

February 28, 2016
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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OH, TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD!

Psalm 34

The title of this psalm (*OF DAVID, WHEN HE CHANGED HIS BEHAVIOR BEFORE ABIMELECH, SO THAT HE DROVE HIM OUT, AND HE WENT AWAY*) seems like overkill. We who already know the story about David's failed immigration to Philistia and their ruler's response would be satisfied with "Of David Before Abimelech." In a way, this title reminds me of the title of a book Gary Leon Hill published in 2005 titled: *People Who Don't Know They're Dead: How They Attach Themselves to Unsuspecting Bystanders and What to Do About It* (Red Wheel/Weiser Books). That is a little more detail than I care to know.

In spite of the extreme length or details in the title, this psalm is very encouraging.

Reasons for Blessing the LORD (vv.1-10).

David declared, "I will bless the LORD" (vv.1-3). Why? The setting established in the title is well known. It reads, *OF DAVID, WHEN HE CHANGED HIS BEHAVIOR BEFORE ABIMELECH, SO THAT HE DROVE HIM OUT, AND HE WENT AWAY*. The story is found in 1Samuel 21:10-22:1a: *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'?" 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 departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam.

This event came about because David was escaping from King Saul who tried to kill him. Making a bad decision, in fear David ran to the king of the Philistine cities. The story makes that perfectly clear. There is a problem regarding the king's name between the 1 Samuel story and David's title for this psalm. Who was Abimelech if Achish was the king? Abimelech was a title for the Philistine rulers like Pharaoh was for the Egyptian rulers. At the time, the name of the Philistine ruler was Achish. Problem solved.

The response in the setting is exemplary (vv.1-3). Because God delivered him from disaster, David sang, "Praise the LORD." He wrote, *I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth (v.1)*. To bless is to salute, bow before in humility. This is not the same word we saw in Psalm 32 which means "happy." It is interesting though that the same word can speak of showing honor (as it is here) or showing contempt and cursing.

The person who loves God and trusts God should have a heart bowed before God and a penchant to honor Him all the time. According to this verse, praise for the LORD should be continually in our mouths. This praise flows from deep within a thankful heart. It is the genuine outpouring that manifests the true spirit of a person. This praise is in response to the LORD's manifold actions which we know benefit us. Not many people are so characterized. Maybe the norm for humans is to be angry, jealous, critical, and virtually unaware that God is, or cares, or acts. That certainly should not be the case for people who have experienced His deliverance from certain disaster. You have never had that experience? Are you saved from sin's penalty and power by God's grace?

We should not only bless the LORD, but also boast in the LORD. David confessed, *My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad (v.2)*. The root to the Hebrew word translated *boast* means to give off light. We are to be like reflectors, mirrors that give off light. We are to reflect the light of God's glory in what we say and by the way we live. That should be the norm for

people who bow before God because they are people who have experienced God's deliverance.

Also, in the description of people whom God has delivered is that we are humble people. We have to be humble. We bring nothing to God to offer in exchange for His grace. All we have is what He gives us. And we are *glad* for this David said.

Third, delivered people magnify the LORD. *Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!* (v.3). Speaking and singing, blessing, praise, and boasts in the LORD are to magnify Him. We've known since we were children that a magnifying glass makes things appear bigger. David commands us to make God great, make Him big.

Our amazing Creator, Deliverer and Savior, loves for us to lift up His name corporately. That is true worship in the corporate sense. Our songs should rightly appraise God's name. God's name is the sum total of all His work backed by His character. When so-called worship songs end up talking about how I feel about myself, who is being exalted? That being true, a truly worshipful song does not sound like a human love song. For example, if you have to listen very carefully to the radio to determine if the station is a secular station or a contemporary Christian station, they are not playing music that makes God big and lifts up His work and character. That kind of music is unmistakable.

In verses four through ten, David listed several reasons why we should praise the LORD. First is the fact that God answers those who seek Him. *I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears* (v.4).

David confessed, "I sought the LORD." That means he resorted to the LORD, he looked diligently for Him. We seek after the LORD through prayer, reading and meditating on His Word, and godly counsel from godly people. David sought and the LORD answered. He delivered (caused me to escape). From what? He delivered from fears. The word refers to fear or terror that causes us to shrink back or be afraid. Often that definition truly is manifested by circumstances beyond our control (like Achish turning against David). Ultimately, that is the terror that we sense when we understand that our sin offends our Holy Creator. People who have never come to grips with the gravity of their sin do not cry out to God to rescue them from it.

Another reason why we bless the LORD is because people who depend on the LORD are never ashamed. David put it like this: *Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed* (v.5). This statement simply means that trusting the LORD virtually makes us like the LORD. Notice that we are responsible to show regard to God. That means to "pay attention" to Him. We pay attention to God by listening to His Word. The Bible is the most accurate expression of God we have. Our appreciation for and time with the Bible indicates how *radiantly* we will reflect God. So, too, true dependence on God through honest application of His truths makes us shine like daylight. Because God is light, everyone who depends on Him ought to reflect that light. That's what Jesus taught when He said, *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16).

Trusting the LORD should make sense because trusting is security. Those who trust Him will never be embarrassed because they are confounded. Satan and the world try to shame us. Too easily we, like Peter, are ashamed to live as though we have been rescued by God. But the idea here is that of God's child being put to the test and not able to depend on God. In those times of testing, we discover that God is always faithful. Because He is faithful, we will not be ashamed.

A third reason for us to bless the LORD is because the LORD saved this poor man in particular. David admitted, *This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles* (v.6). Someone responds by saying, "Oh, that doesn't apply to me because I'm not poor!" Maybe that is easy to conclude, but it doesn't make it right. Poor people who cry to the LORD are not necessarily "un-wealthy." The term speaks of those who recognized their inability to defend or care for themselves. Jesus described this kind of person in the Sermon on the Mount. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied"* (Matthew 5:3-6).

Jesus taught that these are the characteristics of a person coming to salvation. We must come to God empty-handed, no offering, no

offer to help Him out with our problem. Instead we come with empty hands and cry out for His mercy and grace. That sincere crying results in salvation. Some people cry out insincerely because they only want to be rescued from the consequences of sin. When God removes the consequences, they go right back to sinning.

Sincere criers desire to be delivered from troubles. But what are “troubles”? Troubles are the tight spots, the narrow, restrictive circumstances of life. We are in one of those tight spots when we feel like we have no way to turn, and it seems impossible to go forward. Picture walking in a narrow canyon, or more possibly between two huge rock formations. As you move forward, the passageway becomes narrower and narrower until it is too restrictive to pass through. You cannot go forward, you cannot turn left or right. So you turn around, and there is a bear behind you. We call that being between a rock and a hard place. That is when we cry out to God and He delights to deliver us. That is the precise picture of the person who becomes aware of his or her offenses against God. At that moment we realize that we cannot wash away our guilt, we are at God’s mercy, and we cry out to Him for help.

Fourth, we have reason to bless the LORD because the Angel of the LORD guards those who fear the LORD. *The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them (v.7).* The Angel of the LORD is often an appearance of God Himself, often a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. A good example of this is the Angel’s appearance to Joshua. *When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?” (Joshua 5:13-14).*

But if God Himself sets up a guard around us His people, why do some servants suffer? All of God’s servants need to experience all of God’s will because it is through difficult circumstances that God makes us like Himself. The wall of protection God sets up around us includes the “sandpaper” experiences that smooth out the rough edges in our character. So David gave all the credit to God for being

delivered from a difficult situation—one he caused himself! But wait! wasn’t it David’s idea to act like a madman? It would appear that he was delivered through his own wisdom or shrewdness. Could God the Spirit not have inspired the thought for David to act like this? What guarantee was there that Achish would dismiss David rather than have him killed. He had power to do either one. It is obvious that God intervened either in one way or another, or more likely in many ways to deliver David from a dangerous situation in which he placed himself.

Because God intervenes in our troubles, David offered some fitting admonitions for us. First, we need to taste the LORD. *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! (v.8).* This means that we are to pursue this experience of God’s deliverance from trouble. That is not to say, “Make foolish decisions so you can enjoy God’s deliverance.” Rather, it is an invitation for us to throw ourselves wholly and completely in dependance on God. The result is that “happy is the person who takes refuge in God.” There is security in resting in the LORD. But doesn’t resting in God require me giving up certain pleasures or freedom? We come to the LORD with empty hands. We give up everything to rest in Him. Why?

A second challenge is for us to fear the LORD. *Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! (v.9).* Fear precedes taking refuge in the LORD. Human nature concludes that we could never really rest in someone we fear. Mature fear has grown from terror at the reality that God is justified and able to condemn us for eternity to deepest respect built on love that hates to hurt God by our sin.

Therefore, we come to a third admonition. Seek the LORD. *The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing (v.10).* Young lions picture strength and independence. Even they experience want. At some point, every person no matter how able, wealthy, smart or gifted he or she might be, will experience want. If at no other time, all people will come face-to-face with incredible need when they stand before Christ’s judgment bar. But we who have resorted to the LORD (see v.4), lack nothing that is good, acceptable, right, proper and honoring to God.

Do you suppose that the person who has experienced this kind of deliverance by God and has learned to “taste the LORD, fear the LORD, and seek the LORD” has anything to teach other Christians?

Lessons to Teach About the LORD (vv.11-22).

First we need to learn to fear the LORD (vv.11-12). This is more of an invitation than a command. David offered, *Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD (v.11)*. It is like an invitation from a parent who desires to teach his or her children. The lesson to be learned is that mature fear, deep respect for God is something we come to through a process. That kind of fear does not fully blossom instantly through some miracle. It begins with the miracle of God opening our spiritual eyes to who He is and what we are. It continues to grow throughout life as we become better and better acquainted with God.

The question is, *What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good (v.12)*? Doesn't everyone desire quality life and length of life? Such life is found only in a relationship of deepest respect for your Creator. “Oh!” someone says. “I think I have that.” Really? Consider the obvious contrast between fear of God and rejection by God (vv.13-22).

These lessons teach us what fearing the LORD looks like contrasted to human nature's rebellion against the LORD—which is most natural for us. Fear is to do right by not doing wrong. We sang about this when we were children. “Be careful little tongue what you say.” David wrote it, *Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit (v.13)*. I am responsible for what I say. Here the lesson is not what I should say, but what I must guard against saying. I must guard against saying what is contrary to God's character and that which is contrary to truth.

While you are at it, “Be careful little feet where you go.” Or as David said, *Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it (v.14)*. I am responsible to turn away from everything that is contrary to God's character. That is a large portion of popular, modern life. I am responsible to chase after good. Good is that which is honorable and acceptable to God. I am to chase after peace—that

which is found in fellowship with God. That is what fearing God looks like.

The result of this mature fear is that the LORD looks favorably on those who do right and is against those who do evil. That the LORD is opposed to the evil person sounds serious. It is. God will remove them. *The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth (v.16)*. God's very person (*the face of the LORD*) is opposed to PEOPLE who do what is contrary to His character. It is not just that God is opposed to sin—which He is. But God is opposed to the people who commit sin. Ultimately, He will cut them off at the final judgment. He does not cut them off yet, because He is incredibly long-suffering. But we can be sure that God will slay and condemn them. David promised, *Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned (v.21)*. Sometimes God permits or sends affliction in life against the wicked. Wicked people hate God's righteousness and God condemns them because of their choice.

What a huge contrast that is with the LORD's concern for the righteous person. He shows His concern for us in that He is aware of our troubles. *The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry (v.15)*. God sees our circumstances. God knows our feelings. God hears our cry. That truth is sufficient. God does not need to tell us what He will do. God does not have to reveal the future. It is sufficient for us to trust Him, knowing He knows.

Furthermore, God delivers us from our troubles. *When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles (v.17)*. He is near us when we are helpless. *The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit (v.18)*. This is the joy and beauty of a broken heart. It is especially tender when our hearts are broken because of our sin. But most people never allow themselves to descend all the way to a crushed spirit. Psychologists warn that a crushed spirit must be avoided at all costs because it is not good. God loves for us to come to this point so that we can trust wholly in Him. Is it really possible to trust God alone if we never have a crushed spirit?

God delivers us from troubles and God delivers us from our many afflictions. *Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all (v.19)*. Sometimes God makes the

affliction or the one afflicting disappear. Often God delivers us from the pain of affliction by giving us sufficient grace to offset the grief.

But most important is that God redeems us. *The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned (v.22)*. This is the peak of the mountain or the focus of the picture. God has paid the price to buy our eternal life. Because He Himself bought us, He will never condemn us. How did He buy us? What price did He pay? God pictures His care by Jesus Christ. David promised that *He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken (v.20)*. Okay, that promise really cannot apply to us real humans. Many of God's people have experienced broken bones. This statement has to apply specifically to Jesus dying on the cross.

Typically, the executioner broke the leg bones of all criminals being crucified so they would die sooner. Read the story from John. *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. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness – his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth – that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken” (John 19:32-36)*.

Our loving LORD delivers us because He has redeemed us through the sacrifice of Christ. That is why we do not fear troubles. Life in this world will never be without troubles and afflictions. Most people would love to escape their troubles, and yet they never realize that most of their troubles are consequences of sin—theirs and other's. Our precious LORD holds out this amazing invitation to all of us who are plagued by sin's consequences. He tells us to come and experience Him. He is allowed to make the offer because He has paid the entrance fee Himself through God the Son's sacrifice.