

Who Can Show Us Any Good?

Psalm 4 (CSB)

For the choir director: with stringed instruments. A psalm of David. ¹ Answer me when I call, God, who vindicates me. You freed me from affliction; be gracious to me and hear my prayer. ² How long, exalted ones, will my honor be insulted? How long will you love what is worthless and pursue a lie? *Selah* ³ Know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself; the LORD will hear when I call to him. ⁴ Be angry and do not sin; reflect in your heart while on your bed and be silent. *Selah* ⁵ Offer sacrifices in righteousness and trust in the LORD. ⁶ Many are asking, "Who can show us anything good?" Let the light of your face shine on us, LORD. ⁷ You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and new wine abound. ⁸ I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, LORD, make me live in safety.

Last week, we were challenged to observe whether or not Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Sarah were faith failures or not. Although they didn't receive some of the things God had promised to them while they were still living, we zoomed out in history to see that indeed God had kept his promises to them. They were not faith failures and neither are we when we put our faith in God and what he says will happen. Today, we have another faith challenge summed up in verse 6 of our psalm: Many are asking, "Who can show us anything good?"

Sometimes psalms have an introductory note that explains the situation in which the song was written. We don't have that for Psalm 4; we only have musical notations. However, the previous psalm, Psalm 3, has the introductory note that it was written by David when he fled from his son Absalom. These two psalms seem to be paired up by content, flow, and length. So, maybe they were written together - Psalm 3 to be used in the morning and Psalm 4 to be used in the evening. Why bring this up? Because I want you to know what things might have been pressing down on David and afflicting him while he wrote this.

For 4 years, Absalom, one of David's sons, had wooed travelers to Jerusalem by saying that the King didn't have any time to hear their cases but, if he were king, he would see that they would get justice. Confident that he had the people on his side, he called for a secret celebration where he was crowned king and the crowds went along with it. Absalom had won the hearts of the people by insulting King David's honor and lying about him. Seeing what had happened, David simply fled from his throne without a fight or a special meeting and lived in exile for more than a year.

During those many months, how many times would he have been asked, "Who can show us anything good?" (verse 6) They had been forced to leave their homes, some of them also their families. The soldiers, David's supporters, weren't preparing for battle. The situation wasn't changing. The longer they were away, the harder it would be to retake the throne. People cursed David, threw rocks and dirt at him, thought him weak and incompetent even though he was the Lord's anointed who was always supposed to have an heir on the throne forever. Morale was fading.

That was David's situation. I'm guessing that you haven't had your son conspire against you, steal your throne, and have you exiled. But I am sure that you have had seasons in your life where you or people around you have asked, "Who can show us anything good?" (verse 6) Although you didn't see it at the time, maybe people did conspire against you, going around and telling lies about you, manipulating people to dislike you, to stay away from you, withdraw support from you. Maybe it was someone's conniving ways that led to you losing out on a promotion or getting fired or not getting into your school of choice. Maybe it cost you someone you had called your best friend or a family member became estranged from you. Your honor was insulted as people pursued lies.

Whatever it was, you have felt that dark feeling that you're on the verge of defeat having lost so much, that people have gone behind your back and taken from you more than you can handle. You start asking, "With everything going wrong, who can show us anything good? God, just give me a win. Show me something good!"

In this song, this prayer, David shows the people asking and us something good. He shows us a God who vindicates him. A bit more literal translation would be, "God of my righteousness." Some translate it as my righteous God. These all can be understood properly, but when you dive into King David's life, into his horrible and shameful sins and the confessions he made, we understand that David knew that he was not right with God because of anything he had done. Instead, he knew that he was right with God because of what God had done, because of God's righteousness and uprightness. God would defend David, be his vindicator – not because David was an innocent victim but because God would pay for his sins through his descendant, the one who would rule the nations, the one who would be king forever: Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Because God had removed and forgiven David's sins on account of the future perfect life and sacrifice of Jesus, God would not give up on David, on those that he loves, has forgiven, has saved them from their sins. This fact put more joy in David's heart than the joy celebrated at a harvest festival, better than a bonus paycheck, even at this miserable and dark time.

Because God was his righteousness, had removed his sins, David also knew that God would be good to him and answer his prayers. "Know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself; the LORD will hear when I call to him." (verse 3) God had heard David's prayers in the past and had protected him from enemies like Goliath and the Philistines as well as Saul king of Israel. He had heard David's prayer for forgiveness and readily granted it to him through Nathan the prophet following his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah, her husband. He saw this as something good and is showing something good to his people and us: God will answer our prayers again because we too are vindicated by God. Because he has taken away our sins, we have total access to him. He wants us to pray and promises to answer us in the way that's best. This is something good that we have, even in dark times.

Remembering these good things, David shows us another good thing: "I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, LORD, make me live in safety." (verse 8) He felt so secure in God's hands that he could go to bed and sleep soundly instead of shaking with fear in a corner, not able to sleep. He had peace having seen good from God and knowing that God would still be good today because he is his righteous God who had vindicated him, taken away his sins. Maybe we take a restful night of sleep for granted, especially if we are used to it. Have a night of insomnia, of fitful sleeping, and then when a deep sleep of peace comes, you know that comes from the Lord. This is a good thing.

So, who can show us any good? If you are in one of those moments like David was, there are at least two things to do. The first is to pray boldly, like David, that God would take care of this, that God would lift the afflictions, the suffering, that he would silence the liars and those who pursue a lie and also have God shine his light on us. The second is for you to seek out a Christian friend who can show you something good and tell them that you need to see something good – because that's exactly what we have as Christians.

Sometimes we're blessed to see in the moment something good from God even in a bad thing – like having said, "I love you" as the last thing before your loved one died or that God immediately answered my prayer for a win in a dark time and I got to see some light. Sometimes we can zoom out and see the good in the bigger picture. We can see that bad relationships created patience in me, helped me to appreciate future relationships, prepared me to get through tasks that I wouldn't have gotten through before. It's great when we see these things with time, but we don't always get to see these good things in the moments.

Yet, we can show people something good now. And I don't mean that we make silver linings out of everything. By that I mean when we hear about someone going through suffering, wanting to see something good, and we say, "At least..." Oh, you didn't get that raise. At least you have a job. Oh, you're fighting with your spouse. At least you're married. Oh, you had a miscarriage. At least you can get pregnant. Instead of trying to make ourselves feel better by trying to make silver linings everywhere for people, it's better to acknowledge how difficult and dark and afflicting our moments in life can be. "Be angry," David says to acknowledge that David's supporters and David himself had a right to be angry because Absalom had lied to the people and people believed the lies. But he also says, "and do not sin." (verse 4a) Yes, acknowledge the suffering. Acknowledge that it is hard. Thank them for sharing the hard stuff with you and don't try to immediately put a silver lining on it. Don't let your anger lead you to curse, to despair, to sin.

Instead, show something good from God. Someone lied about you? People lied about Jesus too and still do. The lies cost you a friend or a family member? There were times when many people withdrew their support from Jesus and stopped following him because of lies. Even his own brothers didn't believe him. Jesus was afflicted and suffered, but not without meaning. He suffered for you, so that you would be right with God. He took away your sin. He gave you the gift of heaven - assurance that these dark, awful times will not last forever. He walks with you actually knowing how you feel having felt it himself. You have something good, something good that we as Christians can show others.

Now that you have seen something good, show someone else something good. Show people a good God who vindicates you, makes you right with him. Show people a good God who has answered David's prayers, our prayers. Show them a good God who helps people like us through affliction. Show people the good you have been shown. Amen.