

Psalm 34 / Fatherhood/Motherhood

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[0 : 00] So, we're singing songs in a series on Psalms. Well, that was a lot of essays, wasn't it? Singing songs on a series of Psalms. And we've come to Psalm 34.

And I have the pleasure of opening up Psalm 34 to you. I was also asked to do a side order in some stuff on being spiritual mothers and fathers. So, we'll do a little diversion and come back and we'll go around and around.

Psalm 34 is quite a long psalm, so we can either be here a long time or we won't complete it, one or the other. It doesn't really matter. Let's start. Let's start in. Okay, doesn't look anything like a rope. Never mind, that's fine. So, this is Psalm 34. And if you have a Bible, we're going to be going through it verse by verse. So, it starts out of David when he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away and he left.

Well, what's that all about? Well, if you get your Bibles out and look in 1 Samuel 21, you'll find this rather strange story. David was running away from Saul because Saul was out to kill him.

[1 : 05] Because he didn't like David. Because Saul had gone mad. So, David ran off to Gath. Goliath of Gath. Remember, he killed Goliath. He ran off to Gath, where Goliath was from.

And while he was there, Achish. Abimelech. Achish, Abimelech. Which one is it? In 1 Samuel, it talks about Achish.

And here it talks about Abimelech. Well, we don't really know which is which. I think his name was Abimelech and he was the Achish. That his title was Achish. But it could be the other way around. We don't really know. And, you know, people have gone, Oh, there's an inconsistency in the Bible there. Say, Oh, well done. You've spotted it. It's not that people didn't know what was going on or there's a mistake.

It's probably that there are two names involved. One's a title and one's a name. Okay, so he runs off. And the Achish says to him, They say to him, We've got David.

[2 : 05] And they go, Oh, David who killed Goliath? Yes. Well, let's go and get him. David goes, Oh, no, what am I going to do? So what he does is he pretends to be completely gaga mad in front of the Achish of Abimelech.

And the guy goes, Oh, get rid of him. I don't need another idiot. Thank you. Get rid of him. He goes, Yes, result. And runs away. The reason why I think he's called the Achish is because about five years later, he goes back again and fights for the Achish.

I think it's a different guy because otherwise you would have recognized him, wouldn't he? So anyway, so we have this. Here is this great psalm of praise that David is going, God saved me. I was going to die.

I thought I was going to die. I've been brought up before my greatest enemy when he was about to kill me. And he gave me this great idea and we pulled it off. Call one Lord. And so he writes this psalm.

Now this psalm, you might think, is just a great psalm of praise, of, Wee-hee! I was freed. But it's actually, we're doing a lot of Hebrew today. I don't know what there is about Hebrew, but we're doing a lot of Hebrew today.

[3 : 10] This is an acrostic psalm. Now an acrostic psalm, like Psalm 119, every verse starts with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet.

So, Aleph, Beth, Gamble, I don't know, after that I lost it because I don't speak Hebrew. Okay, so each verse has a letter on it.

And this has the effect of making each verse stand on its own. Rather than being a sequence or a story, it's a single thing and then another single thing and then another single thing.

So we could basically pick any of these and almost take them in any order. There is an order. There is a sort of story worked out. But basically, each one stands on its own. And it's almost as if this is like a mini book of Proverbs long before Solomon was even thought of.

Okay, so we can take each verse and look at it. And that's what we're going to do. We're going to work our way through some of them. I'm not planning to get to the end. You'll be relieved to know. In fact, I ran out of steam at verse 16.

[4 : 19] So if you get beyond verse 16, I'll be winging it. So that could be interesting. Right, let's start in. Verse 1. I will extol the Lord at all times.

His praise will always be on my lips. Well, isn't that what we've been doing? We've been praising God. We've been extolling Him. And is that what we can do day by day? Do we take our praise out into the week with us?

I'm seeing plenty of people nodding. And I know that's true for many of you. And this is just a challenge to those of you who may not do that, who may compartmentalize yourselves and say, I live my life here and then I go to church on Sunday and I'm someone different.

God's calling us to live holistic lives with the whole thing links together. And that can be quite tricky at times. You know, what do you do when your job calls you to do things that you think are not necessarily helpful spiritually?

What do you do when, you know, you're so busy with other things that you go, I can't spend the time with the Lord I want to do. And yet God is with us and He walks with us.

[5 : 34] Just as He walked with David. Why am I looking that way? I will glory in the Lord. Let the afflicted hear and rejoice. What does that mean?

What does it mean to glory in the Lord? It means that our glory, any glory that we have, and we have glory. You know, you look good.

You're tall. You're strong. You've got a brain. You have glory. But He's saying, no, that shouldn't be my glory. Not who I am. It's the Lord who is my glory.

When people look at me, they shouldn't be seeing, and this is my prayer, is that when you look at me and hear this sermon, you don't see me. You hear the Lord. And you glory in the Lord. That He has the glory.

That we get our glory from Him. And that we are nothing in the equation. That He is everything.

That He would be glorified. Which follows on, to glorify the Lord with me.

[6 : 32] Let us exalt His name together. How do we glorify God? Well, one of the ways, oddly enough, is by being dependent on Him.

Asking Him for things. We might feel guilty. Oh, I keep asking God to help me for this and that and the other and the other. Do you know God loves that?

Because it's us expressing our dependence on Him. And our faith in Him. So this is where our diversion heads off.

And I want to talk a little bit, this is a very strange thing to talk about, is fatherhood and motherhood. It seems odd, because many of you, when I look out, there are more grey hairs than I have, have been fathers and mothers, or are fathers and mothers.

You never stop being a father and a mother. And you know much more about this than I do. So I'm not trying to teach, this is not a lesson on parenthood. Okay, but what I want to do is to look at some aspects of what it means to be a human father and mother, and then to look at what those means as a spiritual father and mother.

[7 : 40] Because there's a difference. The temptation is we think, well, because I've been a human father and mother, I should be good enough to be, you know, I can do the spiritual bit. Let's have a look. Let's follow the first one.

Unconditional love. We love our children unconditionally. When they're good, they're bad. When they're annoying, when they're lovable, when they're not.

We love them. Okay, next one. Self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice. We give up our desires for our children. All right? We don't, you know, we put food on the table. If there's a lack of food, it's the children who feed rather than us. The self-sacrifice. There's a giving of ourselves for our children.

And these are basic things, all right? Nothing complex here. Let's keep going. We model things. We teach. But we don't teach necessarily by telling. In fact, that often doesn't work.

[8 : 41] Although, at younger ages, it works. What they're doing is watching how we live. We are modeling. We should be modeling life to our children. That's a challenge and a half in its own right.

And the last one. No. Okay, I did them in a funny order. We'll come back to the last one in a minute. So, what's the parallel here? In the spiritual life. Unconditional love.

God loves us with an unconditional love. This love has a lovely Hebrew word. I told you we're getting a lot of Hebrew today. It is chesed.

Chesed. You have to get into it. You can just say chesed if you want. It's fine. All right? This is his unconditional love. This is love that is not dependent on you and me.

God loves you not because you're lovely. Do you realize that? He also likes you. He also thinks you're pretty cool. But it comes out of who God is. We love people.

[9 : 40] The love here is about the person who does the loving. Not the person who is receiving the love. All right? We can love people who aren't lovely because God gives us power to love them.

And that's a calling that we should be wanting to see in any church. It's that we are loving each other not because we like each other.

Even though that would be really nice. It's really nice when you like each other. But there are some people in church you may not like very much. Your personality is smash. You know? Or whatever it is. We're still called to love each other because of who God is making us rather than who God's making them.

Self-sacrifice. Well, Paul talks about this in terms of vicarious or vicarious suffering. About suffering on behalf of the church.

That you're willing to suffer. Get up early. Put in long effort. Paint walls. Turn up early for music practice. You put other things first.

[10 : 43] I mean, that's not a heavy sacrifice. But there are other times when there is heavy sacrifice that goes on. For the benefit of the body. And of the church. Modeling.

That's the next one. We are to be imitable. Not inimitable. But imitable. You can be imitated. Paul says, imitate me as I follow Christ.

Wow. Can we really say to other people in the church, just imitate me as I follow Christ? I look at myself and go, I'm not there.

And yet, I don't think Paul felt he was there. If you look at Philippians 4, he goes on about, I've just not got there yet. I press on for what God has for me.

And I keep going. And I make an abject failure of it. But God still loves me. I don't think, just as we as human mothers and fathers are not perfect.

[11 : 45] God is expecting us to be perfect spiritual fathers and mothers. We should be able to say, those of us with a bit more spiritual maturity, yes, follow me as I follow Christ.

You could do worse. There are worse people to follow. Even me. All right? Let's be. And the funny thing is that children have this innate, I think it's innate, ability to work out what's good fathering and mothering and what's not.

All right? Our children are very quick on pointing out when we mess up. They know what good parenting is. I don't know where it comes from. Maybe it comes from God. But they just know.

We know what good fathering and mothering is. We know what good spiritual parenting is. We just know it. We can spot it. So let's not be afraid to embrace this idea of caring for each other and showing what Christ is like.

And the last one that I stuck in because I forgot to sort out the animation on the slide isn't there. Okay. Right. So we won't do that one. It was about feeding.

[13 : 00] How we feed. Let's go back. Let's go back a slide. Thank you. How we feed. We feed our children. And the difference between milk and meat.

And the temptation is. And the problem with a sermon is it does not teach you how to eat meat. The whole purpose of a sermon really is about giving you milk.

It's about me or whoever's standing up and preaching having thought through all the issues, thought it all through, and then expresses it and feeds you from the milk from what they have gained from eating the meat.

We don't learn in sermons. We don't learn in sermons how to eat meat. I don't have an answer to that question. I would love to have an answer to how do you teach people to eat meat. Because that's what, if you want to grow into spiritual parenting, you need to be able to eat meat.

Because you need to be able to feed those God's calling you to feed. So the role of a spiritual parent is in many respects doing God's work with legs on it in the church.

[14:08] My challenge to many of you is, is this where you want to go? Is this what God is calling you to you at this time? If you just come to faith, don't worry about it. Right?

This is about those who have come to faith a long time ago and are moving forward in their faith and are wondering, what's next? I've been doing, doing, doing. Now what does it mean to be and to be, to have this role?

So how do we get to this point? Point is never a point. How do we move in this direction? Now we come to my current favorite verse of the Bible, which I used to have a favorite verse of the Bible. We can go on to the next slide if you like. I used to have a favorite verse in the Bible, but I never told anybody about it. This favorite verse, I get in every sermon, everywhere. It just comes up everywhere. And it's up there.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh. Again, well that's Greek now. I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

[15:10] Let's go through this. If we want to be like Christ, we have to be crucified with Christ. We have to die to self.

All over the place you'll see, die to self, die to self. What does that mean? It's my own inclinations. My own desire to be seen to be somebody.

Remember what we said earlier, we want to glorify God, not ourselves. It's whatever I happen to enjoy. It doesn't mean to say we can't have fun, but it's giving that up for Christ.

It's that time when God comes along and completely wrecks your brain because he does something he should not do. Causes you to suffer in some way that is just outside the pale.

Or causes someone else to think, that's not right. That's not God. And yet God's done it. John Wimber, I should put up a nice quote there. John Wimber has a wonderful quip that he says, God affronts the mind to expose the heart.

[16:17] And God messes with us. You find something in the Bible that just doesn't fit. And you go, this doesn't fit my understanding of you, Lord. How could you go and wipe out, or command the Israelites to go and wipe out that whole nation?

Might be a problem for you. Not a problem for me. You can ask me afterwards if you want to know. Something like that. They're just like, this isn't right. This isn't what I signed up for.

This isn't who I think you should be, God. And God's going, well, I am. Are we willing to let God be God?

There's some wonderful books, and there's some wonderful book titles. This is a wonderful book title. I can't remember who wrote it. John can probably remind us. And I've never managed to get through the book because it was written in about the 12th century, and I'm not very good at Middle English, even in translation.

And this book is called The Cloud of Unknowing. Just this idea that you enter into this position of just, I don't get it. I thought I understood God.

[17:29] I thought, you know, this, this, this. I've been taught this, this, this. And then God just doesn't fit. And we enter this sort of, okay, so who is this God?

Who, who, what, what? And some people start deconstructing their faith. Really, it's God saying, I want you to give up what you think you know about me and come to know me for yourself.

To trust me, to let me be God, not you be God. I'm going to bring in, I'll bring it in now. It'll come back later.

Do you know cat and dog theology? Who knows about cat and dog theology? Oh, cat and dog theology is great fun. The dog looks at his master and says, you feed me, you care for me, you give me somewhere safe to sleep.

You look after me, you give me toys to play with. You must be God. God. The cat looks at the master and says, you feed me, you care for me, you give me somewhere safe to sleep.

[18:38] You give me toys to play with. I must be God. Which one is it? Which one are we living?

You know, I look at my own life and I go, yeah, I tried to live dog theology, but sometimes the cat creeps in. So this cloud of unknown, this entering this sort of, I don't know what's going on here, Lord.

I'm just going to hang on and wait. There's a lot of waiting in growing in Christ. A lot of waiting. One of the hardest things we do as Christians is wait.

Wait, wait. But just wait. But just wait. Then he goes, okay. As we put out our hand in this cloud of unknowing, we find that somebody grasps it.

That God will grasp it. And we discover not truth, a nice little book of instructions. We discover a person who will lead us through life and who will walk us into the truth that he has for us.

[19 : 49] And it's a glorious thing to discover. So he grasps his hand and he walks us forward. And he says, are you willing to do my will, not yours?

Are you willing to let me do the one thing that you do not want me to do? That one thing. And it's no longer a hypothetical question.

It's a real question. Will you let me take all your money? Will you let me take your children? Will you let me take your health?

Whatever it is. It tends to be very personal. And he knows exactly the one thing that is really hard for you to say, to give to him. It may take you years to say yes to that question.

And God in his patience will wait. Will hold your hand and wait as you work through that with him. Because he loves you.

[20 : 54] But it's a fight you have to have. Jacob wrestled with God. And in wrestling, he had his hip taken out. And he limped from then on.

And sometimes we come out of that wrestling with a limp. In fact, you almost have to come out with a limp. It's a fight you have to lose.

It's really funny that as we lose our life in God, we find we gain it again. That's where we find it.

In the very giving up, in the very crucifying, dying to self, it's when we discover our life. What is this life? It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

Christ learned obedience. If Christ had to learn obedience, how much more do we have to learn obedience?

[21 : 58] How do we learn obedience? Well, one of the primary ways is through suffering. Now, normally when I stand up and talk about suffering, I have to explain how suffering is not the end, how God can use suffering, how suffering is really horrible.

We don't like it, but in it we discover God. But I know that this congregation has suffered a lot. There are many people in this church who know about suffering.

You know these things. You know that in suffering you discover God, that he is there for you and that he will see you through. That suffering is not the end. And that out of suffering, especially when we bring it to God and let him to be in the middle of it, growth happens.

We become stronger in God. We do not need to fear suffering. In fact, those who haven't suffered often fear suffering more because they haven't experienced it.

We tend to fear what we haven't experienced more than not. Somebody gave an example of the first time they had a certain operation. They were dreading it. And then after they had it, go, oh, is that all it was?

[23 : 07] Oh, okay. It wasn't as bad as they thought. So, we discover God and we strengthen through that but we're learning obedience that life is all about him.

It is. I sigh because I look at my own life and go, it's not all about him and I want it to be. And we grow what's called a holy dispassion.

It says, I just want to walk with Jesus into whatever he has for me. The rest is just not important. Really not important. It does not matter who won the football.

It really doesn't matter. And then this lovely reassurance at the end. And the life I now live in the flesh, that's the old me that I was born with, not the new me in Christ.

So when I live out of my old selfish ways, I live in faith. I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

[24 : 16] We're going to mess up. Boy, do we mess up. Sometimes we even think, can I make one step forward? But we know that Jesus is there for us and he loves us and he will see us through because it is about him and he loves you.

We'll come on to that. Okay, let's return to the psalm. We've got to verse four. I sought the Lord and he answered me.

He delivered me from all my fears. Have you experienced that? I pray that you will and you have.

We do not need to fear. Perfect love casts out fear as it says in 1 Peter somewhere.

5, 7 or something. Don't quote me on that. But as we experience God's love for us, we learn not to fear.

Not to fear God and not to fear the world around us. If you are suffering from fear, as it were, well certainly, get help, get people to pray for you. But most of all, learn that God loves you, that Jesus loves you.

[25 : 37] It's one of the most powerful things for dealing with it. Those who look to him are radiant. Their faces are never covered with shame.

Do you know, we reflect what we love. It spills out of us. If we love football, we spend all our time talking about football. If we love Bible-type setting, we spend all our time talking about Bible-type setting.

That's me. If we love Jesus, we'll talk about him. It just spills out of us. We may not even need to talk about it. It just comes out of us. And people start to see God in us.

Even when we don't feel like we are in a position for God, for them to do that, they do. And we never need to be ashamed of Jesus. Kids are out.

But I would say one of the toughest times of being a Christian is at school. Oh, you're a Jesus freak. Or whatever like that. Could happen at work too, but tend to have a bit more maturity to handle it.

[26 : 41] Jesus doesn't need defending. It's a bit like defending a lion. Just let the lion loose. He can defend himself. He's very good at it. He's a strong rock in a world that's being shaken.

The world is being shaken. God seems to be withdrawing all the alternatives to him in terms of hope that this country is facing as we come into election. It's an election about hope.

I don't know, I saw one of the debates and it came up. This is an election about hope. The election is not going to solve the question of hope. Only God can solve the question of hope.

And people are going to come flooding into this church because they're looking for hope. And are we ready to receive them? He says, looking at everybody because it's going to be full in here.

That's my prayer and my excitement.

Verse 6. This poor man called and the Lord heard him. He saved him out of his troubles. Is that a daily experience?

[27 : 46] Of God being there for us. You know, we know God is for us. Let's live secure that God is for us.

I came into this service not feeling ready to preach. And I had to remind God is for me. And he will see me through. We see this most in suffering.

In the worst of times is when we see God the most. Almost gets to the point where we, where the tough times are better than the easy times.

Because in the tough times we know God so much more. We experience him so much more that they become holy places. And that is a wonderful thing that we can take the worst of times and turn them into a holy place where we can praise God and we can say thank you for taking me through that.

Romans 8, 28 it says, all things work for good for those who love God. And for me, I would say when there's something that bad happens to us it is only healed when we can turn around and say I know that is true and I thank God for that because of the good that he brought out of it and because I experienced him in it.

[29 : 00] We know his, we experience him saving us out of our troubles. The anger of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and he delivers them.

God has real power. Sorry, the angel, not the angel. God, dear. The angel of the Lord. God, dear. Thank you, thank you. Most of the way that God protects us is unseen.

There's an unseen world out there and now it's really tempting to try and get involved in that unseen world. Why? Because when God's power is involved, power is incredibly seductive.

Powerful people are incredibly attractive. We are attracted to power like moth to a flame. We just say, power, yes! Now it's either power because I want it or power because I need it.

But we want power and we'll grab power from anywhere. And yet all of this stuff that's going on that God is doing hidden is hidden for a purpose. We don't need to know about it.

[30 : 02] We are just merely human beings. There's other stuff going on. I don't know much about it. I haven't gone there. But some of you might be attracted to get, start digging into that stuff and coming up with principles and stuff like that.

If it ain't in the Bible, you're off on a bit of an interesting route. I would encourage you to come back. To God, power is nothing. He is just absolute power.

All right? Wielding power to somebody who's powerful isn't that exciting. It's just getting on with what they need to do. God wants us to relate to him, not his power.

as if we could control it or rub off on us or make us powerful, give us status. God's not into that. He's into drawing us to himself because he loves us.

We don't need to know. So let's just let God do God's stuff that he's hidden and just rejoice in it and thank him for it. That means we can pray. Sorry, I'm just wondering if I'm going to talk about this later or not.

[31 : 04] God's power, in my experience, you've got a big problem ahead of you and you're praying about it. What you really want to do is God to get his big gun and go, like this, a big powerful explosion and it's gone.

Right? Won the battle. Yes! What usually happens is you pray and the thing sort of turns into smoke and just disappears. That's real power.

Right? It's not about flamboyant. It's just, oh look, it's not there anymore. It's gone. That's power.

That's God's power caring for us. And now we come to this glorious verse which I think I'm going to finish with. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. That wonderful phrase that we've probably heard many times. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. Good. It's in songs. It's everywhere. We have been tasting.

[32 : 13] There's two aspects to tasting. One is you can taste like, hmm, ooh, that tastes nice. I'll give this a try. Give God a try.

Give him a go. Taste him. See what happens. If God really loves you, he's going to show up for you because he wants you to taste him and find out. If you don't know him, give him a go because you may find out he's absolutely wonderful.

The other one is we taste when we eat. So take lots. Taste him. Eat him. Consume him. Get into God. He's well worth it.

God is good. In fact, the Bible says something much stronger. In Mark 10, 18, he says, God is the only good.

Only God is good. This rich man comes up to Jesus and says, good teacher, what must I do to be saved? And Jesus says, who are you calling good? Only God is good. Now this is the debate of the Bible.

[33 : 20] Is God the only good? It starts in Genesis 3 with the devil or the snake saying, did God really say? Was God really good in saying you couldn't eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil?

I mean, you know, gave him all the other trees. God's not really good. He's not really sufficient. He's not really everything you need, is he? You need something more. And how we buy into that lie.

How we buy into it. We spend our lives fighting that lie. If God really is the ultimate good, then we should go for him.

Sold out entirely for him. Knowing that what he has for us, even if it's tough, is good. And he's for our good because he loves us. Here's an interesting definition of evil.

We sometimes equate evil and suffering. It's not. Evil is what takes us away from the good.

However pleasant the evil might seem. You can have non-suffering evil.

[34 : 33] In fact, most sin is very nice. Otherwise, you wouldn't do it. And you can have non-evil suffering. evil is taking away from what is good.

God is good. And we spend our lives. Oh, I didn't realize I'd done that slide. Excellent. God is good. And we need to work that out in our lives.

We have this debate going on in history and in scripture and in our lives. And we will spend our lives in this debate. Settle it. Let God win that one each time.

So, yeah, I'm going to stop here. Otherwise, we'll just keep going and going and going. There's a wonderful psalm. So much in it. In conclusion, God loves you with a hesed love.

That's a love that's not dependent on how good you've been, how strong you are, anything about you. He loves you because he is love.

[35 : 42] And he loves you. He likes you. You might think, oh, because God loves me independent of who I am, that means he doesn't really love me.

No, he loves you. He is for you. He is for you. He is for you. He wants you. He wants to give you good things. What's the good things he wants to give you? Himself.

He will do everything to give you himself because that's the best he can give you. That's why we go through suffering because he wants to give you even better. God loves you. God loves you. God loves you. And since this is my final sermon before we go overseas, God loves you. God loves you. So let us glorify him in all that we are, in all that we do. May he be glorified. May he be the one that we revel in and glory in him all the days of our lives. Amen.