

An Invitation

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back to our reading in Psalm 34 in the book of Psalms. Page 556 or thereabouts. Psalm 34. We're going to look at the beginning of the psalm, verse 1 through to verse 12.

Verse 8, it says, O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. These great words of this verse, familiar to many of you, I'm sure.

Come, taste and see that the Lord is good. And then there's a question that we see too in verse 12. What man is there who desires life and loves many days that he may see good?

How many questions have you had to answer in this past week? Every day we have to answer questions of all kinds.

From the standard questions, maybe what do you want for your dinner? What time is it? We just have these constant questions that keep recurring. We have pleasant questions.

[1 : 15] When we meet somebody, maybe ask, how are you? And they're interested in how well you are or how you're doing in life. You often answer these kinds of questions.

And then there's the direct questions. Very often we'll be asked direct questions, maybe questions we want to avoid or get away from. They can be maybe to do with our work situation.

We're approaching the holiday season and maybe you're avoiding the boss before he asks you, will you work Christmas Day and New Year? You try and avoid answering these kinds of questions, maybe direct questions.

You've been asked about maybe coming to church. Will you come to church with me? You've tried to avoid that question or to come to Hope Explored or something like that.

And you're trying to put these questions away. Maybe perhaps in this coming week you'll be asked direct questions as well, especially as we approach a time of communion.

[2 : 17] And maybe it's not somebody around you that's asking the question. Maybe it's yourself. You're asking questions of yourself when it comes to the Lord's table.

Should I go? You may be asking yourself or others may come and ask you, are you going to the Lord's table? Do we feel we are worthy of going to the Lord's table?

There's all kinds of questions maybe going on in our lives. As we look at this psalm this evening, we find David in the midst of his own experience.

Psalmist David writing this psalm. And he's writing from his own experience in life. Things that he has gone through in his life.

And he's writing to others around him, not just at that time. He's writing to generations to come after him to ourselves today with these great statements and these great questions for ourselves to ponder.

[3 : 21] Statements like we have in verse 8. Come, taste and see that the Lord is good. Or the questions that we have like in verse 12.

What man is there who desires life and loves many days that he may see good? It's a direct question, that one. He's talking there about where is your desire?

What is your heart's longing? And he's going right into the very being of who we are. It's a direct question. And basically behind it is he is saying, how is it with your soul?

How are you with the Lord? What is your desire? What is the greatest desire in life that you have? And so he's asking direct questions.

And they're questions for ourselves to ponder and to consider as well. In light of not just communion time, but in light of our lives in general.

[4 : 28] And when you see the situation of David here, I just want to put this psalm into context for a wee moment. Notice if you have perhaps the ESV Bible, or some of them at least have a little bit before verse 1.

It explains the situation of the psalm. It says, it's a psalm of David when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out and he went away.

Now it doesn't explain everything for us, but it explains the context of David writing this psalm. And it's related to a time in David's life when he was in a particular place, in a particular situation.

And you can read about it in 1 Samuel chapter 21. And there you read of what David, how he changed his behavior, as it says here.

He changed from being a normal person to pretending to be mad, pretending to be crazy. He was fleeing from Saul at the time.

[5 : 34] And he was fleeing and his life was in danger. And those who came after him, they found him and they thought they had caught who they were looking for.

But David pretended to be crazy, to be mad. And Abimelech came along and says, I've got enough madmen. I don't want any more. Just leave him.

And so in pretending to be mad, he was able to escape. And it sounds such a bizarre situation that the one who has been appointed king by God himself, to be king over his people, is having to act like a madman.

But that is what he did. And it's following this that we see, well, why did he have to do this? Where was it that this incident occurred?

It was in a place called Gath. A place called Gath. Who else came from the place called Gath? A man called Goliath, who David had killed.

[6 : 42] And so here is David, who had killed one of Gath's mighty warriors. His very life in danger. His enemies around him.

If they recognize him, his very life is going to be taken from him. But he came through. The Lord spared him. The Lord kept him.

And that's the context of Psalm 34 being written. After these events. That David is able to look back in his life and see how the Lord has spared him.

The Lord has kept him. And as you go through this, that's what you're seeing. That's what we're going to see as we look through these first 12 verses. There's a sense of praise and joy towards the Lord coming out.

That there's a sense of sharing his testimony. A personal word of the testimony of God's goodness towards him. So and then you have this praise testimony.

[7 : 45] And then the third thing we're going to see is a desire. A desire that others would know this. That others would taste of the goodness of God. And come and put their trust in him.

And so there's these three parts. That we're going to look at this evening. And in many ways there are parts that we can reflect on ourselves in this coming week. As we prepare to come to a time of communion.

When we think of these three things. Praise. It is our praise and thanks towards God. Testimony. What is our testimony of the Lord?

Has the Lord been good to us? And are we being faithful to him? And then thirdly when we see that desire. Is our desire, is our longing to come and taste of the goodness of God.

To come and together praise the Lord. Give thanks to God. And how can we do it? How can we do it but by remembering what the Lord has done for us.

[8 : 53] How he gave himself for us. The Lord protected David here in a particular way. The Lord has protected us. That if we put our trust, our faith in the one who gave his life for us.

We know that salvation. That salvation joy. That we are to remember in him. So I want to look at these three things then. First of all, that sense of praise.

And you notice that in the first three verses here. 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. O magnify the Lord with me. Let us exalt his name together.

These verses are full of praise. They're full of words that express that sense of praise that David has. I will bless the Lord.

[9 : 55] I will offer up my praise to God. Just like Psalm 103 expresses. O thou my soul bless God the Lord and all that in me is.

There's this sense of blessing God. His praise, it says, shall continually be in my mouth. Never-ending praise. Is that how we live our days?

Are we constantly praising God? Not just as we sing a psalm together, but as we go from here. Are we constantly expressing that praise to God?

Boasting in him. Boasting in the Lord. Magnifying the Lord. Magnifying the Lord. Exalting the Lord together. There's just a sense of praising the Lord.

And as you look at these opening verses, what you see is David pledging himself to the Lord. That this is how he is going to live. That the Lord alone is worthy of all his praise.

[11:00] There are so many other things that could easily take our attention away from the Lord. There are so many other things that could take our praise away from God.

But David here is focused. David here is seeing the one who is truly worthy of all his praise. And that's what he's saying to us.

There is no other God in this world who compares. There is no other idol that we can worship who is worthy of praise. That's all it is.

An idol-dom. We are to praise the Lord with everything that we have. So God is worthy of our praise.

And just as David pledges himself to praising God, so we are challenged ourselves to pledge our lives to him.

[11:58] To say that I will bless the Lord. Not just David speaking here, but yourself, myself speaking personally. That this will be my praise.

I will bless the Lord. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. That this is what we want to feel of ourselves as well. And we can so often do that.

We can pledge ourselves to the Lord and say, I will bless the Lord because he's been good to me when things are going well. But look at what David's situation was here.

It was difficult. It was hard. His very life was in danger. But the Lord has spared him. Because he had that delight in the Lord in the midst of it all.

But he will continue to praise him. And that's for you and me to consider as well. Where we find ourselves.

[12:59] Whether it's today, tomorrow, or in all the days ahead. Whatever situation we come into, will we still praise the Lord? David was afflicted.

David was challenged. David was persecuted. And yet he still praised the Lord. So similar to what Paul says in Philippians 4. Rejoice in the Lord always.

I will say it again. Rejoice. That sense of praising God no matter what. No matter what the circumstances are. So do we praise the Lord?

There's a phrase that's used. Sometimes used of sports fans. Fair weather fans. So there are those who are there when things are going well.

When there's success. But when that changes, they disappear. They only want to be there when the going is good. When the success is there. You just have to look at our own nation.

[14:08] You look at Hamden just over a week ago. Where 50,000 people singing their hearts out. Singing their hearts in celebration.

They could be heard for miles away. There was that sense of delight. But how often is it the opposite? When the tide turns.

When things aren't going so well. Seats are empty. There's no joy. There's only shouts. I'll sack them. Get rid of him. All of these things.

Fair weather fans. They can so easily change. And the same is used of Christians. Fair weather Christians is a phrase used by some.

And that's being used as those who will only praise God when things are going well. But when the going goes hard. They disappear. They don't trust God.

[15:05] They don't give him the praise in the midst of that situation. They turn away. We don't want to be fair weather Christians.

We want to praise him. No matter what. To praise him with all our heart. To extol. To magnify. To bless.

All of these things. Constantly going on. In the praise of God. C.S. Lewis once put it like this. I think we delight to praise what we enjoy.

Because the praise not merely expresses. But completes the enjoyment. Praising completes our enjoyment of God.

Psalm 146 which we sang together. The first two verses. Praise the Lord my soul. O praise him it says. But then it goes on to say. I'll extol him all my days.

[16:02] Another way of putting it is. While I have breath. I will praise the Lord. Let us praise him. John Wesley.

When he was 21 years old. He was studying in Oxford University. And he'd been brought up in a Christian home. And he was a very gifted man. Even at that early age.

But in those younger days. He was often described as being sarcastic. And snobbish. He hadn't come to trust the Lord.

But something happened to him in those early days. That made him realize what real praise was. And it was when he met a man who was working at the university.

He was a porter. This man in the university. And he had very little. And when John Wesley was speaking to him. He discovered that this man only had one coat.

[16:59] That was all he had to wear over his clothes. Just one coat. He lived in such poor conditions. That he didn't even have a bed to sleep in.

And yet this man was always happy. He was always glad. Filled with gratitude towards God. And he expressed his delight in God.

And John Wesley said to him this day. In his snobbish way. What else do you have to thank God for then? Very sarcastic.

And the man stopped and said. Well I thank God that he has given me my life. My being. And a heart to love him.

And above all a constant desire to serve him. And this resonated with John Wesley. He may have made the comments sarcastically.

[17:54] But the response moved something in him. And he recognized that this man. Had something that he wanted. That he had a sense of praise within him.

That didn't go. It didn't matter what his surroundings were. What his possessions were. He could still praise God. And John Wesley came to believe in God.

And gave his life to him. And so much so that years later. On his deathbed. At the age of 88. People said of him. How he was still praising God then.

And while he was there on his deathbed. He began one day to sing a hymn. I'll praise my maker. While I have breath. He still had that sense of.

No matter what. I can praise my God. While I have breath. Just like Psalm 146 expresses. So that is our call.

[18:52] To be a people who praise God. The second thing we see with David here. Is his testimony. In verse 4.

Through to verse 7. David gives us here a sense. Of how he came through. This experience.

And again. When we look at our lives. We see so many things. That the Lord takes us through. And in verse 4 to 7. David expresses it like this. I sought the Lord.

And he answered me. And he delivered me. From all my fears. Those natural 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 round. Those who fear him.

[19:46] And delivers them. So David here gives us an insight. Into his own testimony. How the Lord has delivered him. And that's what a testimony is all about.

Not about us. And what we've done. But what the Lord has done for us. And David expresses here. I prayed. I sought the Lord.

And he answered me. This poor man cried. And the Lord heard him. It doesn't express that. Well the Lord needed. And should answer all my prayers.

It's more humbling ourselves before God. This poor man. This poor man was David. Anointed king. Of God's people. And yet he's humbling himself.

And saying this poor man cried. And the Lord heard. And that's all we are. Poor men and women. Poor boys and girls. And all we can do is call on the Lord.

[20:43] And the Lord is able to hear. And as you look through these verses. You see that there's two sides of the coin here. Two like themes that we see in David's testimony.

One is fear. And the other is desire. Fear and desire. There's his own natural fear. He delivered me from all of my fears.

It says in verse 4. And we all have fears. But we see too that there was this desire. I sought the Lord.

I cried to the Lord. And the Lord was able to help. And what you discover as you go through this psalm. That it's shaped on these two things.

What we fear most. And what we desire most. And that's the way it is with our lives so often as well. There are the things that we fear.

[21 : 46] And there are the things that we desire. And so often the things that we fear. Keep us from what we desire most. And especially when we think of fearing.

Or deciding the Lord. There are so many fears that will come in. That will keep us from fully having that desire satisfied.

Because we look to ourselves. He feared. His natural situation. But it says here. He also feared the Lord.

And what fearing the Lord means here. Is not being afraid of God. But giving reverence. To God. And one person.

Put it like this. If you fear God. Or if you give reverence to God. You will fear nothing else. You will give reverence to nothing else.

[22 : 48] But if you do not fear God. If you do not give reverence to God. You will fear everything else. You will give reverence to everything else.

So we are to be a people. Who fear the Lord. Who give reverence to God. And then that helps us. In our natural fears.

Because when we give reverence to God. Suddenly nothing else matters. When we put our trust in God. When we cry to God.

When we call upon him. Then we know the help of God. As you see here in verse 7. The angel of the Lord encamps.

Round those who fear him. And delivers them. This is the help that David had. As he was playing the madman. In front of Abimelech.

[23 : 48] But the angel of the Lord was with him. The angel of the Lord encamped. The Lord was there to help. Because David was fearing God. Fearing his natural situation.

But fearing God. Giving reverence to God. And there he knew God's help. His desire was towards God.

There's fears. And there's desires. And for ourselves. Especially maybe as we approach a communion. There can be many fears. Many fears of failure.

Maybe a fear of rejection. They're not going to let me come to the Lord's table. A fear of failing God. But what if I let him down?

Or a fear when it comes to comparing others. Or not measuring up to others. So many things. A fear of guilt. A fear of the unknown.

[24 : 46] So many of these fears. Natural fears. That we can have. But as David shows us here. It is to fear the Lord.

To desire the Lord. To give through reverence to God. And then we will know. What it is to have the help of God. We'll know what it is to have the angel of the Lord encamped.

That is God with us. God strengthening us. God helping us. That we commit ourselves to him. And that he will help us.

That he will deliver us. We like to take control of our own lives. To think that we have everything in our hands. In our doing. But there comes that time we have to say.

No. Lord I'm going to put it all into your hands. It's the best place to put all of these things. My fears. My worries. My desires.

[25 : 46] Everything Lord I give over to you. To fear God. To reverence him. To bless him. To praise him. David's testimony is one of knowing fears and worries and troubles in his life.

But also knowing God with him. God there constantly. God hearing his prayers. God answering his prayers. A testimony is a declaration.

David's testimony here is God is good. God is gracious. God is faithful. Is that your testimony this evening?

Is that what you're able to say in your life? Is your praise one that leads you into the sense of. My testimony is one that I can do nothing but praise God.

Because God has been good to me. May we all have that testimony. That assurance of God with us.

[26 : 54] God is good. Thirdly and finally we see here. That desire that David has. Not for himself. But for others.

Is it time to come? That's what David is saying here. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

As we give reverence and fear to the Lord. That means taking refuge in him. That means bringing ourselves.

As I said. Where we take control away from ourselves. And give ourselves over to God. And say Lord. My refuge is in you. Verse 8 says it here.

Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. And verse 22 says it as well. The Lord redeems the life of his servants. None of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

[27 : 56] So this refuge is a place of security. A place of safety. A place of blessing. And so David says. Come.

Taste and see. That the Lord is good. He has experienced it himself. He has spoken of his natural fears.

The fears that he had. But the Lord delivered him from all of his fears. And he was brought to fear. To reverence the Lord. And you see how it expresses.

Fear of the Lord so often here. In verse 9 it says. Oh fear. The Lord you his saints. For those who fear him have no lack.

The Lord is with him. In verse 11. Come oh children. Listen to me. I will teach you. The fear of the Lord. And so the fear of the Lord.

[28 : 55] That reverence of God. Is something we are learning. Something we are depending on. All of our days. So we are to be a people. Who fear the Lord.

And when we fear the Lord. The angel of the Lord. Enamps round those. Who fear him. And delivers them. David calls on us.

Taste and see. That the Lord is good. How do you know. If something tastes good. Do you look at it.

Do you listen to someone. Describe it. So many people. Base it on that. You look at something. You say. I'm not touching that.

I'm not eating that. No way. Or someone describes it. And I'm still not sure. So many are watching.

[29 : 50] I'm a celebrity at the moment. And they have all these. Eating challenges. And you're looking at these places. There's no way. I would taste that. There's no way.

I'm going to go near. Any of that. And you see the reaction. As they're eating. It's like. Well I'm definitely not. You're put off. Even trying it. Smells.

And looks. And all of these things. Can put us off. Trying things. But the reality is we don't know if it's good unless we've tasted it ourselves.

If we base it only on what others say or how it looks, we cannot say anything about it really. But the reality of the Christian life is that that's the way so many people look at it.

They'll hear other people talking about it. And say, you don't need the Christian faith. You don't need to go to church. It's a waste of time. It's nonsense.

[30 : 54] And so many people will just listen and say, well, if you say it, then yes, I'll just believe you. Or maybe you've looked on and you've thought, I want nothing to do with church. I want nothing to do with these people.

Because you've seen something that's wrong in them. And we all have our faults. People will look at us and they can rightly say they're not perfect. Because we never are.

But it's no reason to turn away. It's no reason to say I'll have nothing to do with it myself. And maybe you say, I've tried church.

I've come to church. And it does nothing for me. And it's all based on that experience that's at a distance.

But what David is saying here is not just to look on from a distance. Not just to listen to what others are saying. But to come for yourself.

[31 : 52] It doesn't say to come and taste and see that God's people are good. Or that church is good. It says come and taste and see that the Lord is good.

Put the Lord to the test. Can we say that Jesus is not worthy of our praise? Can we say that Jesus will not help us?

That Jesus is just make believe if all we've done has been at a distance from him? To be able to answer, we have to come and taste and see the Lord for ourselves.

And what David is saying here is, When you do, then you will know it is good. When you put your trust in the Lord.

When you taste and see the Lord. All you'll be able to say, It is good. It is wonderful. It's the greatest thing I've ever tried.

[33 : 04] And you will not lack. For those who come and taste and see, they will not lack in any way. There are so many things in life that man never convinces.

So many things that maybe look appealing for a moment, but we change our mind on them. But when we come and taste and see the Lord himself, there will be no going back.

Because there's nothing better. That's what David is saying. He is saying, My testimony is, I have seen the Lord's goodness.

I have been in many trials and tribulations and situations that apart from God, I would not have survived. And God is good. And so he's saying to others, Come, taste and see that the Lord is good.

Why does he say that? Well, he has that question in verse 12. What man is there who desires life and loves many days that he may see good?

[34 : 19] What is better than knowing the Lord? Let our desire be towards him. We'll be asked many questions in this coming week.

But what of the Lord? How is your heart with him? Are you trusting in him? And then we'll know many statements.

And David's statements is one of the greatest ones we could take with us this week. Come, taste and see that God is good.

Blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. Let us pray. Amen. Lord, our gracious God, we do thank you for all you do for us.

We thank you for the praise that you put into our lips. We thank you for the testimony that we are able to give of your faithfulness towards us. We thank you for the desire that you put in our hearts to come and taste and see of your goodness.

[35 : 31] And we pray, Lord, that if we have experienced it, we will know it all the more. And if we have not yet come, that we would indeed be a people who would hear your call to us to come and taste of you, of all your goodness, of all your mercy, that we might be blessed in you.

As we ask all in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm going to conclude by singing some of these verses of Psalm 34, the Scottish Psalter version page 247.

We'll sing from verse 7 to 11. Psalm 34, the Scottish Psalter, we'll sing from verse 7 to 11. The angel of the Lord and the angel of the Lord encamps and round encompasseth all those about that do him fear and them delivereth.

O taste and see that God is good who trusts in him is blessed. Fear God his saints and on that in fear shall be with want oppressed. We'll sing verse 7 to 11 to God's praise to Tuna's Wiltshire and we stand to sing.

The angel of the Lord encamp and round and come at said for those are those To trust in heaven's place Dear God, his saints Than that in fear

[37 : 45] Shall be where come to press The lions young may agree And they may love their food But they that truly seek the Lord Shall not lack any good O children, hither do ye come And unto me give ear I shall you teach to understand

How ye the Lord should fear After the benediction I'll go to the door to my right We'll close with a benediction Now may grace, mercy and peace From God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit Rest upon and abide with you all Now and forevermore Amen Amen Thank you.