

God the Ultimate Carer

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[0 : 0 0] to psalm 34 we're going to look at verses 15 to 22 for a short time this evening psalm 34 in the book of psalms and at verse 15 the verses down to the end of the psalm the eyes of the lord are towards the righteous and his ears towards their cry the face of the lord is against those who do evil to cut off the memory of them from the earth and so on through to the end of the psalm now if you look at the number of verses in the psalm you'll see that there are 22 and that's exactly the number of letters in the hebrew alphabet hebrew of course being the language in which the old testament was written and this kind of device in hebrew is called an acrostic this is an acrostic psalm because it's got these verses 22 now each of these verses begins in turn with the letters of the hebrew alphabet from beginning through to the final letter and you'll find that in other psalms as well you'll actually find it in certain books of the old testament if you think about they don't have to look it up just now but the book of the lamentations of jeremiah there are five chapters in it the first two chapters have 22 verses each chapters four and five have 22 verses each and chapter three in the middle has 66 verses three times 22 so you'll find that that pattern is found in the psalms and passages and the question is well why is that we can't be absolutely certain about it but it appears that one of the best ways of looking at it is that this was an aid to memory an aid to learning and especially useful especially for young people coming through in the hebrew homes that they would actually have a mechanism by which they learned the psalms and actually could then think of the hebrew alphabet and trigger their memory for these verses that's a very good way of looking at it i think in any case you have that in psalm 34 here each of these verses begins in turn with the letters of the hebrew alphabet and you do see in it an invitation to actually come and learn which fits in with the idea that the acrostic is actually a mechanism for learning the things of god and what the psalm especially sets out is the lord's care his pastoral care his wonderful care not just for his people but for his suffering people and the care of the lord for his suffering people is a care that's in this psalm particularly it's directed to them in their suffering while they're suffering in respect to their sufferings different kinds of sufferings but as they as they go through this psalm as we go through it ourselves in relation to whatever sufferings afflictions difficulties challenges we may have here is a passage of the bible that really in the complete sense of the whole hebrew alphabet brings us a counter to thinking that some or other things would be better outside the will of god or that if god's will were different for us to what it actually has shown itself to be we actually have of course that temptation to think that things would be better if god had not willed this or that for us well that goes all the way back to eden doesn't it it goes all the way back to the tempter coming in before eve first of all and then she took it to adam where the tempter said regarding god has god really said this in other words he was really saying would it not have been better for you if god had given you all the trees of the garden including the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and of course in the mystery of that situation uh adam and eve capitulated to the suggestions

of the devil and all the way through from then as human beings we always have to remind ourselves whatever is in god's will for us even the difficult bits the challenging bits he has planned that in his wisdom for us and therefore there must be a benefit for us somewhere in that as god takes us through now we imbibe this sort of wisdom this sort of teaching as we sing the psalms one of the great points of singing the psalms one of the great benefits of singing the psalms is that we actually imbibe this teaching almost unnoticed in some ways as far as the singing of the psalm although of course we have to always try and understand and follow the meaning of the words that we're singing that's a very important thing but as you sing your way through the psalms you actually are getting this teaching flooding into your mind informing your heart coming to actually add to what you already know about god and his ways of dealing with you and so here in the psalm we have psalm 34 the lord's care for his own suffering people i'm just taking verses 15 to 7 to 15 to 22 just as as a section to look at in itself two things from that first of all in terms of god's care and he is the ultimate carer of course god's care for his suffering people is first of all god has them in his mind always god has them in mind all the time and secondly god helps them in his might he has them in mind and he helps them in his might and these two points really summarize for us the teaching of those verses indeed you could say the teaching of the whole psalm and when you think of god having his people in his mind there are two things that come into that as well god looks out to them wherever they are found whatever their circumstances are god is looking out to them looking out specifically not just for them but to them with a particular regard for them in mind and secondly he listens out for them too because the psalm talks about how how david actually cried to the lord and he's thankful for the lord heard him god has them in mind as he looks out to his people he's directed towards them in his own mind because you'll find for example this elsewhere think of exodus chapter 2 for example just to pick one incident where this is also very much mentioned there exodus chapter 2 verses 24 to 25 where you find um god heard their groaning and remembered his covenant with abraham with isaac and with jacob god saw the people of israel and god knew and of course then he later told moises i have heard the groanings of the people of israel and i am come down to rescue them to deliver them so he has them in mind he he views them he sees them all the time and it's not just that god knows everything that's taking place in your life as he sees you in your circumstances as he sees you in your challenges and your sufferings it's not just his mere sight the psalmist is saying this is the favor of the lord that i'm experiencing it's one thing to actually know that god is seeing you you can have that with a fear and a trepidation but it's another thing to know that god's sight of you is a sight that's filled with favor filled with blessing and good intentions toward you and that's what the psalm is really saying about god's care for his people in their sufferings towards them in their sufferings god views them god god looks out for them you see the contrast there verse 15 is

saying that the eyes of the lord are towards the righteous he's drawn towards them he's locked into them and onto them and the contrast then follows in verse 16 the face of the lord is against those who do evil to cut off the memory of them from the heart the psalmist often does this puts two contrasts it puts a contrast between two opposites within the one verse or within two verses and he's saying here is the favor of the lord toward the righteous here is the frown of the lord towards the wicked and there is a god's loving care of his people first of all in the sight that he has of them they are in his sight in the way of his favor as in grace he looks out toward them but also he has them in mind in terms of listening out for them we've got verse 15 here and then verse 17 as well now the eyes of the lord are towards the righteous and his ears towards their cry when the righteous cry for help the lord hears and delivers them out of all their trouble of course that's part of god's perfect ability to know everything that's going on all at once in the lives of everybody and especially the lives of his people but it isn't just simply in a general way just as the sight of god is very much focused in terms of his favor so the hearing of god is very much to do with his intensity of listening because you have an image here really as you see sometimes although of course now with advancements and in hearing aids and so on that maybe isn't quite as regularly the case that you would see somebody like this when you're talking to them or even like this if they're deaf in both ears but your cup your hand your cup your palm so the sound is directed more uh more easily towards your your hearing and that's the kind of imagery that you find here in the psalmist where it says that the lord actually hears his ears are towards their cry you might say he's cupping his ear of course he doesn't have physical properties the lord are from the humanity of jesus but the lord this is an image of just demonstrating for us how intensely interested the lord is in our cry to him you know sometimes if you're like me sometimes you get above your knees when you're praying and you say that was a pathetic effort at prayer you say am i not learning anything at all as i go along as a christian or why did i have to actually ask the lord to forgive this sin yet again that i'm conscious of in my life and you may be feeling quite downcast over that and i'm not maybe something in your life that you're not simply getting over as far as you're concerned and you're still struggling with it and you're crying out to the lord and you're saying lord i'm sorry but again i have to come to you with this well just look at what the lord is saying the lord is saying i hear you and i hear you with my interest in you and i hear you as nobody else is hearing you and i'm listening as nobody else is capable of listening and when in this world we know how difficult it is for people just to listen for a few moments intently to what people are saying because we're so used to noise we're so used to having the television or the radio or social media or something and it's just flitting in and out very often into our brains and to actually sit down and have a studied time of listening so difficult to fit into the ways of the world but this is so different this is god on his throne the almighty

the great god the majestic god the creating god the redeeming god what is he saying to us he's saying i am listening intently to your cry cry to me and i assure you it will not pass my ears it will be something i give my earnest attention to you and many millions of people the lord is listening to tonight throughout the world billions of his people crying out to him and yet you and i can say that the intense listening of god the intent listening of god to our cry to my cry to your cry is as if we were the only ones crying out to him the only ones needing attention he is just that concentrated on your life and what an encouragement that is we're we're looking at this passage tonight hopefully um as it will encourage us as believers in the lord as we see the difficulties of life sometimes uh really challenging our progress and here is god having them in his mind god's pastoral care for his suffering people for his people in regard to their suffering and he has them in his mind as he looks out to them and as he actually listens out for them and it's not without good reason that the apostle peter when he wrote his first epistle took these these words of of the psalm and quoted them specifically you have them in first peter chapter three and verse 12 um we began that passage it's in the esv where you have section headings there just to help us through uh with uh what the what the words are actually saying what the passages are actually saying that heading is suffering for righteousness sake finally all of you have unity of mind sympathy brotherly love etc do not repay evil for evil reviling for revival but on reviling but on the contrary bless for to this you were called he's saying you were called to the kind of suffering that's particular for christian people and so that in those sufferings you would be conscious of the fact that god never loses sight of you and god is never out of out of your uh out of hearing of your voice and that's he goes on to say for the eyes of the lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer but the face of the lord is against those who do evil now peter was writing to people who are being persecuted who are suffering grievously for their faith and he finds the words of psalm 34 so applicable so relevant so up to date for him and so they are for you and for me too they're never out of date they're always a benefit to us as we look at them though god has them in his mind moving on secondly god helps them in his might and there are three elements from verse 15 to 22 that come into god helping his people in his might there's first of all his nearness and then secondly there's his keeping of them and thirdly his deliverance there's firstly his nearness look at verse 18 the lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit look at verse 7 the angel of the lord encamps round those who fear him and he delivers them the angel of the lord in the old testament sometimes speaks as god so it's a um it's a bit too far to say going too far to say that it's actually the lord

present in a human actual human nature but it's an anticipation of the angel of the lord as you know in passages in the old testament appears at people like joshua and others and speaks to them but he speaks as god and so it's an anticipation it's a foresight or a foretaste if you like of the coming of jesus himself the coming of the son of god in then taking our nature to himself permanently and that's anticipated here in the angel of the lord what does he say he encamps around those who fear him and delivers them and when you take that with you into the new testament and into its absolute fulfillment in the lord jesus christ himself what do you then find well you find that jesus comes alongside of us through his own sufferings through not just taking our nature but taking all that was thrown at him by way of temptation and suffering as he represented his people as he stood in their place and in the great book of hebrews as you well know let us come he says therefore boldly to the throne of grace so that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need because we don't have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us or empathize with us in our sufferings that's the argument that jesus who comes to surround his people he encamps around them and delivers them and of course as we think about jesus as we think about all that it took to rescue us all that it took to provide for our sufferings the very presence of god the nearness of god just think of that cry from the cross it's not a cry of nearness is it my god my god why have you forsaken me it's the very opposite of nearness it's jesus in the depths of experiencing the curse of god that was due to us for our sin that's the way that jesus actually took to open up a way for us to have the presence of god come to minister to us in our need and our sufferings in our difficulties and the presence of god in this sense that you find it here and the lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit it's not the presence of god as theologians call his omnipresence in other words that god is present everywhere there is no place where he is not but his presence is absent but this is a specific redemptive presence it's a presence that is allocated to his own special people to his believing people to his saved people especially as they are at times brokenhearted and crushed in spirit he brings that presence through the holy spirit into their experience to bless them his nearness his nearness to the brokenhearted whatever it is whatever it is whatever it is tonight that sometimes breaks your heart as you reflect on it or maybe even in the current moment of your life whenever we have a broken heart sometimes we do but we are never out of god's view of us and god drawing near to us he has a special regard for the brokenhearted he understands what a broken heart is because jesus experienced it in the sufferings of the cross

[20:11] and so his nearness is the first item in helping them in his might the second one is his keeping of them now they're not kept from suffering but they're certainly kept in or during their sufferings so they're not overwhelmed by their sufferings look at verse 20 here he keeps all his bones not one of them is broken whereas in contrast affliction will slay the wicked those who hate the righteous will be condemned one of the brethren mentioned tonight in prayer isaiah 43 and that's something i noted down here in my notes for the sermon tonight too in regard to this very point where isaiah was being informed or used by the lord to convey this message of encouragement to the people of god in his time who were suffering a lot for their attachment and faithfulness to god now thus says the lord who created you oh jacob he who formed you oh israel fear not i have redeemed you i have called you by name you are mine when you pass through the waters i will be with you and through the rivers they shall not overwhelm you when you walk through the fire you will not be burned and the flame shall not consume me consume you there's nothing in these verses that says you will never experience what it's like to be burnt you will never experience what it's like to go through a flood in your emotional or spiritual experience it's not saying that to us but it's saying to us when that happens when you do have pain and suffering to engage with and to go through and to overcome they're not going to overwhelm you it may at times feel the flame very hot the waters rising fast but what he's saying here is i assure you i will be with you and so they will not overwhelm you and the flame shall not consume you how precious that is how very precious that is to us tonight because whatever it is you're suffering and your sufferings your afflictions tonight perhaps only known to yourself and to god maybe you just simply cannot share them with anyone else maybe they're just the burden of your heart and the pain of your heart whether it's through the loss of loved ones or something else in your life or in your community or in your family but here is god saying to you it doesn't matter how much you may feel the waters rising or the flame intensely hot they're not going to take hold and crush you and overcome you because i am with you i in my nearness is key i am keeping you and um the puritan theologian john owen once had a wonderful illustration of the difference between a believer and an unbeliever or an atheist both experiencing exactly the same type of suffering let's say they're both in exactly the same situation where they are suffering in their lot in the providence of god and he's asking the question what's the difference between them and what difference is there between the suffering in the case of the believer and the suffering in the case of the atheist or the unbeliever well he said it's a bit like this the sufferings that the believer experiences can be pictured as a surgeon binding up the wounds of the patient because that suffering is going to one day just issue into eternal glory it's preparing as paul said the sufferings of this present time it's preparing for us

a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory the sufferings in the believer's life are really a preparatory method of god to cleanse to further purify to prepare for heaven when the sufferings will be gone now contrast that Owen is saying with the same sufferings in the atheist or unbeliever and the picture he makes there is not of a surgeon binding up wounds with a view to complete healing no he says it's an executioner putting a bandage on the eyes of the victim before he takes his life because for the wicked the sufferings of this present life are just a preparation for the eternal sufferings of the next that's the difference that's the difference the same sufferings can be in the life of two people one a believer one an atheist or unbeliever and when you look at the end in view these are the two images

Owen makes now aren't you thankful tonight that as you trust us in the lord so you regard the sufferings of the christian life the very same way as the psalmist here and throughout scripture god's way of carrying out his program of sanctification or an element in that I know it's very difficult sometimes just to get your your thinking clear enough to think that way when you're in the sufferings that sometimes occur in your life but we have to go by what the word of god assures us of and this is what it's saying that god keeps us even through the most intense sufferings when our trust is in him not because of our trust not because the the level of our trust guarantees his keeping it's not based on anything in us or done by us we are assured of his keeping because he is faithful because he's faithful to his covenant and he will not actually be any way short of that at any step of your life so he helps him in his might through his nearness through his keeping and finally through his deliverance verses 19 to 22 there many are the afflictions of the righteous but the lord delivers him out of them all he keeps all his bones not one of them is broken there again you have the contrast affliction will slay the wicked those who hate the righteous will be condemned but the lord redeems the life of his servants none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned well he says many are the afflictions of the righteous many in number many in kind he's just stating that very matter of fact like but it's something that obviously he knows is a reality but out of them all the lord delivers them not necessarily while they're in this life entirely but the lord will deliver them out of all of these afflictions ultimately and especially when the afflictions are left behind as we leave this life behind let's think about the contrast then not only with the wicked but contrast how things are with you in terms of your need presently in this life look at all the different kinds of people of experts that you need in order to help you through various things that you need to deal with in the course of your life if you're something legal that you need to attend to you need a lawyer who's qualified solicitor if it's a health matter a physical health matter you need to go to a doctor you might have to consult a surgeon somebody who's expert in that field if it's a mental health issues you go to someone who can hopefully help you with that as well and give you some support all the way through it if it's a spiritual issue well we hope that although it's not very common in this world we hope that as ministers of the gospel people would ask us look I've got this spiritual problem can you help me with it all of these different people and there are many more each of them with a specific area of expertise that can hopefully help hopefully help us but when you go to

Jesus and to the Lord the Lord of your life all of the expertise is packed into the one person many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivers him out of them all you only need the one expert this Christ this Lord he has everything in himself for you to appeal to for you to apply to whatever kind of need arises and of course that's something that carries through into the very end of your life and on into eternity itself now that David doesn't merely list these as truths for us that God has his people in mind that God helps them in his might and the various points we've looked at under each of these headings he's not content simply to specify these he's actually inviting those that are going to be reading the psalm those that are going to be listening to what he's saying here he's inviting them to come and prove this put it to the test experience it for themselves look at what he says there verse 3 oh magnify the Lord with me let us exalt his name look at verse 8 oh taste and see that the

Lord is good look at verse 9 oh fear the Lord you his sins for those who fear him have no lack and then verse 11 come oh children listen to me I will teach you the fear of the Lord and so as he makes his appeals so we tonight are the beneficiaries of this great psalm this portion of God's word and where tonight God has laid out these great truths for us he's also saying to you and he's saying to me come and see and taste that the Lord is good come and fear him oh you saints come God is saying to you come oh my children listen to me put into practice the wisdom that I'm setting out for you Lord our God we thank you that we have such such great words as these to console our hearts and to guide us we thank you tonight for the way that your regard for your people is constant unailing and true we thank you oh

[31 : 24] Lord that even such as we are can actually say these things of ourselves oh Lord help us we pray in the confidence that we must have in the Lord help us never to doubt you or to doubt your wisdom give us to progress in our Christian lives in our walk in such a way oh Lord as would seek to draw our encouragement and our strength from these great truths that you have given us grant his mercies to us we pray now accept our worship and cleanse us from all our sin for Jesus sake amen and we're going to conclude from Psalm 34 robert on the of the of the the the the