

Book	Psalms – Study 13
Topic	Praying Our Petitions
Reference	Psalms 4
Date	9 January 2019
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Psalms 4:1-3 (ESV) 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! 2 O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah 3 But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him. 4 Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah 5 Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord. 6 There are many who say, "Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord!" 7 You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

This is the prayer of supplication. It is about hearing my prayer. If we look at the grammar it can be a bit confusing in this particular psalm only. He is saying

2 O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah

It is as if he is talking to some man. On one hand, it is like third second person.

3 But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.

Then he refers back to himself again. So here it is very funny, you sit in the room alone and you are praying about other people and the other people are not there. As a result of prayer,

Psalms 4:8 (ESV) In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

So basically, this is about him praying and the result of him praying is that he can lie down and sleep. So, this is basically what Keller calls a self-communing or meditation. He is working on his own heart as he answers this imaginary group of people. This imaginary group of people represents his own attitude towards prayer. That's why the language sounds a little bit funny here.

PURPOSE OF THE EVENING PRAYER

Psalms 4:1 (ESV) Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief when I was in distress.

The result of this prayer is the last bit

Psalms 4:8 (ESV) In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

It is an ideal prayer to pray when you are going to sleep. Why it is important to pray before you are going to sleep. St. Francis Xavier actually wrote these words,

At night, before you go to sleep, you must examine your conscience, inquiring into your thoughts, words, and deeds of the whole day, and also whether you have left out anything of what you ought to have done." Sleep is the likeness of death. Meditate on death and eternity. Retire not without being prepared for death

He is saying that sleep is like death. Because when you sleep, you don't know whether you wake up and more than a few people don't wake up from their sleep. So, it is best at the middle of night just before you sleep, you pray and you sought things out because prayer is a little bit like that.

PETITION IS ABOUT OUR CONCERNS

We need to put our petitions in perspective. We have talked about prayer, praying our sadness, praying our tears, praying our worship, now we are going to go to the last part, praying our petitions. Petitions are about our concerns. Look at the Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:9-13 (ESV) Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

Give us our daily bread is way down. The trouble is most of us when we pray our petition become way up first then just before we sleep to make sure our prayer can reach heaven then we worship a bit. That's not supposed to be the way. We are supposed to have our father in heaven hallowed by thy name and you want his kingdom to be done first, his will to be done before you ask for your daily bread.

ATTITUDES:

James 4:1-3 (ESV) What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have,

because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions

So, when we actually pray, the problem about answered prayer is the problem of praying because you want to satisfy your own passions. So therefore, there are three attitudes in this prayer. Prayer for petition or supplication isn't about a laundry list of things that you need to have done. Before you have a laundry list of the things that you want God to give you, three basic attitudes in this particular psalm needs to be sorted out.

Idolatrous attitudes

2 O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah 3 But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.

Angry attitudes

Psalms 4:4-7 (ESV) Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah 5 Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.

Self pitying attitudes

6 There are many who say, "Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord!" 7 You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

These are the three attitudes he is praying over before even ask things.

THE IDOLATROUS HEART:

For example, he is talking about shame. Why am I embarrassed? He is looking at his particular situation and looking at the attitude that caused the embarrassment and shame.

How long will you love vain words and seek after lies?

This means my shame, somebody called me a loser so I felt insulted. Why? Because my pride. I am supposed to be a winner, and someone called me a lousy businessman, I am supposed to be a good businessman. So therefore, your actual shame, your embarrassment reveals what is important to you. Basically, when you are praying you've got to look at your idols because you are going to pray, our father in heaven hallowed by thy name, thy kingdom come. So, if you actually harbor idols in your heart, that's not going to work out. So, if anyone call you a loser and you feel insulted, you look back and your shame is actually a symptom of my idol. My idol is my pride.

We have to look at the attitudes that underlie our emotions. Those attitudes will actually show our actual idols. You need to deal with the idols before, because otherwise when you are praying, your passions, your desires are actually based on your idols and God is not there to give you what you want if that's in a pursuit of your worship of idols. That needs to be sorted out first.

Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.

So the self-esteem that you actually have, you must just adjust your attitude. The most important thing is that God has set you apart for himself and the Lord hears me when I call to him. We have to readjust our attitudes towards this. So basically, this is the answer to every shame that you have, you are readjusting your attitudes as it were.

Colossians 3:5 (ESV) Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry

"Covetousness" means desiring something other than God in the wrong way. That's very important thing because many of our supplications are actually based on covetousness. Covetousness is desiring something in such a way as to destroy relationships, which can be with God or with people. If you enjoy another person's wife, house, car, money and reputation then you break the relationship. So basically the same thing is with God. Now if you enjoy your house, your car, your wife, your family and your holiday there is nothing wrong with that, but it becomes wrong when the enjoyment becomes idolatrous when it is disproportionate to the worth of what is desired. It draws us away from duties or God

Augustine talked about most of our pain and suffering in life is because of this problem of disordered love. You need to place everything in life in a hierarchy of importance and when this hierarchy gets disordered the things which are not very valuable becomes at the top and things that are very valuable becomes to bottom. That is the cause of most of our stress in life and most of our lack of satisfaction and our happiness. So basically you can enjoy, God gives you the house, your car, your wife, your family and your holiday, whatever it is, that's godly desire, there is nothing wrong, but if it is joy in such a way there is disproportionate to what it is.

You enjoy your car to the extent in which you ignore God. That is covetousness and that attitude needs to be examined when you pray. Enjoyment becomes idolatrous when it is not permeated with gratitude or it start to feel like a right, which means the things that you enjoy, your car, your house, your wife, your holiday, your condo, your business, whatever it is, if you enjoy it in a such a way that when it is taken away, then instead of having gratitude it feels like it is a right. Then it becomes idolatrous. Enjoyment becomes idolatrous when loss ruins our trust in the goodness of God.

This becomes covetousness when the things that you love, it is not working a deeper capacity for holy delight, which means it does not make you feel more gratitude. The things that God gives you, either in your business or your family or your house, does not make you in awe of God because you recognize that everything comes from God then it becomes idolatrous. These idolatrous attitudes are so common in our lives. Then we have a church that has got the problem with our society is that, the purpose of Christianity is told to us that we are supposed to be successful.

For some the whole idea of Jesus Christ coming into your life is to make you successful and a lot of people sell Jesus Christ their way. That's a problem. If God loves them he would give them temporal blessing that means God loves me then you will bless my work. He will bless my family. He will bless my health. We expect these things. The other thing is that we become cultural Christians. It means that our life and a non-Christian's living next to me is exactly the same. Not much difference at all, in our desires, in our priorities, we become consumers instead of worshippers. We want to receive blessing and say give blessing. That is a consumer attitude which then leaks into our prayer.

There is a God we want and a God who is there. There is a difference. We come to church to be entertained rather than be broken and disciplined. People hop from church to church to be entertained. They want to be filled up with some kind of emotion. They don't want to come to church to be broken. Because nobody wants to be broken, it is a very painful process but because we are sinners we need to come to church not to be entertained but to be broken. Word of God will break us, break the hold of sin in us rather than to be disciplined. So the whole idea of coming to church is to be disciplined rather than to be entertained. Kenneth Copeland writes,

"the basic principle of the Christian life is to know that God put our sin, sickness, disease, sorrow, grief, and poverty on Jesus at Calvary."

He distorts the gospel. Physical and financial prosperity provided by the cross. Charles Sherlock Filmore started the Unity Church. Let me read for you his translation of Psalm 23

The Lord is my banker; my credit is good.
He maketh me to lie down in the consciousness of omnipresent abundance;
He giveth me the key to His strongbox.
He restoreth my faith in His riches;
He guideth me in the paths of prosperity for His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk in the very shadow of debt,
I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me;
Thy silver and Thy gold, they secure me.
Thou preparest a way for me in the presence of the collector;
Thou fillest my wallet with plenty; my measure runneth over.

Surely goodness and plenty will follow me all the days of my life,
And I shall do business in the name of the Lord forever.

Creflo dollar writes,

"When we pray, believing that we have already received what we are praying, God has no choice but to make our prayers come to pass. . . . It is a key to getting results as a Christian."

So therefore, the utility of faith in prayer becomes a way to force God. That means the way to God's heart is to recognize some sort of formula. It is a manipulative key which you use, but if you actually look at scripture. Scripture says,

John 15:16-17 (ESV) You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and **bear fruit** and that your fruit should abide, so that **whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.** 17 These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

So you come to God with agenda, God's agenda is that you bear fruit. So anything you ask for in supplication that fulfills his desire for you to bear fruit he will give you. So you can ask whatever you want, by faith in his will but if it causes you to bear fruit surely God will give it to you, so that's a little bit different from Creflo Dollar, God has no choice. Kenneth Copeland writes,

"Faith is a spiritual force, a spiritual energy, a spiritual power. It is this force of faith which makes the laws of the spirit world function," "There are certain laws governing prosperity revealed in God's Word. Faith causes them to function."

Which means the whole world is governed by some laws and these laws like the law of gravity will actually, law of prosperity. The way to unlock the treasure of the universe is faith. So therefore, faith becomes a force. It is actually taken from Buddhism. If you actually look at Buddhism. The function of prayer within Buddhism is

It is practiced to awaken the practitioner's inner bodhichitta, or Buddha nature. This concept can be defined as the fundamental compassionate vital energy; an energy that is as much present in the cosmos as it is within the individual. The process of prayer aids the practitioner in uniting himself with the cosmos by awakening this inner energy and consequently tapping into otherwise unused sources of wisdom, empathy and knowledge

Rachel Alexander

But if we look at blessing in the New Testament. Jesus tells you,

Matthew 5:2-12 (ESV) And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

When Jesus Christ talks about blessing, it is completely different from what many churches tell you about blessing. It is absolutely different. It is like foreign language. So we are asked to indulge in this kind of idolatrous practice, for which we have to be very careful.

ANGRY ATTITUDES:

When you pray you need to look at your anger because sometimes you get upset with people.

Psalms 4:4-7 (ESV) **Be angry**, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah 5 Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.

So basically, if you are angry, there are couple of things that causes it. A painful event and added to that an anger triggering thought. Another thing that causes anger, anger is a substitute emotion. It is used to distract, to avoid dealing with feelings of vulnerability or weakness or embarrassment. So, this is the pathology of angry.

When you are angry, do not sin.

The sin is actually bitterness and then revenge. So basically when you have bitterness, it is a sense of moral superiority. You setup aside a criteria which condemns other people and excuses you. We have our own set of criteria to give ourselves moral superiority, which then excuses you and condemns other people and get angry. So, you are angry for a particular thing.

Bitterness can go down

Be angry at the insults, treachery, injustice
Don't cover it up

Don't make excuses for people

You can be angry but you do not sin, which means you ponder in your own hearts. When you are angry, you must find up when you are praying, not asking God to curse that person. You actually pray and look in your heart, why are you angry. Are you angry because it is a substitute emotion for embarrassment, are you angry because of some actual wrong. What about your own heart and your own sin? So, the psalmist says, ponder in your own hearts, in your own bed and shut up. This means before you get angry and start to judge other people, you become filled with bitterness. So therefore, the Bible tells us to ponder over all the stuff that made you upset in such a way that you don't filled with bitterness.

Psalms 4:5 Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord

This means worship God, trust God for justice because we are in no position to judge. How do you overcome bitterness? You overcome bitterness by worshipping. Because when you worship God, you appreciate his greatness and his fairness. So therefore, he will judge. So, this is how you overcome your attitudes. Psalm 137 is a psalm of anger

**Psalms 137:7-9 (ESV) Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem, how they said, "Lay it bare, lay it bare, down to its foundations!"
8 O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! 9 Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!**

He is actually praying that the Babylonians who actually persecuted the Jews should also be persecuted same like them, but the difference in this prayer if you actually look at this prayer. Psalmist is actually praying to God. He is asking God for justice. It is not revenge. It becomes revenge when you take matters in your own hands. When you actually take your feelings of hurt, anger and you bring it to the Lord, that actually dissipates the anger, dissipates the feeling of revenge, dissipates the pain, rather than you retaliating.

SELF PITY:

Psalms 4:6-7 (ESV) There are many who say, "Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord!" 7 You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

It means that you are suffering and you need a break. So basically, this pray is self-pity. There are two kinds of people. Some people always unhappy because of what they don't have. Another kind of people are overwhelmed by what God has already given them. When they are praying, they are praying to have this sort of attitude, not an attitude of self-pity, because many of your supplication, the things that you

want are actually based on self-pity. You are never happy of what you have and whatever you have, you are not very grateful for it. So therefore, this prayer is to adjust that particular attitude.

Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord!" 7 You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

So therefore he is asking us to rejoice in the Lord because of what he has done for us. That is an antidote towards feeling sorry for yourself. Famous American revivalist Jonathan Edwards who started Princeton University writes,

1. Our bad things will turn out for good. (Rom. 8:28)
2. Our good things can never be taken away from us. (Ps. 4:6-7) 3.
3. And the best things are yet to come. (1 Cor. 2:9)

You take these three things and you sit down and you start to pray our these attitudes, you can see the way you change. If we look at 10 things that Paul prayed for

1. Paul thanked God for His people
2. Paul prayed for their wisdom and knowledge
3. Paul prayed that they be full of hope
4. Paul prayed that they would live in peace and unity
5. Paul prayed that they would be strengthened with spiritual power
6. Paul prayed they would learn to abide in Christ
7. Paul prayed that they would grow in their love for others
8. Paul prayed for their righteousness and purity
9. Paul prayed that they would overflow with praise and thanks to God
10. Paul prayed for opportunities to minister to them

Now if we take our list and put it side by side with Paul's one, most of us will surely be embarrassed. Because these are the things that God is interested and suddenly you will find that what God is interested in and what you are interested in are completely different. Then you come and tell me, why God didn't answer my prayer. That's the problem with supplication. It is an attitudinal issue. Once that attitude is correct, God can provide you your heart's desire. Bearing of fruit revolves around attitudes of idolatrous covetousness, self-pity and anger against the world. Tim Keller summarizes this psalm with some of the things

- The goals of petitioning prayer are: put the world right and put your heart at rest.
- The qualities of petitioning prayer are: boldness, specificity, ardor, discipline, yet submission to God's will and wisdom. The boldness and submission come from knowing we are his children.

- The accompanying prayers with petition are: repentance for idols – so we are not too despondent to pray; forgiveness of wrongdoers – so we are not too angry to pray; and gratitude and praise for grace in the gospel – so we are not too self-pitying to pray.
- The basic assurance for petitioning prayer: we get the prayer-reception he deserved because he got the prayer-rejection we deserved.