

Psalm 34

Introduction – This is a well-quoted and loved Psalm (at least in snippets), both in the New Testament and in the lives of believers. Like Psalm 119 and a handful of others, Psalm 34 is an alphabetical Psalm. Puns, plays on words, poetic structures and the like, God loves them all in proclaiming His truth and goodness. The Bible is a repository of truth, but it also models for us what is beautiful and the beautiful ways in which to bring that truth across.

Context – We are told that this is “a Psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away and he departed.” This will shed a great deal of light as to how we are to understand this Psalm. 1 Sam 21:10-15 tells us the story and it is important to note that just before this, David is without food or weapons, and just after, he is hiding in the cave of Adullam, certainly a low point in his life – *“this poor man cried...”* (v6).

I Will Bless the LORD at All Times (vv1-10) – The first part of the Psalm is a hymn, a song of unbridled praise and thanks to God. With the context in mind, consider, *“at all times.”* We read vv1-2 and are tempted to think, “O David, king David, you don’t know my troubles...” – thinking this of a man who has a price on his head, no one to trust in, no help, hiding in a cave in the wilderness. And so, it is always good to *“boast in the LORD,”* and especially when things are not going so well. Imagine David gathering his small band together in the cave and saying, *“Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together.”*

Driven to Prayer – One of the central reasons God puts us in difficult times is so that we will cry out to Him and trust no one and nothing else, ourselves included. David had feigned madness, but he knew it was the LORD who had delivered him – and not only from his enemies, but from his fears as well (v4). This kind of faith-filled person can be living as an outcast in a cave and yet have a face radiant with the love and hope of the LORD (v5) for he knows that *“the Angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him”* (v7).

Taste and See – The goodness of God is not simply an abstract proposition; it is more like food to be tasted. In a bind like David, we might declare we are not tasting anything. What makes your tongue alive again? *“Blessed is the man who trusts in Him”* (v8). Faith is our spiritual taste buds. And that faith is also a fear of God (v9); not an abject fear of judgment (1 John 4:17-19), but an overwhelming sense of the greatness and goodness of God. The opposite of this kind of person is likened to a young lion (v10). Young lions trust in themselves, in their own strength, our proud of their skill and cunning. They think themselves kings of the jungle – yet they lack and suffer hunger; they will be humbled.

Therefore, humble yourselves, young lions. But of course, young lions do not have it in their nature to humble themselves. This kind of humbling, this kind of fear, this kind of trust, this kind of rejoicing in the LORD must be given. And this is just what the LORD intends to do...

Come, You Children, Listen to Me (vv11-22) – *Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God* (Rom 10:17), and so this section is a declaration, a sermon, an instruction to those who would hear. Children of the covenant and young lion-types are first, but Peter will use this passage to address all believers as well (1 Pet 3:10-12). The fear of the LORD can be taught (v11) and therefore a devout and thorough Christian education is absolutely necessary – and must be done by those who themselves fear the LORD. The fear of God is not a call to a life of asceticism, for it is consistent with a desire to live a good life and see many days (v12). There are many promises to you children of the covenant. Do you want them? Then, with faith in those promises learn to fear God. The fear of the Lord is about actions (vv13-14). It is about holding your tongue from evil and from speaking lies. It is about departing from evil, but that is not enough. It is about doing good and seeking peace. God-given faith and fear has legs. We are not saved by good works but we are saved to good works. Young people especially are tempted with whatever is culturally cool which often leads down the road to foul language, rebellious and tantalizing dress, and all sorts of selfish, banal and poor judgments and decisions. They think they are *“desiring life”* but they need to listen closely to this Psalm-singer.

The Goodness of God – As we come to the last part of this Psalm, it is good to remember that a Psalm of David sings of David, of David’s Greater Son, and then of those in David’s Son. This must be mulled over and over. David sings of God’s attentiveness to the righteous and a face of wrath against the evil (vv15-16). The righteous cry out, and like a mother who recognizes her child’s personal wail, He hears and delivers them *“out of all their troubles.”* Again, David is singing this while in the cave. He knows, even there, that the LORD is near to those who are humble (v18).

But – *“many are the afflictions of the righteous”* (v19). You have come to Christ? Well then, welcome, and now you are in for it. There will be many afflictions, but the LORD will deliver us out of them all. How do we know this? Verse 20 is fulfilled in Christ (John 19:33,36) but when? After He had been afflicted, crucified, suffocated, and found dead.

This morning is the beginning of Advent and Advent is a time of preparation for deliverance, for a change, for a new creation, for Incarnation. Christ died for the wicked and not one of His bones was broken. God never lost control of Christ’s situation – and therefore He has not for you either. All the blessings of this Psalm belong and are possessed by Christ – and for all those who, while in the cave, find His praise in their mouths. In Christ, these are yours.