

Psalm 34

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Preacher: Steve Palframan

[0:00] We're going to be looking at Psalm 34 tonight. It's on page 561. Psalm 34. If you turn it up! Natasha's going to come and read it for us.

Psalm 34. I will extol the Lord at all times. His praise will always be on my lips. I will glory in the Lord. Let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

Glorify the Lord with me. Let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord and he answered me. He delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant. Their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called and the Lord heard him. He saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and he delivers them. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

Fear the Lord, you his holy people. For those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

[1:11] Come, my children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies.

Turn from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil to blot out their name from the air.

The righteous cry out and the Lord hears them. He delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all. He protects all his bones. Not one of them will be broken. Evil will slay the wicked. The foes of the righteous will be condemned.

The Lord will rescue his servants. No one who takes refuge in him will be condemned. Thanks, Natasha. Let's pray and ask for the Lord's help as we look at it together. Let's pray.

[2:22] Father, we do ask now, just as we come to your word, we pray that you might speak to us through your words. That we come as those who are hungry for your word, who are often easily distracted and need your help.

And we know, Lord, too, that to respond rightly to your word is outside of the grasp of our own energies. And so we need the help of your spirit. Now, please, Lord, lead us in obedience and faith in your son, the Lord Jesus, as we pray in his name. Amen.

I'm going to move Josiah's guitar back a little bit. Great. If you look at the footnote in your NIV, which is a great way to start a sermon, isn't it?

If you look at the footnote, you'll notice that you are told that Psalm 34 is an acrostic poem. That is one of those poems that you are taught to write in GCSE English, where each line starts with a successive letter of the alphabet.

And they're very difficult to write. At first thought, I thought it might be fun to do the whole sermon like that. But then it became quite difficult.

[3:35] Carrying on with a different letter of the alphabet for each line, definitely not easy, especially when you're of limited skill. Fortunately, though, I decided I didn't need to do it. Grateful that the psalm does the work for me.

Hallelujah. I think we should move on just in case it takes over. Anyway, there you go. I got to J. No one else noticed. Did you not notice?

I'm not going to do it again, because that just feels like I'm showing off. Which I suppose I was, but it was wasted on all of you anyway. There you go.

Anyway, unfortunately, what the footnote doesn't tell you, but the commentaries will tell you, is that verse 22 at the end of the psalm stands outside the acrostic. And so it sort of stands out from the

rest of the psalm, and I think functions like a bit of a summary of Psalm 34.

So we're going to start there. Verse 24. The Lord will rescue his servants. No one who takes refuge in him will be condemned. That, I think, is a summary of what the psalm is about.

[4:42] And it's very similar, isn't it, to this morning's passage in Isaiah 4. Here we find David, like Isaiah, teaching us and telling us, take refuge in God. Find shelter in him.

I wondered as I was preparing, maybe this is just something that the Lord really wants to lay on our hearts today. This is something that he has appointed that we might hear twice today. Right? So the psalm series linking in with Sunday evenings has been going back a very long time.

So that Psalm 34 has come into land at the same time as Isaiah 4 is all in the Lord's hands, isn't it?

But what stands out as different from this morning's is that the picture is not of future judgment.

It's not that David is telling you, like Isaiah, to take shelter in the light of future judgment. His eyes are not on the future so much as the present. Present trouble is David's occupation here.

And what he's emphasizing is not really so much the flimsiness of our weak shelters in the face of the day of the Lord, but what he's talking about is a satisfaction in, a comfort in, a trust and confidence in, the shelter of God's goodness in the present trouble that we face.

[5:51] Seeing that the God who is his God is the one who takes care of us and watches over us and loves us now. Now, I think as you read the psalm and you look at verse 22 and think, OK, so this is an acrostic psalm.

Verse 22 stands outside of it. I think as you read it through, you notice that verse 10 is really almost identical to verse 22 in its emphasis. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

That also works as a summary sentence in the psalm. And so what you've got in the psalm really is two halves. Verses 1 to 10 summarized in the end of verse 10 by the lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

And then verses 11 through to verse 21, which are summarized in verse 22. And so what we'll find is that seeking the Lord and taking refuge in him, they're basically the same thing from verse 10 and verse 22, are all coming to this one God that we need.

So let's just spend our time splitting in between those two halves. The first half, the God who cares for me, the sort of personal testimony of David himself. And then we'll look at the second half, which is about teaching us to follow David's example and to copy his obedience.

[7:06] So the first half, God cared for me. Now, David introduces himself before the psalm starts. So there you go, just underneath Psalm 34, a psalm of David, when he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away and he left.

It's pretty worth knowing if you don't know this already, that the bits underneath the numbers of the psalms are part of the original psalm. So they're not like the other headings in your Bible, which are written by the Bible translators.

These ones are included by either the psalmist themselves or by the editor of the psalms who put them together. And you'll notice again from the footnote, because we like the footnotes, you'll notice that actually verse one of the psalm is of David when he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away and he left.

In the Hebrew, that is verse one. So what you know is that the setting that David wants you to know as you read Psalm 34 is 1 Samuel 21, when he is acting insane in front of Abimelech.

Now, you can read it later in all its detail, but what you probably need to know is that David in 1 Samuel 21 is on the run from King Saul.

[8:23] Saul is fueled by jealousy and insecurity and is hunting David down and trying to kill him. I've been reading through 1 and 2 Samuel in my quiet times over the last few months, and I have been struck because you know the end, right?

Because you know that David wins in the end. You read it like that, don't you? And you sort of pass over the intensity of the opposition for David. But he doesn't know that he's going to win, does he? I mean, he knows God's promises and he's trusting those. But in the moments, it is terrifying for him. This is David, largely on his own at the beginning, on the run from the king and all his army and all the power of his army. David is outgunned, he's outnumbered, he's often betrayed.

And he's in fear of his life. And so he ends up in the Philistine city of Gath. But he's recognized, isn't that that guy that they sing about who killed more people than Saul?

Isn't that the person they sing about? And so the king of Gath calls him to him. And, well, David acts like he's insane and he dribbles. And king of Gath says, well, I've got enough insane people of my own in my kingdom.

[9:28] I don't want another one. And so he sends him out. And David escapes the city and runs to a cave. And in the cave, his brothers and his family join him, along with the other exiles and misfits from the nation. Now, when David reflects on that salvation or that rescue story in Psalm 34, he sees it as God's rescue.

So if you look down at verses one to seven, it's all personal testimony, isn't it? I will extol the Lord. I will glory in the Lord. Glorify the Lord with me. I sought the Lord and he delivered me.

It's fascinating, I think, that David is so keen to attribute his rescue to the Lord, even though the Lord uses very ordinary means. You wouldn't have thought, would you, if your rescue came from dribbling like a madman in front of the king, that you would then sing a song that says, I sought the Lord and he rescued me.

But David does. He writes, doesn't he, verse six, this poor man called and the Lord heard him. He saved him out of all of his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and he delivers them.

Dribbling David is clearly also praying David, calling out to God and dribbling at the same time. It's interesting, those aren't contradictory actions, are they? But complementary ones.

[10:41] And David is not content to leave it there, is he? He wants his readers to experience this rescue of God for themselves. So, in verses eight and nine, you swap the personal testimony for a sort of imperative instruction.

Do this, he says. Verse eight. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. Fear the Lord, you holy people. For those who fear him lack nothing.

I wonder what you, what do you make of that? David wants you to see from his experience. He doesn't just want you to be a passive observer of his experience, but more than that, he wants you to be an experiential learner.

That God saves and rescues his people. Taste this, he says. See this. Fear this, Lord. He will provide, he will rescue. And so, if he's asking us to taste and see that, because that's been his experience in front of King Abimelech, what he's saying is, no, the Lord will care for you.

But he won't necessarily swoop in with angels from heaven to lift you up. It might not mean that you're miraculously healed in the moment. I mean, it could. But God's rescue might come to you in a very ordinary way.

[11:56] A way that involves you calling out to God and taking action. God's rescue of you might involve a doctor treating you for a sickness or a friend providing for you or a job offer coming your way.

But if it does, and when it does, make no mistake that it was God who stood behind it. God did it. Of course, there's more to it than that, isn't there?

Because David wants you to understand that as well as God being involved in all those mini-salvations, if we can put it in that way, he's also involved in major salvation. Because the big threat to David, the big threat to us, is not King Saul or joblessness or financial struggles.

Our big threat is our sin and our need of salvation from hell and from the onslaught of the devil's lies. And really then, in one sense, Jesus becomes like David and he is rescued by God and we share in his rescue in that way.

Salvation comes not from the madness of David dribbling in front of Abimelech, but from the foolishness of the cross where Jesus pours out his blood in front of the crowds for you and me. And David says, that's the salvation that you need to taste and see.

[13:07] So here it is. This is the first half, isn't it? God is personally involved with you. And he wants you in every moment of every day to taste and see his goodness. I wonder what you think tasting and seeing the rescue of God means.

It's an interesting picture. It seems to suggest that it is possible for you, probably even as a Christian, to sort of understand this in theory without sort of really tasting it or experiencing it. David wants you to move from somebody who knows the theory of God's salvation or the idea of God's involvement in your life to feasting on that and recognizing it in every moment of every day. David wants us to trust in it, to notice it. It's twin in verse 9 is the fear of the Lord, isn't it? So we taste and see and we fear, not as in terror, but as in a recognition of the power and majesty and

glory of God involved in all things and above all things.

Knowing that if our lives are in the hands of a God of that kind of glory, then we will, verse 10, lack no good thing. I wonder if, like me, you're quite quick to sort of question where is God when things go wrong?

[14:22] Like, why did God allow that? Why didn't he stop that? Why did he let me go through that? Why did I experience that? Why do I still struggle with that?

I don't want to dismiss those questions because they're difficult and I have them, I share them with you. But David wants us to take a different perspective. He wants us to say good things don't happen by accident in our lives.

And he wants us to notice that God stands behind them and that we should see and recognize that and thank God for the food that we eat, for the job that we have, for the home that you live in, for the clothes he's provided, for the text from a friend that came just at the moment when you need it, for the church family that cares for you, for the bus that came on time, for the swift action of a doctor to diagnose you, for the saviour he sent to die for you.

God cares for you. And you see his care and his salvation in every little moment of your life.

Secondly then, learn from my instructions, verse 11 to 21.

Learn from my instructions. Now, one of the things that you can do in your Bible, I don't know if you like writing in your Bible, maybe you don't. You don't have to write in your Bible. Certainly if you've got church one, don't do it right now.

[15:34] But, one of the things to do to try and help you understand passages is maybe just to put a little circle around instructions, like do this kind of words. And if you do that in Psalm 34, you'll see that they are collected around this hinge in verse 10.

So you've got taste and see and fear in verses 8 and 9. And then you've got a whole string of instructions in 11 to 14. Come, keep, turn, do good, seek, pursue.

And so these are sort of an echo of verses 8 and 9 and now in this second half in verses 11 to 13.

Come my children, says David. Listen to me, I will teach you.

And the lesson is holiness. So verse 13, you are to keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it.

This teaches David is the lifestyle or the ambition of the rescued. These are the people that the Lord hears. These are the people who experience God's care in every moment of every day.

[16:32] Those who turn to him, who follow him, who obey him. Now, in case you make the mistake of thinking, oh, okay, so I follow these instructions and then the Lord cares for me as a sort of I'm earning that.

Well, then if you think like that, then David quickly moves away from the imperative instructions to some more teaching, doesn't he? Verse 17, the righteous cry out. That's what they do.

It's not that they are earning God's care. Instead, they cry out to God and he responds to them. He hears them and delivers them. The righteous find themselves to be broken hearted in verse 18.

So righteousness is no protection from broken heartedness. But even in the midst of the broken heartedness, still the Lord is close. He saves those who are crushed in spirit. Righteousness then is neither the grounds of their rescue nor a protection against trouble.

Because the ground of it is the of the rescue is the calling out to God for it, asking for it, desperately seeking him for it. And verse 19 tells you, if you're in any doubt, the righteous person may have many troubles.

[17:35] And even though he does or she does, it carries on. But the Lord delivers them, protecting their bones, slaying the wicked in verse 21.

Still, the experience of obedience is not a guarantee of an easy life, is it? And we know that's true from our own experience and from the experience of our church. Now, we've run through that really quickly, but just think about what David's teaching us here.

He's telling us, isn't he, from his own experience, that it's possible to know the presence of God in the most unlikely places. Trouble, desperation are not hallmarks of God's absence, but can be the place that you find God's presence and experience his salvation.

That following God, listening to his word, obeying him, is not something that we do to avoid trouble, but is something that we do because we want to know God even in the midst of trouble.

You might want to turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 2. I should have written down a page number, but 1 Peter chapter 2. Someone can yell out a page number when they get there, so you beat me to it.

[18:43] 1 Peter 2, page 1218. There are a number of New Testament passages which echo Psalm 34, the tasting part especially, of verse 8.

And it seems in 1 Peter 2 that the tasting is pictured as the beginning of the Christian life. This is where it starts, knowing experientially that God is good. But it doesn't end there, does it?

So 1 Peter chapter 2, what does he say? Verse 1. 1 Peter 3, verse 1.

That's the two halves, isn't it, of Psalm 34. Taste God's goodness from David's word about him and then follow him in obedience. It's almost like, isn't it, I don't know what your particular food preferences are, but it's almost as if once you've tasted something really yummy, you do not want to go back and eat something really grubby, right?

Once you have tasted and seen the Lord's goodness, his kindness, his mercy, his grace to you in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will want to eat more and more and more of that and less and less of hypocrisy, envy, slander of every kind.

[20:06] You will be craving pure spiritual milk like a newborn baby screaming out for his mother's milk. And you do that not as a guarantee against trouble, but because you know it's the only way to survive in the midst of the trouble, to know God in the pain and the difficulty.

And David thinks that's something you learn, isn't it? So he says, come, my children, and listen to me, and I will teach you this fear of the Lord. I've had this conversation with a number of you, but I think we wonder, don't we, at times, why the Lord doesn't just make us holy like that, right?

Surely, surely God, my life would be much more straightforward and much easier if you just made me holy. Just like, and you could do that, Lord, right? The temptation, you could take that away like that.

You know, the slowness of my heart to feel and love what you love. You know, I come to church and it's great because people are singing God's praises, but I feel in my heart, oh, do you know what?

I could be sat on my sofa at home. You know, why am I so sluggish in the Lord's presence? But it seems to be, doesn't it, that God loves this process of us learning and growing.

[21:17] Actually, God delights in seeing us grow and flourish and develop. God is not in the same kind of rush that you are. He is patient and caring.

And so we listen to God's word. We learn from people like David. We learn the fear of the Lord. And we are taught it by his word. So study it. Think about it.

Dedicate yourself to it. It won't come to you quickly. It's all right, Hilda, no one's noticed. A guy called Nahum Tate lived in London in the 17th century.

Does anyone know who he was? Nahum Tate. Don't Google it on your phones because that's cheating.

But he was a playwright. He rewrote the end of King Lear. And he was one of the very first poet laureates. Does anyone know what a poet laureate actually is?

[22:20] Does? Josiah. He writes poems for the king. Yeah, that's right. So, you know what, don't you, Josiah? Look at that.

I just, I got absolutely nothing for the beginning of my sermon or starting with a different letter of the alphabet. But you got a clap for that. Anyway. Do you know where you get paid? You get paid in wine.

Did you know that? Did you know that? And you also get an allowance. So, yeah. People are furiously scrolling down poems to see whether they can get themselves a job. Anyway, but Tate was one of the first, I think he was the third poet laureate.

So it was a job that you held until you died. I think now you have it for 10 years or something.

Anyway, he died penniless in Southwark. And you can go and find his grave in a churchyard there.

But he, as a poet laureate, he set about with a friend called Nicholas Brady, re-sort of paraphrasing Psalms and setting them to music so that churches could sing them.

And so he was doing what people are still doing today, trying to put them into easy hymns to sing.

And this is how he wrote Psalm 34. I'm going to end with this so you can listen to Mr. Tate.

[23:34] Sorry? I should sing it. I should sing it. No, because, you know, I would start like that and I would regret it. And then you would begin to regret it.

And everything good in this would be lost. So let me just read it to you. Through all the changing scenes of life, in trouble and in joy, the praises of my God shall still my heart and tongue employ.

O magnify the Lord with me. With me exalt his name. When in distress to him I called, he to my rescue came.

The hosts of God encamp around the dwellings of the just. Deliverance he affords to all who want his succor trust. O make but trial of his love.

Experience will decide. How blessed are they and only they who in his truth confide. Fear him, ye saints.

[24 : 39] And you will then have nothing else to fear. Make you his service, your delight. Your wants shall be his care. My meditation sweeter far than honey shall be he.

So shall my cheerful thoughts confess his condescending love to me. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we experience your love and your care all the time.

And yet often we are ignorant of it. We thank you that we find ourselves in this room tonight to hear your word, to sing your praises, to share this supper together.

And that this is a good place for us to be. And we're here because you brought us. And help us, we pray, to taste and see that you are good.

And to live lives of obedience to you. Not in order to earn an easy life. But in order to know you even in the trouble of life.

[25 : 52] And so, Lord, as we think about one another in this room, we know, Lord, just some of the trouble that we are facing together. And we pray, Lord, that we, like David, might know that you are with us and will save us.

That we, with David, will be able to extol your name at all times. Glorifying in you. Glorifying and exalting your name together. As we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.