

NOW I LAY ME DOWN TO SLEEP--An Evening Hymn

PSALM 4

Introduction:

My mother taught me an evening prayer when I was a small child--"Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." Because of the loving and good home in which I spent my childhood, it was rather easy to lie down in peace for the night. But as life matured, and my life took on more complexity, a good night's sleep became more of a challenge. I could still lay my body down, but how could I find the sleep that I needed?

If David is the author of this evening hymn, maybe he can help us. The day is begun with prayer in Psalm 3, and it is closed with prayer in Psalm 4. The king has made it through a long day in which conflict has swirled all around him. Everything has been at a hectic pace during the day. Rumors have been painting the outlook darker and darker. Absalom is in a position to bring the reign and the life of David to a hasty end. If Absalom succeeds, this could be David's last night on earth. What do you pray before you seek rest for the night? Is there some way that you can find sleep while the world is falling apart around you? I believe that the king knew the secret, and we can learn from him.

I. CAST YOURSELF ON GOD'S MERCY (V. 1)

The Psalm is a mixture of prayer and reflection. That it comes at the close of the day seems rather obvious since it ends with the word about lying down to sleep. By any measure, it must have been a horrendous day of David. The showdown with Absalom and the rebel army is drawing nearer and nearer.

What does the future hold for him and the kingdom of Israel. Before David lays down to sleep, he uses prayer to cast himself on the mercy of the Lord.

Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me *when I was* in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer. (v. 1)

Let's take note of two things in this appeal for mercy.

1. Base your prayer on His righteousness.

David addresses the Lord as "the God of my righteousness." That David uses the personal pronoun "my" should be noted. If you compare the different translations of this address to God, you will discover a variety of angles suggested. Most see this is an appeal for God to do the right thing, and to be his vindicator. Another sees this simply as a reference to the righteous character of God.

Another seems this as an indication that God is the only giver of righteousness, so if David has any righteousness, he received it as gift. We should probably relate the phrase to the covenant that God

had with Israel. Mercy has a prominent place in the covenant that God established with Israel. So when you come to the close of a confusing day, you appeal to God as the God of the covenant when you throw yourself on His mercy. He will surely do the right thing!

2. Trust your life into His hands of mercy.

Some of the newer translations use "be gracious to me," instead of mercy. It is not the typical Old Testament word for mercy, and does emphasize the idea of grace and graciousness. So at the close of day by such a prayer you remind God that it is all about who He is and the kind of person that He is--not about how well you have handled everything during the difficult day. You just lay your life in His hand with an appeal to continue to show you His mercy.

II. UNLOAD ANY ANGER BEFORE YOU LIE DOWN.

Keep in mind what has been going on during the king's day.

Terrible accusations are be thrown at him. Many are gathering evidence to justify putting him off the throne, and even putting him to death. While there may have been some truth in the accusations, most of them were false. Would these not cause anger to boil in your spirit? Did you ever try to sleep with a spirit full of anger?

Listen to what he said--

O ye sons of men, how long *will ye turn* my glory into shame? *how long* will ye love vanity, *and* seek after leasing? ³ But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him. ⁴ Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.

1. Reject the things of that the world has done that might stir anger.

This is what he is doing when he address the "sons of men" who want to turn his glory into shame.

2. Affirm what God has said about you.

"The LORD has set apart him that is godly for himself." This should make a difference when you try to sleep. Who will I believe, what the enemy has said about me, or what God has said about me. I choose the testimony of God.

3. Stop your anger before it becomes sin.

The KJV translates this "Stand in awe.", but all of the newer translations follow the Apostle Paul in Ephesians, and translate it, "Be angry and sin not." While anger can lead to sin, it is not necessarily sinful in itself. Paul warned us to not allow the sun to go down on our wrath. So when you ready for bed, clear your heart

of all unresolved anger. This is best done by putting the wrong that has been done, and the wrongdoer into the hands of God. He can be trusted to take care of any wrong that has been done to you, after all, He is the God of my Righteousness.

III. FILL YOUR MIND WITH THOUGHTS ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED FROM GOD.

What will I think about as I lay down to sleep? Will I focus on just how difficult life really is? Will I try to sleep with a lament over all of the problems that I have?

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD.

⁶ *There be* many that say, Who will shew us *any* good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. ⁷ Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time *that* their corn and their wine increased.

1. Offer to the Lord a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Could this "sacrifice of righteousness" not be a grateful prayer of thanksgiving for a New Covenant Christian? This would be a good way of expressing "trust in the Lord.

2. Count your blessings, name them one by one.

"You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased." Remember where David is?

Remember what might happen tomorrow! Quiet your troubled

heart by remembering just how many ways God has brought gladness into your heart.

III. REST IN THE LORD'S PROMISE TO PROTECT YOU. (V. 8)

I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.

That is what my mother taught me to pray, "I pray the Lord my soul to keep."

1. God is the giver and the keeper of the peace.

The New Testament identifies our God as the God of peace. If you are under His care, you can rest in peace.

2. God is our keeper.

He is the one who makes us dwell in safety. O you are not sleeping alone--You are under his watchful care and He never slumbers or sleeps.

Conclusion:

In light of this Psalm, I think I will pray the little prayer that my mother taught me, and take a nap. I will lay myself down to sleep!