

Blessing, Boasting, Magnifying the Lord

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[0 : 0 0] page 463. I'm going to read the first seven verses again. Obviously these are the verses we'll be looking at and also because the Bible class has just come in. So I'm going to read from the beginning again. That little introduction, these little introductions were added after the Psalms were originally written, but they bring out, it doesn't happen in every Psalm, but they bring out the context in which some of the Psalms were written. And we read at the start there of David, in other words this was written by David, the Psalm, when he changed his behavior, when he pretended to be mad, insane, before Abimelech, the king, his name was Achish, the king, he was a Philistine king in the town of Gath in the Philistine territory. David had fled there, we'll look at that later. But then he had to escape. So the king drove him out and he went away. And then David wrote these words after that emergency had passed.

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. Let us exalt his name together. 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.

You know, it's the experience of the Christian, the believer, that there are many, many times when he and she can tell of God's wonderful deliverances, especially deliverances from times of great suffering, danger, terror, distress. Now, of course, we know that the greatest deliverance that God gives to the Christian is God's delivering the Christian, God's saving the Christian from God's eternal wrath. God's delivering the believer through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the cross. But, of course, we can say too that in the life of the Christian, there are occasions, there are times when the believer reaches a point in his life, a point in her life when there's some deep distress, some desperately difficult circumstance under God's providence.

The believer at that time cries out to God for relief, for rescue, for release from that pit of darkness. If not all of you who know the Lord can tell of these times when you might say you almost hit rock bottom, as we said, through some difficult providence of God. And it appeared at the times that God was silent. And you were in torment of soul. And the refrain of Psalm 88 was ringing in your heart, I'm shut in so that I cannot escape. My eye grows dim through sorrow. And rejoicing at that time was the last thing in your heart. But then in God's perfect timing, God caused you escape from that pit of despair. And God gave you such relief. That you were able to cry out in thanksgiving. That you were able to give praise and thanks to him for his mercy towards you. Because that's the tone of the psalm. That's what the psalm is about. That's the experience of David who wrote the psalm. I mean, we're looking at the life of David. We're looking at his, as it were, his experiences before he actually is crowned king. We see God leading David to this point when, you know, that David's about to take the throne of Israel.

But of course, in seeing God's hand at work in the life of David, of course, this is integral to the coming of the Lord Jesus. Lord Jesus, of course, in his human nature, a descendant of David. So, in all that we see in the life of David, the hand of God is there all the time. Leading David. Shaping David in his life. And David will trust in God. David will wait upon him, even in the darkness. Even when hope seems to hang by a thread. Even in the experience of so many Christians. When hope seems to hang by a thread, only for that thread not to break. Because that thread is connected to Almighty God. He'll never leave you, never forsake you.

[5 : 04] So, let's just recap in the background to this psalm. As we said, we've seen the heading, the little heading here. We know the story because we read in 1 Samuel 21, David's fleeing from Saul. Saul is intent on killing David.

Saul is so jealous of David's popularity, his fame, that Saul is still king. But David has this adulation of the people. David's managed to escape, as we said, to this place called Nob, the city of the priests.

He goes to the priests, Ahimelech. David is hungry, he needs food, he needs weapons to protect himself. He gets the consecrated bread, he gets Goliath's sword. Obviously, Goliath's sword had been taken for safekeeping in this town. You know, you can see David's thinking here. I mean, Saul's not obviously going to go into Philistine territory. Saul would be instantly recognised. But David goes.

And you can work it out from verse 10 and 11 of 1 Samuel 21, that actually David goes incognito. David's going there thinking, nobody's going to recognise me. So he goes straight to the, as it were, the centre of Philistine territory. He goes even to the king himself, King Achish.

And it seems that for a short time anyway, David isn't recognised. He's gone into hiding in the very place, in fact, the last place where Saul would look for him. Of course, David can't hide his identity for the whole time. He's spotted by one of the Philistine servants. And that servant actually repeats the song that was sung of David's abilities against the Philistines.

[6 : 59] And being recognised, David realises he's in the middle of a real crisis here. There's a real emergency happening in his life. He's in real danger. I mean, he'd killed many Philistines. He'd actually killed the Philistine champion Goliath from that very town of Gath. He's in real peril. And the only way he thinks he can get out of that danger is to pretend that he's mad. So he's feigning madness in order to, you know, to be told to go away. And that's not unusual. And if you know the story of Koldix in the Second World War, you know there were some prisoners of war who did exactly the same thing to try and get out of that prison, that camp. Some anyway did pretend to be mad. Some even couldn't get back to normality. But anyway, that aside, David pretends to be mad. You can see the details there. The king believes him that he is actually mad. And as a result, he gets rid of him. And David escapes. And that's why David wrote Psalm 34. He wrote it as a channel of thanksgiving to God for God's ultimate hand in his being delivered from danger. So David wants to express thanksgiving to God. It's his heart's desire to express joy before God. God saved him from death at the hands of these Philistines.

And surely there's a lesson here for ourselves. Particularly after a time of distress and danger in your life, that you return thanks to God for his many mercies towards you. And you know, in that return of thanks to God, yes, do it from the heart. But use scripture. Use scripture even to form the very words to express your desire to thank God for his delivering you. Do it in worship. Do it in praise. Do it in the quiet of your own homes. Use even the very words of this psalm. Psalm 34 is your guide.

And as we go through this psalm, we'll see, I hope more clearly, that this is a great psalm to be used in thanksgiving before God. Especially after a time of particular distress. So, let's look more closely at this psalm. Let's very, very briefly look at it overall and then we're going to focus on the first seven verses. It's a beautiful psalm. It's a beautifully crafted poem, in fact. Of course, it's written under divine inspiration. It's what we call an acrostic poem, an acrostic psalm. You know, the first line begins with A, the second B, or Hebrew B and so on. Why? Well, one reason, of course, to memorize.

You know, the truths that the psalm brings forth about God's protecting love, about God's mercy, about God's grace, these truths are so relevant to every one of God's children. You know, especially in times of adversity. So, you know, when we're tempted to think that God doesn't care or tempted to think that God is just silent, no, we're reminded, reminded even from God's word itself.

He is always there. He is always with you. He is that love that will never let you go. And David wants to express that truth in this particular form that he's written this psalm in.

[10 : 32] And, you know, we might think, well, how does actually David do this? Well, we don't need to somehow force a theme from this psalm. The whole structure's there. The focus is right before your eyes. The focus is the Lord. Just look at the whole psalm. Just look at the whole psalm. And look how many times David refers to the name of the covenant God of Israel. Capital letters, L-O-R-D, the Lord, the name of the Lord. In almost every verse, the name of the covenant Lord of Israel, the name of the Lord is mentioned. Why? Because David wants to express his sure confidence in the God of Israel. He wants to express again that God is faithful.

Like the God who established his covenant with his people, he is the faithful one. And David knows God as his Lord. He's the one whom God has forged that relationship with David.

So, you know, when we ask, how are we going to tackle this psalm? Well, it's there before us. We begin with the Lord at every turn. And that's why we've got these headings there.

Verse 1, the Lord to be blessed. Verse 2, the Lord to be boasted in. Verse 3, the Lord to be magnified. And then verses 4 to 7, the Lord to be sought. And God willing, next week we'll look at verses 8 to 14 and then in a few weeks' time the remainder of the psalm. But let's look firstly, the Lord to be blessed. I will bless the Lord at all times, but his praise shall continually be in my mouth. Well, as we said, David's been released from a near calamity in Gath. He's escaped, we would say, by the skin of his teeth. And in response, he's taken time to reflect on God's dealings with him.

I mean, his only response can only be praise. But notice praise with an emphasis. There's a personal testimony happening here. This personal testimony that resolves to keep at all times.

[12 : 42] This resolve that he'll praise God at all times. And that God's praise will be in his mouth. What's David doing here? He's blessing God. Blessing God. In other words, he's ascribing to God all that God is in his goodness. He's ascribing to God all that God is in his grace, in his mercy.

And David knows that. He knows that even in his recent experience has shown that. So he's resolving to bless God at all times. And here's an indication of a believer with strong faith. Here's a believer who can affirm the truth of Scripture, that all things work together for good to those who are called by God. Here's faith. Here's that faith in the one who, even through loss, even through suffering, can still say with Job, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

That's a real challenge, isn't it? It's a real challenge to your faith in our covenant God. to know continually that God does all things well. It's a challenge here to strengthen your faith in him and to say with utter conviction that it's well with my soul. And for those of you who even now know the pain of suffering under God's hands, yes, it's real pain. Yes, it's real suffering. Yes, the tears that you shed are real tears. But be assured that God whom you bless is the God who's blessing you even now. He's blessing you even in his perfect wisdom. And you know, as I know, that those who shed the most tears before God are often the ones who bless him most. Well, in this psalm of praise, David doesn't finish just with one line of praise to God. He doesn't, you know, offer a quick fire thanks to thank you, Lord. He's taking time in thanksgiving. He's composing this psalm of praise, this poem of praise. And, you know, notice how he does this, this opening personal testimony of praise to God.

But he's not writing this psalm, you know, as a solo, because he wants others to join him in praise to God. And he's doing this thoughtfully, he's doing it carefully. And, you know, when you come before God, when you come before him in praise and prayer, then yes, there are times when you offer up that quick prayer to God. Yes, there are these times. But, you know, when you are giving thanks to God, surely the quick fire, 30 second praise to God should, as it were, be taken to one side.

And that you, as it were, have that slow walk with God. Take time with him. You know, in your time of prayer and praise, take time to reflect on his goodness towards you. Think on him. Meditate on God. That's Christian meditation that takes time to take in God's word, to reflect on what God says and what God has done for you. Meditate on God and his love for you. And don't rush through praise. And don't rush through prayer. Take time with God, as David here is taking, obviously taking time with God and in doing so, be enriched. Your heart will be enriched as you take time to ponder God's goodness towards you and his mercy. And as you ponder that, that mercy of God, then look what happens next.

[16 : 31] If you will do so as well, you'll boast in the Lord. As David does here, the Lord, our second point, the Lord to be boasted in. My soul makes us boast in the Lord. You know, often when we think of boasting, you know, we tend to think of it in a negative sense. You know, a kind of pride, a self-pride that really no Christian should have in his character. In fact, it's a sin. It's a sin of pride to boast himself. It's a sin that God detests. But you know, when we speak of boasting in the Lord, there's nothing negative. There's nothing sinful in that. Because boasting in God concerns what you value most. What gives you that greatest of delights? On whom you're finding your chief joy, your greatest joy. I mean, the boasting of man without God, well, just points to things that have passing pleasure, fleeting pleasure, material things, you know, power, status, identity and so on. You know, you're just projecting yourself. You want the world to notice you and to praise you. But the boasting of the Christian in the Lord is directed away from self to the God of glory.

So for the Christian, you're a Christian, you're boasting. You're boasting in God. You're boasting. Well, you're boasting in the cross of the Lord Jesus. That's where you find that ultimate value, you see.

That ultimate blessing you're seeing there in the cross of the Lord Jesus, where God's deliverance of his people is seen in all the glory of the cross. That's what Paul declared. He said, far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. Galatians 6, 14. Are you boasting in the cross of our Lord Jesus?

Is your boasting direct to God words or self words? Because, you know, we're to boast in nothing else. Not in a denomination. Not in a Bible version. Not in any kind of self-projected attention seeking that, you know, demands praise from others. Yes, we have to be boasters. But not boasters in self, but boasters in God. Because of who he is, because of what he's done in rescuing you from death itself.

No. David could boast in God for God's delivering him from near death in gas. And you're to boast in the deliverance that God has made it possible for you to know eternal life through the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. And if you are blessing God, you're boasting in the Lord, well, it's for you who love the Lord to magnify the Lord. That's what David's moving on to in his personal testimony and now calling on others to join them in praise of God. As we see there in the middle of verse 2, let the humble hear and be glad. He's inviting those who are humble, humble in heart, to gather with them in a great assembly of praise. Now, as we said, there's a legitimate place for, if you like, for solo praise to God. If you've got a quiet place where you have your quiet time before God. Maybe it happens in the car when you're on your own or when you're out for a walk or cycling, whatever. But of course, you want to join with God's people, with fellow believers in praise of God, surely. Whether it's in a relatively small gathering such as this or whether it's in some of the larger congregations that are meeting at this very moment. Whether it's in special gatherings like last week's general assembly, whether it's in large conferences. Do you want to unite your heart and praise to God with fellow believers? Do it to join one with another in united praise.

[20 : 40] And surely you do it as well in that expression of that foretaste of heaven itself, where there'll be and is that continuous praise of God before the throne from all, from all who've been redeemed, from all who are even now singing the very praises of God. Blessing, praising the one who's bought them with his blood. As we said, it's the humble, it's the humble who are asked to join with David in that communal praise. And notice who it's not, who are not being asked to join. It's not the proud.

It's not the ones who boast in themselves. You know, in another psalm, Psalm 52, David would write of a man who boasted in himself. A man whose name we mentioned when we read 1 Samuel 21. A man called Doeg, a spy, we might say, that you read of him in that chapter. Saul's servant who actually reported to Saul that David was with Himalek, the priest. And David begins Psalm 52 with the words, Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? But here in Psalm 34, there's no identifying of any kind of, you know, self-boasting individual. It's the humble whom David calls on to join with him and prays to God.

Why? Why are they calling him the humble? Surely it's because it's only those who know there is no merit in themselves before a holy and righteous God. Only they, only the humble can come before God in true worship and true adoration of God. So the humble of the land here, they're called to be glad.

They're called to magnify the Lord. They're called to exalt his name. Verse 3, the Lord be magnified. What does that mean? It means, you know, the Lord's name, the Lord's name be held and high.

The Lord's name be glorified. Why? Because God is great. God is great. God can't be made any greater than he is. But God can be prayed with words from the heart that tell how great he is.

[22 : 53] It doesn't need me to tell you that in America right now, the presence refrains constantly is make America great again. You know, this idea to re-establish the USA as a country to be respected and honoured, you know, around the world rather than being disrespected in the world stage.

That sense of magnifying a sovereign country because, well, because of its perceived influence in the world. But when believers are called to make God great, it's not something that, you know, you somehow manufacture. He is great. He always has been great. He always will be great.

He's the eternal Lord, maker of heaven and earth. His greatness is within himself and his holiness and his justice and his wisdom and his power. And it's for his humble people to tell others that he's given us, for his grace. And he's given us a lot of courage. And he's given us a lot of hope. And he's given us, you know, to do it in all that you are and word and deed. And not so much to doing it in little isolated pockets, but doing it together. Let us, notice, let us exalt his name together. I mean, the impact of worship, the impact of worship where God truly is exalted, truly exalted in collective praise. Let us notice. The spirit of worship where God is truly honored and truly honored by the humble of the land. Yes, we're so imperfect in how we approach God.

But truly, it's for you and for me to magnify God, to make God's name great together, to tell others of our great and holy God, to magnify him, to magnify his name, and therefore to seek him.

Verses 4 to 7. As we said, David's got a very personal reason for his desire to bless God. A very personal reason to boast in the Lord, to magnify the Lord. Because God's delivered him. Delivered from that crisis and gas. And in this poem of praise, David wants all who worship God in humility to hear his personal testimony. I mean, David's been brought to this point where he's praising God. And he wants to explain in more detail why he's doing this, written this psalm of praise.

[25 : 21] Look at verses 4 to 7. It's because God's answered his prayers. You know, during that time of personal crisis, David called on God in prayer. He sought God. He earnestly cried to God for mercy.

I mean, obviously, he was in great fear when he prayed. I mean, at the end of verse 4, he actually speaks of his fears. At the end of verse 6, he speaks of his troubles. I mean, he truly had experienced much distress. He'd reached, in many ways, the lowest point in his life.

He's been hounded by King Saul. He's been reduced to pretending to be insane. With all that that behaviour would involve. He feared death when he was recognised. And then at that lowest point, he pled with God. He pled for God's delivering him from his fears.

And God answered his prayers. David was delivered. His face that at one time looked so utterly dejected and distorted and troubled. His face was now shining. Because God had rescued him. Because God had saved him.

The grace of God had delivered him. And for you who had called on God for his mercy and delivering you from sin.

[26 : 44] Well, continue to call upon him. Why not call upon him for deliverance from your fears and troubles? Think about when you woke up this morning. What fears were still lodged in your heart?

Maybe some fear about something that you think about this week. Maybe some resident fear that you've harboured in your heart for a long time. Maybe some particular problem at work. Or in the family. Or in your personal life.

Maybe some people who've had said that you've had said that you've had done it. And don't we forfeit so much blessing when we refuse to come before the God of all grace. When we refuse to cast, or are hesitant to cast before him your burdens.

And it's so true, isn't it, as the hymn says, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Well, David here, he did cast, eventually cast his cares in the Lord. And God answered his prayers. And in that God's answering his prayers, David was transformed.

[27 : 52] He was transformed from that man of despair to this man of hope, this man of joy. And he's not just speaking of himself. He's saying, of all who look to the Lord, we'll have God's reflected glory.

It impacted their very appearance. Remember Moses, when he met with God. And after coming down from the mountain, his face still shone. Think of the believer who looks to the Saviour.

The Christian who basks in the Saviour's love. That Christian will shine when she's looking to the Lord. And knows God's presence with him.

Yes, and even through the heartache. Because you know, you who know the Lord. You who gaze in the face of the Lord Jesus. You know the abiding love of the Saviour towards you.

And that abiding love, not just towards you, but surrounding you. You know that he's with you. That's what David here tells us in verse 7 of the angel of the Lord encamping around all who fear God.

[29 : 01] The angel of the Lord, we might say, is this pre-incarnate designation of the Lord Jesus. And that's the assurance that every Christian has in being surrounded by the love of the Lord Jesus.

And his love surrounding you, his presence surrounding you by his spirit. He's with you always, in all circumstances, in all occasions. You're never alone. He's with you.

And surely that's cause enough for the Lord to be blessed. For the Lord to be boasted in. For the Lord to be magnified. And for the Lord to be sought.

So seek him. Seek him, yes, even in your fears and troubles. Seek him for deliverance from these fears and troubles. And know the blessing of God in your life.

So that with David you can rejoice in the Lord. And so that you can give glory to God. And boast in him. Amen. Let us pray.

[30 : 01] Lord God, our gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for your promise. You never leave us. You never forsake your people.

You're with us always, even to the very end of the age. Help us, Lord, to put our trust in you. Forgive us, Lord, for our weak faith. Lord, strengthen that faith.

So that we might continually trust in you. Knowing that your promises are yes and amen in the Lord Jesus.

So, Lord, continue, we pray, to bless us in the remainder part of the service. Bless our fellowship, one with another, afterwards. Go before us for the remainder of this day, we pray.

Bring us back here to worship you again later this day, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's close in our singing of Psalm 34.

[31 : 00] From verse 15 to 22, page 41. The Lord's eyes are upon the just. He listens to their plea. The wicked he rejects.

And blots from air their memory. Verse 15 to the end. Psalm 34. To God's praise. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.