

A Song for Every Season (Part 4 of 10)

Taste and See: The Lord is Good!

Psalm 34

Mark Vroegop

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. 2 My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. 3 Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!

4 I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. 5 Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. 6 This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. 7 The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

8 Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! 9 Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! 10 The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

11 Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. 12 What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? 13 Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. 14 Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

15 The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. 16 The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. 17 When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. 18 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. 20 He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. 21 Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. 22 The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned. (Psalm 34:1-22)

Have you ever had a “close call?” The kind of experience where if one small detail would have been different, someone (maybe you?) would have been seriously hurt or even killed?

Last week I saw a picture on a church member’s cell phone that gave me chills. Tony Trent, who is a landscaper, was pulling a Bobcat on a trailer behind his truck. As he was traveling about 40 mph, the fork attachments on the front of the Bobcat began to vibrate, and one of them came loose. The fork fell off the Bobcat, off the trailer, and the tip of the fork hit the pavement. The force of the impact transformed the fork into a boomerang, and the fork propelled itself back toward the truck.

As Tony was driving, the 75 lb fork pierced through the back window of his truck, and ended up over the passenger seats in the cab. A few feet either way or with passengers in the vehicle, and this situation would have been tragic.

When Tony showed me the pictures he said, "Hey, let me show you what the Lord saved me from this week." A very close call.

So what do you say in a moment like that? What comes out of your mouth when you know that the Lord has just saved you from a very serious situation? You pray a little differently afterwards, don't you? You sing with a little more enthusiasm, don't you? **There is something about tasting the deliverance of God that gives you spiritual eyesight to see life differently.** Psalm 34 is a song of gratitude when God brings you out of a "close call" moment.

The Psalms have a song for every season of life, and they capture what we are thinking and feeling. They point us upward – toward biblical thinking and the worship of God. In every season of life, the Psalms help us to be honest with what we feel but to turn us where real hope is.

So far we've looked at three Psalms. Psalm 1 identified two paths in life – the way of the righteous and the way of the wick. Psalm 8 showed us the marvelous contrast between God and us – "*You have set your glory above the heavens...what is man that you are mindful of him?*" (Ps 9:1b,4b). And last week we looked at Psalm 9 where we learned that praise for the past leads to trust in the crucible – "*I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart*" (Ps 9:1).

Today we are going to learn what to say and how think about life in light of the countless "close call" moments.

David's Close Call

Psalm 34 has a unique context to it. My translation has an interesting statement just under the title: "Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away." What is this all about?

David wrote this Psalm after a dangerous situation where he felt that his life was threatened. It happened when David running for his life from King Saul in 1 Samuel 21. Saul was the first king of Israel, and he was a dismal failure. Therefore, God chose another man, David, to be king. In God's providence, David became part of Saul's court and a leader in his military. Over time, Saul became very jealous of David's success, and he smelled the aroma of the loss of the affection of the people.

Eventually David learns from Saul's son, Jonathan, that his life is in danger. Therefore, he flees his homeland and takes refuge in the land of the arch-enemy nation of Philistia. It seems that David is hoping that he can become a hired soldier for the Achish, King of Gath.¹ However, the servants in the court recognize him, and they tell the King that David is a famous Jewish warrior. Now keep in

¹ The title of Psalm 34 says that the name of the king was Abimilech. It is likely that the name was an alternative name or title given to the King of Gath.

mind that the giant that David killed as a boy was the champion of the Philistine army (1 Samuel 17). As well, Saul refused to give his daughter, Michal, to David until he had killed one hundred Philistines and brought back their foreskins. So David is not in friendly territory. He is in trouble.

1 Samuel 21:12-15 tell us what happened next:

12 And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. 13 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 (1 Sam 21:12-13).

This is bizarre stuff! David claws at doors of the gate, begins to foam at the mouth, and pretends to be insane. And the result is that the King of Gath wants nothing to do with him:

14 Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? 15 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?" (1 Sam 21:14-15).

David is delivered from the hand of the King of the Philistines, and he writes Psalm 34 as a celebration of what God has done for him. His experience of deliverance gives him spiritual eyesight to see life differently. This Psalm is important because it can give you spiritual eyesight – eyes of faith – to see life differently when it gets scary.

Six “Taste and See” Statements:

I want to take Psalm 34 and make it very personal and practical for you. This Psalm should be studied, but it should be studied for the purpose of learning how look at life through a particular lens. And I hope that these statements will help you today or in the future. There are six:

1. God is awesome (vv 1-3)

David begins this Psalm with a shout of joy, and a statement about God’s worthiness to be praised and honored at all times. Notice how he emphasizes the broad scope of praise – *“I will bless the Lord **at all times**; his praise shall **continually** be in my mouth”* (v 1). The idea here is that a powerful deliverance experience is creating a commitment to continual praise. David has seen the deliverance of God, and he is overwhelmed with praise to God.

David has seen God personally deliver him. That leads him to know that he has nothing without God, and he has a desire for others to know what he knows – *“My soul makes its boast in the Lord, let the humble hear and be glad”* (v 2). The word for “boast” (Heb: *halal*) means to be supremely thankful or satisfied with something great. This word is used all over the Psalms as a means to call people to worship, and in particular David is interested in calling those who know their place – “let the humble hear” – to join him in worship.

God is awesome. And there is nothing like a great deliverance to motivate a person to inspire others to worship as well. That is why David uses words that mean “make great” (magnify) and “raise up” (exalt) to describe what he desires to happen (v 3).

This is what moments of great deliverance do for us and others. They serve as a spiritual telescope. They make the bigness, the majesty, and the exaltedness of God clear and near. These moments confirm what we know in theory: God is awesome. So if you’ve tasted and seen God’s awesomeness or his deliverance you have to share the joy. Because your heart individually and our hearts collectively need the inspiring reminder that God is awesome.

2. He can do it (vv 4-7)

The second statement relates to God’s ability to rescue us in times of trouble. In verses 4-7 David recounts the fact that when you have nothing left but God, you may be desperate, but you need not despair. David is going to recount his experience and commend the wisdom of trusting the Lord.

David wants us to see that God is able to powerfully help those who put their hope in Him. David has felt the spiritual confidence that comes from trusting the Lord. He seems to say that same thing in verses 4-5 as he says in verses 6-7:

- (vv 4-5) – David tells us that when he sought the Lord’s help that a spiritual victory took place. As he sought the Lord, he was answered, and he was delivered from all his fears. In other words, David received a level of spiritual confidence or peace. Verse 5 reinforces this by saying that there is a spiritual radiance which is given to those who seek the Lord in crisis. Life may be hard, but they have found the presence of the Lord to be sweet, comforting and empowering.
- (vv 6-7) – People in fear or pain feel weak. But a seemingly powerless person has every reason in the world to be confident and hopeful when they are talking to God. Verse 6 is an echo of what was said in verse 4. In David’s desperation, God heard him and helped him. Verse 7 gives us a great image and story to consider as David portrays God’s protection around him like an angel that is guarding his very life. In other words, there is a spiritual protection that is sometimes really, truly felt. But we often don’t have the right spiritual perspective.

A good illustration of this is a situation that happened with the prophet Elisha when he was in the city of Dothan in 2 Kings 6. The king of Syria was trying to defeat Israel, but Elisha was using his prophetic powers to tell the king of Israel about Syria’s plans. Therefore, the Syrian army surrounded the city in which Elisha lived in an effort to capture or kill him. 2 Kings 6:15-17 records the perspective changing moment:

15 When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" 16 He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 17 Then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see." So the Lord

opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:15-17)

So when you are tempted to despair, remember the words of 1 John 4:4 – “greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.” Listen! God has done it in the past. He can do it again.

3. He is good all the time (vv 8-10)

The third statement captures the essence of the entire Psalm as David invites the reader or singer to experience God the way that he has. “Come, taste, see! The Lord is good!” (v 8). Further, he is commending trust in the Lord as a wise and prudent step: “*Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!*” (v 8b).

The picture that David paints for us is one of safety and security for those who have God-focused hearts. God provides for those who make him their trust:

- “...those who fear him have no lack!” (v 9)
- “...those who seek the Lord lack no good thing” (v 10b)

Now it doesn’t mean that every desire or every wish is fulfilled exactly as you asked. It means that God supplies exactly what is needed.

If you know the New Testament at all, this Psalm should sound familiar. David is saying that there is satisfaction in God, and the Apostle Paul makes some very similar statement except he bases his ideas on the work of Jesus Christ:

- *28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:27-28).*
- *32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Rom 8:32-33).*
- *8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work (2 Cor 9:8).*

God is good all the time!

4. His ways work (vv 11-14)

Do you remember that I said that sometimes the Psalms can sound like Proverbs? Well, here’s a great example of that. Verses 11-14 highlight the wisdom of doing things God’s ways:

- v 11 – David invites people to learn about the fear of the Lord from his experience.
- v 12 – Long life and blessing comes to the person who chooses God’s path.

- v 13 – He advises that how you talk is very important. (By the way, we are going to look at this subject – the tongue – in depth during the month of August.)
- v 14 – David has seen the blessings of obedience, and so he exhorts those who are reading and singing this Psalm to remember that obedience brings blessing.

Why does David mention this at this point in the Psalm? He gives some advice at this point because he knows that following God's commands takes courage and faith especially in a culture that is hostile. To believe God's promises, to heed God's commands, and to do what he says (like not killing the King while he's on the throne) takes an enormous amount of trust. So it is good to be reminded – as a parent would a child – that following God is the better path. God's way is best.

I read an article in the Indy Star this week that illustrates this point. It seems fairly obvious that God's design for a family (a husband, a wife, and kids who come after marriage) is becoming less and less common and less valued in our country. The article highlighted a Pew Center report which identified that marriage rates and traditional family households have fallen to historic lows. But it was the following statistic that just really grieved me: "Nearly half of American dads younger than 45 this Father's Day say they have at least one child who was born out of wedlock. And the share of fathers living apart from children is more than double what it was not so long ago."²

However the story behind the story is this is what happens to culture when you attempt to do things that ignore God's ways. David reminds us that God's ways work.

5. He's not ignoring you (vv 15-18)

One of the beauties of moments of deliverance is the reminder that God hears the cry of those who need him. This is a vitally important truth to remember because most of our lives are spent waiting for God to act, and we could be tempted to think that God is not listening or that he is ignoring our cries for help. Therefore, on the heels of a great victory David reminds those who would read this Psalm that God does really listen.

- v 15 – God is not ignorant of what is happening in your life. He sees. He knows. He does indeed hear the cry of your heart.
- v 16 – God knows what the unrighteous have done, and he is against those who do evil. Judgment will come one day.
- v 17 – God takes your prayers seriously, and he is able to give you the strength and the power to be free.
- v 18 – God is *"near to those who are brokenhearted and he saves the crushed in spirit."*

It is very easy to think that because God is not acting immediately or on our time line that he doesn't really care. Sometimes the circumstances seem almost overwhelming or even like they will eventually crush us. But David reminds every hurting person that those who put their trust in God find real comfort.

² Hope Yen. "More Dads Live Apart from Kids." Indianapolis Star, June 16, 2011. A1

This is one of the great contrasts and hope of the New Testament: the humble receive help. No one comes to receive the forgiveness of their sins without first admitting that they need help – to be saved from their sins (see Matt 18:3). But beyond that, 1 Peter 5:6-7 has some very important instruction here:

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:5-7).

Be humble. Trust in God. He really cares for you.

6. He's our ultimate hope (vv 19-22)

Finally, we come to the last statement which is yet another concept that we will find throughout our study of Psalms. David looks in this section beyond the immediate circumstances to the ultimate hope that we have in God. He looks past the present circumstances and even beyond death itself to deliverance that God will personally bring.

David uses this single instance of God's help as a platform to acknowledge that life is filled with many, many difficulties. Yet he also knows that God, in the end, will deliver us out of all of them. In other words, affliction doesn't win! God does. *"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all"* (34:19). Life is hard, but God will make it right.

Further, God protects the righteous in the darkest of darkest days. David uses a metaphor in verse 20 which the Gospel of John references in the crucifixion. Even Jesus was still cared for by God even as he bore the curse of sin.

Verse 21 points us toward the coming judgment of the wicked. There will be a day when *"those who hate the righteous will be condemned."* Even as David is writing this Psalm, he is placing his hope in that thought.

Finally, the Psalm concludes with two concepts that are so hopeful for those of us who know Jesus as our Savior: **redeemed and no condemnation**. David is looking to God for his ultimate redemption. His joy of the rescue from the clutches of Achish of Gath is only a foretaste of a future redemption that God will bring. And remarkably David concludes with yet another Gospel-rumbling statement: *"none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned."* David speaks about a concept that the New Testament fully celebrates in Jesus.

The Eternal Close Call

With that in mind, let me expand our scope beyond Psalm 34 and beyond your life on earth. Every person here today will stand before God to give an account of his or her life. I don't know exactly what that moment will be like, but I have a suspicion that our sins and our unworthiness will be very clear, at least to us. I think that we will see the beauty of God's holiness, and it will be devastating in its glory in comparison to who we know that we really are. The verdict of guilt for

the product of your life will be overwhelming, convincing, and clear. In front of you is a holy God, and there you stand as an unrighteous human being. It will be dangerous – eternally so.

The only hope for your soul on that day is a promise that God made in his word: *God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God (Rom 5:8-9).* Or in another place it sounds like this: *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1).* In other words, when confronted with the holiness of God and the devastating guilt of your life, the only hope is that God counts you forgiven and righteous in Christ Jesus.

I can only imagine what it will be like in that moment to see a holy God welcome you into heaven based upon the finished work of Jesus. I can only imagine what it will be like just after you've really seen his glory and your guilt to know that you are safe from God's wrath only because in this life you repented and trusted Christ. There will be nothing more relieving or joyful than knowing that God has forgiven you despite who you really are. And the joy of that moment – having escaped the wrath of a holy God – will be the basis for singing Psalm 34:1-2 for all of eternity: *"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 I hope that will be the confession of your mouth because you know the real meaning of Psalm 34: you know Jesus. Because without him, Psalm 34:1-2 will never come out of your mouth. You'll only know verse 21: *"Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned."* I plead with you to taste and see that Jesus is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge from sin in Him.

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Summer Challenge:

- Memorization – Psalms 34:4-6
- Reading:
 - — Psalms 57-60
 - — Psalms 61-65
 - — Psalms 66-68
 - — Psalms 69-70
 - — Psalms 71-73