

Psalm 34 • Taste and see that the Lord is good

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We're in Psalm chapter 34, so, open your Bible there, please, and let's begin with prayer.

Heavenly Father, as we dig into this Psalm tonight, I pray that You would help us to have a heart of understanding, and that we would gain insight from it, and that we would learn this evening the things that You want us to learn.

Teach us, Lord. Speak to our hearts. You have given us ears to hear and eyes to see. Now, Lord, activate those this evening so that we would hear from You. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Psalm chapter 34 is the third Psalm to be written as an acrostic. I don't know if I've always mentioned this every time we've come to one of these. That basically means that every verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet; and that was done, we think, probably just to help promote memorization. If you were remembering something, and you knew that the first verse started with A and then B and then C and so forth, you would probably—at least, it'd help you get the first word, which sometimes helps you to be able to do that; and we know that people did memorize these.

But what we also know about this is that Psalm 34 was written during a time in David's life when he was running from Saul, who, being inflamed with jealousy, was trying to kill David. And so, there was a couple of times actually that David sought refuge in the land of the Philistines; and this Psalm is written essentially after that first time. David figured, on both of those occasions, that Saul wouldn't come looking for him in the land of the Philistines since they were the perennial enemies of Israel. But this particular time, David barely escaped with his life, and he knew he had been unwise in going among the Philistines.

And so, when he was able to escape, he was very grateful to the Lord, and he saw the Lord's mercy in it. This Psalm is a celebration of the mercy and the faithfulness of God; and you can just—I mean, David's gratitude is just replete throughout this Psalm.

Let's begin looking at verse 1. Some of you are going to hear old songs. I'll just warn you ahead of time as we read through these first verses.

*"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!
⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears." (ESV)*

I was actually singing the song that goes along with this to Sue today while I was studying. I won't burden you with it, but it's one of those times when you read through the verses of the Psalms and a song just rises up in our hearts.

You can see from these first 4 verses that David is full of joy. He's full of gratitude and full of praise to the Lord. He says: *"I will bless the LORD at all times; I'm not going to stop praising Him with my mouth; my soul makes its boast in the LORD; and then, let the humble hear and be glad (that's an interesting statement); and then, I sought the LORD and he answered me and delivered me from all of my fears. Wow, that's pretty amazing.*

He says in verse 5:

*"Those who look to him (the Lord) are radiant,
and their faces shall never be ashamed."*

I want you to stop for just a moment and think to yourself: What does it mean to look to the Lord?

We see that phrase in the Psalms, and it's not something that we're familiar with. But what exactly does it mean: I look to the Lord? *Those (he says) who look to him (the Lord) are radiant.*"

Well, if somebody said to you, (Your name inserted here), I'm looking to you, well, that's putting a lot of pressure on somebody, but that means they're relying on you. Maybe a coach might say to one of his players on the team, Jack, I'm looking to you to get the job done tonight. Well, again, that's basically applying that focus on one individual to pull it out to make it happen, and so forth.

When David says, *“Those who look to him are radiant,”* he's talking about those who are utterly depending on the Lord, who, basically, are saying, it's God that I'm looking to.

So, here's my question to you: What do you lack? What do you lack in your life right now? Patience? Provision? A job? A relationship? Maybe a healed relationship? We all have things in our life that we lack. Every single one of us. There's probably hardly a time in our lives that we can't look at our lives and say, I'm lacking something.

Here's the point. Are you looking to the Lord to meet that need, whatever it is? Because David says, *“Those who look to him (the Lord) are radiant and their faces shall never be ashamed.”* Those who are depending on the Lord, those who are saying to the Lord, this is the need in my life.

Now, here's the question—or I guess I should say, here's the option that you and I have. We all have needs; here's the question: Are you going to take care of it on your own? Work it out yourself? Or are you going to look to the Lord?

All right. It's the same thing as waiting on the Lord. When you stop and think about it, it's very similar. But waiting on the Lord should never be—and I think looking to the Lord also—should never be misconstrued as, I'm sitting and twiddling my thumbs, waiting for God to do something. I'm just waiting for God to do something. I need a job, so I'm just waiting for the phone to ring. I think some people look at it that way, like any effort that I do on my part is going to be circumventing looking to the Lord or waiting on the Lord.

The possibility exists that if I do step out, I'm going to step out in my own strength; there's certainly always going to be a temptation to do that. But I think that there's a point where we do step out in faith, believing that the Lord's going to provide. In other words, I need a job, I'm going to get out there, and get my resume out there, and fill out some applications, and so forth, but I'm trusting that the Lord is going to provide me with the job that's best. I'm looking to the Lord to do that, right? I'm not going to bust doors down. I'm not going to pull, twist somebody's arm. I'm going to wait, and wait for the Lord to take care of it for me.

Notice what David goes on to say in verse 6; he says:

*“This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him
and saved him out of all his troubles.”*

I want you to notice how David refers to himself here in this verse, right after talking about those who look to the Lord. He refers to himself as the poor man, and by doing that, he's acknowledging that he was without resources to bring about his own rescue, right?

And that is one of the most important revelations that we can have about our lives: that we are poor.

Yet you'll notice here that, throughout the course of this Psalm, even though he calls himself a poor man, he's delighted. He's delighted with his poverty. He's delighted with the fact that his abundance and his provision is found in the Lord. He's basically saying, I have nothing, but I'm delighted to say that. I'm delighted to admit that I have nothing.

If you haven't yet found the joy of your utter poverty then you have not begun to really, truly experience the abundance of God's provision and the joy that comes along with resting in Him. But I want to reiterate: It begins with understanding that you're not bringing anything to the table. You're a willing vessel. You're going to be out there to step out in faith, if that's what the Lord directs, but you are not bringing provision to the equation and then asking God to bless it or add to it. You are coming to the Lord and saying, I have nothing. I'm the poor man.

Think about that when you're praying next time, and just tell the Lord—I believe it delights Him to hear from His children when we say to Him, I have nothing and I'm trusting in You. My hope is in You.

Look at verse 7:

*“The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.”*

Now, this is going to be the first of several verses in this Psalm where David makes a reference to fearing the Lord, so it would be helpful for us to ask: What does it mean to fear the Lord?

I'll never forget a number of years ago, had a guy come up to me after a message in which I was obviously talking about fearing the Lord, and he really took issue with my statement, although it comes right from the Word of God. He said, I don't think we should fear God at all. I said, well, the Lord would disagree because you know He says over and over again that fearing the Lord is a good thing.

Here's the deal: He was thinking of fear only in the negative sense; and I don't blame him, somebody coming from a place where they really aren't familiar with the Scripture. They start reading verses that say, “...*fear the LORD, you his saints* (people).” They're going to go: Really? Isn't this the same God that we were just singing about and we were saying He's a good Father? The Lord is faithful to it, and we sing all these wonderful things, and then we read the Word, and it goes: Fear Him.

Again, a new person in the Lord is, maybe, taken aback because when they think of fear, they think of all the things they're afraid of. They think of getting sick. (Many of us are afraid of disease, death, crime, tragedy happening, storms, demons—and we could go on and on about the many things that we're afraid of.) So when I think of fearing God in that context, it seems out of place because isn't He a loving Father? Well, the first thing you have to understand that even when it comes to fearing God, there's a bad kind of fear; and that's an important thing to remember.

You guys remember in the book of Genesis? After Adam and Eve ate of the tree that was forbidden for them to eat, it says that they heard the sound of the Lord walking in the cool of the garden. (What a cool thing that would have been.) But it says, they ran and hid, and when they were finally called out of their hiding places, they said, we heard you coming and we were afraid.

We were afraid. Well, that's not the kind of fear that God is talking about when He says, “...*fear the Lord*,” because the fear of the Lord has a positive effect in our lives. It's not being afraid of God in the sense of: I'm afraid things have been going too good lately in my life (you ever heard that one?), and I'm afraid that the sword is going to fall any day now because it just can't keep going like this. In fact, I wish something bad would happen so I could just breathe a sigh of relief.

That's not the kind of fear that God wants you and I to have. Actually, there are several Hebrew and Greek words that are translated, fear in the Bible; and although they can have different meanings—different shades of meanings—when they're used in relationship to speaking about the fear of the Lord, they always have a positive connotation.

Okay? References to the fear of the Lord speak positively. Fear of the Lord speaks of good intentions, and it serves to make a person receptive to the counsel of the Lord.

Let me show you how this is communicated in the Proverbs. Proverbs 1:7; look at this:

Proverbs 1:7 (ESV)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; (but) fools despise wisdom and instruction.

You see what we're saying here? The fear of the Lord speaks of good intentions and an open heart toward the counsel of the Lord, but somebody who doesn't properly fear the Lord, the Bible calls a fool; and they are going to despise wisdom and instruction because they're not open to it, because they don't have that proper fear of the Lord.

Now, in the Greek, when we get to the New Testament and it starts talking about the fear of the Lord, it refers to a reverential fear, to revere God. In fact, Vine's Expository Dictionary calls it, "*a wholesome dread of displeasing Him*"—but a wholesome dread, okay? This is a positive and helpful kind of fear of the Lord. It's the kind of fear that the early church had.

Let me show you this on the screen from Acts chapter 9. It says:

Acts 9:31 (ESV)

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up. (And look at this:) And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Interesting, in the same phrase, we hear the "*fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Spirit.*" So, as they feared the Lord and walked in the fear of the Lord, they were comforted. Again, do you see that it has a positive connotation, this idea of fearing the Lord?

And that's what David is talking about here in this Psalm in verse 7 when he says, "*The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and (He) delivers them.*"

But even then, sometimes those words need to be added to a little bit. Check out this passage from Hebrews 12: 28-29 on the screen. The writer says:

Hebrews 12: 28-29 (ESV)

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, (that is that word, with fear and awe; and it ends with) for our God is a consuming fire.

I don't know, that doesn't, maybe, sound like something you want to think about when you're thinking about receiving comfort or something from the Lord, but we fear Him because we know and understand who He is.

But notice that the writer of Hebrews says in this passage: “*let us be grateful.*” So, he speaks of gratitude in the same passage where we're reading about the fear of the Lord. Again, the fear of the Lord brings out gratitude and awe, which are good things.

And then, the Book of Proverbs adds this. Look at this one, Proverbs 8:13:

Proverbs 8:13 (ESV)

The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

So, what else is the fear of the Lord? It's the hatred of evil. Right?

Finally, I want to show you a verse that's almost identical to the one we started with, but this one's in Proverbs 9. This one says:

Proverbs 9:10 (ESV)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...

The earlier one said, “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.*” Now, we have “...*the beginning of wisdom.*” You know the difference between knowledge and wisdom: Knowledge is simply knowing something; wisdom is putting that knowledge into practice and knowing how to put that knowledge into practice. All right?

So, the fear of the Lord—now, here's what the reason I brought this up alongside the earlier one we looked at that's almost identical. It's because the word, beginning here is actually different from Proverbs chapter 1 that says, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.*” Now, we say, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*” But it's a different word— a different Hebrew word— and it literally means, prerequisite. The fear of the Lord is the prerequisite of wisdom.

In case you need a refresher on prerequisite, let me show you this:

Pre.req.ui.site (noun)

- a thing that is required as a prior condition for something else to happen or exist

What does *prerequisite* mean? It's a thing that is required as a prior condition for something else to happen or exist.

What are we learning in that verse? The fear of the Lord is required before wisdom can exist. Isn't that interesting? Wisdom doesn't begin to enter into the heart of man until the fear of the Lord is present. And even then, it's just the beginning, right? It has to come first.

Okay, verse 8:

*“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!”*

I've always loved this verse because it dares the skeptic to experience the Lord for themselves in a real and tangible way.

When I was in the 6th grade— 5th or 6th grade, I can't remember— we were going through this exercise in school where they would blindfold us and have us taste things, and we would have to tell them what it was— brown sugar, salt, you name it.

Taste is a very intimate sort of a thing; and I remember what they would have us do before we tasted it is they'd have us smell it first (they were talking about our senses and all this), and so, they took some sugar and put it first up to my nose. Now remember, I'm blindfolded— and I don't know if you've ever smelled sugar, it doesn't really smell that good. Sugar does not have a nice aroma.

They said, okay, here, now smell this, and I went, eww, and they said, now taste it, and I was like, no, I don't want to taste that. But I tasted it; it was like, oh, sugar! There's sugar! And that's the first time I learned as a kid that sugar doesn't really smell good, but it tastes great. By tasting it, I was convinced that this thing that I thought smelled bad and thought was bad, I was convinced that it was in fact good.

And that is exactly what David is challenging you and I to do with the Lord. Taste and see or taste and prove that the Lord is good. I really like this challenge.

Too many of us— I'll just say this flat out— too many of us as Christians talk about the Lord's goodness second or third hand. We might see somebody else who has experienced the goodness of God, and we go, wow, God is good. Too few of us have experienced His goodness for ourselves.

When I was thinking about this verse, I started looking around at some other authors from years gone by and how they looked at this verse, “*taste and see that the LORD is good!*” and I was touched by several of their quotes.

I want to put them up on the screen for you. The first one by a man by the name of Campbell Murdoch. He says:

We may argue about God, His existence, and the external evidences which the universe and providence provide. But only when His love and presence touch our hearts can we really know Him in His unspeakable goodness.

- Campbell Murdoch

We may argue about God, (we can talk about) His existence, (we can talk about all) and the external evidences which the universe and providence provide (like proving that God exists and He's real and so forth and so on). But (he says, you know what?) only when His love and presence touch our hearts can we really know Him in (that one undeniable way of) His unspeakable goodness.

You have to really know that firsthand.

Here's another one from a guy—check the date on this at the at the bottom, 1869. This man wrote:

There are some things, especially in the depths of the Christian life, which can only be understood by being experienced, and which even then are incapable of being adequately embodied in words. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. The enjoyment must come before the illumination. Or rather, the enjoyment is the illumination. There are things that must be loved before we can know them to be worthy of our love. Things to be believed before we can understand them to be worthy of belief. —Thomas Binney 1869

There are some things, especially in the depths of the Christian life, which can only be understood by being experienced, and which even then are incapable of being adequately embodied in words. Oh taste and see that the Lord is good. The enjoyment must come before the illumination. Or rather the enjoyment is the illumination. There are things that must be loved before we can know them to be worthy of our love. Things to be believed before we can understand them to be worthy of belief.

I know that's backwards. The world would say: Prove it to me and then I'll believe it. What he is saying here is, sometimes, you have to believe and then you experience.

Can you imagine trying to convince somebody who had never ever in their life tasted sugar, trying to explain what it's like? It's like my wife describing to me what it feels like to have a baby. Well, I can't know that in personal experience. And same is true if someone had never ever eaten sugar. You're saying, well, it's sweet. And they'd say, define sweet. Oh, the opposite of sour? I don't know. Opposite of salty? Boy, you just be grasping for words, right? You ever felt that way when somebody is talking about the goodness of God? You hear them, and you hear the words, and you know the definition of good, intellectually, but you have not experienced firsthand God's goodness; and so therefore, it's a foreign concept.

The biblical authors are challenging us: Open your mouth, and taste, and see. Look what Peter says in his first letter, chapter 2, verse 2:

1 Peter 2:2 (NIV)

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

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Beautiful passage.

And then we return here in our Psalm to the subject of the fear of the Lord. Remember, it's a positive thing:

*“⁹ Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,
for those who fear him have no lack!”*

Remember what I asked you earlier? What are you lacking? What are you lacking? And who are you trusting to fulfill that lack? He says here: *“those who fear him (the Lord) have no lack.”*

*“¹⁰ The young lions suffer want and hunger;
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.”*

What a wonderful promise.

*“¹¹ Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.”*

And here it comes. Here's the fear of the Lord from David. He says:

*“¹² What man is there who desires life
and loves many days, that he may see good?”*

Who doesn't want to see good in their life, right? So, how do I do that? Here's the fear of the Lord:

*“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.”*

There's the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord moves upon our hearts to live our lives in such a way that there is stability; and that's what he's talking about here. Who desires life? Wants to see many days? Wants to see good? I want to see good, don't you?

What's the fastest way to not see good in your life? Do the opposite of these things. Speak evil. Let your lips speak deceit. Talk about other people behind their back. Run toward evil. Do evil. Seek division. Pursue that. Well, your life is going to be full of chaos and drama.

He says, rather, live a life that is governed by the fear of the Lord.

And here's another reason why. Verse 15:

*“The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
and his ears toward their cry.”*

But— and there isn't a but there, but verse 16 should start with, but:

*“The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.”*

Notice that we have those two words, toward and against. The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous; His ears are toward their cry, but His face is turned away or against those who do evil.

Verse 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.”*

Again, we get some wonderful promises here in these verses. Verse 17: Cry to the Lord, he says, for help. When you do that, God will deliver you. Verse 18: The Lord is near to the brokenhearted. I've said that to many people when they're going through the pain and heartache of some loss or something in their life. I tell him, hey, God, He's near, very near the brokenhearted, to save those who are crushed in spirit.

And then, look what he admits in verse 19. Do God's people get out of having troubles in life? No. It says, *“Many are the afflictions of the righteous.”* It's one of those verses I wish wasn't there. I wish God wouldn't say that in His Word. I

wish He would say: For the righteous, it's smooth sailing. It's a cakewalk. Nope. Many are the afflictions of the righteous.

What did Jesus say? He said, *“In this world, you will have trouble, trials, difficulties, but be of good cheer,”* didn't He? Be of good cheer. Why? Because He'd overcome the world. Well, what it says here is: *“the Lord delivers him out of them all.”*

And then in verse 20 there: *“He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken.”* In a general sort of an application, this is a promise that God's going to keep the righteous man complete. But in a prophetic sense, this was ultimately fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Check out this on the screen from John's Gospel:

John 19: 32-33, 36 (ESV)

So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. 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.”

So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first (meaning the first robber/ thief), and of the other who had been crucified with him. 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.” (A quote there from Psalm 34:20.)

Verse 21—now, after speaking of God's deliverance for the righteous, the Bible here says:

*“Affliction (is actually going to) ... slay the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.”*

And this is why this statement that is given right here is why you and I as believers should never ever take revenge for anything that's awful, done to us, because we know from this and so many other passages that the Lord is the final judge. He's going to take care of those things. Nothing escapes His notice. If there is a judgment to be administered, He's going to do it, right? The judge of all the earth will do right; and you and I can rest in that. When our hearts are filled with vengeance, it's because we're not believing that God is able to do it. So, the wicked are going to be condemned.

What about the righteous? Verse 22—another place where probably they should start with, but.

*“The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.”*

None of them, right? Well, this is a statement saying that, with God's people, condemnation is not going to happen, right?

And this, of course, is echoed in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul when he wrote in Romans 8:1:

Romans 8:1 (ESV)

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Sometimes, I've shared this with people in the past, and they said to me, I see what the verse says, but I have to ask you a question: Why do I feel condemned? Why do I feel that way? And they naturally assume that it's God who's condemning them.

Well, we can feel condemned for all kinds of different reasons. We can feel condemned because others are condemning us, and they're putting that on us. We can feel condemned because our own conscience is condemning us, perhaps wrongly so (because your conscience is a wonderful thing but it can get things wrong). And lastly, we can feel condemned because the enemy is condemning us; that's what he does.

So, we have to remember that God's Word trumps my feelings; God's Word trumps even my own sense of condemnation; and God's Word definitely trumps the condemnation of others that are placed upon us wrongly or rightly as far as they're concerned.

When we come to God, when we've received forgiveness at the cross of Christ, condemnation is gone. I hear so many Christians talking about judgment for them, and it's like they don't understand. They'll speak of judgment—and they'll even quote verses and say, well, it says that we're all going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

That's absolutely true, but if we're condemned at that judgment seat, then that verse is wrong and what Jesus did on the cross isn't enough. You have to remember, believers, that we will stand before God, but we will not stand before Him in a judgment of condemnation. It'll be a judgment of reward. Our

condemnation has already been born in the person of Jesus Christ. He was condemned for you.

So, when He said, “*It is finished,*” we have to believe that; and we have to hang on to that, even when our hearts are condemning us, even when the enemy is condemning us, even when other people around us are condemning us.

We have to know that we are free from condemnation, as David says in this final verse: “*The Lord redeems the life of his servants.*” That word, redeem means to purchase back, to buy back. You and I have been bought back from death to life; and now, none of us—because we are taking refuge in the blood of the Lamb—will ever be condemned.