
The Pilgrim's Glad Boasting

Psalm 34

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Open your Bibles this morning to Psalm 34. Notice how it starts. It gives us historical context of the Psalm. We read:

*Of David when he changed his behavior before Abimelech
so that he drove him out and he went away.*

This introduction to the psalm points us to 1Samuel 21v10-22:2. It's the story of King David as a fugitive king who flees to enemy territory and gets delivered from death in a fascinating way. He then meets up in a cave with a bunch of nobodies who recognize him as King. He becomes the captain of this congregation of misfits in a place of insignificance. To both understand Psalm 34 and its context just might change your life.

As I read the historical context of this Psalm pay attention to two characters. 1) David and 2) David's people.

(Read text and reflect briefly on 1Samuel 21v10-22:2 intimating the gospel)

First notice David.

- David was a fugitive king. Day in and day out he was stocked by Saul and his army.
- David fled into enemy territory. They recognized him as "David, king of the land" and yet, that meant little. They desired to kill him. The king of the Philistines was so unimpressed by the King that only could see David is a madman; an idiot who needs to be taken from his presence.
- David's identity was hidden in plain sight. The arch enemy of the Philistines was in the hands of the king. And the king did not recognize him. He sent him away mocking him "o king of the land".
- Though David put on the show of his life, he did not need trickery. According to Ps.56 he attributes the escape to the LORD's doing. His life was spared. He was delivered from death. it is astonishing that David survives this experience.

That's David. Let's notice David's new people.

- David flees and finds himself in a cave. It seems as though David creates/expresses our Psalm for this morning – Ps.34 right here in this cave with these people.
- We are introduced to 400 people who gathered to David to be led by David. The anointed one, King David becomes the captain of this congregation – a congregation of throwaways.
- The congregation is described as distressed, in debt and discontented. They gathered around him and David became their captain.

And so we see David in a cave with his congregation as their captain. What David wants for his congregation and how he aims to bring about this change is Psalm 34.

Ps. 34 is David's expression of praise when He was delivered by God from death. But it's more than this. David delivered from death delights in God and desires to share his happiness with his new haggard congregation.

So this morning imagine with me that we are this congregation gathering around this unrecognized, rejected and yet overjoyed King. What does he want to do to us this morning?

Our King is a happy King. It is deliverance from oppression that occasions his joy. And he wants us to give us his joy. And so, he sets out to create &/or strengthen our joy in the LORD in three basic ways.

By inviting us to share His joy

v1-3

Take a listen as I read for us v1-3.

*I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.
Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together!*

Notice the first three lines follow the theme of the King's personal praise of the LORD. He loves the Lord. He finds his satisfaction fully in the One who delivered Him from death. At all times He finds his joy in God and expresses it through boasting over him. We mustn't miss the obvious. Our king is a happy king.

But notice, his joy in God is a loving joy as he extends this joy to us - misfits. He loves to share his delight in God with people who are not impressive. The last line shifts to the invitation to the people in the cave. We are invited to have something. The king's congregation – the harassed and helpless – hears His invitation to “come, share my joy found fully in the LORD”. Let us together magnify the LORD. Turn from everything that would keep you from this one thing – gladness in God gives glory to God.

By telling us of his testimony & promises

v4-7

The second way the king aims to bring joy to his distressed, distraught, disenchanted congregation is found in verses 4-7. Let's listen to the king's testimony and his promises.

*I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.
Those who look to him are radiant,
and their faces shall never be ashamed.
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 delivers them.*

This section is organized in a back and forth movement. The King starts with his testimony as seen in v4. He then turns his attention to the congregation in the cave with a promise as seen in v5. He then goes back to his testimony in v6. And finishes off this section by turning his attention to us with another promise.

Testimony

(4) Sought

Here we see the King's pursuit. The term "sought" is never used of seeking something/someone unknown. David knows the LORD. And that is precisely why he is passionately seeking him. His seeking is serious seeking; his desire is a driven desire. He is not a confused man. Our king is not wandering around with few clues over God's character and identity. No. David has tasted to see that the Lord is good. He now wants more of God and as a result is graced by an answer from God. David is delivered from "all his fears".

Promise

(5) Radiant

And now the king desires his distressed and downcast congregation to seek the LORD as well. He in v5 makes plain a promise to excite us to seek the LORD. His personal experience of deliverance leads to this attractive promise. Everyone in his congregation who believes this promise will pursue the LORD and put their trust in Him. The congregation will be transformed from bitter in soul to radiant in face as they believe this promise. The NT says it this way. (quote 2Cor.3:18). We who believe this promise seek the LORD. We who seek the LORD are satisfied in Him. We who are satisfied in Him radiate joy through our faces in a real and visible way. (see Isaiah 60:5)

Testimony

(6) Called

Moving our attention to v.6 we see David coming back to personal deliverance. He calls himself "this poor man" signifying that for David his strength is gone. His resources depleted. He is weak. He is helpless. And as a result he calls on the LORD. The LORD heard and David was "delivered out of all his troubles" (see Psalm 56). David is rescued from Abimelek. He doesn't perish. He is, as it were, delivered from death itself. He wants his personal testimony over God's faithfulness to reach the hearts of his congregation as that they too will rejoice in the LORD.

Promise

(7) Encamped

And so, to achieve this aim (i.e. to get his joy into his congregation) David shifts again from personal testimony to a pleasing promise. We who gather around the King can anticipate deliverance and divine protection as we respond to our troubles with an attitude of dependence (ie. fear the LORD). The angel of the LORD is a fascinating character in the Old Testament. You see Him gracing Abraham. You notice how He fights for God's people who truly are trusting in God. One of the clear pictures of the angel encamping around those who fear the LORD is seen in the narrative of Balaam. (Num.22). The angel stands in the way of Balaam with sword drawn to stop the desire to curse Israel. Perhaps, here we see what protection looks like for 400 troubled people who join their lives to the rejected, delivered King. The curse does not touch these people who unite by faith to this King.

By instructing us to trust in the LORD

v8-22

We've notice thus far a King delivered from death by God. This king is truly the anointed king but nobody apparently recognizes this. They think him to be a madman. He is not recognized as God's anointed. Rather, he is dismissed as a fool. He meets up with a congregation of troubled people who do recognize him as "king of the land". They desire to join him and say to him, "o captain my captain". The king is overjoyed in God due to deliverance from death and desires his people to be the same. And so he aims to inject this joy in them by inviting them to be glad in God and telling them of testimony and promises.

Now we end the Psalm with yet another way the King aims to instill this expressive joy in his congregation. He does so by instructing us to fear the LORD. Follow along as I pick up in v8-22.

*The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.*

*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,
for those who fear him have no lack!
The young lions suffer want and hunger;
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*

*Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
What man is there who desires life
and loves many days, that he may see good?
Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking deceit.
Turn away from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.*

*The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
and his ears toward their cry.
The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.
When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears
and delivers them out of all their troubles.
The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and saves the crushed in spirit.*

*Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD delivers him out of them all.
He keeps all his bones;
not one of them is broken.
Affliction will slay the wicked,*

*and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.*

These instructions aim to lead the distressed and distraught to discover the goodness of Yahweh and to “take refuge in him”.

The LORD is satisfying for those who fear Him

v8-10

Verse 8 is clear. This King wants his congregation to know the LORD. But this knowledge is far from mere speculative (academic) knowledge. To just know facts about God and say “sure I believe” is like saying I believe Abraham Lincoln was born February 12, 1809. This abstract acquaintance with history is not what the King aims to give his people. To boast excitedly on the LORD, the king’s congregation needs to know that the LORD is satisfying. But here’s a surprise. Verses 9-10 tell the King’s congregation that we are to fear the LORD. Here’s a question. How do you find enjoyment/satisfaction in the One you fear? Don’t you run from people you fear? Delighting in the one you fear just doesn’t make sense does it?

This is an important doctrine for the believing Church. We hear that the LORD “takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love” (Ps.147:10-11). Properly treating God as He is (namely; the King of creation) brings a reverence into our hearts over Him. But raw power alone will not melt our hearts in adoration of Him. It makes us run from, not to him. But as we become convinced of His steadfast love for all who take refuge in him, we now can see not just raw power but ravishing beauty. When we are protected in His mercy we can pleasure in His majesty. Fearing the LORD sets us up for enjoying the LORD. This we see in v9-10.

Learn as a humble child how to walk and how to talk

v11-16

This large section in this Psalm (v8-22) makes clear that joy in God takes instruction. And being instructed takes humility like a child as noticed in v11-14. Learning how to fear the LORD in a biblical way requires humility by the congregation. This godly fear will influence how we walk.

It also will influence how we pray. According to v15-16 the Lord is attentive to the believers’ needs (eyes and ears open). When the righteous cry he hears. We who fear the LORD can be assured that we are heard when we cry and that we are protected and delivered from the wicked.

(2 Tim. 3:11; 1Peter 3:12)

The LORD delivers the righteous from condemnation

v17-22

We come now to the last section v17-22. How is our King going to get His joy in us? He instructs us over the fact that the LORD delivers the righteous from condemnation. In v17 we hear the cry for help and we see the deliverance from trouble. Then in 18 we notice that He is near to the brokenhearted and in v20 he keeps his bones from being broken. The evil will stay with the wicked and the righteous will be protected. There will be no condemnation for us who find our refuge in Him.

To get his joy in us the king instructs us with breathtaking news. The Lord delivers the righteous from condemnation.

Let's bring this message not just to a close. Let's bring it all the way into our hearts.

We are encouraged to take refuge in the Lord. This is where the congregation finds safety. (v8) And this taking refuge in the LORD means that we "fear the Lord" (9). This "fear" is defined as turning from evil and pursuing shalom (11-14). And the consequences of responding as such are outlined in v15-22. To teach this is to aim at encouraging the righteous that dependence on the LORD is the only hope for redemption – no condemnation.

Well, that's a summary I suppose but something missing. We just imagined ourselves in a cave as a congregation of distressed, discontented people who gathered around a captain who is treated as a madman by the world whose identity is the obscure, rejected King David delivered from death and now overjoyed in God He desires to share His joy with us – a bunch of misfits. But who are we talking about. Who is this rejected king representing?

We hear the clue as Ps.34 ended. "He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken...and those who take refuge in him will no be condemned" (v20,22).

We are one week from resurrection Sunday (Easter). We will hear the historical records of Jesus' death – words like John 19:36 "for these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled. "not one of his bones will be broken".

Can you see now who we've been looking at this morning? Can you recognize the rejected king's voice? Have you sensed him addressing you personally in Ps.34?

Beloved – The sufferings of David and his miraculous deliverance picture for us the sufferings of Christ and his resurrection. This is the good news of great joy. Jesus defeated death and came to us with this good news. He found us fearful in the cave of our own sinful making. We were bitter in heart. We had a debt we could not pay. His sufferings on the cross paid in full our debt. He was brought up out of the grave to demonstrate His victory over Satan and hell and death. He rescued us from the penalty of our sins – namely condemnation lasting for eternity. He showed us Himself. We, by grace, recognized Him as our Captain. We joined Him by faith. He gives His joy. O beloved, let this day be a day that never ends – a day of glad boasting over our King who did it all for us.

Quote Psalm 34:1-3