

MY FAVORITE CHARACTERS

Text: Psalm 4:1

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October 17, 1965

First Baptist Church, Lakeland, Florida

One of the noblest Psalms is one of the less familiar ones. Here is a tremendous meditation by a good and a great man who has learned his lesson in a time of public -trouble, in which he and the cause for which he stood were in trouble. I have come to appreciate this Psalm because it reveals to me that which makes for great character. Some of the great characters I have known have revealed in their lives some of the principles set forth in the 4th Psalm. Let me, then, suggest some of my favorite characters~

I. THE MAN WHO CAN SAY, "HE IS THE GOD OF MY RIGHTEOUSNESS".

Wrapped up in the phrase, "The God of my righteousness" is a great Gospel truth, for the phrase literally means, "The God who has justified me". This is the great doctrine we call "Justification by Faith". There are only two alternatives. There are those who seek to be justified by their good works, and there are those who know that they are justified by faith. Paul makes it clear that there is only one way that a man can find peace with God - "by the works of the law shall no man be justified." Gal.2: 17.

Faith as trust is the center of the Christian religion. The only way out of humanity's entanglement is faith, which surrenders to Christ. Not by our deeds, but by putting our lives for time and eternity into the hands of Christ.

Faith is the way into the universal priesthood of all believers. There "were many things as a child that I did not under; stand about the Christian faith, but there was one thing I was sure of - I knew that I had put my faith in Christ. I knew that He had died for my sins. I trusted Him to be my Saviour. I surrendered to Him.

Salvation's object is most important. The whom of faith is more important than the what. The emphasis of salvation is on the object of your faith. Indeed, the emphasis is not on the subject who believes, lest he take price in what he does in believing. If salvation rested upon an act of a man's mind, then he could very easily feel that he was earning his salvation. Therefore saving faith does not emphasize the subject (man), but the object of faith (Christ).

My favorite character is still the man who does not think he can save himself, by the good works of his life, but he received salvation as a direct gift of Jesus Christ in answer to unreserved trust.

The moment you trust and surrender to Christ, you become personally attached to Him, so that His righteousness flows from Him to you. Faith is not a substitute for righteousness, but it is the way to secure righteousness.

Such faith in Christ is Paul's concept of what it means to be a Christian. The two most important words in the New Testament are "in Christ". Martin Luther said that a man's religion comes out in the pronouns he uses. But Adolf Deismann says that a man's religion comes out in the prepositions. On the Damascus Road, Saul of Tarsus found a new relationship, and he came to be "in Christ".

What a thrill to know that you can be connected directly and intimately with the living Christ. There is no intermediary person, law, or institution. From the moment you exercise faith in Him, you belong to Christ. The great question is not "What do you believe?" but "To whom do you belong?" Faith in Christ does not bring knowledge of Christ, but it brings Christ Himself.

Even your spiritual achievements are not self-generated. It comes from an organized relationship to Christ. Keep attached to the vine, which is Christ, and the Vine will do the rest. Christianity is person-centered. So often I hear a man say, "I believe in God." My friend, you can believe in God and go to hell. Saul of Tarsus believed more in God as one God than any man who ever lived. But when he met Christ he realized that it is not enough to believe in God. Jesus said "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me." Until you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and have experienced justification by faith, you cannot know the full meaning of "The God of my righteousness".

II. MY FAVORITE CHARACTER IS ONE WHO DOES NOT WORRY ABOUT HIS ENEMIES (v. 2)

Verse 2 comes from a man who has experienced opposition. Yet he refused to worry about his enemies or the opposition. I thought when I started out in the ministry that I had to have everyone like me. Then one day I read the words of Jesus, woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you." (Luke 6:26)

There were those who were opposed to Christ, yet He was sinless and blameless. You and I can make mistakes, but He made no mistakes. Yet there were those who despised Him.

David is referring to those who "turn my glory into shame". His opponents were bringing not only his policy, but also his office into shame. Yet with a glorious indifference, he challenges them to spend a little time in reaching a great conclusion, that God is on the side of the man who is honestly seeking to serve Him.

III. MY FAVORITE CHARACTER IS THE MAN WHO IS SET APART TO GOD (v. 3)

A 'godly man' is not a perfect man, one who is infallible, but he is a man who is set apart to God. God has created all things for His glory. In redemption, God does more than to rescue the lost and to pardon the guilty. When man is brought into a saving relationship with God in son ship, God is glorified.

The man who is set apart has a special privilege. "The Lord will hear when he calls on Him". This is the privilege of access. He has a claim on God. At first the sinner has no claim on God. But when he becomes a child of God by faith, he does have a claim, based on God's paternity. To 'hear' means to answer. God has agreed to answer every prayer. He will not always say 'Yes'. Sometimes He may say 'No' or "wait awhile." Sometimes He may not give us what we ask for, but He Answers the larger prayer that we had in back of our foolish request.

IV. MY FAVORITE CHARACTER IS THE MAN WHO WILL EXAMINE HIS OWN LIFE (v.4b)

In the latter part of verse 4 we read, "Commune with your own heart upon your bed." What does it mean to commune with your own heart? It means to examine your own life under the x-ray of God's will, to see if you have offended God in word or deed. It is to search and try your own ways.

There are many values to this examination of my own life. As I commune with myself in such self-examination, I arrive at knowledge of my own character. Such self-examination helps me realize the value of my own salvation. The longer I live, the more I realize that I have so many sins in my own life to be forgiven. Then, as I examine my own life, I come to distrust myself, and it leads me to cast myself in dependence upon God. It leads me to more prayer. It makes me more sympathetic of others. I find myself saying, as I see others who fall into sin and failure, "There but for the grace of God, go I".

All of us need to take time out for meditation. We all need the suggestion of verse 4 to "be still". Meditation is contemplation turned within. Do not confuse meditation with reading. You may read without really meditating. In reading we learn truths, but in meditation we apply them to our lives. Don't even confuse meditation with prayer. You may actually say prayers without really meditating. You may learn truths, but in meditation with prayer. You may actually say prayers without really meditating. You may pray: "Dear God, bless that widow and provide for her needs But when you meditate you say: "Lord, what do I have in my closet that I can share with that widow?"

V. MY FAVORITE CHARACTER IS THE MAN WHO LOVES THE WORD OF GOD (v. 4)

The reference to the Word of God is not made clear in the translation, "Stand in awe and sin". But Moffatt translates it, "Tremble at it (the Word of God), and sin not". If you and I tremble in awe at the Word of God, we will not go far wrong. "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against God."

I used to worry and tremble for the Word of God; for fear that man might overthrow it. But one day God said to me something like this, "Son, don't tremble for it, but tremble at it." The Word will look after itself. It will outlast all its critics. but those who do not stand in awe, they are in a perilous state.

Those who are opponents of spiritual things in public are usually those whose private lives cannot bear close scrutiny.

VI. MY FAVORITE CHARACTER IS THE MAN WHO CAN TURN TROUBLES INTO TREASURES. (verse 7)

In verse 7 we read: "Thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time that the corn and wine increased."

We need to realize that a good life is no guarantee that we will have so-called success. It is true that "honesty is the best policy" But let us not invert it to say, "Prosperity is the outward and visible sign of honesty". A professor in a university said that there were three different preachers in three chapel services, and each one of them told success stories. They seemed to have the gospel of success, as if to say, "Be good, and you will be president of whatever company employs you. Let us never forget that the unrighteous do prosper at times -- and the godly do go to concentration camps.

Yet the psalmist declares that in the midst of the times when he did not prosper that God was able to put gladness into his heart. Some of the greatest sufferers I know are the most conspicuous possessors of peace and gladness. An Englishman once commented that the British people were never happier than in the depth of the dangerous days of 1940. Churchill said to his countrymen, "Let us be grim and gay." The two terms are not incompatible. Our blessed Lord said, "Ye shall have tribulation (be grim) but be of good cheer (be happy). "

Ask some of your outreach visitors what they discover as they visit shut-ins. They will tell you that when they visit shut-ins of great suffering, as they walk out of the door they are rebuked by their smiles. There are men and women on beds of pain who prove that they can face life's hardships and still smile. The bed of suffering is often the place where a man proves his manhood.

Not in the days when corn and wine are increased, not in the days of prosperity, but in the days of trouble and adversity, we reveal our true strength. The days of real and abiding gladness are the days when we discover that the world is less important than our souls, the days when we realize that what we are is more important than what we have.

VII. MY FAVORITE CHARACTER IS THE MAN WHO LEAVES TOMORROW IN THE KEEPING OF GOD. (Verse 8)

"I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for Thou, Lord, only; makest me dwell in safety." The Psalmist ends with a lullaby. It is as if he sings himself to sleep with quiet assurance.

During the daytime he was a great king. At nighttime, however, he becomes like a little child, a trusting child of God. He does not know about tomorrow, but he knows the God who holds every tomorrow, and he is willing to go to sleep, leaving tomorrow in God's capable hands.

I like Moffatt's translation of another similar expression of the Psalmist. It is Psalm 127:2. Moffatt translates this verse: "Vain is it to rise early for your work, and keep at work so late, gaining your bread with anxious toil. God's gifts come to His loved ones as they sleep."

Since I have discovered the wondrous truths suggested by the 4th Psalm, I find myself so often saying, "Dear God, let my life be guided with the great principles that are set forth by this precious passage in the Word of God."