

## “Taste and See”

Psalm 34

Pastor Jason Van Bommel

**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.*
- <sup>2</sup> *My soul makes its boast in the LORD;  
let the humble hear and be glad.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Oh, magnify the LORD with me,  
and let us exalt his name together!*
- <sup>4</sup> *I sought the LORD, and he answered me  
and delivered me from all my fears.*
- <sup>5</sup> *Those who look to him are radiant,  
and their faces shall never be ashamed.*
- <sup>6</sup> *This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him  
and saved him out of all his troubles.*
- <sup>7</sup> *The angel of the LORD encamps  
around those who fear him, and delivers them.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!  
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!*
- <sup>9</sup> *Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,  
for those who fear him have no lack!*
- <sup>10</sup> *The young lions suffer want and hunger;  
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Come, O children, listen to me;  
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*
- <sup>12</sup> *What man is there who desires life  
and loves many days, that he may see good?*
- <sup>13</sup> *Keep your tongue from evil  
and your lips from speaking deceit.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Turn away from evil and do good;  
seek peace and pursue it.*
- <sup>15</sup> *The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous  
and his ears toward their cry.*
- <sup>16</sup> *The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,  
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.*
- <sup>17</sup> *When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears  
and delivers them out of all their troubles.*
- <sup>18</sup> *The LORD is near to the brokenhearted  
and saves the crushed in spirit.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
but the LORD delivers him out of them all.*
- <sup>20</sup> *He keeps all his bones;  
not one of them is broken.*
- <sup>21</sup> *Affliction will slay the wicked,  
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.*

<sup>22</sup> *The LORD redeems the life of his servants;  
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.*

## **Introduction: What Makes You Rejoice?**

When was the last time you experienced something so wonderful that you just had to tell other people about it? For some of us, it comes when we eat at a great restaurant. For others of us, it comes when we visit a new park or a new museum or go on a new hike or read a great book or hear some great music.

Last week, when we were at General Assembly, Andrew got to go to Carowinds Amusement Park, where he spent five hours riding roller coasters. He had not ridden roller coasters since he was five and we tried some of the kiddie coasters at Knoebels. He was terrified then, so I hoped he would have a better experience this time. He did. He came back so excited about his experience that he just had to tell us all about the Fury 325, one of the tallest roller coasters in the world. His joy and his sense of accomplishment were infectious.

This is a universal human experience: We discover, we experience, we rejoice, we share our joy, and our joy is made complete is being able to share it with others.

For David, the delightful experience he could not wait to share with others was his deliverance from the hands of the king of Gath. The title says that this psalm was written “**when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.**” The story is told in 1 Samuel 21, and we looked at it two weeks ago, because the same incident provided David with the inspiration for Psalms 56 & 34. In 1 Samuel 21, the king is called by his name, Achish, but here in the title of Psalm 34, he is called by his title, Abimelech, which means “Father-King” or “Father-Leader.”

In Psalm 56, we saw David acknowledging his fear when the Philistines seized him, but in Psalm 34, we see the overflowing joy of David as he thanks God for His powerful deliverance. So these two psalms form a before-and-after picture of God’s deliverance of his servant, David.

### **A. Personal Testimony, vv. 1-7**

David begins with a personal testimony:

*I will bless the LORD at all times;  
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*

<sup>2</sup> *My soul makes its boast in the LORD;  
let the humble hear and be glad.*

<sup>3</sup> *Oh, magnify the LORD with me,  
and let us exalt his name together!*

David begins his psalms by proclaiming his resolve to bless the Lord at all times. What does it mean to bless the Lord? We understand what it means when God blesses us, but how can we bless God? Well, the Hebrew uses the same word for God blessing us and for us blessing God, and basically to bless someone in this way is to speak well of them. God speaks well of us, and His words are

powerful and effective, so His speaking well of us actually benefits us and brings His blessing into our lives. We speak well of God, but our words do not create a blessed condition for God, they simply reflect reality, echoing the truth of how marvelous and majestic God truly is. In this way, the second line is just a re-statement of the first: “His praise shall continually be in my mouth” – I will praise God at all times, for He is worthy of praise. I will speak well of Him, for He is worthy to be spoken well of.

Then David declares that his soul make its boast in the Lord. Notice that David is not boasting in his own cleverness. David is not taking the credit for being quick on his feet and thinking up an ingenious way of escaping Abimelech Achish. Whatever role his own acting abilities played in his escape, David is boasting only in the Lord for his deliverance. Thus, the humble can hear and be glad. Why? Because David had nothing. He had no money, no friends, no political power, no options. But God rescued him, even when his enemies had him in their grasp. That means that God can rescue anyone, even the most humble, poor, powerless and outcast person.

David then invites the humble who are totally reliant upon the Lord to magnify the Lord together with him. Like blessing the Lord, we might wonder how we can magnify the Lord. Can we make God greater than He is? No, but we can make His greatness more clearly known through our testimony and our praises. The Fury 325 didn’t become any taller or faster or more exciting because Andrew told us all about it, but its fame did spread, because we had not heard of its greatness before, but now we have. That’s what it means to magnify the Lord, to show off His greatness to people who otherwise can’t see it for themselves.

In verses 4-7, after having declared his resolve to praise the Lord and having invited others to join him in his praise, David then gives his testimony, the basis for his praise of God:

*<sup>4</sup> I sought the LORD, and he answered me  
and delivered me from all my fears.*

*<sup>5</sup> Those who look to him are radiant,  
and their faces shall never be ashamed.*

*<sup>6</sup> This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him  
and saved him out of all his troubles.*

*<sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD encamps  
around those who fear him, and delivers them.*

In the midst of his fears, David sought the Lord. Psalm 56 gives us the expression of David’s seeking of God in the midst of his fears. The Lord faithfully and powerfully delivered David from all his fears.

David then moves from his own experience to the experience of all who look to the Lord. Those who look to Him are radiant. Because the Lord is light, full of glory and wisdom, perfect in splendor, all who look to Him reflect His radiance on their faces. Thus, their faces shall never be ashamed.

When we look to the Lord and He shines on us with His favor, we never need to be ashamed, for all of our glory and strength, power and wisdom, comes from Him alone!

David then recounts his own experience again, this time referring to himself in the third person as “this poor man,” telling how he cried and how the LORD heard him and saved him from all his troubles. Not only did the Lord deliver David from all his fears, but He saved him out of all of his troubles, too.

And again, this is not only David’s experience, but “the angel of the LORD encamps around all those who fear Him, and delivers them.” God doesn’t just offer comfort and encouragement but real deliverance.

Think about our fears and our troubles: We are mortal, and we know we’re going to die, and so we’re afraid of death. We’re also guilty, and we know it, and so we’re afraid of coming judgment. We’re also afraid of other people, what they might do to us or say about us. We’re also afraid of being alone, of being rejected and left on the outside looking in. We have so many fears and insecurities, and the Lord does indeed deliver us from them all. He forgives our sins. He defeats death. He welcomes us into His family and adopts us as His children. He doesn’t just say nice words to make us feel better about ourselves, but He actually, powerfully saves and delivers us from all our fears and troubles!

## **B. Passionate Invitation, vv. 8-14**

- <sup>8</sup> *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!  
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!*
- <sup>9</sup> *Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,  
for those who fear him have no lack!*
- <sup>10</sup> *The young lions suffer want and hunger;  
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Come, O children, listen to me;  
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*
- <sup>12</sup> *What man is there who desires life  
and loves many days, that he may see good?*
- <sup>13</sup> *Keep your tongue from evil  
and your lips from speaking deceit.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Turn away from evil and do good;  
seek peace and pursue it.*

Now, on the basis of his own experience of God powerful goodness, David invites us all to “taste and see that the Lord is good!” He tells us the blessing that comes from taking refuge in God. He calls us to fear the Lord, promising that those who fear the Lord have no lack.

For God to be a refuge, He must be the God we fear, for He must be mighty, mightier than all of our enemies. Too often, we have seen people seeking tame God and domesticate Him, making Him passive and gentle and harmless and non-judgmental and non-offensive, and in the process we lose any

real sense of awe and wonder at the mighty majesty of God and we also lose any real sense of God as a refuge, a shelter, a sanctuary from the storms of our fears and troubles.

What does it look like to fear the Lord, to seek Him? Well, we need to come and listen to His word. Then, we need to seek to walk in His ways. We are to turn aside from evil, in our words and our actions, and to seek truth and goodness and peace in all that we say and do. This is the measure of how much we have understood the fear of the Lord – How much has our life been transformed?

The same domesticated shrunken God who inspires no fear and offers to refuge also brings about no real life-change. If we want life, we must have the true and living God abiding in us. If we want to see the goodness of the Lord, we must have truly and sincerely tasted and seen that the Lord is good. A cheap imitation God will never satisfy our souls, will never be a refuge, will never cause us to tremble, will never lead us in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. The God who caused Mount Sinai to shake and smoke, the God who delivered David from His fears, the God who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, He is the living God, awesome and holy and full of compassion and goodness for His people. We need Him and we must never settle for a substitute.

### **C. Promised Rewards, vv. 15-22**

When we do have the true God as our God, when we belong to Him and He belongs to us, then we know the benefits of being His. Verses 15-22 spell out the rewards of belonging to God:

- <sup>15</sup> *The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous  
and his ears toward their cry.*
- <sup>16</sup> *The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,  
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.*
- <sup>17</sup> *When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears  
and delivers them out of all their troubles.*
- <sup>18</sup> *The LORD is near to the brokenhearted  
and saves the crushed in spirit.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
but the LORD delivers him out of them all.*
- <sup>20</sup> *He keeps all his bones;  
not one of them is broken.*
- <sup>21</sup> *Affliction will slay the wicked,  
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.*
- <sup>22</sup> *The LORD redeems the life of his servants;  
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.*

The first reward of belonging to God is that we have His regard: His eyes are upon us, and His ears are open to our cry. We may feel like no one sees and no one understands, but God always sees His children, always understand our need, and always hears our cries to Him. But He does more than just watch and listen. He hears, delivers and saves.

God's kind and intimate regard for His own is contrasted with the stance He takes against evil-doers: The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. Those who spread evil are opposed by God, cut off from this life and forgotten for all eternity. To belong to God is to be heard, to be helped, to be remembered, to be loved. To be opposed to God is to be living in futility and destined for frustration.

One famous study in contrasts that has been used to illustrate the fruit of the fear of the Lord against the consequences of rebellion against the Lord is the comparison between the descendants of Jonathan Edwards and Max Juke:

Richard Dugdale wrote a book about the Juke family in 1874. Max Juke's descendants included: 7 murderers, 60 thieves, 50 women of debauchery, 130 other convicts. 310 paupers (with over 2,300 years lived in poorhouses) and many who were physically wrecked by indulgent living.

American educator A.E. Winship studied the descendants of Jonathan Edwards in 1900. Among 1,394 known descendants of Jonathan Edwards, he found:

- "practically no lawbreakers"
- more than 100 lawyers, 30 judges
- 13 college presidents, and hundred and more professors
- 62 physicians
- 100 clergymen, missionaries, and theological professors
- 80 elected to public office, including 3 mayors, 3 governors, several members of congress, 3 senators, and 1 vice president (Aaron Burr)
- 60 have attained prominence in authorship or editorial life, with 135 books of merit
- 75 army or navy officers

Now this does not mean that Christians are always morally and intellectually superior people to non-Christians. That is not true and self-righteousness is the opposite of living in the fear of the Lord or humbly magnifying His name. But God does bless and keep His own, and very often He vindicates and exalts those who seek Him in a way that history shows to be remarkable, to the praise of His glorious grace.

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous" – God never promises His people a life free from pain and sorrow – "but the Lord delivers them out of them all." A powerful example of this protecting hand of God in affliction comes in verse 20 –

*He keeps all his bones;  
not one of them is broken.*

The New Testament applies this verse to Jesus, whose bones were not broken on the cross. Even when Jesus was turned over to His enemies and was being cursed on the cross, God the Father kept His promise and not one of His bones was broken. This is a sign to us of God's ability to keep His people, even when we suffer affliction.

Affliction comes to the wicked, just as it does to the righteous, but *“Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.”*

Just as there is a contrast in the effect of affliction on the righteous and the wicked, so this psalm ends with a contrast of condemnation: “those who hate the righteous will be condemned” but *“The LORD redeems the life of his servants;”* so that *“none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.”*

These verses give us such strong hope and such powerful assurance of God’s protection and blessing.

**Conclusion: Taste and See. Go and Tell.**

So, what is our application and our conclusion? It is very simple. We, like David, should look to the Lord in the midst of our troubles and fears. We should cry out to Him, and look to see His hand of deliverance. Have you seen His mercy pardon all of your sin because of what Jesus has done to deliver you? Have you known His adopting, accepting love calling you His own child forever? Have you indeed tasted and seen that the Lord in good?

If you have, then magnify the Lord together with me. Let us exalt His name together. And then, let us go and tell others of the marvelous, majestic God who has saved us and keeps us and blesses us in all our afflictions. Let us taste and see. Then, let us go and tell.