

Psalm 34 “Taste and See”
Psalm 34
1 Peter 2:1-12

July 9, 2023

We saw last time that Psalm 33 was a “quasi-acrostic”!

Psalm 34 is an actual acrostic.

Each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
This pattern happens in reverse in Psalms 37 and 38.

Psalm 37 is the actual acrostic –
and then Psalm 38 is a “quasi-acrostic” – having 22 verses.

So if Psalm 33 is quasi, and Psalm 34 is acrostic –
and then Psalm 37 is acrostic, and Psalm 38 is quasi –
then there is something going on in Psalms 35 and 36
that Book One is trying to show us!!

Psalms 35 and 36 are at the heart of this final section of Book One.

Psalm 35 will be another Psalm of the Cross –
speaking of the Davidic King as the Servant of the LORD.

Psalm 36 will even put in the title, “Of David, the Servant of the LORD”!

Psalms 33-34 set up this section with a statement of the underlying reality
of who God is – and what God has said.

Psalms 35-36 will focus on David, the suffering servant of the LORD –
and then Psalms 37 and 38 remind us that in the midst of “the kingdom” –
things are still not yet the way they should be!

In Psalm 33, we saw that God’s word remains true.

He is faithful.

His steadfast love endures forever!!!

Psalm 34 now sets us up for David, the servant of the LORD,
with a song about how God redeems the life of his servants
through the righteous *one* – the one whose bones are not broken!

Sing Psalm 34B

Read 1 Peter 2:1-12

Peter says that we should “long for the pure spiritual milk,
that by it you may grow up into salvation—
³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”

What does it mean to *taste* that the LORD is good?

This comes from Psalm 34 – which says:

Taste and see that the LORD is good!

If you think about that long enough, your brain starts to spin.

Taste . . . and see.

We don't usually associate tasting and seeing.

Certainly presentation enhances our dining experience–

but that goes in the opposite direction:

See and taste!

What does it mean to *taste . . . and see!*

How does *tasting* of God improve our sight?

Over the last several months I have been seeing myself more clearly.

The key moment came when my friend, David Covington,

told me – “Peter, you aren't seeing your sin against God.

You are so focused on the horizontal –

how you have sinned against others –

that you are missing your biggest sin.”

When we see that our sin is *against God* – and before others –

then we start to see clearly.

After all, what does it mean to “taste”?

When we take a bite of food, what are we doing?

If we get strictly pragmatic, we are turning plant and animal matter

into energy so that we can go on with life!

But truth and beauty and goodness all go together in our eating.

I suspect that most of us want food that tastes good!

Food that is truly good for us!

And food that satisfies us – not merely for our basic animal needs –

but also that nourishes our souls.

We do talk about “soul food”!

And that is why David says, “Taste and see that the LORD is good.”

When you have tasted of the goodness of the LORD –

when you have digested his kindness and mercy –

then you *see* that the LORD is good.

If you are just sitting there – listening to this –

and you are saying, “well, if I see it, then I'll believe it!” –

then you will never see!
Tasting comes before seeing!

How can I taste of God?
Let us learn how from his servant, David!

Psalm 34 uses the language of the senses to describe our experience of God.
Indeed, much of the sensory language in the Psalm describes God's actions.
The eyes of the LORD see us, the ears of the LORD hear us

Does God have ears?
Does God have eyes?
Not in the same way that we do!
Our eyes see a few things –
 but God's eyes see everything.
Our ears are finite and limited –
 but God's ears are infinite and hear everything.
God created us in his image,
 and so our finite, creaturely ability to see and to hear
 is modeled after his infinite, divine ability to see and to hear.

And Psalm 34 calls us to rejoice because God has seen and heard the affliction of his people,
and he has delivered us from death.

Introduction: His Praise Shall Continually Be in My Mouth (34:1-3)

Psalm 34 is titled,
*Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech,
so that he drove him out, and he went away.*

This refers back to 1 Samuel 21,
when David fled from Achish, the king of Gath.

Psalm 34 refers to Achish as "Abimelech"
"Abimelech" is the title of several kings in the Bible.
(Literally it means "my father is king."
 Think of how the Egyptians called their kings Pharaoh,
 or the Romans called their kings Caesar.
Abimelech appears to be the title of certain kings in the region—cf. Genesis 20 & 26).

David was fleeing from Saul,
and he had been driven from the Land.
He was now in such desperate straits that he fled to Gath!
Gath was the home of Goliath.
David had killed the hero of Gath only a few years before,
and yet now Gath – Goliath's home town – appears to him to be safer than Israel!

By the way – there is a reason for this!
Goliath himself had said in his challenge,
 that if David killed him, the Philistines would serve Israel.
 Most of the Philistines seem not to have been men of honor.
But there were some – especially in Goliath’s home town –
 who felt themselves to be bound by Goliath’s vow.
And that is why you will find many “Gittites” (namely, Gath-ites)
 among David’s followers for the rest of his life!

But not *all* Gittites!
Because when he arrives in Gath
 the servants of the king complain,
 isn’t this David “the king of the land”?
Isn’t he more popular in Israel than Saul?
Didn’t he slaughter tens of thousands of Philistines?

And so David pretended to be insane,
 and Achish let him go, saying, “Do I lack madmen?”
 Get him out of here!

David had been in the hands of his enemies.
 They could have killed him,
 and yet God delivered him from all his fears.

Therefore David says,
 I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
 In 1 Samuel 21:13 we hear that he had made marks on the gates.
 This seems to be saying that David had been chewing on the city gates,
 in an effort to demonstrate his madness!
His praise shall continually be in my mouth!
 Whether I am chewing on the gates of Gath,
 or whether I am singing before God,
 his praise shall continually be in my mouth!

Psalm 34 begins by reorienting us to the most important thing!
 I will bless the LORD at all times.
 Not just when things are going well.

Augustine asks,
 “What prompts a person to bless the Lord at all times?
 Being humble.
What does being humble consist in?
 Being unwilling to be praised in yourself.

Any of us who want to be praised in ourselves are proud,
but whoever is not proud is humble.” (p260)

As David says:

*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!*

David calls all Israel—indeed all who worship the one true God—to join him
in exalting the name of the LORD.

Psalm 34 is a Psalm of rejoicing.

It celebrates the sovereignty of God in salvation.

We do not boast in ourselves.
We boast in the LORD.

How do you hear this?

Do you want everybody to know what you have done?
Do you like being the “big man” -- the important person –
the one who gets things done!

David says,

Let the humble hear and be glad.

You need to hear David’s song of joy—

and as you hear, remember that it is also the Son of David’s song of joy,
because Psalm 34 comes to its conclusion in Jesus Christ—
the one who also played the fool,
allowing himself to be arrested, convicted, and executed.

But he, too, was delivered by God and raised up to glory at his right hand.

1. The LORD Delivered Me (34:4-7)

*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. (34:4-7)*

Seek and he will answer.

Look and your face will not see shame.

Cry out and the LORD will hear.

As he heard Jesus – so also will he hear you!

Why don’t you cry out to the Lord?

It’s because you think that you are rich!

“This poor man cried”

If you are not crying out to the LORD, it is because you think that you are rich.
You think that you have the resources to handle your situation!
“Oh no, pastor, I know that I am a sinner – I just don’t know if God will accept me!”

He says that he will – if you will cry out to him!
The humble will hear and be glad!

Do not be proud!

Verses 4-7 open and close with the idea of fear and deliverance.

Verse 4 says that the LORD delivered me (first person singular – David/Jesus)
from all my fears,
verse 7 says that those who fear the LORD (God’s people!) will be delivered.

Verses 5-6, sandwiched in the middle, are about seeing and hearing.

What does it mean to “look” to the LORD?

David says that those who *look to him are radiant*.
Isaiah 60, verse 5 speaks of the faces of God’s people being radiant,
when God arises and shines his light upon them.
It is an echo of Exodus 34,
where Moses’ face was radiant.
When the light of God’s glory shines upon the faces of his people,
their faces are radiant.
God’s glory is like the glory of the sun.
Our faces are like the moon—reflecting the sun’s glory.

And that is the difference between the glory in the face of Moses,
and the glory in the face of Jesus.

Because Moses’ glory was a reflected glory—the radiance of the earthly temple.
But Jesus’ glory is the uncreated glory of God himself—the radiance of the heavenly temple.
And we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
We see him, who is crowned with glory and honor, seated at the right hand of God.

How do you see him?

How do you look to Jesus?
The same way David did!
By faith – in the midst of trial and danger!
As David was trapped in Gath, imprisoned by the servants of Achish,
he looked to the LORD and was radiant!
And so he feigned madness.
He pretended to be crazy!

Maybe you don't need to *feign* madness!
Maybe the pressures of keeping up with your family—your work—or other things in life
is truly driving you crazy!
But in your madness – in the midst of the craziness, look to Jesus—cry out to the LORD,
*for the angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,
and delivers them.*

Whom do you fear?
Do you fear the LORD?
Or do you fear something else?

Are you more concerned with what God thinks of you?
Or with what others think of you?

2. So Taste and See that the LORD is Good (34:8-10)

*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.*

Verses 8-10 open and close with the themes of eating and goodness.
Verse 8 says that the LORD is good.
Verse 10 says that those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.
And right in the middle—verse 9 says that who fear the LORD have no lack.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.
Young lions may suffer hunger.
Lions often represent the most powerful and self-sufficient of all animals,
but even they may suffer want and hunger.
But God takes care of those who take refuge in him.

And so *taste and see that the LORD is good!*
If indeed David had been chewing on the gates of Gath,
then this image takes on a whole new meaning!
At the very least he had been frothing at the mouth—
but now he calls us *taste* and see that the LORD is good.

This is a fascinating image.
Seeing and hearing are the most prominent images in Psalm 34,
and indeed, of all the senses, they are most prominent throughout the Bible.
But we are also called to taste in order to see the goodness of God.

What are we tasting?

Well, think of it in the terms of spiritual seeing and hearing.

How do you see Jesus?

By faith.

How do you hear the voice of the LORD?

By faith.

So how do you taste and see the goodness of God?

By faith.

By faith we taste the heavenly banquet prepared by our Lord Jesus Christ.

By faith we sit at Wisdom's table and partake of her spiritual food (Proverbs 9.

And by faith we *long for the pure spiritual milk*, by which we *grow up to salvation—*
if indeed *you have tasted that the Lord is good*.

That's the way Peter puts it in 1 Peter 2:2-3.

Peter echoes Psalm 34,

reminding us that we taste the Lord's goodness.

The goodness of God is not just something we see in creation,

it is not just something we hear about in the Bible.

The goodness of God is something we taste!

And when you taste something,

it becomes a part of you.

God has blessed us with all the bounty of his house,

granting us the privilege of coming to his table,

where we are fed with all the delicacies of heaven.

Taste and see that the LORD is good!

Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

Those who fear the LORD and take refuge in him,

seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness,

will lack no good thing.

3. If You Would See Good, Do Good (34:11-14)

In verse 11, David turns to the children.

Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

After all, if those who fear the LORD lack no good thing,

then we need to learn the fear of the LORD.

This is whole premise of the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 1-9 is the voice of the father teaching his son to fear the LORD.

What does it mean to fear the LORD?

Put simply, it means to be more concerned with what God thinks of you,
than with what others think of you.
Because whomever you fear is the one who will dictate how you live your life!
If you are trying to please your boss—
and his opinion matters more to you than anything else,
then you will do anything to get your boss's approval.
If you are trying to please your husband—
and you are afraid of losing his favor,
then you will do anything to get your husband's approval.
And yes, if you are trying to please your children,
and you are afraid of losing their favor,
then you will do anything to get their approval!

The one you fear is the one you serve.

Let me say it bluntly:
when you are fixated on horizontal relationships —
(relationships with other people) —
all your relationships will go sideways!

If I'm focused how do I fix this relationship —
what am I doing?
I am trying to fix this relationship.
Which, of course, means that "I know how to fix things!"
I am wise and powerful and I know how to fix this!

This is the opposite of "I sought the LORD,
and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears." (v4)

Only when you fear the LORD — only when you learn to fear *him* —
can your relationships be restored in a healthy way!

And so David says in verse 11:

*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?
Do you want a long life and prosperity?
Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.
Turn away from evil and do good.
Seek peace and pursue it. (34:12-14)*

If you would see good, do good.

You will not experience the LORD's favor and blessing
if you ignore what he says.
If you are sitting around waiting for God to bless you,
so that you can serve him,
then you may be in for a long wait.

Fearing God does not mean doing nothing!
No, fearing God means turning away from evil and doing good.

David says that if you would learn the fear of the LORD—
if you would taste and see his goodness—
then you need to walk in his ways.

But notice the order:

God delivers his people (verses 4-10) and then calls them to walk in the fear of the Lord.

You have to be rightly oriented toward God
before you can even begin to figure out what direction to walk!
Think about any situation that you are in.

What are you supposed to do next?
If all you do is look carefully at your situation,
you may think that you know the next step!
But if you don't fear God – if you aren't first concerned with what *he thinks* –
then what *you think* comes next may be the worst thing imaginable!

Come, you children, listen to me – I will teach you the fear of the LORD!

I can see the child Jesus growing up in Nazareth singing Psalm 34.
As he learned the fear of the LORD, growing in wisdom and stature before God and man,
he would have understood that if he wanted to see many days,
then he needed to guard his tongue and pursue peace.
Because Jesus is both the child who learned this lesson perfectly,
and he is also the Son of David who now sings this song to us!
Jesus sings to you:
Come, you children, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of the LORD!

4. Because the Eyes and Ears of the LORD Are Toward the Righteous but Against the Wicked (34:15-18)

Verses 15-18 help us understand why we should listen.

Verse 15 opens with the eyes and the ears of the LORD being “toward” us,
and verse 18 closes with the nearness of God to those who are brokenhearted –
and in the middle?

What God does when he hears and sees!

*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 trouble.
The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.*

God is not just sitting there, passively observing what we do.
His eyes and his ears are “toward” the righteous and their cry.

Once again we see how the Psalms speak of the people of God as righteous.
And the righteous are contrasted with “those who do evil.”
When scripture calls us “the righteous,”
it is not just saying that we have been declared righteous in our justification.
The “righteous” are those who do good *because* they have been justified.
Because God has forgiven all our sins,
and because God has declared us righteous in Jesus Christ,
therefore we are called “turn away from evil and do good.”

Now, you may try to say
“Pastor, I may do a few good things here and there,
but I’m still a sinner!
I’m not righteous!”

Well of course you still sin!
David did too!

But God has forgiven your sins!
If God has forgiven your sins, and declared you righteous in Jesus Christ,
then how dare you say that you are not righteous!

“Well, even my best works are but filthy rags!”

Yes, but God forgave you for that too!
It’s not just your sins of commission that God forgave.
It is also your sins of omission!

God has forgiven you of all your sins.
All that he sees in you now are those good deeds that he created you to do in Christ Jesus.
Therefore he calls you “righteous.”

And yes, you are going to blow it and you are going to sin again tomorrow.
And God will forgive you for that, and still call you *righteous*.

So get used to it!

Because he's not going to change his attitude about this—so you'd better change yours!

If you still think that you are under condemnation for your sins,
then your experience of God is going to be pretty feeble.
But when you hear that the eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
and his ears are open to their cry,
then you come with boldness before the Lord your God,
trusting that he will hear you and deliver you from all your troubles—
just as he did for Jesus!

But there is a flip side to this.

Because verse 16 says
*The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.*

If you do not believe in Jesus Christ,
if your sins have not been forgiven,
and you are living in rebellion,
then the face of the LORD is against *you*.
And his purpose is cut off your memory from the earth.

Those who reject Jesus Christ have no legacy.
They will be forgotten.
And in the new heaven and the new earth,
there will be no memory of them.
For there is no communication between the new creation and the fires of hell.

Conclusion: God Delivers His Servants out of Affliction (34:19-22)

In verses 19-22 David concludes his song of praise
by reminding us that

*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.*

Here David moves from the plural to the singular.

Throughout the Psalm he has usually used the plural
(except when he talking about himself).

In v17 he spoke of the righteous in the plural – “he delivers *them* out of all their troubles”
But here in verses 19-20 he switches to the singular –
“the LORD delivers *him* out of them all.”

We see again the importance of the Son of David.

Yes, we are the “righteous” – but only because
the Son of David is the righteous one,
and God delivers *him* out of all his troubles.

The Holy Spirit wants you to see Christ here:

John 19:36 quotes this Psalm—*He keeps all his bones;
not one of them is broken.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ was delivered from trouble and affliction—
not that God protected him from getting into trouble.

No, the Father even sent his Son to the cross!

But God delivered him from death and raised him up to his right hand.

And that is our hope.

We know that affliction will slay the wicked.

We know that those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

We know that none of those who take refuge in Jesus will be condemned.

For what can separate us from the love of God in Christ?

You thought that was a New Testament idea, didn't you?

But Paul lifted it straight from Psalm 34:

None of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Take heart, O people of God,

for in Jesus Christ, God has redeemed the life of his servant—

and therefore we who hope in him have the hope of eternal life.

Taste and see that the LORD is good!

Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!