

Taste and See!

Psalm 34

Series: Psalms

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Please open your Bibles to Psalm 34. Before we come to the Lord's Table this evening, I want to spend a few moments in this psalm and consider what it teaches us about those who have entrusted themselves to God.

The psalm is divided into two parts: praise and proclamation. Its structure is a beautiful picture of worship as we both exalt God and give attention to His Word. Its 22 verses form an acrostic or alphabetical psalm, like Psalm 25 and Psalm 119. Each verse begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The first 10 verses are a song of praise that beckons us to come and worship God. Verses 11–22 are a sermon that exhorts us to hear God's instruction as we are taught what it means to fear the Lord.

The inscription to the psalm tells us that it was composed by David and it informs us of the event that inspired its writing. The inscription reads:

 Psalms 34 Of David when he changed his behavior before Abimelech,
 so that he drove him out, and he went away.

This inscription ties the psalm to an occasion in David's life recorded in 1 Samuel 21:10–15. This was a time when Saul was king in Israel, when David was fleeing from Saul and ended up in a dangerous place, very much afraid.

 1 Samuel 21:10–11 And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances,
 'Saul has struck down his thousands,
 and David his ten thousands'?"

 1 Samuel 21:12–15 And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"

David—you will remember—when he was younger, killed a prominent soldier from Gath on the battlefield with God’s help. His triumph over Goliath is recorded in 1 Samuel 17. David boldly proclaimed on that day:

1 Samuel 17:45–47 Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give you into our hand.”

As we read into the next chapter, 1 Samuel 18 affirms that God continued to give David success against the enemies of Israel, and that he killed many Philistines—as commemorated in song—music that served to make Saul jealous and eventually seek David’s life.

“Saul has struck down his thousands,
and David his ten thousands”

Now, running away from Saul, David is in Gath and has been recognized. And so, in fear of being found out, he pretends to be insane, hoping to convince the Philistines and their king that he could not really be who some think he is.

If you were following closely, you may have noticed that title of the psalm refers to Abimelech as the ruler, while the account in 1 Samuel refers to King Achish. The name Abimelech means “Father-King” and was likely a title for the ruler (like “Pharaoh” or “Caesar”).

Servants of Abimelech—King Achish—thought they recognized David and so David feigns madness, is thrown out the court, and makes an escape. This is the event that David had in mind as he wrote Psalm 34.

Let’s read now the psalm together and then briefly look at its message.

Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech,
so that he drove him out, and he went away.

- 1 I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
- 2 My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.
- 3 Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together!
- 4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.
- 5 Those who look to him are radiant,
and their faces shall never be ashamed.
- 6 This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him
and saved him out of all his troubles.

- 7 The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.
- 8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
- 9 Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,
for those who fear him have no lack!
- 10 The young lions suffer want and hunger;
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.
- 11 Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
- 12 What man is there who desires life
and loves many days, that he may see good?
- 13 Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking deceit.
- 14 Turn away from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.
- 15 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
and his ears toward their cry.
- 16 The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.
- 17 When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears
and delivers them out of all their troubles.
- 18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and saves the crushed in spirit.
- 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD delivers him out of them all.
- 20 He keeps all his bones;
not one of them is broken.
- 21 Affliction will slay the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
- 22 The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

I. Invitation—Magnify the Lord with me, Exalt His name together

The first three verses of the psalm are an invitation—a call to worship.
In verse one David expresses his own commitment to praise God.

Psalms 34:1 I will bless the LORD at all times;
 his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

God is worthy of all praise—worthy of unending praise. David desires that God's praise be continually on his lips—at all times, whether it be in enemy territory or in the courts of God's temple with His people.

In verse two David calls upon the humble to hear him and rejoice with him as he lifts his praise.

Psalm 34:2 My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
 let the humble hear and be glad.

His words are good news to the humble. For those whom God has brought low, for those who see themselves in peril and needy of a way of escape, David knows where to point them for hope and strength.

In verse three he invites those who hear him to join his praise, that God would be magnified.

Psalm 34:3 Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together!

This psalm, like many in the book of Psalms, begins as personal praise and then spreads as it is shared and joined by others. What was individual devotion is now sung by many as corporate worship. David is not content to praise God by himself for his deliverance—he wants the people of God to join him. He wants the Lord to be **magnified**.

As we help and encourage others to look to God and acknowledge God and praise Him; as we share what God has done for us to encourage the hearts of others to look to Him and trust in Him, He is magnified—not in the sense that we add to God or make Him appear large or great (as a microscope would take a small thing and make it look large), but rather we take who God is and what He has done and bring it close to others, so they can see it and know it and rejoice in it (as a telescope would take a large and magnificent object and bring it into focus so all can enjoy and marvel in viewing it up close).

David wants to take the deliverance he has experienced by the grace and mercy of God, and bring it close to the people of God so that they can see it and rejoice with him in an overflow of praise and thanksgiving.

II. **Testimony—the Lord has heard and answered me**

In the next four verses David explains the reason for his praise as he recalls his escape from Gath and King Achish. He gives us his testimony or witness of the event.

Psalm 34:4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.
5 Those who look to him are radiant,
and their faces shall never be ashamed.
6 This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him
and saved him out of all his troubles.
7 The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.

It is worth noting here that David does not give any specifics about himself, except to refer to himself as a “poor man.” The word he uses here for “poor” means “afflicted, humbled, shamed.” It is the same word he used in verse 2 (translated as “humble”).

Psalm 34:2 My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the **humble** hear and be glad.

The word is also found in Isaiah 66:2—

Isaiah 66:2 All these things my hand has made,
 and so all these things came to be,
 declares the Lord.
 But this is the one to whom I will look:
 He who is **humble** and contrite in spirit
 and trembles at my word.

David has good news for the humble—the afflicted—because he himself has faced affliction and he has seen the power of God come to his help.

David does not point to his own ingenuity or creativity as a reason why he was able to get away. He does not say—I came up with this brilliant plan to pretend madness and it worked; the king drove me away. I was able to outsmart the court of the Philistines! No—he is “poor”! He knows that his deliverance was by the mercy and power of God alone. David cried out to God and God was pleased to deliver him.

And for David this is good news—news so good he can’t keep it to himself. This is news that he must proclaim to the joy of all others that God has humbled or is now humbling.

David continues his invitation in verse 8.

III. **Invitation—taste and see that the Lord is good, fear the Lord**

Psalms 34:8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
 Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
9 Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,
 for those who fear him have no lack!
10 The young lions suffer want and hunger;
 but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

As one who had personally known the saving power and deliverance of God, David gives a wide-open invitation to all who would hear him— “Taste and see that the LORD is good!”

“Taste and see” is an invitation to personal experience—not a glance or a glimpse from far away, but a call to come close and imbibe—to know God intimately and thoroughly. To be fully satisfied in Him.

He couples this invitation to **taste** and **see** in verse 8 with an exhortation in verse 9 to **fear** the Lord. In Gath David was fearing man when he went before King Achish and did not want to be recognized—the one who stood up to Goliath as a young person was now pretending madness in the courts of the enemy. And though David thought he had a plan, in truth, there was none who could blind the king’s eyes as to who he was except God alone. David had no one to fear but God. The Law of God makes it plain—

Deuteronomy 10:12 And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

When Israel was preparing to face the enemy, crossing the Jordan and entering into the Promise Land, God told them—

Deuteronomy 31:6 Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.

This is the lesson David learned firsthand. God came to his help and David understands, as he reflects back in this psalm, that there is none to fear but the Lord. Those who fear God will lack no good thing.

And so David desires that all learn this important lesson. He finishes this psalm with a sermon that he introduces in verse 11.

IV. Sermon—the blessings of living in the fear of God

Introduction (34:11)

Psalms 34:11 Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

David takes the position of schoolmaster and invites the children of Israel to come and hear him. There are two main points to his message:

Point 1: Fearing the Lord sets us on the path of goodness and peace (34:12–14)

Psalm 34:12 What man is there who desires life
and loves many days, that he may see good?
13 Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking deceit.
14 Turn away from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The fear of the Lord is the starting place if we are find peace and reconciliation with God.

These verses contrast two ways—one that leads to evil and the other to good. One path will ultimately lead us to self-deception and death; the other will point us to righteousness and ultimately bring us to God. Both in word and in deed, we are to pursue good (all that God has revealed in His Word that is pleasing to Him) and turn away from evil (all that God has revealed in His Word that is contrary to Him and at enmity with Him). We must forsake sin and deceit; we must pursue peace and holiness.

It is a contrast that was introduced at the beginning of the Psalter.

Psalms 1:1 Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

- 2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
- Psalms 1:3 He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
- 4 The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
- Psalms 1:5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
- 6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

The fear of the Lord sets us on this right path—a path that will turn us away from sin and toward what is pleasing to God. It will turn us from scoffing at God to delighting in His Word.

Point 2: Fearing the Lord sets us on the path of salvation and deliverance (34:15–22)

- Psalms 34:15 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
and his ears toward their cry.
- 16 The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.
- 17 When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears
and delivers them out of all their troubles.
- 18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and saves the crushed in spirit.

As in Point 1, there is a comparison between the righteous who seek what is good and the wicked who do evil. God watches over the righteous—those who are His—but He is against those who do evil. He is near the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

The word for *crushed* means “beaten out or pulverized.” It describes the effect God’s truth has on our spirit as we are convicted and confronted in our sin. It is the same word found in Isaiah 57:15, translated as *contrite*.

- Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
“I dwell in the high and holy place,
and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly,
and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

It is the crushed who are humbled and taught the fear of the Lord. It is the broken who are made whole, and made fit for the presence of the Lord. David learns this lesson again later in life when he writes the words of Psalm 51 following another attempt to take matters into his own hand.

He writes in—

Psalms 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

As God teaches us and shepherds us—He humbles us and breaks us. He makes plain the way that is right and the way that is evil. And God does this through His Word. He takes His truth and shapes us on the anvil of His will.

Listen to the words of—

Jeremiah 23:28–29 Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the LORD. Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?

Listen to what David is teaching us through his sermon in Psalm 34. Learning to fear the Lord and live in the light of His Word does not mean that we will always be led into easy paths, that we will be free of trials and difficulties, that the way will be smooth. David confesses—

Psalms 34:19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous,

But hear then the promise!

20 but the LORD delivers him out of them all.
He keeps all his bones;
not one of them is broken.
21 Affliction will slay the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
22 The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous. But the promise is that God will bring us through them. And that He will use them for our good and His glory.

Those who follow the Lord and fear Him can find the blessings in affliction.

- They bring us to prayer—as we set out heart on seeking God.
- They bring us God’s care and comfort—as God is near us in affliction
- They can bring us joy—as God keeps us and delivers us

If you belong to God, there is nothing that He can’t and won’t use to bring you closer to Himself. God enjoys showing Himself strong in behalf of His people. He is a God of salvation and deliverance.

The joy of God’s deliverance is not so much from temporary trials and hardships—though God can and does bring us relief from some of our hardships in this life. Our greater joy is found as God uses our brokenness and afflictions to deliver us from the snares of the world, from getting tangled, ensnared, and complacent in its sin and darkness.

We can rejoice, even in times of trouble, because God uses our trouble to point us to our salvation. We feel our need; we sense our weakness; we know our frailty and depravity. And so, the good news that God has given us salvation in His Son is all the more sweeter. **This is good news to the humble. Our God saves!** He has sent His Son that we might have life. Christ suffered and died that we might be rescued, redeemed, and brought near to God.

In Isaiah 53 Jesus is described as a Man of Sorrow, acquainted with grief. He was crushed and bruised that we might be saved. We have hope tonight because we have a Savior who *humbled* himself and made Himself *poor* that we might have life eternal.

As David sings: "Let the humble hear and be glad!"

My prayer tonight as we come to the Lord's Table is that you would heed David's invitation:

"Fear the Lord, you His saints."

When you fear God, there is nothing more to fear. God reigns and has all power over life and death. He has made all things for His glory. Trust Him, rest in Him.

"Taste and see that the LORD is good!"

God's goodness is deep and rich and satisfying—not something you can fully appreciate at a distance or in theory. It is something you must plunge into. God doesn't want you to see and be satisfied with Christ afar off—to just know something about Him, but not embrace Him; to regularly attend a church that exalts Him and proclaims Him, but never come to Him yourself.

If you have not yet tasted that the Lord is good, my prayer is that you will look to Christ and find Him to be all you need. That you will watch tonight as we celebrate the Lord's Supper and see the gospel as it is displayed in the broken body and shed blood of our Savior.

And if you are trusting in the Lord tonight, my prayer is the same, that you will yet again look to Christ and know Him to be all you need, all-satisfying, the Giver of every good thing.

Let us pray.

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