

## Taking Refuge in God – Psalm 4

Psalm 2 ends with “How blessed (happy) are those who take refuge in You!” (Ps. 2:12). Many of the following Psalms describe the security of God’s refuge, and counsel us on how to take refuge in God. Let’s consider Ps. 4 in this light.

*<sup>1</sup> Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress; be gracious to me and hear my prayer.*

*<sup>2</sup> O sons of men, how long will my honor become a reproach? How long will you love what is worthless and aim at deception?*

*Selah.*

*<sup>3</sup> But know that the LORD has set apart the godly man for Himself; the LORD hears when I call to Him.*

*<sup>4</sup> Tremble, and do not sin; meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still.*

*Selah.*

*<sup>5</sup> Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the LORD.*

*<sup>6</sup> Many are saying, “Who will show us any good?” Lift up the light of Your countenance upon us, O LORD! <sup>7</sup> You have put gladness in my heart, more than when their grain and new wine abound. <sup>8</sup> In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone, O LORD, make me to dwell in safety.*

### The Goodness of God’s Refuge

First, notice in 4:6-8 how David describes God’s refuge. Although he is “in distress” (4:1) and is surrounded by people who slander him (4:2) and have lost hope in God (4:6a), the “light” of God’s countenance nevertheless shines upon him. To “see God’s face” – to experience the smile of God’s love and favor (see Numbers 6:24-26) – brings a sense of gladness that is greater than circumstantial prosperity (4:7). This is why,



in the midst of his distress and despairing company, he can lie down and sleep in the peace and safety that God alone provides (4:8). Such a refuge is indeed precious beyond reckoning! This is why David shares with his audience insights on how to take refuge in God . . .

## **How to Take Refuge in God**

The Psalms do not provide “three easy steps” to refuge in God. Rather, they provide personal examples of what it looks like to trust God. As we ponder these inspired prayers, we glean helpful insights that inform our prayers for God’s refuge.

We can glean two such insights from 4:1. First, David requests God’s refuge as an unmerited gift. He asks God for refuge, not on the basis of his righteousness, but because He is the “God of my righteousness.” We can never earn God’s refuge because we are never sufficiently righteous. Rather, God’s refuge is available as a free gift because He has granted us right standing with Him through Christ (Galatians 2:16). This is why David prays: “*Be gracious* to me and hear my prayer.”

Second, David recalls previous instances in which God has “relieved me in my distress.” It is often difficult to simply believe God’s promise of present refuge, but our faith can be strengthened by remembering how God has kept His promise in the past. He has given us refuge then, when our distresses were great and our faith was weak. Surely, therefore, He can give us refuge in our present situation.

David’s instruction in 4:4,5 provides two additional and complementary insights. First, he counsels us to “tremble (with anger or fear), but do not sin.” In other words, we are to honestly express our negative emotions to God, but not let them dictate our ultimate response. By definition, distresses elicit negative emotions. We feel angry at those who are mistreating us; we feel afraid of what might happen to us. It is not spiritual to repress these emotions. God Himself feels with and for us, and He cares about how we feel. Rather, we should pour them out before God and ask Him to help us. This kind of raw, unvarnished



prayer the Bible calls *supplication*. The Psalms are full of such supplication, and Jesus expressed His negative emotions to God when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (see Matthew 26:38,39a). God grants refuge to those who cry out to Him in childlike honesty. He cannot grant refuge to those who are dishonestly stoic, because they are insistent on protecting themselves.

On the other hand, David warns us not to sin in our response to distress. We can become so consumed by our anger that we pervert prayer into a way of nurturing a murderous rage. We can become so consumed by fear that we pervert prayer into a way of rehearsing and reinforcing our anxieties. We can choose to honestly express our feelings to God – yet stop short of these destructive excesses. The alternative is to “meditate in your heart on your bed, and be still.” We can choose, after expressing our angry and fearful emotions, to recall and focus on God and His promises, and (in light of these promises) to commit ourselves to God in the quietness that trusts Him to deliver us. Rather than rehearse acts of vengeance or escape, we can “offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the Lord.” This is what Jesus did when He concluded His prayer in Gethsemane by saying, “. . . yet not as I will, but as You will.” Likewise, after expressing our fears and anger to God, we can choose to “entrust ourselves to a faithful Creator by doing what is right” (1 Peter 4:19).

It may take some time and effort to get to this heart-attitude. It took Jesus three rounds of prayer in Gethsemane. But God will help us as we wrestle in prayer, and He will grant refuge to those who come to Him in this way.

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