

Part 1

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[0:00] We can worship in the midst of deep sorrow.! No matter what our circumstances are, we can boast in the Lord.

While our lives can be as variable as the weather outside, mercy and forgiveness from the Lord, who he is, his disposition of grace towards us, never changes.

And to the world, right, our boast in the Lord, it makes no sense. You know, who are these Christians who have this faith that can't actually protect them from all the pain and suffering that's in the world, right?

You know, Christians maybe even sometimes experience more pain and suffering than those who don't know the Lord. So why does it make sense to boast in the Lord? Well, Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians where he says that it's actually God's design that Christians, not always, but largely look foolish and humble and weak in the eyes of the world.

Because we have nothing to boast in, in and of ourselves, so we don't look that impressive. The only thing we have to boast in is God. And from our vantage point, which is actually clearer than the one that David wrote from, our boast is more specifically in Christ and in the church.

[1:57] So if you want to put up 1 Corinthians there, Kevin. I can start reading it while it's coming up.

So this is 1 Corinthians 1, starting in verse 18. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom. It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

[3:00] For the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards.

Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are. So that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

So that as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. So an encouragement to you today is to boast in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Whatever, wherever you're at in life right now, if you're in a place of weakness, boast in the cross. Are you in a place of strength? If you are, be careful. Work hard to humble yourself and boast in the cross.

[4:08] I know I have been humbled this week and I can say that the cross has never been sweeter. But why is humility necessary? So back to Psalm 34 here.

David's invitation here is to the humble. Let the humble hear and be glad. When you're proud, right?

When I'm proud, I'm boasting in something other than Christ and the cross. It's not possible to be proud and to boast in the cross. When we're proud, we're boasting in ourselves. And so like Paul says, the cross is going to just look like foolishness.

And David tells us that the goal of our boasting in the Lord is that his name would be lifted up. Oh, magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together.

When we're proud, we're really interested in lifting up our own name. But the heart of the humble instead is expressed in these words from the hymn, Rock of Ages.

[5:15] Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to the cross I cling. Naked, come to thee for dress. Helpless, look to thee for grace. Foul I to the fountain fly.

Wash me, Savior, or I die. We bring nothing to the Lord, right? Except an honest acknowledgement of our own neediness. I sought the Lord and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant. Their faces shall never be ashamed. This poor man cried and the Lord heard him and saved him from all his troubles.

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them. I know there are some in this body that are experiencing pretty deep sorrow this morning.

I know that a lot of tears have been cried this week. So if you're in a place of sorrow, I just want to encourage you this morning to seek the Lord.

[6:24] Not because that's the spiritual thing to do. We don't do that out of duty. But because he will hear you and he will deliver you. And if I can give a personal testimony for a minute.

This has been a hard week. Been quite a few tears and not that much sleep. And it's just been hard. But I can say that I have never prayed more than I prayed this week. And the Lord has been with me. And he has, I've seen him move in remarkable ways.

And he's given me what I've needed, you know, every day of the week. And this, not to say that it's about me or anything like that. But it's just, I've been encouraged that this promise, this is true. So I just want to encourage you with that.

And yeah, there are people who are experiencing significantly more pain, you know, and suffering than I am. And if that's you, I just want to implore you to seek the Lord.

[7:22] To cry out to him. He will hear and he will deliver. But it's really important to ask, right? What does deliverance look like?

Does that mean that God just erases our problems? I think we see both in this text and also in the rest of Scripture that deliverance includes, really we can look at it two ways.

It includes in the moment provision. And then also it includes ultimate deliverance. So in the moment, what does God provide?

Well, he provides refuge to those who look to him. And he also provides his presence. He almost always doesn't erase our problems.

He can, and that's a great prayer to pray. We can pray, Lord, take this away. That's a good prayer to pray. But he doesn't always do that. Psalm 27, another amazing psalm, has been food for my soul this week and for my wife's as well.

[8:32] This is a verse from Psalm 27. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble. He will conceal me under the cover of his tent.

He will lift me high upon a rock. So the Lord never refuses refuge to those who cry out to him from a heart of humility.

So he provides refuge. He also gives us his presence. In the moment of affliction, deliverance looks like refuge, but also his presence.

In Psalm 27, so David has sought the Lord, and the Lord has given him his heart's desire, which is to dwell in the Lord's house or his tent. And then we see that same thing in Psalm 34.

In verse 8, God's presence and the refuge he provides are actually one and the same. We take refuge in him. Are you hurting this morning?

[9:32] If you are, I want to encourage you to take refuge in the Lord. He will not disappoint you. So in the moment, right?

Refuge and God's presence. But then ultimate deliverance. Skipping to verse 22, which is actually the ultimate verse of the psalm.

Ultimate deliverance is redemption and freedom from condemnation. And that redemption is ours in Christ. I don't think I gave you this verse, Kevin, but I'm going to bring up here, and you can skip to Romans 8.33.

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who is indeed interceding for us.

[10:46] God's final word over you is that Christ died and was raised and is now interceding for you. Nothing could ever change that.

So there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. We cling to that truth, right? Amen? Amen. Back to Psalm 34.

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 lions suffer and hunger, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. So God isn't just our protector. He's so much more than that. He's our greatest love.

He's our greatest good. And there are times in life when the Lord strips things away, right? When there's loss. But there's a promise here that even in the midst of loss, there is no lack of a good thing for those who fear the Lord.

[11:55] Can that be true? What does God mean by that? I don't think he means that we're never going to feel a lack. That's not really consistent with our experience, right?

And I don't really think that's consistent either with what we see in Scripture. There's a passage in Mark where Jesus talks about believers losing houses and lands and even family for the sake of the Lord and facing persecution.

And that sounds like a lot of loss. So we're going to feel feelings of lack, but what we'll never lack is the Lord. He is the ultimate good thing.

We'll never lack his presence, which is our refuge. Come, O children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is there who desires life and loves many days that he may see good?

Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it.

[13:07] So this is an exhortation to holiness. And the connection of tasting God's goodness with holiness reminded me of a different text.

1 Peter 2, 1 through 3. 1 Peter 2, 1 through 3. So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

Like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

So Peter connects here tasting the goodness of the Lord with longing for the word and also with killing sin. These three things are deeply connected.

Tasting God's goodness, longing for the word, and killing our sin. So honestly, ask yourself, have you tasted God's goodness recently?

[14:14] Like actually think about that for a minute. Like when was the last time you would say, I experienced a real moment where I was tasting the goodness of God? If you feel like, man, it's been a long time, or maybe never, or it's kind of a fog, I don't know that I can clearly answer that question, then I just want to encourage you to be seeking him.

Be running after him. Because if you don't start with seeking him and seeking his presence, then you're not going to desire the word, and you're going to have a hard time killing sin.

Lord, I pray that you would fan into flame an earnest, deep desire for you and for your presence in me and in this entire church, Lord.

Lord, give us that desire. Even that desire is a gift from your hand. We can't manufacture things in our hearts, so we just ask you for that gift, Lord.

Would you be gracious to us and give that to us? And Lord, I ask that we would stir that up in one another, because the truth is it's there sometimes, and then sometimes it fades, Lord.

[15:42] And so, would we, when we gather together, would we not waste our time with triviality, Lord? Would we stir one another on?

Would we exhort one another? Would we be sharing with one another the words of truth that you're giving us, Lord? That's what you've designed us to do, to speak the truth of your word to one another, so that we're constantly building one another up in love and growing in maturity, Father. Help us to do that. Help us to be doing that in our community groups. Help us to be doing that just when we gather during the week. Sometimes we're not gathered, so help us to be doing that with texts and emails, Lord.

Would you help us to grow, Lord, in that joy and that discipline as well? And as we do that, Lord, when there's one brother or sister who's just on fire for you, who's ignited, who's stirred by your spirit, then when we gather, that spreads.

We ignite one another, Lord. But even that, there's like a practice of that, you know? And so the more we do it, the easier that is to happen. But if we haven't been doing that, then it's just, we're like wet wood.

[17:05] It's really hard to light the fire. So Lord, would help us to be faithful, to be preparing our hearts continually for you to move in our spirits, Lord.

And then we just ask that you would do that work. The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry.

The face of the Lord is against those who do evil to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Our God is a God of patience, mercy, and forgiveness.

But he's also a just God who takes our sin really seriously. And he deals with our sin in part because it's against him, but also because our sin always affects other people.

[18:08] And God is always working on behalf of those who are in need and who are crying out to him. So I implore you again, examine your heart, examine your life.

If there's any hidden sin in your life and you're a child of God, it will eventually be brought out into the light. And that's an act actually of grace and mercy.

The Lord disciplines those he loves. And I say that as a sinner who's been disciplined this week.

So that's not, that's just truth. That's just good truth that I'm sharing. It's not condemnation. If you're brokenhearted and crushed in spirit today, cry out to the Lord.

He sees you. He will hear you. He will be near to you. He will bless you with his presence and with refuge. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

[19:13] He keeps all of 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. We've talked about how the Lord doesn't remove the storms from our life that often.

Sometimes he does, but often he carries us through them. And some of those storms come from our own sin, but there's also afflictions because as Dave Moynihan likes to say, as a Christian, you've got a target on your back.

We have a powerful enemy. He's prowling around seeking whom he may devour. But Ephesians 6, which we won't read because of time, equips us for battle with him.

And I want to exhort you that your two most important resources, which we see in that text, are the word of God and prayer. If you are regularly equipping those, yourself with those, he can't touch you.

[20:20] But if we aren't doing that, don't deceive yourself. You're vulnerable. So be digging into the word.

Not just coming here on Sunday to be fed from the word. That's a good thing. But that is not intended to be your time in the word for the week. We need to each be digging into the word on our own and then be spending time with the Lord in prayer.

So how can we know for certain that God cares, that he understands our affliction, that he cares deeply for us?

The Apostle John quotes verse 20 and he applies that actually to Jesus. See, God himself became a man like us and he suffered like us, but actually even more than we've ever suffered.

And his suffering actually was for us. So Isaiah 53 says, He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

[21:37] And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

And with his wounds we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray. We have each turned, every one to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

So friends, wherever you are in life, run to the Lord for refuge and to experience fellowship with him, to experience his presence.

He can identify with the depth of your affliction. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

[22:39] Let's pray. Father God, you are so good to us to give you, to give us your word. We're so thankful for it.

Lord, we're so thankful for the promises that we have in your word, Lord. There's times when we believe them. There's times when it's hard to believe them, Lord.

But especially in those times, Lord, help us to be clinging to them. Help us to be reading them, praying them, speaking them to one another.

When the word is spoken, it's powerful. Just to hear it is powerful, Lord. And we know that your word never returns void.

So I just thank you for your word this morning. And just Psalm 34 that we've talked about, but then also your word woven through all the songs that we've sung.

[23:37] And I just ask that you would do a work through the word that we've heard, Lord. Would you plant it deep in our hearts, Lord, and may it do a work of healing, of encouragement, of instruction.

And we ask that you would that you would be glorified in all of that. I pray these things in the name of Jesus.

Amen.