

“Taste and See that the Lord is Good!”

Psalm 34

November 20, 2022

I chose Psalm 34 for today because it provides a perspective on life that fuels a heart of thanksgiving. Our aspiration as believers is not to be thankful when good things happen, but for all of life to be flavored by deep gratitude for the ever-present mercies of God. A life of thanksgiving in a fallen world is born out of two fundamental doctrines: the sovereignty of God and the goodness of God. There is never a time when God is not in control and there is never a time or circumstance that diminishes his goodness. If you are anchored in these two realities, the aroma of your life will be hope-filled praise and thanksgiving.

Sometimes God’s sovereignty and His goodness appear to be in tension from our human perspective, but they are never in conflict with one another. Its extremely important that we align our beliefs with these truths about God for the well-being of our soul. For example:

Sovereignty – Good = bitterness and hardening of heart

If you believe God is sovereign but not good, then you will be tempted to blame God for your troubles and believe He is against you, resulting in bitterness that hardens your heart. On the other hand...

Good – Sovereignty = hopelessness and despair

If you believe God is good but not Sovereign (in control), then you will doubt that He can help you resulting in hopelessness and despair.

Sovereignty + Goodness = Hope → Thanks

But the reality is that God is both sovereign and good, and therefore we can have hope, even in the midst of adversity. We can say, *“O Lord, I’m so thankful that in the midst of this mess You are in control and You are good—so I can trust in You; You are my hope.”*

So, a life of thanksgiving is rooted not in our day-to-day circumstances, but in the unchanging character of God. Therefore, giving thanks can only reach its legitimate fullness when our gratitude finds its destination in God Himself. For example, when I thank someone for something, my gratitude is never complete unless God is factored in as the ultimate giver. Why? Because “every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow” (James 1:17). Or as Romans 11:36 says, ***“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”***

So what does all this have to do with Psalm 34? Well, Ps 34 bleeds the goodness and sovereignty of God. According to the superscript, the background for Psalm 34 is I Samuel 21:10-15, where David pretended to be insane to escape the from the Philistine King. Yet the Psalm itself includes no details of the story itself but gives its full attention to God’s gracious deliverance and how we should respond.

Call to Praise [1-3]

Private blessing begets public praise to magnify God’s fame and edify God’s people.

[1-3] God’s deliverance was so significant, that David concluded there would never be a time in the future when it would be inappropriate to bless the Lord! **[vs. 1]** What does it mean to bless the Lord? We can understand how God blesses us—He does good unto us. But how might we bless Him? The word for “blessing” (Heb: *barak*) literally means “to speak well” which can also be rendered as “praise.”

So, God blesses people by speaking and thereby imparting “blessing” (good) to them. People bless God by speaking well of Him, saying what is true of

His good qualities. In other words, *God blesses us by bestowing good on us while we bless God by praising the good in Him.*¹

As David reflects on God's deliverance in vs. 2, he comes to the sane reality that God is the only one he can boast in, not himself (2a). And this boasting will be a source of joy to all those who are humble (2b). Why will the humble rejoice? Perhaps it is because they are reminded of God's mercy toward the humble and afflicted. Yet consider this: ***True humility is seeing the greatness, goodness, and beauty of God and turning all one's affections and awe toward Him in such a way that self becomes secondary and insignificant in light of His supremely satisfying glory.*** Humility is only genuine when you factor God into the equation of your life. Humility is finding our joy and purpose in being a reflection (image-bearer) of His beauty; not thinking too highly of ourselves as though we are glory-producers and not thinking too lowly of ourselves because we have the sacred privilege of reflecting God's worth.

The humble will be glad and rejoice when they hear David boast in the Lord, because they share the same passion. Have you noticed this phenomenon about people who truly know and love the Lord? When they hear others testify of what God has done and how good He is, they have to get in on it. They join in the praise and share in the joy because they are being refreshed in what they love most!

So David calls us to join him in **[vs. 3]**. Private blessing begets public praise because when we praise God, we magnify His fame and edify one another. Now in vs. 4 David turns to his testimony of what God has done...

Testimony (4-7)

Those who fear God are delivered from godless fear by His favor.

[vs. 4-7] David considers himself to be like a poor man (6) who deserves nothing. He has no great importance in himself that the Lord should be mindful of him and yet the Lord heard David's cry and answered him. He

delivered David from *all* his fears and rescued him out of *all* his troubles—what lavish mercy!

Countless millions would cynically say, "I wish God would do that for me. I wish he'd deliver me from all my troubles and fears." But don't miss all of the active verbs in vs. 4-7: "*I sought the Lord...those who look to Him...this poor man cried [to the Lord]...those who fear Him*" are delivered. *There can be no answered prayer for those who neglect to seek God.* Yet vs. 5 tells us that those who do look to the Lord are radiant and will never be ashamed. Why? Because their countenance reflects God's favor which results in God's deliverance.

Psalm 147:11 says it this way, "*The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast Love*" (ESV). God's favor is on those who fear Him. And notice here (just as we saw in Psalm 33:18 last week) that to fear the Lord is to hope in the Lord. Those who truly fear God, trust God.

So when Ps 34:5 says, "those who look to Him are radiant and their faces shall never be ashamed," it means that those who fear the Lord rejoice in His favor, being assured of His care.

Vs. 7 describes God's militant, protective care and protection on every side for those who fear Him. **[vs. 7]** The greatest protection you could ever have, the safest place you could ever be is walking in the fear of the Lord! I urge you, even in this moment, to pray "Lord, give me the fear of God!"

David is not content to simply share his testimony. He turns now to exhort us to experience God's goodness for ourselves...

Exhortation (8-10)

Those who fear God experience His goodness by trusting in Him.

¹ Willem VanGemeren, Gen Ed. Michael Brown, NIDOTTE, Vol. 1, pg. 764.

[vs. 8-10] When David calls us to taste and see, he's calling us to personally experience and see for ourselves just how good the Lord is, how blessed it is to trust in Him!

So how do we taste and see God's goodness? There's a clue in vs. 7: "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him." What does a God-fearing believer do when he's in danger? He *trusts* in the Lord. Or as vs. 8 says, he "...takes refuge in Him!" How do you take refuge in God? You *trust* Him. So, the way to taste and see God's goodness for yourself is to trust Him and experience His mercies.

Those who fear the Lord not only experience His protection (7-8), but also His provision (9-10): "*O fear the LORD, you His saints for to those who fear Him there is no lack. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing.*"

This is remarkable because young lions, the most advantaged predators in the animal kingdom, those at the top of the food chain—even they sometimes go hungry. But not those who fear the Lord (9b), not those who trust the Lord (10b). God *Himself* attends to the needs of those who fear Him.

This is so significant that David begins to teach us about the fear of the Lord. Why? So that in fearing Him we can taste and see that He is good and join him in magnifying the Lord with thanksgiving and praise.

Instruction (11-14)

Those who fear God forsake their evil ways to imitate God's goodness.

[Vs. 11-18] So what is the fear of the Lord? Wayne Grudem defines the fear of the Lord as "*the desire to avoid God's displeasure and discipline on our lives.*"² Or to state it more positively, we could say that ***to fear the Lord is to***

revere Him for who He is; to live in such a way that honors him as God with or trust and obedience.

So how do we walk in the fear of the Lord? David gives us 3 instructions:

1. ***Abstain from evil*** by revering God as holy (vs. 13-14a): "*Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil...*" In other words, war against your sinful inclinations, beginning with your deceptive thoughts and words.
2. ***Do good***, by imitating and revering God's goodness (vs. 14a): "Turn away from evil *and do good...*" That is, seek to bestow blessing on others as God has blessed you (1Pet 3:9).
3. ***Seek peace and pursue it*** by revering God as Redeemer [vs. 14b]. Notice, as the psalmist moves from our words (13-14a) and actions (14a) to our relationships (14b), he becomes emphatic. We are to *seek* and *pursue* peace. The Hebrew word here is *shalom* which carries the sense of wholeness. We are to seek and pursue wholeness in our relationships.

Because we live as sinners in a sinful world, we will have to be peacemakers. We need to *abstain from evil* even when others advance evil toward us. We need to *do good* by living charitably, graciously, and peaceably, by pursuing peace rather than strife. Why? Because we revere and imitate God who made peace with us. If this was true in David's day, how much more for us who live in the peace of the gospel. Jesus abstained from evil when others advanced evil against Him. He blessed us (did good to us) by taking sin's curse upon Himself to make peace between God and man.

The apostle Peter shows us that Psalm 34 finds its ultimate fulfillment in the gospel. Walking in the fear of the Lord means imitating Christ. In 1Pet 2 we're called to follow in Christ's footsteps who committed no sin nor was any deceit found in His mouth; who while being reviled did not revile in return; who kept entrusting Himself to God to who judges righteously; who bore our sins in His body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live in

² Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 757

righteousness and be healed (1Pet 2:21-24). Do you see how Jesus abstained from evil to do good?

Then in chapter 3 Peter quotes Psalm 34:12-16 and based on that foundation calls us to seek peace and pursue it: “all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit, not returning insult for insult but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing” (1Pet 3:8-9). This is the wholeness that we are to pursue in our relationships with our words and actions by walking in the fear of God.

And the good news is that the gospel (our union with Christ) empowers us to walk in the fear of God! And yet you may think, “that sounds like a lot of work—abstaining from evil, doing good, peacemaking.” Well, David proceeds to give us some incentives in vs. [15-16].

Encouragement (15-22)

Those who fear God trust Him to deliver the righteous and avenge evil.

For those of you who walk in the fear of the Lord, vs. 15 is God’s *posture* toward you [vs. 15]. He is poised and ready to answer! He looks on you with favor! And if vs. 15 is God’s posture toward you, then vs. 17 describes the *action* He will take as you trust Him. [vs. 17] Finally, vs. 18 describes God’s heart of *compassion* and mercy toward His children [vs. 18]. In other words, as we wait for God to deliver us, (because He doesn’t always intervene right away), the Lord does not leave us to ourselves, but draws near to us.

What a contrast to those who do not fear God in [vs. 16]. Pause and reflect for a moment. Do you want to walk in the fear of God and experience His favor, care, and compassion? Or will you disregard the fear of God, making Him your enemy, judge, and executioner?

Psalm 34 ends encouraging us to consider the *eternal* outcome of walking in the fear of the Lord. [vs. 19-22]

First, notice in vs. 19 that the Psalmist is not suggesting that we will have a trouble-free life. On the contrary, he says, “*Many* are the afflictions of the righteous...” But he goes on to say that “the Lord delivers them out of them *all*.” Yet, does God’s deliverance always come immediately? No, in fact, while there are countless ways the Lord delivers us in this lifetime, there are some things that we will only be delivered from in death. Even death is the final deliverance from every affliction for those who trust in the Lord.

So the final verses of Psalm 34 are an incredible comfort, that even when we are long-awaiting the Lord to vindicate the righteous and avenge the evil, we can be comforted by this eternal reality: God will deal justly with the wicked and those who trust the Lord will not be condemned. Why? Because the Lord redeems their soul!

This is how the Psalmist can say that the Lord delivers the righteous from *all* their afflictions (vs. 19; cf. vs. 4, 6, 17). Even from those lifelong afflictions, the righteous will be delivered through death to our heavenly reward. And this is how we can say, I will bless the Lord at *all* times. ***A life of thanksgiving is rooted not in our day-to-day circumstances, but in the unchanging character of God who is sovereign over all things (including our afflictions) and good at all times.***

And if ever we need a reminder of God’s perfect goodness in severe affliction, we need only look to the cross which vs. 20 points us to. [vs 20] I’m sure David didn’t realize it at the time, but the apostles looking back saw this as a prophetic word pointing to Christ (Jn 19:36). With all the torture and abuse that Jesus went through at the cross, none of His bones were broken (Num 9:12). *His enemies could not harm Him beyond what His Father permitted.*

Jesus modeled the perfect life of walking in the fear of the Lord, trusting His father and perfectly revering Him for who He is. Yet His life was filled with afflictions. From some He was delivered immediately. Yet from the ultimate affliction, he would only be delivered in death. And God’s ultimate vindication would come in raising Him from the dead so that all who trust in

Jesus would also be delivered from the evil of sin and vindicated with Him in resurrection life.

Those who fear the Lord shall taste and see that He is good and be overwhelmed, not by their afflictions, but by God's favor and a heart of boundless thanksgiving for our Redeemer.