

Exposition on Psalm 4

by St. Augustine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living in simplicity and singleness, seeking the true good of God's light, and hoping for peace and rest in our lives.

Scripture: Psalm 4, Romans 8:25, Romans 10:4

Topics: "Righteous Living", "Repentance And Hope"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on the Psalms, highlighting the themes of righteousness, repentance, and hope in the Lord. He delves into the significance of being heard by God, the importance of being enlarged in heart through tribulations, and the need to turn from worldly desires to seek God's truth. St. Augustine emphasizes the sacrifice of righteousness through repentance and the seeking of internal goods rather than temporal pleasures. He encourages believers to be angry with their sins, to offer themselves as sacrifices to God, and to hope for the light of God's countenance within. The sermon concludes with a call to dwell in hope and singleness, awaiting the fulfillment of eternal promises.

Transcript

To the end, a psalm song to David.

1. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes. Romans 10:4 For this end signifies perfection, not consumption. Now it may be a question, whether every Song be a Psalm, or rather every Psalm a Song; whether there are some Songs which cannot be called Psalms, and some Psalms which cannot be called Songs. But the Scripture must be attended to, if haply Song do not denote a joyful theme. But those are called Psalms which are sung to the Psalter; which the history as a high mystery declares the Prophet David to have used. Of which matter this is not the place to discourse; for it requires prolonged inquiry, and much discussion. Now meanwhile we must look either for the words of the Lord Man after the Resurrection, or of man in the Church believing and hoping on Him.

2. When I called, the God of my righteousness heard me Psalm 4:1. When I called, God heard me, the Psalmist says, of whom is my righteousness. In tribulation You have enlarged me. You have led me from the straits of sadness into the broad ways of joy. For, tribulation and straitness is on every soul of man that does evil. Romans 2:9 But he who says, We rejoice in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works patience; up to that where he says, Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us; he has no straits of heart, they be heaped on him outwardly by them that persecute him. Now the change of person, for that from the third person, where he says, He heard, he passes at once to

the second, where he says, You have enlarged me; if it be not done for the sake of variety and grace, it is strange why the Psalmist should first wish to declare to men that he had been heard, and afterwards address Him who heard him. Unless perchance, when he had declared how he was heard, in this very enlargement of heart he preferred to speak with God; that he might even in this way show what it is to be enlarged in heart, that is, to have God already shed abroad in the heart, with whom he might hold converse interiorly. Which is rightly understood as spoken in the person of him who, believing on Christ, has been enlightened; but in that of the very Lord Man, whom the Wisdom of God took, I do not see how this can be suitable. For He was never deserted by It. But as His very prayer against trouble is a sign rather of our infirmity, so also of that sudden enlargement of heart the same Lord may speak for His faithful ones, whom He has personated also when He said, I was an hungered, and you gave Me no meat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me no drink, Matthew 25:42 and so forth. Wherefore here also He can say, You have enlarged me, for one of the least of His, holding converse with God, whose love he has shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us. Romans 5:5 Have mercy upon me and hear my prayer. Why does he again ask, when already he declared that he had been heard and enlarged? It is for our sakes, of whom it is said, But if we hope for that we see not, we wait in patience; Romans 8:25 or is it, that in him who has believed that which is begun may be perfected?

3. O you sons of men, how long heavy in heart Psalm 4:2. Let your error, says he, have lasted at least up to the coming of the Son of God; why then any longer are you heavy in heart? When will you make an end of crafty wiles, if now when the truth is present ye make it not? Why do ye love vanity, and seek a lie? Why would ye be blessed by the lowest things? Truth alone, from which all things are true, makes blessed. For, vanity is of deceivers, and all is vanity. Ecclesiastes 1:2 What profit has a man of all his labour, wherewith he labours under the sun? Why then are you held back by the love of things temporal? Why follow ye after the last things, as though the first, which is vanity and a lie? For you would have them abide with you, which all pass away, as does a shadow.

4. And know ye that the Lord has magnified his Holy One Psalm 4:3. Whom but Him, whom He raised up from below, and placed in heaven at His right hand? Therefore does he chide mankind, that they would turn at length from the love of this world to Him. But if the addition of the conjunction (for he says, and know ye) is to any a difficulty, he may easily observe in Scripture that this manner of speech is usual in that language, in which the Prophets spoke. For you often find this beginning, And the Lord said unto him, And the word of the Lord came to him. Which joining by a conjunction, when no sentence has gone before, to which the following one may be annexed, perhaps admirably conveys to us, that the utterance of the truth in words is connected with that vision which goes on in the heart. Although in this place it may be said, that the former sentence, Why do ye love vanity, and seek a lie? is as if it were written, Do not love vanity, and seek a lie. And being thus read, it follows in the most direct construction, and know ye that the Lord has magnified His Holy One. But the interposition of the Diapsalma forbids our joining this sentence with the preceding one. For whether this be a Hebrew word, as some would have it, which means, so be it; or a Greek word, which marks a pause in the psalmody (so as that Psalma should be what is sung in psalmody, but Diapsalma an interval of silence in the psalmody; that as the coupling of voices in singing is called Sympsalma, so their separation Diapsalma, where a certain pause of interrupted continuity is marked): whether I say it be the former, or the latter, or something else, this at least is probable, that the sense cannot rightly be continued and joined, where the Diapsalma intervenes.

5. The Lord will hear me, when I cry unto Him. I believe that we are here warned, that with great earnestness of heart, that is, with an inward and incorporeal cry, we should implore help of God. For as we

must give thanks for enlightenment in this life, so must we pray for rest after this life. Wherefore in the person, either of the faithful preacher of the Gospel, or of our Lord Himself, it may be taken, as if it were written, the Lord will hear you, when you cry unto Him.

6. Be angry, and sin not Psalm 4:4. For the thought occurred, Who is worthy to be heard? Or how shall the sinner not cry in vain unto the Lord? Therefore, Be angry, says he, and sin not. Which may be taken two ways: either, even if you be angry, do not sin; that is, even if there arise an emotion in the soul, which now by reason of the punishment of sin is not in our power, at least let not the reason and the mind, which is after God regenerated within, that with the mind we should serve the law of God, although with the flesh we as yet serve the law of sin, Romans 7:25 consent thereunto; or, repent ye, that is, be ye angry with yourselves for your past sins, and henceforth cease to sin. What you say in your hearts: there is understood, say ye: so that the complete sentence is, What ye say in your hearts, that say ye; that is, be ye not the people of whom it is said, with their lips they honour Me, but their heart is far from Me. Isaiah 29:13 In your chambers be ye pricked. This is what has been expressed already in heart. For this is the chamber, of which our Lord warns us, that we should pray within, with closed doors. Matthew 6:6 But, be ye pricked, refers either to the pain of repentance, that the soul in punishment should prick itself, that it be not condemned and tormented in God's judgment; or, to arousing, that we should awake to behold the light of Christ, as if pricks were made use of. But some say that not, be ye pricked, but, be ye opened, is the better reading; because in the Greek Psalter it is ἰσχυρῶς ἠνοήθη τὸ ἦν, which refers to that enlargement of the heart, in order that the shedding abroad of love by the Holy Ghost may be received.

7. Offer the sacrifice of righteousness, and hope in the Lord Psalm 4:5. He says the same in another Psalm, the sacrifice for God is a troubled spirit. Wherefore that this is the sacrifice of righteousness which is offered through repentance it is not unreasonably here understood. For what more righteous, than that each one should be angry with his own sins, rather than those of others, and that in self-punishment he should sacrifice himself unto God? Or are righteous works after repentance the sacrifice of righteousness? For the interposition of Diapsalma not unreasonably perhaps intimates even a transition from the old life to the new life: that on the old man being destroyed or weakened by repentance, the sacrifice of righteousness, according to the regeneration of the new man, may be offered to God; when the soul now cleansed offers and places itself on the altar of faith, to be encompassed by heavenly fire, that is, by the Holy Ghost. So that this may be the meaning, Offer the sacrifice of righteousness, and hope in the Lord; that is, live uprightly, and hope for the gift of the Holy Ghost, that the truth, in which you have believed, may shine upon you.

8. But yet, hope in the Lord, is as yet expressed without explanation. Now what is hoped for, but good things? But since each one would obtain from God that good, which he loves; and they are not easy to be found who love interior goods, that is, which belong to the inward man, which alone should be loved, but the rest are to be used for necessity, not to be enjoyed for pleasure; excellently did he subjoin, when he had said, hope in the Lord Psalm 4:6, Many say, Who shows us good things? This is the speech, and this the daily inquiry of all the foolish and unrighteous; whether of those who long for the peace and quiet of a worldly life, and from the frowardness of mankind find it not; who even in their blindness dare to find fault with the order of events, when involved in their own deservings they deem the times worse than these which are past: or, of those who doubt and despair of that future life, which is promised us; who are often saying, Who knows if it's true? Or, who ever came from below, to tell us this? Very exquisitely then, and briefly, he shows (to those, that is, who have interior sight), what good things are to be sought; answering their question, who say, Who shows us good things? The light of Your countenance, says he, is stamped

on us, O Lord. This light is the whole and true good of man, which is seen not with the eye, but with the mind. But he says, stamped on us, as a penny is stamped with the king's image. For man was made after the image and likeness of God, Genesis 1:26 which he defaced by sin: therefore it is his true and eternal good, if by a new birth he be stamped. And I believe this to be the bearing of that which some understand skilfully; I mean, what the Lord said on seeing Cæsar's tribute money, Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; and to God the things that are God's. Matthew 22:21 As if He had said, In like manner as Cæsar exacts from you the impression of his image, so also does God: that as the tribute money is rendered to him, so should the soul to God, illumined and stamped with the light of His countenance. Psalm 4:7 You have put gladness into my heart. Gladness then is not to be sought without by them, who, being still heavy in heart, love vanity, and seek a lie; but within, where the light of God's countenance is stamped. For Christ dwells in the inner man, Ephesians 3:16-17 as the Apostle says; for to Him does it appertain to see truth, since He has said, I am the truth. John 14:6 And again, when He spoke in the Apostle, saying, Would you receive a proof of Christ, who speaks in me? 2 Corinthians 13:3 He spoke not of course from without to him, but in his very heart, that is, in that chamber where we are to pray.

9. But men (who doubtless are many) who follow after things temporal, know not to say anything else, than, Who shows us good things? when the true and certain good within their very selves they cannot see. Of these accordingly is most justly said, what he adds next: From the time of His grain, of wine, and oil, they have been multiplied. For the addition of His, is not superfluous. For the grain is God's: inasmuch as He is the living bread which came down from heaven. John 6:51 The wine too is God's: for, they shall be inebriated, he says, with the fatness of your house. The oil too is God's: of which it is said, You have fattened my head with oil. But those many, who say, Who shows us good things? and who see not that the kingdom of heaven is within them: these, from the time of His grain, of wine, and oil, are multiplied. For multiplication does not always betoken plentifulness, and not, generally, scantiness: when the soul, given up to temporal pleasures, burns ever with desire, and cannot be satisfied; and, distracted with manifold and anxious thought, is not permitted to see the simple good. Such is the soul of which it is said, For the corruptible body presses down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weighs down the mind that muses on many things. Wisdom 9:15 A soul like this, by the departure and succession of temporal goods, that is, from the time of His grain, wine, and oil, filled with numberless idle fancies, is so multiplied, that it cannot do that which is commanded, Think on the Lord in goodness, and in simplicity of heart seek Him. Wisdom 1:1 For this multiplicity is strongly opposed to that simplicity. And therefore leaving these, who are many, multiplied, that is, by the desire of things temporal, and who say, Who shows us good things? which are to be sought not with the eyes without, but with simplicity of heart within, the faithful man rejoices and says, In peace, together, I will sleep, and take rest Psalm 4:8. For such men justly hope for all manner of estrangement of mind from things mortal, and forgetfulness of this world's miseries; which is beautifully and prophetically signified under the name of sleep and rest, where the most perfect peace cannot be interrupted by any tumult. But this is not had now in this life, but is to be hoped for after this life. This even the words themselves, which are in the future tense, show us. For it is not said, either, I have slept, and taken rest; or, I do sleep, and take rest; but, I will sleep, and take rest. Then shall this corruptible put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality; then shall death be swallowed up in victory. 1 Corinthians 15:54 Hence it is said, But if we hope for that we see not, we wait in patience. Romans 8:25

10. Wherefore, consistently with this, he adds the last words, and says, Since You, O Lord, in singleness hast made me dwell in hope. Here he does not say, wilt make; but, hast made. In whom then this hope now is, there will be assuredly that which is hoped for. And well does he say, in singleness. For this may refer in opposition to those many, who being multiplied from the time of His grain, of wine, and oil, say,

Who shows us good things? For this multiplicity perishes, and singleness is observed among the saints: of whom it is said in the Acts of the Apostles, and of the multitude of them that believed, there was one soul, and one heart. Acts 4:32 In singleness, then, and simplicity, removed, that is, from the multitude and crowd of things, that are born and die, we ought to be lovers of eternity, and unity, if we desire to cleave to the one God and our Lord.

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