

TASTING GOD'S GOODNESS
Through His Rescue and Redemption
Psalm 34
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If it looks good, eat it

This past week we celebrated and enjoyed Thanksgiving in our homes. It's one of those times when we reserve certain traditions and foods to only be enjoyed at this particular season. It's not the typical meal preparation and setting we regularly plan, but the gathering and food take on a special significance. In our family gatherings it's the one time of year I can look forward to several styles of potato dishes to choose from, gravy is allowed to be poured over everything, and I can unashamedly eat whipped cream with a slice of pumpkin buried underneath.

There is a delight in savoring good food and enjoying our favorites dishes. And then there's also the attempt at trying new things. As I've grown up, I've been introduced to new flavors and have began enjoying foods I never thought I would - like *brussel sprouts*. As a kid there was no attractive or appetizing quality for me to enjoy them. But as I've gotten older my tastes have expanded and I actually request to have them at certain meals. I'm learning that if it looks good, eat it!

Not unlike our changing physical appetites, your spiritual appetite should also be growing as you mature in the Lord. It is through your relational experiences with God that you grow in your taste of God's goodness in your life. The people or situations that once scared you, don't hold the same power anymore. You learn from previous trials and troubles how to remain faithful to God in the midst of them. And when affliction comes, you grow from being paralyzed with fear to walking faithfully in the fear of the Lord.

As we study Psalm 34 and the circumstances surrounding David's writing of it, we will learn that **TASTING GOD'S GOODNESS MEANS YOU EXPERIENCE HIS MERCY IN DELIVERING YOU FROM FEARFUL TROUBLE AND DELIGHT IN TELLING OTHERS OF HIS GRACIOUS REDEMPTION.**

Fear, Desperation and Deliverance

This is why David wrote this Psalm. It came out of his harrowing experiences with both King Saul and King Achish of the Philistines. The historical reference for this psalm is found in 1 Samuel 21-22. In fact, Psalms 34, 56 and 57 were written during these circumstances in David's life. Take some time to read 1 Samuel 21:1-22:5, and next read Psalm 56 and 57, which is David's crying prayer for deliverance. Then re-read Psalm 34 which is David's worshipful response of deliverance.

^{ESV} **1 Samuel 21:10-13** *And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath. ¹¹ And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'" ¹² And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. ¹³ So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard.*

This episode in David's life is not a shining moment. In fact, it was made worse by fearful and sinful choices he made, which led to desperate attempts by David to deliver himself. Up until this point David had been the rising star, legendary hero and anointed future king. But relations between himself and Saul

had deteriorated to such a point that on multiple occasions Saul attempted to end David's life. David was right to escape Saul's court at this time, but his fleeing was out of untrusting fear that God - not Saul - had the power over his life.

The evidence that David did not trust the Lord at this time is seen by his lying to Ahimelech the priest that he was on a "secret mission" (1 Sam.21:1-9). This "mission" was so secret and sudden that David left unprepared and alone. Both Ahimelech and a servant of Saul, Doeg the Edomite, were suspicious of David's story which led to him desperately running away into enemy Philistine territory for safety. David's plan backfired as he was immediately recognized (with Goliath's sword), captured and interrogated by King Achish.

Sadly, David's best plan to escape his compounding situation was to act insane. From there he was shamefully dismissed from Abimelech's court and forced to hide out in the caves of Adullam (22:1-5). For David, his fearful responses led to sinful lying, foolish choices and shameful behavior. You might not have someone actively trying to kill you, *but have you ever ran away out of fear before? Have you found yourself alone, not feeling like you can trust anyone else so you decide to trust in yourself and your clever abilities to solve a problem?* When out of sinful fear you choose to run away, isolate or associate with godless people, you begin to make decisions and act in ways you did not think you would behave.

The setting for Psalm 34 is important because it helps us identify with the fears, decisions and behaviors David faced. Even though David ran away in fear at this time and acted disgracefully, He was not forgotten or abandoned by God. God did not leave it up to David to figure it out before He would help him. God mercifully rescued David from his deteriorating circumstances and gently restored him to a place of confident trust in the Lord. You and I share in this same hope that God rescues us from our sinful, desperate behavior and redeems us to a position of confidence in him.

I. TESTIFYING TO GOD'S RESCUE [34:1-10]

HUMBLE BLESSINGS

Psalm 34:1-3 *Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away. I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. ² My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. ³ Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!*

The way David wrote this Psalm was to help others remember and recite its promises. He wrote it in an acrostic pattern, which means each verse begins with a word corresponding to the Hebrew alphabet (see also Psa.9, 25). This encounter David had with others and before God made such a strong impression on him that he eagerly wants us to learn from his situation. Not unlike Charles Dickens' character Ebenezer Scrooge, whose encounter with the Christmas spirits left him a changed man, David testifies to God's mighty rescue and immediately teaches others the truth.

It is fitting this psalm begins with David blessing and boasting in God because his own "cleverness" had failed. Since only God could have rescued him, and only God could have done this, David responds in worship and praise! When God does something remarkable and you recognize His unmistakable work, your response is to be praise and worship. Praise and worship come from the overflow of your trust-filled, faith-driven experiences with God. When you trace the good hand of God through the threads of your life's events, the only proper response is to exalt and boast in Him alone.

FROM TERROR TO DELIVERANCE

Psalm 34:4-7 *I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. ⁵ Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. ⁶ This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. ⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.*

Looking back on his circumstances, David relates the process of his experiences before God:

PRAYER = GOD ANSWERS = DELIVERANCE

The simplicity of the formula does not diminish the reality of the fear. In fact, the Hebrew word used here for "**fear**" is found only 3x in Scripture (Pro.10:24; Isa.66:4). It carries with it the idea of HEAVY DREAD and TERROR. This isn't about being afraid of the dark, this is genuine fear for your life and fearful desperation in times of trouble. FEARFULNESS IS THE ENEMY OF THE BELIEVER.

But as real as the fear is, God's deliverance is just as real. The Hebrew word for "*deliverance*" (vs.4, 7, 17, 19) means "to be snatched away, rescued, saved; to escape." God doesn't simply give you the means to figure out *how to escape*, He is the means by which you are saved. David is the poor man who desperately cried for help which lead to God's hearing and actively rescuing him from all - *not some* - of his troubles. More than that, David learned that God had always been surrounding and protecting him. He had never stopped being under God's mighty protection or out of reach from His ready-rescue. [i.e. 2 Kings 6]

NEITHER ARE YOU! Those who belong to God through the Lord Jesus Christ have the same hopeful assurance that His protection is surrounding you, His deliverance is near. Don't allow the size of your fear and trouble paralyze you from crying out to God and testifying to His mighty deliverance.

Psalm 34:8-10 *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! ⁹ Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! ¹⁰ The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*

When you live through experiences like this you, you learn what it means to "*taste and see that the Lord is good!*" Tasting means acting in faith. This is not a *trying-God-out* sort of thing, this is a purposeful resolve to trust the Lord in the midst of your troubles. You have a choice when faced with your fear, when overwhelmed by your trouble, where will you turn to trust?

David's analogy depicting young lions is a poignant illustration of TRUST and the SIN OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY. Of all the animals in the world that seem capable of sufficiently providing for themselves, it seems absurd that young healthy lions would starve of hunger. David's point is that young lions will go hungry before God will allow His own to lack anything good! Tasting God means trusting in His sufficient provision in the midst of your troubles instead of pridefully relying on your self-sufficient means to survive.

Do you rely on your own self-sufficient means to solve your troubles? Have you learned to trust and taste God's goodness as He delivers you from fear?

II. TEACHING OF GOD'S REDEMPTION [34:11-22]

Psalm 34:11-14 *Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*¹² *What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good?*¹³ *Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.*¹⁴ *Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.*

FEARING IS THE KEY

David turns from sharing his personal testimony of deliverance to teaching about God's redemption of the righteous. In this psalm he states several imperatives: *taste* (8), *fear* (9), *come* (11), *keep* (13), *turn, do, pursue* (14). The point David is emphatically expressing is that true goodness comes only through living in the fear of the Lord. You can picture David in the cave of Adullam or the forest of Hereth, calling the children over to listen as shares his recent experience of narrow escape with Saul and God's miraculous deliverance from the Philistine king.

However, David is not just sharing exciting fireside stories. He wants them to learn from his failure, and to live, not in the fear of others, but in the fear of God. Specifically, living in the fear of the Lord is an active resolve to speak truth, not lies and deception like at Nob. To turn away from evil, not into the company of men like Gath. And to pursue peace with God, instead of running from Him. Tasting God's goodness means you live a life of godly integrity.

CASE FOR GODLY LIVING

Psalm 34:15-22 *The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry.*¹⁶ *The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.*¹⁷ *When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.*¹⁸ *The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.*

¹⁹ *Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.*²⁰ *He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.*²¹ *Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.*²² *The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.*

Why does living a godly life matter? It has everything to do with if the Lord is for you or against you. Do you stand with God's commendation or under His condemnation. Only the righteous have the assurance of His divine attention (15-17), everlasting compassion (18-20) and final justice (21-22). God's promises of blessing and protection come only to those who actively live righteous lives. God is watching, listening and personally drawing near to you in your time of trouble.

GOD'S PRESENCE IS EXPERIENCED *WITHIN* YOUR CRISIS SITUATIONS. He is gentle not to break and abandon you in your time of help, but to help those who are "broken-hearted, crushed in spirit." In other words, those who are humbled and repentant of their self-sufficiency. Notice that being a godly person doesn't mean a trouble-free life, but promises rescue and redemption from all your troubles.

*The promise of prayer does not mean that God will change every difficult thing in your life. But he will preserve you for as long as he has work for you to do, and he will transform even the difficult circumstances by his presence and perhaps by the presence of others whom he sends to be with you.*¹

¹ James Boice, *An Expository Commentary: Psalms, vol.1*, p.295

Notice how all this points to the ministry of Jesus Christ. When Jesus publicly announced Himself as the Messiah (Luk.4), he read and applied Isaiah 61 to Himself, "*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.*"

When Jesus hung on the cross as the atoning lamb for your sins, He fulfilled this Scripture "*But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs... For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken.'*" (Jn. 19:33, 36)

For those who have taken refuge in the redemptive work of Christ, you no longer fear condemnation but have confidence that the full weight of God's love is for you, "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died-- more than that, who was raised-- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?³⁶ As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.'³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Rom.8:1, 33-34)

May the testimony of your life be one of praise for God's merciful rescue and testifying to others about His gracious redemption in your life!