

Psalm 34

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[0 : 00] Go ahead and take your copy of God's Word and open up to Psalm 34. Psalm chapter 34. My daughter, we think, has been teething lately, and so you can imagine how my nights have been.

! So I had way more coffee than I should have, so if I start shaking uncontrollably, it's not the Spirit or, you know, anything like that. It's just a lot of caffeine. So, but yeah, we'll be looking at Psalm 34 this morning.

And, you know, I feel like since we're doing kind of random psalms this summer, every week started off with like an apologetic, like, why I picked this psalm. I picked this one because it relates heavily to the Sermon on the Mount, so you know I was going to take that opportunity, because if you know me, I'll take any excuse to bring that up.

But then as I finished prep today, or yesterday, sorry, as I finished prep, I realized I never actually got to it. I didn't have time, so I was really sad and disappointed.

So I say that on the front end to encourage you this week, if you have time, to read this side-by-side with the Beatitudes, Matthew 5, verses 3 through 12.

[1 : 08] And I trust that that will be a great benefit to you. But our text today is Psalm 34. This is a psalm that David wrote after his incident before Achish, the king of Gath.

And you'll notice our psalm says, in the superscript, it says, After David changed before Abimelech. Okay, but Abimelech is not a name. It is a title.

His name was Achish. And if you're familiar with this story, you'll recall from 1 Samuel, chapter 21, verses 10 through 15, that David was fleeing King Saul for his life.

And in his evasion of Saul, he went into pagan territory, the homeland of Goliath, in fact, the giant that he had killed. And he went to Gath.

And the residents of Gath recognized David and essentially said to themselves, Isn't this that guy that killed a bunch of our buddies? Isn't this why card night has been poorly attended?

[2 : 11] It's a lot of empty chairs. And David, recognizing that they were likely preparing to take vengeance to kill him, he begins to act as though he were crazier, loonier, insane to save himself.

Right? And he did this to the point of letting spit run down his beard, which was a powerfully shameful image in the ancient world. And so why did he do this?

Again, to preserve himself. He was hoping that, oh, they'll see I'm crazy, take pity on me, and not even take the time to kill me, because I'm just this crazy guy. And so it was.

David was able to leave Gath with his life at the expense of great personal shame. But Psalm 34 records his thoughts after this event.

Our psalm today is a reflection, then, of what was spurned in his mind by that event. And it leads him to worship the Lord, to testify concerning the Lord, and to instruct others for things pertaining to life and godliness.

[3 : 20] So our outline is simple, just a three-step outline. Number one, David's testimony. Number two, David's teaching. And number three, David's conclusion.

So number one, David's testimony, verses 1 through 10. We'll begin reading in verse 1. David writes, So it's remarkable that David begins his psalm with praise.

So contextually, remember, he's on the run from Saul, who wants to kill him. He narrowly escapes the Philistines by pretending to be crazy.

And they, too, wanted to kill him. He's surrounded by his followers out in the wilderness, nowhere to safely lay his head and nowhere to safely worship the Lord, without the constant threat of death.

And yet, here he is, worshiping the Lord. Verse 1, I will bless the Lord at all times. This praise is continually in his mouth.

[4 : 43] And that should be convicting to us all. I think of the times you've neglected Bible reading, neglected prayer, neglected fasting, neglected singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs because of whatever, behind on work, family obligations.

I'm tired. I don't feel like it. We've all used those excuses before. And here is David, who probably had the best excuse, right? Lord, sorry, a bunch of people are trying to kill me.

Don't have time to talk to you right now. Yet, he is worshiping the Lord. So this, for me, and I trust for all of us, was warrant to stop pretending as though our lives are so busy, as if our lives are so chaotic that we can't find time each day to worship the Lord through the means he has intended. And so I would encourage any of you who are limping spiritually right now to go before the Lord in prayer, to go before him and confess your sin and make a game plan to return to the restful work of worshiping the Lord.

It is good for us to be humbly worshiping him and boasting of him and him alone. And in verse 3, don't miss the fact that David is worshiping the Lord in community.

[6 : 06] He's talking to somebody. He's talking to his guys, the guys with him out in the wilderness. He says, magnify the Lord with me. Let us exalt his name together.

So these men who chose God's chosen, these men who have sided with David over Saul. This is the faith community, right? This is, dare I say, the church, right?

This is the faith community in the Old Testament gathered around David, worshiping the Lord, being persecuted by the falsely religious Saul. And David invites them all to worship the Lord, and he's about to give testimony to God's goodness.

So I would extend the same invitation to us all this morning, that as we read, as we meditate, as we think on God's word, we would worship the Lord and reflect upon his goodness to David together, recognizing that God's care for David and his band is paradigmatic for how he cares for us today. So looking at verse 4, we'll see David's testimonial of God's salvation and deliverance begin. He writes in verse 4, So why does David praise God?

[7 : 46] Because David has been delivered from all his fears. I don't know what all of his fears were exactly, but we can have a good idea, right? I get a good sense that he's probably afraid of Saul.

He's probably afraid of Philistines. Death is probably on his mind constantly. He probably feared starving on the run, right?

You can read stories of him taking bread from the priests. He left even without his weapons. So I'd imagine he's pretty fearful of these things. He's probably fearful of failure, right?

All these men who've chosen to side with him out in the wilderness, their lives, their family lives, all at stake. And the amount of pressure and the fear that often accompanies such pressure for someone like David is unimaginable.

Unimaginable. David testifies that those who look to God shall never be ashamed in verse 5.

[8 : 48] And the language of this verse is reminiscence of Moses, whose face changed in the presence of God in Exodus 34, verses 29 through 35.

If you recall, Moses came down from Mount Sinai, and when he came down, his face was radiant, and all of Israel was afraid of him because of how radiant his face was.

It changed every time he met with God. And likewise, we have the benefit of the New Testament, which gives us a portrait of the greater Moses, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 17 records Jesus' transfiguration before the disciples, the inner circle. And Jesus' face shone, in the words.

His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. So Moses, his face was merely radiant, a reflection. It radiated the light of God.

[9 : 46] But here, Jesus, the light just came out from him, because he is God. So that greater description of Christ, clothes, in fact, lit up white.

And David's testimony in verse 5, that all who look to God are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed, is language used throughout the Bible to describe those who draw near to God.

Language used to describe those who put their trust in God. They are looking to him and him alone for deliverance, and he will deliver. They will not be ashamed.

And so David's confidence is so strong, despite the circumstances. He says repeatedly and emphatically that God saves those who look to him, the righteous, the humble, the brokenhearted, as we shall see.

And David's confidence is strong because it is in the Lord and not himself. Look at verse 6. David says of himself, This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. [10:58] This poor man cried. And again, the emphasis of it being all of David's troubles that he is saved from. God saves the whole man from the whole of his issues.

So perhaps you came to church today by dragging yourself, right? Finances have you weighed down, you're anxious, strife in your families, consuming your thoughts and energy, right? You're bitter, angry, or frustrated that you're incapable of reconciling all the wrongs. Perhaps a sense of loss, whether it be someone you know, a phase of life that you miss, or a friend who has moved away, your discontent.

Perhaps you don't even know why you are, but you just know that you are dragging day to day, moment to moment. And one way or another, you've come to a place where you just recognize that you are powerless to do anything meaningful.

You are incapable of effectively seeing the change you want to see in life. In fact, you recognize that even if you did have that power, you don't even know what's good for you, so you wouldn't bring it about because you don't know what to bring about.

[12:04] So even if you were this powerful, you recognize that ultimately you are weak, foolish, blind, deaf, and dumb. I can't do anything on my own.

I can't provide for myself. I cannot save myself. If you've come to that place, that's the kind of state David was in, right? That blessed, poor man.

David does not look to his kingship. He does not look to his army. He does not look to anything like that, but to God. And by grace, the Lord heard his cries, and he will hear ours too if we'd only look to him, right, to seek him and to worship him with fear and reverence, like David.

And for those of us who do fear the Lord, who recognize that we're broken, that we're poor, that we deserve death and condemnation because of our sin. There's good news in verse 7.

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them. Again, David seems to be picking up on Moses and his writings.

[13:17] The Lord encamped in the midst of Israel when they traveled in the wilderness. The Levite priests were tediously instructed on how to march with the Lord's tabernacle at the center.

And the priests would surround it in the way they marched and the way they camped and the way they did everything. Numbers 1, chapter 1, verse 53, explains why.

Moses writes, But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of testimony so that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the people of Israel.

So Levites, as priests, provided a hedge of protection, so to speak, from God's holiness destroying the unholy people whom he tabernacled with. This was the means by which God was able to dwell with Israel by priests, by sacrifice, by bloodshed, by a covering.

And the priests functioned as that covering. But notice Psalm 34, 7 doesn't say the Levites encamp around his people. It says the angel of the Lord encamps around his people.

[14:29] David seems to understand that this angel of the Lord figure is one who will take the role of priest. This is one who will be a barrier between us and the wrath of God which we justly deserve.

And we know, of course, from the New Testament that the angel of the Lord is Jesus Christ. He provides the perfect sacrifice by offering himself on the cross to bear the wrath of God which we deserve.

He intercedes before the Father on our behalf. Whoa. And he takes the role not only of high priest but the role of sacrificial lamb.

Okay? And only he is fit for such a role. Who better to encamp around the people of God to shield us from the wrath of God than God himself. And we could show that the angel of the Lord is Jesus in a number of ways but suffice it to say the angel of the Lord appears throughout the Old Testament. One example is when Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac. We know from Genesis 22 11 through 18 it's the angel of the Lord who shows up and says don't. And then again in Exodus 3 too it's the angel of the Lord who speaks to Moses through the burning bush.

[15:49] And very significantly the gospel of John opens by explaining how the word became flesh and Jesus was the word. John writes in chapter 1 verse 14 and this is the translation I like he writes and the word became flesh Jesus became flesh and tabernacled among us.

Now the Greek word here is usually translated as dwelt or encamped. However John seems intentionally to be picking this word in a context where he's showing the deity and humanity of

Christ.

All that to say that John seems to have the ideas of tabernacle of wilderness wanderings of God among man all these things seem to be streaming through this one word choice tabernacled this angel of the Lord who encamps around those who fear him our Lord Jesus who delivers us. that's who David is talking about. So what does it mean to fear the Lord then? What does it mean to look like one who is of that community who fears the Lord who will be shielded from the wrath to come?

Well we'll come back to that in verse 11 as David does but looking at verses 8-10 see how David cannot help but burst into praise again.

[17 : 15] He says in verse 8 O taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. O fear the Lord you his saints for those who fear him have no lack.

The young lions suffer want and hunger but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. Now I love eating. I love good food.

And when I picture an ideal time with family or friends or whoever food is a constant. I picture you know ribs, fries, you name it, watermelon, all that stuff.

And there's just something amazing about tasting. And there's really no substitute for tasting. I can't really think of anything that is like tasting. In fact, one of the times I felt the most subhuman in my life was when I had COVID and lost my taste.

It was like, oh man, like there goes half my life. It was miserable. And God designed us with taste buds for a reason, right? To enjoy his gifts of food, not in a gluttonous way, but still to enjoy nonetheless, right?

[18 : 28] All the variety, all the nuance that you can get just from a piece of steak and how salted it is, how grilled it is, or how smoked it is, all the things you can do to that little guy that just invites it, you know?

And then you add in, you know, vegetables, if they're buttered and cooked, of course, you know? All these kind of things. And so I love David's imagery here, taste, that the Lord is good, right?

The nuance, the flavor, the experience from bite to bite, from hotter to colder, I mean, just all those things. How much more so with the Lord? How much greater, how much more satisfying, how much more joyful is it to taste that the Lord is good in so many ways, in every way?

And David invites us to see that he is good, too. You know, what is it about a smile from someone that is so comforting? What is it about seeing someone look at us with a caring eye, or loving eye? What is it about seeing great rocks and trees and mountains and these kinds of things that evokes awe, beauty, and goodness in our hearts and minds? Again, whatever that is, imagine seeing God in our faces becoming radiant because of his surpassing goodness, his surpassing glory, to imagine that.

[19 : 56] In a way, David is saying, give God the eye test. And with great confidence, he's saying, if you look to him, if you give him that test, if you try him out in this way, no doubt you'll see he is good.

Not evil, not a disappointing eye, not an unloving father, not a distant father, not a shady character whom we don't know what to make of, but we'll see and know the Lord is good.

And the man who takes refuge in this good Lord is called blessed. So you can see the Sermon on the Mount, right? Oh, man. This is a beatitude, and they are found throughout Scripture, Old and New Testament.

Essentially, the idea is that someone is considered blessed when the sum of their life will equate to flourishing, to happiness, fortunate, or bliss. This does not mean that a person will not experience persecution or trials, but that in the grand scheme of things, in the sum total, the negatives are insignificant.

Why? Because they are only used, beatitudes that is, they are only used to describe true believers. So in the grand scheme of things, even though you might be boiled in a pot in this life for Christ's sake, in the grand scheme of things, you are blessed because you will reign in eternity with God by grace.

[21 : 20] So anyone in this life can see that the Lord is good, but only the one who takes refuge in the Lord will feast and enjoy him forever and eternity.

Those of us who have recognized that we are poor men like David and have sought the Lord alone for this refuge, this deliverance, this salvation with which he speaks, will not be disappointed.

So what are we to do? Well, David says in verses 9-10 that we are to fear the Lord. Why? Because he encamps around those who fear him.

He saves those who fear him. And because he is good to those who fear him, they lack no good thing. Others will starve and hunger and thirst and shall not be satisfied like young lions, but we who place faith in Christ will not be ashamed.

We will be delivered. Now we get asked the question, what does it mean to fear the Lord? We've had David's testimony of God's goodness from verses 1-10 to which he discussed the fear of the Lord a lot, but what actually is it?

[22 : 38] Well, here David's second invitation verses 11-12 he says, come, oh children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord. So everything we're about to read will cover this.

What is the fear of the Lord? But he goes on in verse 12 to spice it up more. He says, what man is there who desires life and loves many days that he may see good?

He's asking, who loves life and desires a long, full, flourishing time on earth by walking with God, by seeing good? God, he may have to love him.

And I just want to pause for a moment and reflect on something here. You know, I cannot tell you how often I've expressed something like, I can't wait till this is all over.

Right? Not in a depressed sense, not in a suicidal sense, but just simply recognizing that once this life is over, I'm not going to miss it. Right? I'm going to be in heaven, I'm going to enjoy God, there's nothing in this life I would prefer over that.

[23 : 45] And so there's been this expression of just, man, I can't wait for this all to be over, the suffering, the pain, the agony, all of it. And I've heard many of you express this in similar ways.

But here, David assumes we ought to long for a long life to see good. And I am so encouraged by this.

Like me, you've probably looked at the world and just thought, wow, it was already bad and it just seems to be aggressively, unceasingly getting worse at a rapid rate.

I can't even keep up with it. Right? We wake up and the reality is pretty much every week we're hearing about a school shooting. Right? More anger, more confusion, more broken families, sexual revolution is going on in more directions than ever imaginable and on and on.

And this rightly makes us all just long for Christ's return, long for heaven. But even so, David, in the midst of the same fallen and broken world, holds out the enticement.

[24 : 54] Who desires a long life that they may see good? Who wants to live a long life and see good despite all the evil in this world?

This was like a Frodo moment for me. It was Sam Wise just told me, you know, there's good in this world and it's worth fighting for. I mean, it's just like, oh, you know. So how do we find this good? How do we experience God here and now? How do we live the good in long life in this fallen, broken, dark world if the Lord wills?

Well, let's look at David's teaching, the second part of our outline, David's teaching in verses 11 through 20. So what is David teaching? As we said, he's teaching the fear of the Lord as he says in verse 11 and he describes it in verses 13 through 14 where he writes, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.

Turn away from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it. According to David, the fear of the Lord is obedience or at least it results in obedience.

[26 : 07] And that should sound familiar, right? Doesn't that sound like our study of James which we went through recently? Control your tongue, practice good, seek peace, pursue it wherever you don't have it.

The good life is not one full of cursing and bitterness and anger and conflict and loose talk or sin, but it is full of peace, joy, love, harmony, wholeness.

These good things. And we begin this good life according to David, we begin this good life by repenting. Right? He says, turn away.

You could replace that with the language repent from evil and do good. Now, perhaps you're frustrated by some of the things I'm saying like earth to Zach, people in this life are evil and they hate us.

Right? How can I ever live in peace when they will give me none? How can I ever hold my lips when they do nothing but let theirs go? How can I not repay evil for evil?

[27 : 12] But keep reading verses 15 through 18 and notice the contrast. David writes, the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry.

The face of the Lord is against those who do evil to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.

The Lord is near to the broken hearted and saves the crushed and spirits. So the contrast, God is for the righteous and he opposes the evildoer.

We won't even remember the wicked, nor will anyone remember the wicked. Their evil lives and the damage they do during those lives is so small, so inconsequential and so brief.

As Job 18.5 says, indeed, the light of the wicked goes out and the flame of his fire gives no light. In other words, they will all die. Nothing will be left of them, nothing left of their works or anything.

[28 : 22] There's nothing they can do in this life that will permanently damage us. It will not affect our eternity with God. And Jesus picks up on this theme in Matthew 10, verse 28.

He says, do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

In other words, fear God alone. He's picking up on this Psalm 34 idea. Set aside all your worldly fears in exchange for a healthy, good fear of the Lord.

word. Now, if you're looking for additional reason or encouragement to pray this week, look no further than verses 15 and 17. As a God-fearer, a person practicing righteousness, the Lord's ear is toward your cry.

You have his attention. And further, when you cry out to God, he will hear your prayer and he will save you out of all your troubles.

[29 : 29] Now, this doesn't mean he'll answer any prayer you pray, right? He's not going to drop a Lamborghini out of heaven. That would be ridiculous. But this is a promise ultimately that God will bless you.

He will strengthen you to endure in your troubles. He will eventually remove your troubles, either in this life or by ending your life and bringing you to heaven.

All will be well or blessed. it. Your prayer will be answered when your prayer reflects the will of God. So commit yourself to prayer and pray often, pray long, pray short, pray, and God will hear you and answer.

And there's something else in these verses I do not want to miss. Notice that David brings up the dwelling or encamping language again in verse 18. He says the Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

Now by itself, this may not be shocking to you, but I found this verse a little shocking in the flow of the chapter. Just moments ago in verse 12, David is assuming we want to live long lives to see good.

[30 : 48] And that good is real in this life. But here he is saying that the faith community is one of broken hearted people. People who are crushed in spirit.

And we might see a problem in holding these two things out. We want to live long lives to see good and yet crushed in spirit, broken hearted. But David has no problem talking in these terms.

He has no problem holding both as true. And again, I find this so encouraging. I find it encouraging because on the one hand I do see good in this life.

I love my family. I think about my wife and daughter all the time when I'm not with them. I spent two weeks in Louisville a few weeks ago and basically spent half my time looking at photos of my baby girl.

I love my church family. I love the beauty of nature. I love singing great hymns that praise God. I love sharing meals with brothers and sisters. I mean, I could go on and on about good things I have seen and experienced in this life, good things that I have in my life, all by God's grace and kindness, all of it being so good.

[32 : 03] But at the same time, I feel exactly what David is talking about, right? Day to day, crushed in spirit, brokenhearted. You know, primarily I think about this because of my own sin, right?

Day to day, recognizing that I fail to honor God rightly in so many ways, in varying ways, in varying degrees. Likewise, I am broken hearted and crushed in spirit.

When I look at the world around us, every day it just seems like everything's falling apart more and more. With all of creation, I'm groaning for Christ's return.

So why am I encouraged by these two realities? I'm encouraged because they are normal and to be expected in the Christian life. I don't know about you, but whenever I feel these things in tension in my mind, in my heart, I sometimes start to think like I'm weird or something's wrong, you know, that I can swing from one degree to the other so quickly by the hour.

But it is normal. And I'm encouraged because David and his followers felt this way, thought this way, right? I'm not the only one. The same God who proved faithful, able, and gracious to sustain David will sustain me and he will sustain all of us who believe.

[33 : 22] In fact, look at the next two verses, verses 19 through 20. David writes, many are the afflictions, so they're real, he's recognizing them, though they're small, though they're brief, there they are.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken.

So though there may be many afflictions of many kinds and many degrees, the Lord delivers us out of all of them. Not one bone is broken, meaning he keeps us, he preserves us, no one and nothing can interfere with God's plan, with what the Lord has in store.

That is David's teaching, fear the Lord, obey the Lord, seek the Lord, and he will not disappoint. So David's conclusion, verse 21 through 22, he writes in verse 21, Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

The Lord redeems the life of his servants. None of those who take refuge in him will be condemned. So notice that shift. We believers will be delivered from our afflictions, while the wicked will be delivered to affliction.

[34 : 48] God will punish the ungodly. It is only a matter of time. And frankly, even now, their punishment has begun to some degree because they are without God.

They refuse to taste and see his goodness. They don't even know how to enjoy this life. They're denying themselves true delight in God for false delight in their idols.

they hate God and they hate God's people and on both accounts they will be condemned. Justice will reign. And I think it is fitting that David in this circumstance where he's reflecting on such a moment, right, in this fleeing of Saul, this fleeing of the Philistines with his men, facing death, facing unnecessary persecution in the sense that it is evil and wrong, facing all these things and his final thoughts are on the future, on judgment, on the great day in which Christ will come and separate the goats from the sheep.

He finds comfort in knowing that I don't have to right the wrongs, there is a lawgiver, there is a judge, there is a king and he is coming who is able and powerful to save and to destroy, who will bring about justice.

So for those who have truly repented, who have sought the Lord in our brokenness, like David, we will not be condemned, we will not be ashamed, but we will be delivered.

[36 : 17] Let's pray.