

## Praising God in Every Problem

Psalm 34

Studies in the Psalms #36

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**H**AVE you stopped to ask yourself during a struggle of faith and life, “How has \_\_\_ gone through this struggle; what can I learn from \_\_\_?” We all know that loving our neighbors as ourselves is one of the great commandments. And one practical way to show this love is to come alongside someone who’s struggling. As a congregation if we are going to grow up as God’s children into spiritual maturity, we need those of us who have gone through struggles to put our arms around another and share with them how the Lord was good to us and how he will be good to them as well. And those of us doing the struggling currently need to love our neighbor by allowing them to be a blessing to us. Amen?

That’s what we see here in Psalm 34. The heading says David wrote this response to what he went through in 1 Samuel 21. A few years ago we went through 1–2 Samuel so I went to our SermonAudio.com site and that sermon is entitled, “How God Preserves His People,” if you’d like to listen. 1 Samuel 21 is the story of when David had to flee for refuge from Saul to the Philistine city of Gath of all places! But he was threatened there because of his victories

against the Philistines. So he was trapped. To save his life he had to pretend to be crazy in front of Achish, who is called by his title, **Abimelech**, here. He went through a struggle and wrote this Psalm to encourage others in theirs. He describes himself: ***I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD.*** Then he encourages us: **let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!** (vv. 1–3) David says, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess. 5:16–18). Psalm 34 is about *praising God in every problem*.

## **Telling One Another**

We can help each other in *praising God in every problem* by *telling one another* what the Lord has done for us. David had to act insane but attributes his deliverance to the Lord: **I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears** (v. 4). Notice how personal that is. ***I sought the LORD***. I think for many of us who have come out of charismatic, non-denominational, and Pentecostal churches that over-emphasized at times our personal experience of God we’ve thrown that out. But David says ***I sought the LORD***. We need both! It’s okay to tell our personal testimony, but it’s a testimony of what the Lord has done for us. We need to tell one

another of how in a very personal struggle with a sin, or a temptation, or a trial we prayed and the Lord personally answered and delivered us. **This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles** (v. 6). David puts his arm around an Israelite and says, “Think about it: of all men who should have been able to stand proud it was I, the true king of Israel. But I was afraid. Everyone was after me. So I had to totally humiliate myself, act insane, but the Lord used that and delivered me.”

Personal testimony should never be about the person. You’re the third most important person in a testimony! The Lord gets the glory, your neighbor gets the encouragement, and you’re just the person he used to do this. Let’s look here at how David’s telling others his testimony was meant to encourage others: **Those**—not just I—**who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed** (v. 5). That word **radiant** is used of used of the face of a mother as she watches her long lost children coming home (Isa. 60:5). What a promise! You can literally see the Lord’s salvation on a person’s face. **The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them** (v. 7). **The angel of the Lord** is the Lord Jesus Christ himself before he came to earth. And he is with us, camping out with us in the wilderness experience we are facing! Because he is, notice the

reversal from verse 4 to verse 7: those who are full of the fears facing their lives are delivered from their fears by fearing the Lord! Amazing! Tell someone how the Lord has done this in your life.

## **Inviting One Another**

This telling of what the Lord has done for me leads to a second way to help each other in *praising God in every problem: inviting one another to experience the Lord's goodness too. David invites us to taste the Lord's goodness: **Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!** (v. 8) "Grass-fed juicy beef, freshly baked aromatic bread, crispy lettuce, tangy pickles, smoky grilled onions, spicy buffalo sauce." That's what I had Friday night. But what good does it do you just describing this? You need to experience it for yourself! So do you want to join me? In the same way, I can tell my testimony all day long but it's no good unless you come to share in the same blessing I have experienced. To taste the Lord's goodness is a metaphor of receiving and experiencing the Lord for yourself. And when you do, you will know what this phrase means: **Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!** (v. 8)*

David invites us to fear the Lord. He's just described that those who fear their enemies and struggles are delivered when they fear the Lord. But

now he invites us: **Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints** because those who do **have no lack!** While **the young lions suffer want and hunger...those who seek the LORD lack no good thing** (vv. 9–10). Now, you have to realize that the Scriptures often use tangible images to describe eternal realities.

David isn't saying, "If you name it, you can claim it." No, he's illustrating how the Lord alone satisfies our deepest longings, not merely temporary needs.

We do not live by bread alone. As one hymn puts it:

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise;  
thou mine inheritance, now and always;  
thou and thou only first in my heart,  
high King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

### **Instructing One Another**

If you and I are engaged in telling one another what the Lord has done for us and inviting one another to experience the goodness of the Lord for ourselves, this is going to lead us to *instructing one another* to live for the Lord. Why do we your parents teach you how to tie your shoes, brush your teeth, comb your hair, paint a baseboard, and the list goes on? Maybe we dads are just lazy and want some free help! No, it's because we want you to learn how to live and thrive in the world. And it starts with little things.

So David not only says, "Here what the Lord has done for me and I invite you to experience that as well," he also says, "I want you to learn from

your experiences so that next time you'll know how to face your challenges and you'll know how to help someone else.” **Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD** (v. 11). We know **the fear of the LORD** is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). But that’s so easily just a platitude, isn’t it? What does it look like? **What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good?** (v. 12) He’s speaking to us who already believe in and trust the Lord and whom God accepts and saying that the key to a godly life is to **keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it** (vv. 13–14). Your lips and your life need to reflect who you are in the Lord. We were just discussing this at our men’s theology discussion Tuesday night. Hint, hint to the men! John Calvin said it like this: “Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify.” The reason we speak this way is that our being justified and sanctified are inseparably joined together in Jesus Christ. Calvin went on to say Jesus “never allows anyone to enjoy his benefits without also giving of himself.”<sup>1</sup> You and I play a part in that process of sanctification as we instruct each other through our life that has been shaped by the Lord through trials.

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Robert White (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 2014), 395.

## **Assuring One Another**

And as we're instructing each other in what it looks like to be sanctified and to live out a godly life because of what Jesus has done for us, there's a final way we grow together in *praising God in every problem*:

*assuring one another* of the Lord's love for us. Go back to the beginning of the Psalm where David said, **I sought the LORD, and he answered me** (v. 4) and **this poor man cried, and the LORD heard him** (v. 6). I said our personal testimony of the Lord's work in our lives is always meant to demonstrate what the Lord has done. And here at the end of the Psalm David does this, assuring us of what the Lord is doing for us using imagery we can grasp: **The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry** (v. 15). "Look at me in the eyes." "Open your ears to what I'm saying." Why do we speak this way? Because looking someone in the eyes and listening to what they say is important. The Lord looks at you and me and his ears are opened. And David reinforces this with a contrast: **The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth** (v. 16).

"But I've prayed and the Lord's hasn't answered." Assure a brother or sister with these words: **When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears**

**and delivers them out of all their troubles...Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all** (vv. 17, 19). He hears and he will deliver you whether in this life or the life to come. And because he hears this means he's up close and personal with you: **The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit** (v. 18).

That word **near** is the word used in the book of Ruth, for example, of Boaz as the next of kin whose responsibility it was to care for his downtrodden family member Naomi. That's how "near" the Lord is to us. He's a family member. He's our Father!

And the great assurance the we can praise God in every problem, that our telling each other is not just mere words, that our inviting each other is not a mirage, that our instructing each other has meaning, and that our assuring each other is real is Jesus Christ. Look at verse 20: **He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.** This imagery communicates protection, but ultimately it speaks literally of Jesus, who on the cross died at the appointed moment before the Romans could break his legs (John 19:33, 36). And the promise for us is that if we are **brokenhearted** (v. 18) will not have broken bones (v. 20), that is, we will be kept by the Lord's preserving power in all our problems so that we can give him praise. Let's pray...