

Psalm 34

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- [0:00] And if you have a Bible, open up to Psalm 34. If you don't have a Bible with you, you can grab one of the Bibles we've put in the chairs and find Psalm 34 on page 463 right there.
- Or you can find it on your phone. It's not hard. Everybody should have the Word of God in front of them. It'll be on the screen, sure, but it's better to have it right there in your hands. And so I encourage you to do that and to have God's Word in your hands this morning.
- Well, we're looking at Psalm 34 because for the next few weeks we are walking through this section of the Psalms together. So that last week we dove back into the Psalms in Psalm 33 and I said to you that Psalm 33 really prepares us for Psalm 34.
- It's kind of like a link in a chain between Psalm 32 and Psalm 34 and we saw some of those connections last week. For instance, we saw that Psalm 32 ends with the command, Shout for joy.
- And Psalm 33 begins with the command, Shout for joy in the Lord. So that this joyful, exuberant praise is really what ties these Psalms together.
- [1:08] The end of Psalm 33 speaks of our gladness in the Lord which moves us into Psalm 34 so that if I had to say that there's a singular word that sums up Psalm 34, it would be gladness or it would be joyfulness in the Lord.
- So let's dive into Psalm 34 this morning. We've already read most of the Psalm. We're going to pick up where we left off and finish reading it and then we'll try to cover all of the Psalm this morning as we think about, meditate on His Word.
- But stand to your feet and I'm going to jump back in at verse 15 and read all the way down to the end. David writes, Father, we are thankful that your Spirit inspired David to pen this Psalm and we are thankful that the same Spirit has preserved this Psalm for us today and now has the power to open our eyes to see the truth in this Psalm.
- So we ask, Father, through your Spirit to open our eyes so that we might see wonderful things in your Word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.
- You guys can take a seat. Now having read through the Psalm throughout the service this morning and having said that I think that the central theme of this Psalm is tied to gladness or joy in the Lord, it would be very easy, especially in light of a few verses if we just read them sort of out of context, it would be very easy to conclude that, well, this Psalm is teaching us that God is always going to rescue us, that God is going to remove trouble from the lives of His people and that we can expect to live joyful, almost carefree lives in the midst of the world.
- [3:45] It would be easy to assume that if you didn't pay attention to the whole Psalm and if you didn't know the context in which this particular Psalm was written. This Psalm has one of the longest introductions of any of the Psalms and it occurs in our English Bibles before verse 1 even begins.
- So that we get occasionally in the Psalms these little introductions or titles at the front of the Psalm, at the beginning of the Psalm, before verse 1. And in this particular Psalm, it's longer and it's more detailed than most of the other Psalms.

Take a look at it because it's going to help us, it's going to divest us of that idea that this Psalm is teaching us that we won't have trouble in this life, that God will remove trouble. That's not what this Psalm is promising.

Look at Psalm 34. Before verse 1 even begins, it says that this is a Psalm of David, when, so this is when he wrote it, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech so that he drove him out and he went away.

Now, it's okay if you don't have a clue what that's referring to. It's okay if you can't kind of bring your mind to figure out what particular story from the life of David is being referenced here. But it's really one of the stranger stories from the life of David.

[5:04] And that's saying a lot because there are a lot of weird stories in the Bible and several of them are connected to the life of David. There are some weird stories surrounding David. And this particular story is found in 1 Samuel.

And in 1 Samuel, we read during this period of David's life when he was on the run. He was on the run from King Saul. Now, David had already been anointed as king by the prophet Samuel, but he hadn't become king yet.

Saul was still on the throne and Saul was jealous of David and wanted to kill David. And so this is that period of David's life when he's constantly on the run from Saul.

He would briefly sort of make amends with Saul or Saul would extend some sort of olive branch, but the next thing you know, Saul's trying to kill him again. And this is one of those times he's on the run from Saul and he does something really strange.

He goes to his enemies. He goes to the Philistines, but not just to the Philistines. He goes to the city of Gath, which may not mean much to you until you hear the name Goliath of Gath.

[6:10] This is the hometown of Goliath and this is the capital of the Philistines at this particular time. David is notorious. He would have been hated by the Philistines and hated by the people of Gath.

He killed their greatest champion. He brought them defeat time and time again on the battlefield. But now he's running from his own king and from his own people and he goes to the city, the capital city of their number one enemies at the time.

And you would think this seems foolish, David. What are you going to do? But he has nowhere else to go in the moment. He's got to get away and he knows that Saul's armies won't pursue him all the way to Gath.

They don't want to engage in battle right now. They're not prepared for that. They're just on a manhunt. They're not a fully arrayed army ready to attack another walled city. No. So if he runs there and if he can convince them to just give him a little bit of a break, then he may survive.

But how's he going to do that? They do hate him after all and they fear him. They fear him greatly. If you know the story, it is kind of funny. He pretends to be insane.

[7:22] Messes up his clothes. Messes up his hair. My favorite part of the story is where it says that he let spit just kind of run down his beard like he's foaming at the mouth.

And so he really looks like this homeless hobo of a person who's completely lost his mind and he's hoping that that will allay their fears and maybe bring some sympathy for him.

After all, he is running from their enemy. It's a really funny story. It's found in 1 Samuel chapter 21 and I'll just read you bits and pieces of it.

But in verse 10, we're told David arose and fled that day from Saul and he went to Achish king of Gath. Now that may seem strange. We just read in Psalm 34 that he fled to Abimelech, right?

But Abimelech is more or less a title for Philistine kings kind of like Pharaoh is a title of Egyptian kings. It's also a name for Israelites, but it's a title for Philistine kings.

[8:24] We have two different Philistine kings in the book of Genesis that are both titled or it seems like named at the moment Abimelech. So it's probably a title of these Philistine kings, but his name is Achish.

And David runs there and the servants of Achish say, this is David, right? I mean, isn't that David? It looks like David. We think that's David. And isn't he the one that they, people sing songs about how many people he killed and most of those people are us?

Isn't that, isn't it this guy? And so verse 12 says, David took these words to heart and he was afraid. So he, here's where we find Psalm 34, changed his behavior before them.

That's what he did. It says that he pretended to be insane in their hands, made marks on the doors of the gate, let his spittle run down his beard, and Achish said to his servants, Behold, you see the man is mad.

Then why have you brought him to me? And eventually they send him out, but it gives him that brief moment of reprieve so that he can escape from the men who are pursuing him.

[9:27] Now, why does that matter as we read Psalm 34? It matters because it tells us two things about this situation. Number one is David is in the midst of struggle and suffering.

He's in the midst of it. And number two, David also is not fully and completely rescued from all of his troubles.

He's receiving a pause, a brief reprieve from his troubles while he's there and they're talking about what to do with him. But it's not as if Saul is going to completely give up and never pursue him again.

It's just a pause. It's just a moment where David is out of options. He's seeking for help and he goes to his enemies and he gets a brief moment of respite from all of these things.

But suffering is coming back to him. That's the context in which he writes this particular Psalm. He's not writing it as one who didn't experience suffering because he's in the midst of suffering.

[10:25] He's not writing it as one who's about to be set free from all suffering because it's just a pause. A very brief pause. And you have to understand that context within which David writes this particular Psalm.

There's no verse in here understood in that context that is promising us a trouble-free life or promising us that when we come to faith in Christ all of our troubles will suddenly be removed.

In fact, the Bible teaches quite the opposite of that. Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 4 that we should not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon us.

It shouldn't surprise a follower of Jesus in any way when trouble comes our way. We should expect it. And this Psalm speaks much about trouble.

But what we can expect in the midst of trouble is to be able to trust in the Lord and even be glad in Him.

[11:27] In fact, the central verse, the most important verse in all of this Psalm is also the most quotable. And it's verse 8. Let's take a look.

Psalm 34, verse 8. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.

Blessed or happy, happy is the man who takes refuge in Him.

Blessed or happy is the man who takes his refuge in the Lord, taste and see that the Lord Himself is good. And He's good when He redeems us out of our suffering and He's good when He leaves us in the midst of our suffering.

He's good when He gives us a brief reprieve like David. He's good when we go back into the darkness of suffering after that brief reprieve. He's good in all of it. And His goodness is not merely an attribute that we're supposed to see from afar.

- [12:33] It says taste and see. We are to experience. That is, to rejoice in and be glad in the goodness of the Lord. This isn't an abstract truth about God that we affirm though we don't feel it.

You should feel this. You should know this deep down in who you are. The goodness of the Lord is sweetness upon the lips of His people even in the midst of a very bitter life.

It's good. The Lord is good. Come, taste and see. But I want to try to answer the question and this is the primary thing I want to do this morning with this psalm.

What does it mean precisely to taste and see that the Lord is good? What really does that mean and what does that entail?

We know from the whole verse and what we just read that it entails trusting in Him and running to Him as a refuge. Because we are told, again, happy or blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him.

- [13:44] To take refuge in Him is to hide. That's why this psalm is not addressed to people who are living carefree lives, lives free of suffering. You only take refuge, you only go to the place of hiding when you're hiding from something.

You only run to the cover when it's raining outside and storming. Otherwise, you don't need to hide under the covering of a tree or an awning. That's there to protect you from something you want to avoid.

When David runs to find refuge in the Lord, he's running from troubles. So to taste and see that the Lord is good is not to have troubles removed, it's to be protected in the midst of troubles.

There is, in tasting of the goodness of the Lord, there is an experience of salvation that doesn't mean the removal of suffering, but it means joy in the midst of suffering.

suffering. But we can say more than that. We can say more than that from the psalm itself because it goes on in verse 9 to speak of those who fear the Lord in verse 10, to talk of those who lack no good thing because they seek the Lord.

- [15:01] So to taste the Lord or to taste and see that He is good is to take refuge in Him. It is to fear Him. It is to seek Him. Or in a word, it is to trust in Him and His deliverance of you in the midst of your troubles.

But we can say even more than that because Peter actually quotes from this section of Psalm 34, from verse 8 even. He quotes from that in his letter, the same letter in which he warns us and tells us not to be surprised at the future fiery trial that's coming, not to be surprised at that.

He writes this, chapter 2, verse 3. Or we'll begin in verse 2. Listen carefully. He says, Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up into salvation.

So we're talking about salvation here. He's saying that by this pure spiritual milk, which I think in context is a reference to the Word, right? The saving message of the Word.

That we are to long for that, cling to that, drink that because it brings salvation. That's key. But then he makes a statement that helps us to better understand what he means in verse 3 where he quotes from Psalm 34, 8.

- [16:33] If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. In other words, the experience of salvation had by drinking the pure milk of his Word is described in verse 3 as tasting and seeing that the Lord is good.

That's Peter's interpretation of Psalm 34, 8. That means that to taste and see that the Lord is good is to experience His saving work in your life.

It is to be redeemed by Him. That's what verse 22 says. The Lord redeems the life of His servants. None of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned.

We are being rescued not from external troubles but from the condemnation that we ourselves deserve. That's what we're being rescued from. So that we are reminded of Paul's words in Romans 8, verse 1 that there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

How do you take refuge today? You take refuge in Christ. You put your faith in Him and you're united to Him and He becomes your refuge.

[17:52] From what? From the condemnation that hangs over you already. John tells us in John chapter 3 that those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's only Son.

The greatest trouble that you face is not sickness. It's not poverty. It's not loneliness. It's not any of the things that we experience in this world.

The greatest trouble that we face is the reality that we deserve to be condemned in God's court. And to taste and see that the Lord is good is to experience His saving mercy to rescue us from that condemnation.

And that happens in Christ and in Christ alone. There is no other hope. There is no other way. You want to be set free? You want to be redeemed from condemnation?

Christ is the way. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. And you will be a happy person who takes refuge in Him.

[19:06] In Christ and in Christ alone. Now, I would understand it if you're thinking to yourself, where is He coming up with, where is He getting all this stuff about Jesus in connection with Psalm 34?

I understand that. Some good New Testament passages I've quoted. But where are we seeing Jesus referenced in Psalm 34? In other words, how do we know that David's refuge and David's hope in the Lord is refuge and hope in the coming Messiah?

How do we know that from Psalm 34? Is there anything in this Psalm that would give us confidence to know that David himself is actually looking ahead and he's trusting in the future Messiah who would, by the way, be one of his own descendants?

How do we know that he's doing that? Well, we know it in a number of ways. We know it on the one hand because David knows God's promises. David is familiar with the promises of God about a future offspring of Abraham, a descendant of the tribe of Judah who would redeem God's people, who would reverse the effects of the fall and the curse and bring redemption and rescue.

He's aware of that. We've not yet gotten to 2 Samuel 7 where God informs David that this descendant will come from his line. So we can't say that he knows that much, that the future Messiah is his own descendant, but we do know at this point that he knows there is a future coming, Redeemer.

[20:39] He knows those promises and he expresses them, I think, with clarity in this psalm for those who are reading carefully.

But I need to show you that. So jump down to the last section of this psalm that we read and there's something that I want to point out to you that is a little bit difficult, not impossible to see in our English versions, but it's harder to see in English than it is in the original language.

But I'll show it to you even in the English. So, verse 15 says, The eyes of the Lord, now I haven't mentioned this yet this morning, I do it a lot, but when we see Lord in all capital letters, that's God's covenant name, Yahweh.

So the eyes of Yahweh, the eyes of the Lord, are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. Now, mark that word there, that's important.

I know that we're having trouble these days with understanding the differences between singular and plural pronouns in our culture around us, but it's pretty clear here that this is a plural pronoun.

[21 : 46] It refers to more than one person. More importantly, and you can't see this in English, the word righteous, the righteous, is plural in the original language, in Hebrew.

So, the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous ones or the righteous people. Okay? It's plural. And his ears are toward their cry.

That's important. We see something similar in verse 17. When the righteous, so again, that's a plural word. So, when the righteous ones or righteous people cry out for help, the Lord hears, and here we see it in English, and delivers them out of all their troubles.

Right? So, these are all plural nouns, plural pronouns. The righteous here are God's people, referred to elsewhere in this passage as the saints or the holy ones.

They're all those who put their trust in Yahweh. That's who they are. But something very interesting happens in verse 19. There's an important shift that occurs in verse 19.

[22 : 53] It says, Many are the afflictions of the righteous. Singular. One righteous person. Many are the afflictions of the righteous one.

But the Lord delivers, note this, Him out of them all. Verse 20. He keeps all His bones.

Not one of them is broken. So, there are the righteous ones in verses 15 through 18. And God's eyes are toward them.

He hears. He pays attention to them. He's going to rescue them. But there is a righteous one in verses 19 and 20. And He endures many afflictions.

Right? But ultimately, He will be delivered out of all of these afflictions. And even in the midst of the afflictions and the deliverance, He will keep all of His bones and not a single bone will be broken.

[24 : 03] If you're really familiar with the Gospel of John, that should sound familiar to you. Maybe you're not and that's perfectly fine.

We went through the Gospel of John a while back and so some of us have done that more recently and walked through the Gospel. But in John's telling of the story of Jesus' crucifixion, He tells us an important detail about the crucifixion of Christ that we don't get in all of the other Gospels.

He tells us that because there was the Passover and festival, it was a time of celebration, a religious festival in Jerusalem. Because of that and because the Sabbath was the next day, they didn't want the bodies of those, the three men who were being crucified, they didn't want to leave them up on the cross for the Sabbath day.

They didn't want to do that. The Romans were at least, they were at least knowledgeable enough to know that that would be an incredible offense to the Jewish people to have men being hanged on a cross right outside the city on a Sabbath day.

They knew that would be offensive to them and so they want to keep the peace as best they can and so they do what they often do when they want to speed up death by crucifixion, they decide to break all of their legs.

[25 : 24] It's a very quick way to end a crucifixion because when you die by crucifixion, you usually die of suffocation, pushing yourself up on your feet as much as you can to get air as your body is stretched out until you're too weak to do that and you suffocate.

But if you need to speed it up, break their legs. They can't push themselves up anymore. In a matter of a minute or two, they're done. That's a common practice of the Romans.

John mentions it in his gospel but one of the things that he tells us in John chapter 19 is that they did not break the legs of Jesus.

Now let me read this to you. I'll read you the whole context starting, I'll start in verse 31. Let's do that. It says, Since it was the day of preparation and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath for that Sabbath was a high day, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and they might be taken away.

So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

[26 : 40] But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and at once there came out blood and water and he who saw it, this is John speaking of himself, he who saw it has borne witness.

His testimony is true, he knows that he's telling the truth so that you may believe for these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, not one of his bones will be broken.

Psalm 34. John says, Psalm 34, verse 20, is fulfilled in the death of Jesus on the cross when his legs are not broken because he has already died before the other prisoners.

It means that John, who's writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John interprets verses 19 and 20 as a reference to Jesus himself.

So if you're reading in Psalm 34 and you wonder, why switch to the singular? Why have we moved from a focus on all of God's people to one particular individual?

[27 : 46] The answer is because David has now begun to speak of the coming Messiah. Because David is now no longer looking at the sufferings of God's people in his own time, but he's looking ahead to the future afflictions of the one who would bring redemption.

Does David know? Well, he's called a prophet multiple times in Scripture. Does David know? Does David know how his redemption will come about?

Does David know that the righteous one is the future redeemer? John says that he knows. John says that the Spirit inspired David to write this about an event that would not take place for centuries.

And what amazes me is what comes next in verse 21 because in verse 21 the same word for affliction that we find in verse 19 describing the afflictions of the coming redeemer.

Affliction, we're told, will slay the wicked. Singular. It'll slay the wicked one. The affliction of the righteous one slays the wicked one.

[29 : 12] Hebrews chapter 2 says that he had to be made like his brothers in every way so that he might taste death for them. It says that by death he has defeated the one who has the power of death that is the devil.

The death of Jesus slays the wicked and rescues those who take refuge in him.

And that's why when we taste of the Lord, when we come before him and we take refuge in him and we trust in Jesus, what we find is sweetness,!

sweetness, not bitterness. what we find is rescue, not abandonment. And that rescue, yes, ultimately lies in the future.

That rescue is ultimately from God himself on judgment day. That rescue is from the insults and the accusations made by the wicked one, the accuser, on that day.

[30:27] And we are rescued from those because Jesus has paid the penalty for the very things that we stand accused of. It's future. But to taste and see that the Lord is good and to be happy as we take refuge in him, this is a present experience.

This is the present reality of God's people. So here's what I want us to do. I want us to read again this section of verses that's addressed directly to God's people before we get to the switch to the righteous one.

And I want us to read it as being addressed to those who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, that is, who have taken refuge in him, who have trusted in the coming redeemer, the righteous one, who slays the wicked one.

These are words addressed to those people. Now listen carefully. Verse 11, Come, O children, and listen to me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

What man is there who desires life and loves many good days that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.

[31:48] Turn away from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it. If we were to turn again to 1 Peter, we won't again. But one of the things we see Peter encouraging the believers there to do is to face suffering and make sure that they live their lives in such a way that they never suffer because they deserve it.

In other words, if they're going to throw you in prison, if they're going to persecute you, let it not be because you've done something wrong. No. be the sufferer who can honestly say, this is coming upon me because of my faith in Christ and not because of anything that I've done.

And David is saying to us to live that kind of life. Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Are you careful with your words so that your words don't stand up and condemn you before others?

Turn away from evil. do good. Seek peace and pursue it. When other people look at your life and the kinds of relationships that you have, the kinds of conversations that you have, the kinds of interactions that you have with other people whether inside the body of Christ or outside the body of Christ, would they describe you as the kind of person who seeks peace and pursues after it?

Or would they say, be careful, the guy's a troublemaker. careful what you say around them. They might use it against you. David says to us, be the kind of person whose lips are pure of deceit, who turn away from evil, who seek peace.

[33:37] peace. And then he says, the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry.

Do you ever wonder if God really listens to your prayers and answers them? I mean, he's all knowing, we know he hears them, right?

We know in that sense, he's aware of every word we have, every thought we have. But do you ever wonder, is he like listening in a way that he's going to do something in response to my prayers?

David says that he is. He says, the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry.

That he hears and he answers. He doesn't always answer us in the way that we would want. For all we know, David at this point in time might have been thinking, enough of all of this stuff.

[34:42] Can you just get Saul off of my back once and for all? But we know that doesn't happen. But he brings them the reprieve.

He brings the pause, doesn't he? He is listening. He does hear, even if we don't always get the exact answer that we want. And the good news is that sometimes we do get the exact answer that we want, don't we?

Sometimes he answers our prayers with incredible specificity. Our problem is not that God never answers our prayers. Our problem is that when he doesn't answer them the way that we want him to, we forget about his faithfulness in the past.

He always hears, he always answers, and when you don't get the precise answer that you want, it is key that you remind yourself, he has shown in the past that his ears hear me, they are directed toward my cry.

Verse 17, when the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears, and he delivers them out of all their troubles. One of the verses that continually comes into my mind, when I'm praying for things, and I'm not seeing, hearing, the answers to those prayers.

[36:12] Do you know one of the verses that comes to my mind? It's in James. Prayer of the righteous man is effective, powerful, you know what version you're reading, but it's the prayers of the righteous man that are effective.

In other words, when we are pursuing peace, being careful with our lips, living the kind of righteous life that David calls us to hear, that Peter calls us to in 1 Peter in the midst of suffering, that Paul routinely in his letters calls us to, when we are living that kind of life, our prayers are much more likely to be answered as we pray them.

Why? Because the righteous person is one whose desires are aligned with the Lord. and therefore his prayers reflect desires that have been shaped by God's will.

This is good news. This is good news for those who are suffering. This is good news for those who are frustrated. This is good news for those who doubt and struggle and wrestle, taste and see that the Lord is good.

Happy are those who take refuge in Him. And if you've never done that, if you've never really tasted of His goodness, if you've never looked to Jesus and trusted in His death on the cross for your sins, then come, taste and see that He is good.

[37:51] Trust in Him. Turn from those fleeting pleasures that will not last to a goodness that never runs dry. Put your faith in Him.

And if you've done that, if you've tasted and seen the Lord's goodness, then rejoice in the work of the righteous one and pursue a life that makes you look more like Him.

Let's pray.