

Psalm 34:1-22
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Lynchburg, Virginia

EXHORDIUM

This is a remarkable Psalm given the circumstances of David when he wrote it. We are told that this is a Psalm he wrote when he changed his behavior before Abimelech. His proper name is Achish and his title is Abimelech, the father of the King, or Father King. If you recall the story, David was being unjustly pursued by Saul. Saul was jealous of David and had decided to kill him. The people were saying of David, Saul has killed his thousands and David his ten thousands. David was hotly pursued and ended up going to Saul's enemies for refuge. When he arrived there, Achish was pleased to have his enemy in his hand and David became afraid.

1 Sam 21:11-22:1 11 And the servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David the king of the land? did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands? 12 And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath. 13 And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. 14 Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him to me? 15 Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? shall this fellow come into my house? 22 David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him. 1 Sam 22:2 2 And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men.

So, here is David, anointed King, loyal subject, defender of Israel, nationally beloved and on the run. He is pursued by Saul and has to act like a blubbering idiot to escape from Saul's enemies. He does not seem

like a blessed man in any conceivable way. One might think that the Lord is expressly against him. There is no place that David can turn for relief. However, David makes it clear that the only place he feels that he can turn for relief is to God Himself. He ends the Psalm that way in verse 22, **22 The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.**

We see this same principle that has been popping up in the Psalms again and again, that God is sovereign over our lives and as a result we have some difficulty dealing with God's sovereign will for us. But in the same breath, the Psalmist reveals to us a tender Father who desires our good and redeems us from all of our troubles. We do not get a pass out of the troubles but we get to walk through the troubles so that we learn that God is the one who keeps us. Why do we have to keep learning this lesson? Well, because it is true. And if we do not learn this lesson, we begin to think that we are rescued by our own ingenuity and creativity. We become self-saviors, which is idolatry and God will not have it so. He desires that we worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. And the truth is that God watches over our souls and delivers us from our troubles. When we acknowledge this, we are humbled and then we become learners of God's wisdom. If we do not learn this, we are prideful and increasingly become unteachable, thus walking in cursing instead of blessing. So, the lesson is a vital one and David teaches it well.

EXEGESIS

ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א
Teit (T)	Cheit (Ch)	Zayin (Z)	Vav (V/O/U)	Hei (H)	Dalet (D)	Gimel (G)	Beit (B/V)	Alef (Silent)
ס	ן	נ	ם	מ	ל	ך	כ	י
Samekh (S)	Nun (N)	Nun (N)	Mem (M)	Mem (M)	Lamed (L)	Khaf (Kh)	Kaf (K/Kh)	Yod (Y)
ת	ש	ר	ק	ץ	צ	ף	פ	ע
Tav (T/S)	Shin (Sh/S)	Reish (R)	Qof (Q)	Tzadei (Tz)	Tzadei (Tz)	Fe (F)	Pei (P/F)	Ayin (Silent)

One notable structural device is worth pointing out. This poem contains a form of acrostic. An acrostic is a poetical device where the first letter or first word of each line forms a word or a sentence. In this poem the first letter of each verse are the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Mathew Henry calls this an alphabetical poem. We are not sure of the exact reason for this style but one obvious reason is for a mnemonic device. A mnemonic device is simply a way to help remember. If you are learning your abc, or in this case you aleph, beth, dalets, you can remember this poem one letter at a time.

This is helpful to know so that we do not get above ourselves when looking at Scripture. We sometimes want it to be more complex or somehow more intellectually holy than God made it. The Holy Spirit inspired King David to write an Alphabet poem so that he and others could easily commit it to memory. The alliterated sermon, or the acrostic sermon does the same thing. We sometimes poke fun at such things but they are a markedly godly thing to do.

Also, we should get our ideas of what is beautiful and good from Scripture and not from our modern sophisticated and hip society. There are all sorts of these literary devices in the Bible and we should not feel old-fashioned or too simple to employ them. What is good enough for God and kings ought to be good enough for us in the 21st Century. So, let us not think of ourselves too highly, at least not above the glory revealed in Scripture.

34 I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. 2 My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. 3 O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.

Barak, bless, to kneel. This is a term of humility before the Lord.

David is a decidedly determined man. He has decided to be a servant of Yahweh and he serves Yahweh in any and every circumstance. Although we have several laments from David, we might say that he is a rather strong optimist, at least when it comes to hoping in God his Savior. He praises God in and for the most outlandish things. This Psalm is no exception.

Many of us might be asking God, “Why are you doing this to me? What have I done? Don’t You understand that I am Your servant?” We would make a list of complaints and laments out of our trouble. Please do not misunderstand me. Of course, you can be honest with God. He knows all of your troubles, sorrows and sins. Do not feel like you cannot speak the truth to God, as if your ignorance is real faith. Ignorance is not faith. But if you take to complaining to God about your condition rather than seeking Him in it, then you are not acting like David.

David has decided to bless the Lord at all times, to kneel before Him, to submit to His will and counsel. That is why he can say, the humble will hear it and be glad. Humility is such a huge part of the Christian life that there is simply no way around it. We cannot be proud of God’s choice of us, David was chosen, His blessing of us, David had killed the giant and had great victories against Israel’s enemies, our friends, David was beloved by the King’s son. We are called to serve God in true humility which is to bless the Lord, kneel before Him.

This magnifies and exalts the Lord. The older you get, the more you begin to understand this. Raising kids and negotiating the difficulties of life teaches you to give God the glory. How could anyone make it through all of that without a train wreck? When your kids are young and others compliment you on how well raised they are, your tendency is to say “God is gracious” and to think, “I am such a good parent.” And then when they get older and you know yourself and your numerous failings, when someone compliments you on your children, you honestly think, “God has been both gracious and merciful.” That is humility and it takes a lot of humiliation to get there. David knew humiliation and was thus a humble man.

4 I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. 5 They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not 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 encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. 8 O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. 9 O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. 10

The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.

In your adversity seek God. He is there to be found. Are you fearful? So, was David. Stop trusting in your fears. They won't save you. But turn to God, He will deliver you. Like David, if you look to Him in faith, you will feel lighter and as David, you will not suffer shame for your hope in God. He will act according to His power, grace and mercy.

The Angel of the Lord, or the angels of God are watching over you. This is either the captain of the angels or guardian angels. We do not pray to them, since God is their commander and we can go directly to Him but we should take some comfort that not only is God's Holy Spirit with us but there are also real angels tooling about who's interest is for our good. Maybe one day we will know how much they have protected us and be able to give them thanks. For now, thank God that He has assigned them our case.

How does the Lord taste? For some, His taste is bitter. Life has not been fair and so God's way tastes bitter. He is like a very sour lemon and no sugar to sweeten the shock. But those who have truly tasted of the Lord may perceive a bitter taste and come to appreciate all of His fine qualities that make His initially bitter taste palatable, like say a fine India Pale Ale. Bitter but mixed with grace and goodness.

Fear the Lord and you will have no want. The lions suffer want but God's people will be satisfied.

11 Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord. 12 What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? 13 Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. 14 Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

Among other things, David is a teacher. When he begins to teach what is important he does not immediately teach singing, writing, arms and tactics, or diplomacy. He teaches the foundational truths, fear the Lord. Fear God and you need not fear anything or anyone else.

Children, let me ask you a question. Are you ready? Think about this and answer if you can. Who wants to live a good life and a long life?

David tells us how to do it. Watch your tongue. Do not speak evil. Do not tell lies. Run away from evil and pursue goodness and doing good. Seek peace. Do not just desire peace. Seek peace. Be a peacemaker. Understand that peace with your brothers and sisters, peace with your parents, peace in the church and peace with God are the very things that make for a good and long life. Do not live with strife or tolerate it. Either let love cover over sins without taking any offense at all, or confront the sin so that you can forgive it. Do not let strife and division, envy and bitterness devour your soul.

15 The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. 16 The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. 17 The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.

God hears the righteous and departs from the wicked. He turns His face away from those who practice wickedness. But what if the wicked want to repent? In that case, then God's face is turned towards them. This is what it means to turn to God. It is no wonder that God's face is turned away from the wicked because the wicked's face is turned away from God. But when you turn from pursuing your evil way and turn to God, you will find Him facing you. Think of the prodigal son. While he was running away from his father, his face was turned away but when he turned for home, his father was waiting with eager countenance.

18 The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. 20 He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.

The Lord is near the brokenhearted saint. This is so wonderfully true. It is a great comfort to know this. We often see our fellow brothers and sisters go through the most challenging of trials and wonder how they can ever get through it. But this verse should come to mind. God draws near to them and carries them through their troubles. There is always enough grace to go through every calamity.

Look at the contrast in verses 19-21. The righteous have many afflictions but the Lord delivers them from them all. But the wicked have afflictions and it destroys them. That is because God is actively saving the righteous but His face is turned from the wicked.

This is a messianic phrase that applies to David and to us, the Lord keeps our bones. It is true that a Christian man can certainly break his bones. In the case of Jesus, the word was literally kept, His bones were not broken. In our case, we come to understand that whatever God desires for us will be literally accomplished. The Lord is keeping us, so we can rest in Him.

21 Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.

Evil here is the same word as affliction above. Afflictions do not slay the righteous but they do slay the wicked.

EXHORTATION

22 The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.

Again a contrast between the righteous and the wicked. The wicked man is left along by God. He wants to be by himself and God leaves him there. But the righteous are not alone. They are not desolate in their time of need. When they trust in Him, turn to Him, call upon Him, they find Him ready and waiting to save.

Pulling this all together, we should learn to be like David, at all times kneeling before the Lord. We humble ourselves before God because we know that our only real hope of rescue is in Him. When we turn to Him in a real and simple trust we find that He is there to save us.