

The Fear of the Lord Brings Life

A Sermon on Psalm 34

by

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1. Introduction and Superscription

- a. The first half of this psalm, vv. 1-10, is a hymn of praise to God and here David simply highlights three wonderful truths about who God is and what He has done in his life.
- b. In the second half, vv. 11-22, David takes on the role of the tutor, where he teaches us what it means to fear the Lord, and it is written in the style of traditional wisdom literature.
- c. But it is also important to know that this psalm is born out of a time of great despair for David.
 - i. The heading of this psalm tells us that it was written when he feigned madness before Abimelech, who drove him away and he departed, which is a reference to 1 Samuel 21:10-15.
 - ii. If we relate the circumstances of David's life that are found here, these are some of the darkest days he has experienced so far.
 - iii. No one is with him at this time. He is all alone with his thoughts—and yet David doesn't wallow in despair and worry about what may come. He *praises* God and reminds himself of this most vital truth: the fear of the Lord brings life.
- d. For David, this is not merely a doctrine he should profess—it is a truth that he has lived through and experienced at the most intimate level.

2. The Testimony of Fearing the Lord (vv. 1-10)

- a. *A summons to praise the greatness of the Lord (vv. 1-3).*
 - i. Much like many of his other psalms, David begins this psalm with praise, and this is the very foundation of what it means to fear the Lord (vv. 1-2a). David uses a series of

words here that are meant to invoke an attitude of thanksgiving, but ultimately a heart of trust and joy in the God of our salvation.

1. Notice first, in v. 1 David says he will bless the Lord at all times and His praise shall be continually on his lips.
 - a. He is resolved and fixed to bless the Lord.
 - b. Even during the darkest days of his life, where murderous traitors and enemies seek to kill him, David will sing of God's goodness.
 2. Secondly, he speaks of the fact that his boasting will be in the Lord (v. 2a).
 - a. Boasting typically conjures up negative connotations in our mind. We think of those who are prideful and self-absorbed—yet David boasts in the Lord.
 - b. Yet it is not merely a surface level boasting that he speaks to here; it resonates to the deepest, most intimate part of his soul.
 - c. For him to boast in the Lord is to recognize God for who He is, for what He has done, is doing, and promises to do.
 3. The humble will hear these things and rejoice (v. 2b). In other words, it will lead them to savor and delight in the Lord Himself.
 - a. The humble will hear of God's goodness and His works—and they too will be strengthened in their faith.
 - b. They will be reminded of the Lord's goodness and that every single thing he does is good.
- ii. From this, David then invites them to boast in the Lord with him (v. 3).
1. "O magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt His name together."

- a. The beautiful reality is that the occasion for David’s praise is not a private affair, and in light of this, he calls upon all the people to give praise to God for what God has done in his own life.
 - b. Think of all the times the Lord has answered your prayers, or perhaps those times where He’s answered the prayers of others.
2. The blessings of God, great or small, in times of hardship or peace, individual or corporate, create an opportunity for all the saints to lift up the greatness of God.
 - a. In so doing, we encourage one another in our faith, but more importantly, we give God the glory and praise that He is due.
 - b. And so, it leads me to ask, how is it that you speak of the Lord in times of adversity?

b. A summons to seek the goodness of the Lord (vv. 4-7).

- i. David relays his experience of God delivering him from every fear in v. 4, and then applies this same principle of deliverance to the congregation in v. 5.
 1. In v. 4, we find a simple testimony of God’s goodness to David.
 - a. David sought the Lord—another way of saying he earnestly prayed to Him—and lo and behold, God answered his prayers.
 - b. The answer to those prayers is that the Lord delivered him from all his fears.
 2. “They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces will never be ashamed.”
 - a. Depending on what translation you have, yours will either put this in the past tense or the present tense. I believe the present tense translation is actually better because of the way the Hebrew is expressed.

- b. What David is saying here is that as one gazes intently on God, they will shine, or beam, with utter joy because they reflect the joy of God's presence in the midst of the trial.
 - ii. David relays his experience of God saving him from every harm in v. 6, and then applies this same principle of salvation to the congregation in v. 7.
 - 1. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them."
 - a. Here, David is now talking about God legitimately rescuing him from the circumstances he is in.
 - b. As an aside, I find it incredible that the first thing the Lord deals with is David's heart. God's first concern is not David's circumstances, but his heart.
 - 2. "The Angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them" (v. 7).
 - a. The Angel of the Lord is referring to God Himself being physically present to protect and rescue those who fear God.
 - b. In much the same way as we saw in v. 5, David tells us that the one who fears the Lord will be safe in the presence of the Lord.
- c. *A summons to experience the guardianship of the Lord (vv. 8-10).*
 - i. David invites them to experience the goodness of the Lord for themselves (v. 8).
 - 1. There are two imperatives, or commands, that David gives here:
 - a. The first command they are given is to "taste."
 - b. The command "to see" is experienced in conjunction with the "tasting."

2. It is this “tasting” and “seeing” the Lord’s goodness that is the blessed life of those who take refuge in Him.
 - a. People who trust in the Lord and experience His goodness firsthand will also enjoy the bliss of knowing they are safe under the shelter of His wings.
 - b. It is an active state of blessing, meaning that despite the circumstances they may find themselves in, they will see His constant hand of protection and provision upon them.
- ii. David invites them to experience the provision of the Lord for themselves (v. 9-10).
 1. He gives another command here in v. 9: those who are His saints, or His “holy ones,” are to fear Him.
 - a. The reason he gives for why they should obey this command is incredibly practical and simple.
 - b. For those who fear Him, there is no want, or need.
 2. “The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing.”
 - a. The predators go hungry—yet the people of God lack nothing good.
 - b. This is the same reality that Jesus speaks of when He tells us not to be anxious for anything, but to trust in the Lord, for He gives all good things to His children.

3. The Tutelage of Fearing the Lord (vv. 11-22)

- a. A summons to learn the fear of the Lord (vv. 11-12).

- i. This whole section is Proverbial style wisdom from David, where he embodies the teacher/pupil relationship with those who are less experienced in the school of fearing the Lord.
 1. Notice in v. 11 that he calls them “children,” and then commands them to come and listen to him because he is going to teach them what it means to fear the Lord.
 - a. There is a fatherly affection for them; David is not looking down on them for their lack of fearing the Lord.
 - b. All of this goes back to his earlier call to experience the goodness of the Lord for themselves, so that they too will join David in praising God as He is due.
 2. But like any good father, David expects them not to merely hear his words, but to actually put them into practice.
 - a. What this means then is that the fear of the Lord is not just an emotional response—it is a faith that acts.
 - b. It is a faith that carries consequences with it, namely, that as one commentator put it, “...the good that you enjoy [from God] goes hand in hand with the good that you do.”
- ii. David then asks a rhetorical question in v. 12: “Who is the man who desires life and loves length of days that he may see good?”
 1. The appeal is for people who want to live a long life and see many good days. T
 2. The basic premise then is that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and wisdom leads to long life, and a long life leads to seeing many good days.

- a. In other words, the fear of the Lord, which is obedience to the teachings David is about to give here, brings life and blessing.
- b. He gives them four basic principles that flesh out what it means to fear the Lord, which is what we will now see in vv. 13-22.

b. A summons to live by the fear of the Lord (vv. 13-22).

- i. The first principle is that the fear of the Lord is not an emotional response, but a response of obedience (vv. 13-14).
 - 1. “Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” These are overt commands—not mere suggestions.
 - a. This instruction carries with it both a preventative side and a positive side to it, and it involves both words and actions.
 - b. We are to guard our tongues from evil and our lips from speaking deceit.
 - c. Likewise, we are to turn away from doing evil and do good instead.
 - 2. In all of this, the presumption is not that we will merely keep from speaking and doing evil if we fear the Lord—we will actively seek to speak and pursue good in its place.
 - a. It is not enough that we put off evil deeds of the flesh; we must put on righteousness.
 - b. In other words, the one who fears the Lord keeps His commandments.
- ii. The second principle is that the fear of the Lord brings God’s favor, while wickedness brings God’s disfavor (vv. 15-17).
 - 1. Notice once again there is a contrast set between those who fear the Lord and those who do not.

- a. Those who fear the Lord are the recipient of many blessings:
 - i. God watches over them.
 - ii. God hears their prayers.
 - iii. God delivers them out of all their troubles.
 - b. Those who do not fear the Lord are the recipient of many curses:
 - i. God, of course, does not care for the wicked like he does the righteous.
 - ii. Yet more than this, v. 16 speaks to the fact that God is actively opposed to the evildoer
2. The wise listener hears this and chooses the fear of the Lord.
- a. The presumption is that you and I actually want to have God watch over us, hear our cries, and rescue us from the evils that come upon us.
 - b. And do we not want such things, at least in our heart of hearts?
- iii. The third principle is that the fear of the Lord brings God's compassion, while wickedness brings God's indifference (vv. 18-20).
- 1. Lest you and I are tempted to believe David has rose-tinted glasses on, he speaks rather candidly to the reality of living in a sinful world.
 - a. In v. 18 he speaks of those who are brokenhearted and those who are crushed in spirit.
 - b. Then he speaks to the fact that the lives of the righteous are filled with afflictions (literally translated "evils") in v. 19.
 - 2. Yet notice what he says of those who are brokenhearted, crushed in spirit, and afflicted by evil.

- a. God is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit (v. 18).
 - b. Likewise, David states that though the righteous are plagued with many evils under the sun, the Lord delivers us out of them all. The righteous keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken (vv. 19-20).
 - c. The principle then is that the righteous should have every expectation that they will survive the difficulties of life.
- iv. The fourth and final principle is that the fear of the Lord brings eternal life, while wickedness brings eternal death (vv. 21-22).
- 1. “Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned.”
 - a. This final instruction in the school of fearing the Lord should build the utmost confidence in the life of the believer.
 - b. God will punish the wicked, but none who take refuge in Him will be brought to shame on the Last Day.
 - 2. This is one of those great motivations we find to press on in the Christian walk and not lose sight of doing good, for we know that we will reap our reward in due time.
 - a. Though we may suffer many hardships in this life, we know that in the life to come, none of these things will be present for us.
 - b. When we place our trials, sufferings, and even persecutions in light of this reality to come, the natural reaction the Christian should have, is hope.

4. Conclusion