

# Christ Saves (Evening Service)

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[ 0 : 00 ] As we stand, let us pray. Father in heaven, we pray for your Holy Spirit, that you will come among us, that we can understand your word, be strengthened by it, that we can grow in our relationship with you.

Help us, because of our time together, to glorify Jesus in our lives. And we ask this in his name. Amen. Please be seated. Amen. Well, there's a couple of people here, at least, that I don't recognize.

So I should let you know, first of all, welcome, and to let you know that we're in the midst of a sermon series on the Psalms. And we just are doing this over a period of probably seven weeks, I think it is.

And we're right in the middle of it. And this Psalm that we have today is Psalm 34. If you can turn to page, it's mostly on page 464, actually, the Psalm that we'll go through.

This is a Psalm that has to do with fear. And in our lives as Christians, in actually the life of the world, there are really two kinds of fear.

[ 1 : 12 ] There's a worldly fear, a fear of the world, and there is a fear of God. And David talks about both of these fears today. The first fear, the fear of the world, involves anxiety and a type of terror as well.

And it's a fear that we naturally want to avoid in our lives. And I wonder if you can think of a time, it's probably not hard for you, when you have experienced this kind of fear in your own lives.

Perhaps it's fear of failing, or fear of losing a relationship, a fear of not getting married, a fear of not getting the job that you want.

There's fear of rejection that we often experience as well. Fear of maybe being found out as a fraud. You know, people are going to find out what I'm really about. There's a fear of death and the fear of sickness that runs through our lives as well.

And perhaps these are things that you're going through now. It is not wrong to experience these fears. It's part of going through this life in this broken world.

[ 2 : 22 ] David, who wrote this psalm, experienced just these kinds of fear as he wrote this psalm, just before he wrote this psalm.

And you can look at the first line. Turn back to page 463. That line next to the big number 34 is part of the Bible. It doesn't have a verse, but I don't know if you know this.

It's part of the Bible. And it says that this is a psalm of David when he changed his behavior before Abimelech so that he drove him out and he went away. Well, that's describing a time of fear in David's life.

I don't know if you know the details of this, but David had been running for his life from Saul. And in his intelligence, he runs to Gath, where Goliath originally was from, a Philistine town.

And he gets, he's going to hide there because he thinks Saul's not going to go there. But then he realizes, oh, the king of Gath probably won't like me. He might want to kill me because I was known for killing so many Philistines.

[ 3 : 24 ] And so he pretends that he is crazy, literally. And the king doesn't want to have anything to do with him. So he kicks him out of his city. And David goes out into the wilderness to a cave.

And it's there at this cave that he gathers people who are outcasts who will actually become part of his army. But what has happened is this is a fearful time in his life.

He has experienced strongly the fear of the world. And now in this cave, he experiences a second kind of fear.

And this is the fear of the Lord. It's a very different fear. It is all about the goodness of God. And that's why this Psalm 34 is so exuberant, is so joyful.

It is because he has seen God for who he really is. And it is very good. He wants others to experience this goodness of God by fearing him, by seeing the greatness of God.

[ 4 : 30 ] So the key verse in our Psalm today, if you look down at verse 11, is this. Come, O children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

That idea of fearing the Lord is completely foreign in our culture and in our world. So we need to be taught it just like children. So in a personal way, David, through his own testimony, answers three things about this fear of the Lord.

That is wonderful. He answers, what is the fear of the Lord? He answers the question, how can I grow in the fear of the Lord? And then he answers the question, who is this Lord that we are to fear?

First of all, what is the fear of the Lord? Well, we get a sense from the first three verses. David says, I'll bless the Lord at all times. His praise will be continually in my mouth.

My soul will make 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.

[ 5 : 36 ] It's an exuberant start. And it's because in these verses, David sees the bigness of God and he reveres him. Now, I think that is a good definition for the fear of the Lord.

It is seeing the bigness of God and revering him. Literally in verse three, David says, enlarge the Lord with me.

Raise him up. Raise his name together with me. And obviously, you can't make God bigger. You can't make God higher.

But David wants us to begin to understand how big God is and how high God is. And I think that's one of the reasons why we meet together here at eight o'clock. It's actually to help one another see a vaster vision of God.

To see his greatness and his majesty, his power, his love, his holiness, and his goodness in all those ways.

[ 6 : 42 ] And his justice. Our culture and our media around us constantly wants to try to limit our vision of God. To be able to domesticate him and define him in a way that suits us, that makes us comfortable.

And certainly not uncomfortable. David doesn't let this happen. He says, all the time I'm going to bless. I'll continually boast about him. There is a real humility that comes with the fear of the Lord. And that's why the humble that hear, they're glad when David boasts about the Lord. There is a humility that comes with seeing the bigness of God.

Jim Packer, in *Knowing God*, says this about the fear of the Lord. It is standing in awe of God's holiness and sovereignty, acknowledging our own littleness, distrusting our own thoughts, and willing to have our minds turned upside down.

Well, this happens most wonderfully, I think, in Jesus. Do you remember what happened when Doubting Thomas came face to face with Jesus?

[ 7 : 55 ] On that first Easter, God shows the bigness, the bigness of God, by Jesus forgiving sins, judging evil, destroying death's power, bringing eternal life, and one day transforming the world, as those disciples see the resurrection of Jesus.

Their vision of who God is is just widened exponentially. Doubting Thomas is sure that Jesus is dead. There is no way that he can be alive.

But he sees the bigness of God when Jesus stands before him with his scars, the scars of the cross, plainly seen.

And at that moment, Thomas' mind is turned upside down. And he falls at Jesus' feet and he says, my Lord and my God. That's the first time he said that.

And he's saying, you are far greater than I imagined. That fear of the Lord orients his life in a completely different way. He is turned upside down.

[ 9 : 04 ] And it is very, very good, Thomas would say. You see, at the heart of this good fear is seeing the bigness of God. And it's not just his power and his majesty.

It is that in that power and majesty, God loves us. It is a fear that absolutely draws you in to God.

That's why David says in verse 4, And that word radiant is the same word from Isaiah 60, verse 5. And it describes the faces of mothers and fathers who see their children coming back to them. And they thought these children were lost forever. As they see them come back, their faces are radiant.

And that is the case with the fear of the Lord. You're saying that in God, I have found what I have been hoping for, what I have been longing for. The fear of the Lord is finding what your heart has been looking for.

[10:11] The heart's true longing. The God who created the universe loves you and has come back to you for good. It is very, very good. And that is what is involved in the fear of the Lord.

And that's why the nature of the good fear of God is that it actually drives out all other fears. Look at the end of verse 4. It says, God answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

The terrors of the world and in your life. And David goes on to say in verse 7 that the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them. Delivers them from what?

From their fears. Delivers them from what? So you see, to know the fear of the Lord is to know that he brings his awesome power to you within your times of hardship, within your times of fear, because he loves you.

That drives out fear. Perfect love drives out fear. See, knowing that incredible bigness of God, his power and love at work in your life, actually fills our life.

[11:18] It drives out fear. So that the fear of God is the one that we should strive for and grow in. And that brings us to our second question.

How do I grow in my fear of the Lord? Well, the answer is in verse 8. Look down at verse 8. It's probably a very familiar verse to you. It says there, And it's actually restated in verse 9.

Oh, fear the Lord, all you his saints. You see, fearing the Lord means actively experiencing him, tasting his goodness in your life.

And David writes this because it's a real temptation for God's people to just sort of sample God, to try little pieces of God, to dip their toe in the water of God's great ocean now and then.

Our boys, as they were growing up, were fairly picky eaters. And the rule that we had in our household was that you didn't have to eat everything that we were having for supper, but you actually had to try each thing, even if you said you hated it.

[12:32] Now, to get around this, the boys would take microscopic pieces of the food that they weren't sure about and just barely touch it to their tongue.

And of course, we would say to them, How can you possibly know what that food tastes like by putting that little drop of food in your mouth, touching your tongue to it? Come on, take a bigger piece.

Actually try it so you know what it tastes like. Well, David is saying, Come on, take a bigger taste. Take a bigger bite. Fully taste God.

Don't touch him to your tongue. You're actually missing out on the flavor and nourishment of his grace in your life. You're not fully experiencing him.

And this is his call in this verse. And he says that there's three very practical ways to actively taste God, to take a bigger morsel of God. At the end of verse 8, he says, first of all, take refuge in him.

[13:36] And to take refuge is turning to him for help and strength and faith and grace. When? In the midst of hardship.

That's what it means to take refuge. Jesus took refuge in his father throughout the powerful fears of his ministry, in his suffering and his death on the cross.

David has just been doing that in his own life. I was talking to somebody in our church just this week who had battled cancer for two years.

He got good news this week that he's in remission. Well, he talked about what it was like to take refuge in God during that time. He said God didn't take the struggle away.

And faith seemed at times to really falter in his life. But God blessed even that little bit of faith that he had. And he blessed him in such a way that he, this guy, was able to pray with other patients who were being treated for the same thing.

[14:39] He was a channel of God's grace. And he blessed people in a remarkable way in the midst of his sickness. This was what it was like to take refuge with God.

It wasn't escaping from the situation. But it was finding yourself in God's mercy and tasting him, looking for his grace and goodness in his life, and finding that it was very, very good.

Many experience God in a deep way, particularly in their suffering, as they take refuge in him. And the second thing he says about tasting God is to seek God and lack no good thing.

Now, the great desire in Vancouver is to live the good life. Well, that's actually what verse 12 tells us. It's saying that everyone wants to love life.

Everyone wants to enjoy it. But to taste and really taste God's goodness is to believe that in him alone can I find the good life, the true good in my life.

[ 15 : 49 ] And to seek that first of all, every day. Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things, these things that are good in this world, will be added to you.

And the good that he's talking about is not just merely building up material goods. It is about finding our true good, our true good life in him.

And, you know, to seek God for his good necessarily means that we will be praying to him and knowing him through his word.

This is a discipline that's often been lost in our busy life. We no longer emphasize so much the importance of a daily quiet time or devotion or prayer time or whatever you call that.

But that time that you have each day and to somehow carve that out is absolutely essential for us to be able to seek God and his goodness, to cultivate the fear of the Lord in your life.

[ 16 : 56 ] So this is a call to build that into your life in some way. And then the third way to taste God's goodness is to simply obey God in what you say and what you do.

It's a very simple thing to say. But the fear of the Lord prevents all kinds of sin in your life because it softens your heart towards God so that you hear what God is calling you to and what he is calling you away from.

It brings us to constantly ask, what does he want here? What is God teaching me in this time?

When we replace the evil or the lies that we are tempted to speak with and instead, as David says, to actively seek peace and pursue it, you will taste more and more richly the goodness of God in your life.

It is as we obey God that we know God. When we are listening to him and following him, I think particularly when it's difficult for us to do, we see the vastness of who God is in the universe for us and for our world around us.

You will experience the goodness of being a channel of his grace. And that is very, very good. Well, I want to close this sermon by the end of the passage, which it closes in the last verses, 15 through 22.

[ 18 : 29 ] Our passage closes with real hope, with real promise, because having told us what the fear of the Lord is and having told us how to grow in the fear of the Lord, David reminds us who this God is that we fear.

And who is he? He is one who is deeply attentive to us so that he redeems us, so that he redeems us.

Look at verse 15. Well, actually, I want to start by looking at verse 16 because the face of God, there's an incredible contrast in the face of God.

In verse 16, the face of God is against those who do evil and reject him. And then later on in the passage, he condemns those who afflict those who know and love God.

That is one way that God's face works in this world. But his face is wonderfully turned towards those who fear him.

[ 19 : 32 ] Look at verse 15. His eyes are towards you. He sees everything and everything about our lives. He hears our cry for help.

And the question is, have you cried out to him lately? His very nature is to be able to be near the brokenhearted in verse 18, to save those who are crushed in spirit.

Those are remarkable words because they mean your depression or in your grief. God is particularly near there to work through those circumstances to save us, to redeem us.

In those times when God seems far away, when my faith falters in darkness, David says the nature of God is to draw very close to you. He doesn't take you out of the hardship.

He saves you through that hardship. This is the God that we fear, the one who comes near those who are crushed in spirit. And David knew this in his own life.

[ 20 : 39 ] He understood this over and over again, that this is the nature of God, that he is attentive to us. Jesus experienced it as well. In verse 19, it says that the afflictions of the righteous are many.

In other words, it's normal for God's people to experience them. But God delivers each person out of some of them, two or three of them. No, it says all of them.

It is a sweeping promise. And it comes together with verse 22, that God redeems the life of his servants. So it's not just that God is coming near, that he is loving us, that he is with us in these, but he actually redeems all of your life, all of your afflictions.

Even that which is evil in your life, he works for good. And we know this because of Jesus. In Jesus, Jesus has fulfilled this for you.

None of you will be condemned, it says here. None who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Jesus redeems all of your life. This is what he did on the cross, all of your afflictions.

[ 21 : 47 ] Even what is evil, he works for good. There is no other God like this. Nothing in earth or in the universe can do this. And that's why he is the one to fear.

He is the one to love. So listen to the Lord. Listen to this psalm and help each other to magnify and exalt this God who is for us.

Amen. Amen.