forward because we're all looking for...

We all want that. None of us want misery. We all want joy. We all want prosperity, whatever we think of prosperity or whatever we think prosperity is. But we're to look and find it primarily in relationship with God because this is a prayer and prayer is the great call.

Isn't it for the New Year? It's prayer. That's what we've got to be. We've got to be people who are in that relationship of prayer, that relation, living relationship with God because that's where our joy and that's where our prosperity comes from.

And that, I will not one for New Year's resolutions really. This may be going out of favour a wee bit, I don't hear so much about New Year resolutions as you used to, the old days.

[2 : 47] But if we're making New Year's resolutions, surely prayer has got to be for us, the refocus of our lives. And that will require from us spiritual, mental and deliberate intentionality.

That will require that from us to develop that life of prayer because everything else will come easily to us in life that is not prayer. We'll find it very easy to connect with other people on social media.

We'll find it very easy to scroll for many hours and to read other things and to watch other things and to do other things and to be busy and to be disconnected from the living God.

And that will take intentionality from us in 2024, 2024 to pray, to be in that relationship with God.

That is, remember we always used to look at discipleship or the picture of the tree from Jeremiah 17 as the key to understanding discipleship as the roots of our lives being fed in the living water that we've just been singing about in a relationship with the living God with Christ.

[4 : 06] And that's because that's where we will bear His fruit. And one of the fruit of the Spirit, of course, is joy. They're all linked together like a cluster.

We have joy, we'll get the rest as well. But it's in that relationship with God through the power of the Spirit that we will know this great joy. And joy is a great thing.

It's a celebratory thing. Our relationship with Jesus Christ is a celebratory relationship. It's one that should bring mirth and joy and gladness into our lives.

It's a crucial part of life, isn't it? Joy is a really important part of life. I don't know why or where it came from that Christians are kill joys. We were doing something wrong if that were the case.

We've been living a wrong life. We've got in with a sour face. If we go around moping and sort of woe is me all the time, then we've misunderstood the gospel. There is a woe is me, but it moves forward from that into joy, as we'll see.

[5 : 07] Because joy is this crucial and important aspect of our life. Gladness, that's why many of us love this time of year because there's a lot of gladness. Sometimes we're looking for it in the wrong places.

But we enjoy joy and joyfulness. It's a crucial part of life. And we know that the evil one mimics it in our lives. He'll throw lots of different things towards us and say, that'll give you joy.

That'll make you happy. Do that. Involve that in your life. And he mimics God's good joy, doesn't he? In his, that's what he's done all the time.

He doesn't invent something else. He knows the scripture better than us. He knows God better than us. And he mimics all that God wants for us without God.

And he says, that's where you'll get it. You'll get your joy without God if you do this and if you celebrate in this way and if you live in this way. Or if he doesn't mimic it, he will eliminate it from our lives.

[6 : 11] Either way, his intention is to separate you from the living God, to misunderstand the living God. Or to have a wrong understanding of who he is.

That's his lie. That's what he's always done. So gladness, mirth, joy. That's what this psalm's about, ultimately. And that's briefly what we're going to look at.

Because David's, and we find that in his, he finds that in his relationship with God. It's a great prayer. It's a wonderful prayer. And so we find that David starts off.

He's, as he starts off, he's struggling, he's going through a difficult time, he's being opposed. We don't know the situation exactly, but those who were supposed to be God's people around him had turned away from God, obviously, as we'll see.

And we're maybe persuading him to do so, or we're mocking him for his remaining in faith to God. And so he's desperate. And he's crying out to God in distress, pleading for God's mercy and help.

[7 : 13] Answer me, answer me, Lord, when I call. God of my righteousness. You know, he knows that God is his God. His righteousness has come from God, and he trusts in God's mercy.

And he says, I know you've answered my prayers in the past. You've been there. You've given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. It's a real cry from someone who has a real relationship with a living God that he trusts in, who has answered his prayers in the past, and he goes to that place of prayer.

There's a great intensity, a great passion in his prayer. Now, just think back to the last prayer that you prayed. How passionate was it?

How real was it? Did we find ourselves ticking off boxes as we prayed? I'm thankful for this. I'm going through the motions, just tripping off our tongues in a kind of casual way, even a bored way, even a disinterested way.

But here's someone who has a real living relationship. There's a fire in his belly, and he's praying because he knows he desperately needs God's answer and he needs God to come into his heart and help him in the situation he finds himself in.

[8 : 29] There's something very real about this prayer. And it's a great model for us in our prayers that we have that same intensity.

It's never always going to be of that intensity because we'll speak to him at different times and in different ways. But there's certainly a deep reality here because his own life and faith is being questioned.

We don't know the situation, but it may have been at the time of Absalom, his son, who is, you know, trying to rebel against him, or it may have been a time of idolatry in the land.

We don't know, but anyway, the people around him were dishonouring him and were shaming him for being God's King and God's representative. Oh, men, he said, and he speaks to them as it were, as he prays.

He's speaking to those outside who are rebellious. Oh, men, how long shall my honour be turned into sin? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? They were listening to lies.

[9 : 33] They were looking for their joy and celebration in different places, right at the end, even when their grain and wine abounded, when things were really prosperous for them. They were looking in the wrong places.

They were listening to the lies, and he knows that. And it was a challenge to him. He found it difficult. He was calling out to God because he felt opposed. He felt that he had enemies almost from within who were seeking to bring him down. And maybe you go into this new year and your own faith has been challenged. Maybe not like this. None of us are kings of an Old Testament nation. None of us are that important. But we're important to the evil one, if we're Christians, because he wants to bring us down. And we're important to God because he sent his Son to die for us. But maybe your faith has been challenged as you go into a new year. And maybe it's from those around you who are inviting you or encouraging you to find your joy and celebration away from God. [10:36] Maybe you say, there's a better way of living. Maybe you're a young person and the people around you are saying, you don't need to do that. You don't need to be a Christian. You don't need to pray. You don't need to follow.

We've moved beyond that. And they're listening to lies and you're being influenced by that and challenged by that. Maybe in the workplace, maybe in the home. Pray less. Do you want me to pray now? There's no point in praying. You can just live your life. And maybe towards the end you can think about God. There's lots of things. And maybe sometimes it comes from those who should know better, fellow believers, those close to us who have drifted from the Lord and who are encouraging us even subtly to do the same by their lifestyle, by their thinking. The very opposite of what we were talking about yesterday, Barnabas, instead of being encouragers for one another in the faith, we can be discouragers by drawing our fellow Christians away from Jesus and say, you find your joy and satisfaction and prosperity in other places and in other ways.

It may be that. His face was being questioned. But then we see that as He speaks, He speaks to them and He speaks to us. And He speaks to Himself in many ways. [11:57] He says to Himself, but know that the Lord has set apart the godly for Himself. The Lord hears when I call to Him. And again He moves away from Himself. He says, be angry and do not sin.

Ponder in your hearts, on your beds and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord. He encourages those in His prayer here, which presumably became public, those who were against Him to put their trust in the Lord and to be honest before the Lord. And I'm not quite sure what it means be angry and do not sin. And you know that thing, you go to the commentaries for that, the difficult bits they never answer either. They always skim over them. So you go to the commentaries, the deep-seated intellects, biblical scholars. But these difficult passages, they never give you the answers to these difficult bits. And that's the bits you want answers to. And the rest of it is easy. But this is the hard bit. Be angry and do not sin. As it says there, be agitated.

[12:56] It's almost as saying, look to those who are living this way, it says, in all your frustration and anger and agitation against the God who I serve and the God who I'm trying to follow.

And that, it says, don't sin with that. Don't stay away from God. Don't continue to be angry and agitated. But go to Him. He's giving them advice here and saying, ponder in your hearts and in your beds.

Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord. He's invoking them to come back to the Lord and to put their trust, to deal with their emotions before them. Now that is not a great thing. Sometimes we're angry with God. We're frustrated with God. We're frustrated with living the Christian life. And David can speak into it, or the Holy Spirit through David can speak into us at that point and say, well, that's the case, that's okay, but take it to God.

It's a bit like what we're saying to the children. When we do wrong, take it back to God. Don't sin and don't keep being angry and being away from God and shaking our fists towards Him.

[14:01] Take our shaking fists to Him and pray to Him and deal with Him. And you know that whole idea on your beds, be silent and offer right sacrifices.

It's that place, isn't it? It's that place where we, in our beds, whether we're sharing a bed or not, it's a place where there's you're alone with your thoughts very often.

Place in darkness. And it's a place where your thoughts become very real and sometimes become, the perspective all goes awry with your thoughts.

And he says, but in that place, look, that's where you sometimes in your bed, you sense your heart most, isn't it? You sense who you are most when you're lying in the darkness of the night.

And he says, in that time, seek the Lord and take the very reality of who you are into His presence and put your trust in Him.

[15 : 05] Offer the sacrifices of a repentant and a confessional heart. It's great advice, and that's what I was talking about, intentionality.

It's a very intentional reality we need to exercise in 2024. If we're going to know joy and prosperity spiritually and real joy and real prosperity in life, it will take that meditative intentionality of moving beyond a quick, and I can't think of the word I'm looking for, throw away prayer that sometimes we offer to God as a sump.

I say, well, I'm a Christian and I throw away a prayer to Him because that's what I'm supposed to do in the morning, and that will make my day almost like a good luck charm. But it will take intentionality to move beyond that into a deep-seated relationship with Him because He goes on to explain where His true prosperity lies and He knows, because they are asking the question again, again He speaks almost to them or about them, and He says in verse 7, there are many who say, who will show us some good?

They're looking, you know, they're listening to lies, they're wanting prosperity, they're looking for joy, and yet they really can't find it. Who's going to show us any good? Where are we going to get goodness from and joy and celebration?

And then David on their behalf prays for himself and for all of them says, lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord. You put more joy, and He gives His own testimony, you put more joy in my heart than for them, even when they're grain and wine abound.

[16 : 54] So they're looking for prosperity in material things, in celebration with their wine and in material prosperity with their grain.

And He says, that's not where true prosperity lies. They're searching for prosperity, and sometimes we do that as well, don't we? We're looking for joy, for gladness, for celebration and happiness and prosperity in the wrong places, because we can be looking in the darkness away from the light of God's face.

And if we're not facing God, we're always going to be in the dark, however prosperous from a human level, and however glad and joyful we appear of the world, if we're not facing God, it's in spiritual darkness.

We can't find peace and safety there. We can't find true satisfaction there. We will, there is satisfaction in it.

The devil makes sure that's the case. There will be satisfaction, but it's not lasting. It's always temporary. It will not be a foundation for your life, and it will end.

[18 : 09] That's the reality. We can't find satisfaction in material things. I know we have lots of new things over Christmas, and they're good, and we thank God for them. But like I said to the children yesterday, the socks will get holes in them.

And the things that we buy will be dull next year, and we'll need something more, because we can't find our prosperity in material things. We give thanks to God for them, and we recognize why we have them.

There's many people in the world that don't have what we have, and we give thanks humbly for them, and we don't become excessive in any of these things. But we don't find satisfaction, peace and joy in any of these things.

But we realize that's the world we live in. Thinking missionally, that's the world we live in. You ask 99.8% of people that you meet outside of the church context, outside the Christian context, where are you looking for your joy?

Where are you looking for your prosperity? You ask that question, and you know what the answers will be. They're not looking for it.

[19 : 25] The last thing they're looking for is joy and prosperity, and they're relationship with God. They're living their lives, and the engine of their lives is to give them joy and prosperity.

However they can get that away from God. And David, through the Spirit, is teaching us a different way. The gospel for us, and with this I close, offers real prosperity in the light of Christ.

Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord. Jesus, John 8 verse 12, I am the light of the world. I am the light of the world.

And He brings light into the darkness of the world, into the darkness of our own souls, and in the darkness of our misguided and misappropriated desires and longings.

He brings His light through His finished work on the cross, giving us meaning, direction, identity, and hope. That's why on the cross He was plunged into darkness, the light of the world.

[20 : 31] It wasn't just a physical thing. It wasn't just for everyone to go, oh, look at the darkness. It was a spiritual truth that was being declared in that physical reality.

He went and plunged into darkness so that we might know in our darkness His light, His forgiveness, His reconciliation, His hope, and joy, and prosperity.

2024. This living face to face with Him. It's interesting it talks about being in your bed, and then it talks about the light of His face.

Is that just that? Whatever it speaks of, it definitely speaks of intimacy. When you look someone eyeball to eyeball, face to face, there's...

You can't do that really to a stranger. It's a bit weird and creepy. If you went really close eyeball to eyeball with a stranger, but someone you love, someone that you're close to, there's an intimacy there, there's an honesty, there's an openness.

[21 : 40] If you get something against one another, it's very difficult to look eyeball to eyeball with one another. If you're holding something against someone, very difficult to look at them in the face.

That's why we run. That's why we hide. Very difficult. And yet here we've been told for the prayer is that God would lift the light of His face upon us.

That's a remarkable statement. The living God who is the light of the world is willing and able and longs to look as face to face. His light with all the honesty of an innocence of God, He's willing to be in that relationship with us.

He's willing to call Father to be in relationship with His children who have run from Him. And that's what prayer will do for us. And that's what we need to be doing in prayer.

Our prayer needs to ask for God, God's light and the light of His, the beauty of His face to shine upon us.

[22 : 43] And that can only come if we are honest with Him and confess our failings and our darkness. And then we know and reflect His light just as Moses did when he saw God.

He reflected the light. It radiated from. That's what we're looking for in 2024, that our lives, our actions, our responses, our words, our worship radiate with the love and the light of Jesus Christ because we're in relationship with honest relationship.

And maybe it's like yesterday, we talked about Barnabas. It's not a council of perfection. Jesus wasn't steps above all of us. He failed, He made mistakes.

He backslid, He walked away. He was divided from His fellow believers. He was legalistic at some points. And we'll make mistakes.

It's not a council of perfection, but it's taking our failings to the Lord Jesus Christ, to the light of His beautiful face and to be forgiven and rejoiced. And from there comes heart joy and prosperity.

[23 : 50] It's the joy that is much greater than material prosperity, which will keep us going for a while.

Even when the grain and the wine abound in our lives, it's much deeper than that. And He finishes again with this whole idea of lying down, bed.

So there's the idea of knowing yourself very much when you, in bed, it's where your heart is kind of exposed in the darkness. But it's also a place of rest, or ideally we look for it to be a place of rest.

In peace, I will both lay down and sleep. For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. There's a great confidence. It goes to sleep, not with fears of tomorrow, of what He's going to wake up to, of what the future holds.

But there's the sleep of His beloved. And again, it's not, I'm not necessarily speaking about physical sleep because some of us battle with physical sleep. But it's a picture of spiritual contentment and joy and rest and shalom and peace in Him, of being loved, forgiven, being safe in absolute terms, despite and sometimes our circumstances.

[25 : 11] So we're called in 2024. Whoever you will face, whatever I will face, we don't know what we face. God knows what we will face. We don't. Thank God for that, that we don't know what we face.

Some of us might not make it to the end of 2024. But whatever we face, we can, whether it's good times or bad days, whether it's prosperity or whether it's loss, whatever level.

In the battle, as David was in here, David was, you know, he's no theoretical believer here. He was going through the difficult times, really difficult, opposed by those who he thought loved him. In whatever circumstances, we can be celebratory Christians. We can be joyful Christians. But it's not something we can work up in ourselves. It is the reflection of the light of the face of the living God as we are in relationship with Him in prayer.

That's the fruit of the Spirit. And that will be the foundation for our mission of lives in 2024. It will not be techniques. It will not be saying the right words, although these are maybe both important.

[26 : 27] It will be that we are face to face with the living God and reflect the light of His face in our lives, in our joy, in our celebration.

Because that will provoke questions from people to say, why? Why don't you find your joy and satisfaction in wine and in grain, material things?

Why don't you find it in the lies that are believed all around us? Because we have a living relationship with Jesus Christ, peace and safety.

Number one, for 2024, it's your prayer life. Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would teach us about prayer.

And sometimes I'm sure it must seem like a stuck record to be talking about prayer in church.

[27 : 24] But it can never be that. Because if we all know our own hearts and we all know our temptation not to pray or to go through the motions in prayer or to rush prayer or to ignore prayer or not to develop a relationship with God or to find you boring or to find you ordinary or dull.

And we don't see the priority of praying together and we don't see the priority of praying alone. Give us, heavenly Father, we confess that before you.

And we thank you for the example of David in all his mistakes and all his failings. And we know and understand from Scripture how his life went terribly wrong when he stopped praying, when he backslid from you, when he looked for his joy and celebratory life and his prosperity away from you. Great King David, how easy it is for us Lord. And yet we give thanks that you've given us these examples in Scripture, for giving us in hope and renewed joy and prosperity.

Lord, give us the intentionality this year through the power of the Holy Spirit and the work of him in our conscience to be prayerful and to see the adventure that that takes us on as we joy and no prosperity in him.

[28 : 49] Help us to be wise to the lies of the evil one and protect us we pray from Satan and from the dark forces of evil that stand against those who are citizens of the kingdom of God, who are saved by grace.

And Lord, may this year be a year when many people come to know Jesus through our lives and witness, but more importantly through the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. Fill these pews, these seats upstairs, the pews.

Fill them so that with people who come to know Jesus for the first time here and in leaf and in every church in the city and beyond in all the neighbouring towns and villages of Scotland and throughout the world we pray for your kingdom to come.

In Jesus' name, Amen.