

Taste and See that the LORD is Good!

Psalms 34

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Introduction

We are currently in a study of the book of Psalms, and if there is one psalm that expresses the motivating reason for this study, it is Psalm 34. Verse 8 gives us an invitation to enjoy God: *“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!”* My prayer and desire for you is that you too may taste and see that God is good, and that together with David you would say, as he does in verse 3, *“Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!”*

Hitting Rock Bottom

Has there ever been a time when you felt like you hit rock bottom? When everything that could go wrong has, when the losses seem to pile up, when you feel trapped, exhausted, disappointed, and unsure what to do next? Our psalm today was written by David at precisely such a moment — humiliated, hiding, on the run, and alone.

We know what David is going through from the title at the head of the psalm: *“Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.”* The story behind those words is found in 1 Samuel 21. David is running for his life. King Saul has thrown spears at him, and Jonathan has confirmed that his father means to kill him. So David flees.

He had already gone to the prophet Samuel at Ramah, looking for protection, and found none. He goes next to Ahimelech the priest at Nob, who gives him bread and the only weapon on hand — the sword of Goliath — but cannot shelter him. Where else can he go? I do not know exactly what he was thinking, but clearly fear had gotten the best of him, because after he receives the sword of Goliath, he goes to Gath — Goliath’s hometown, a Philistine city. This was a catastrophic decision. As soon as he enters Gath, people begin pointing at him: *that* is the man who killed Goliath. David quickly realizes he has made a terrible mistake. Scripture tells us David *“was much afraid”* (1 Samuel 21:12).

So David plays the madman. He changes his behavior so that the people of Gath think he has lost his mind. The passage reads:

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. Then Achish said to his servants, “Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?” (1 Samuel 21:13–15)

Instead of killing him, Achish drives him away. The very next verse reads, “*David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam*” (1 Samuel 22:1). That cave is likely where this psalm was born.

So here is David: on the run from his own king, alone — no Jonathan, no mighty men, no bodyguard, no armor — humiliated, having had to drool in his own beard and play the fool to survive, and now hiding in a hole in the ground, probably hungry.

If this were you, what would your first words to God be? “*Help*”? “*Lord, where are you?*” “*Lord, you promised me!*” “*Lord, why?*”

Listen to what David actually says when he hits rock bottom:

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. (Psalm 34:1)

If Psalm 34 said nothing else, verse 1 would be enough. *I will bless the LORD at all times* — not just when life is good, not just when I have success, but also hiding in a cave with spit still drying in my beard.

My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together! (Psalm 34:2–3)

At one of the lowest points of his life, what does David do? He worships. And not only does he worship the Lord — he invites you and me to worship with him. “*Magnify the LORD with me.*” You are invited to worship the Lord regardless of whatever dead-end road you are on or whatever rock bottom you find yourself in.

“This Poor Man Cried”: A Testimony of Praise

Reading on, we hear David’s worship unfold as a testimony of praise:

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

Notice how David describes himself in verse 6: “*this poor man cried.*” The Hebrew word for *poor man* here means bowed down or afflicted. That describes David well at this moment. He has nothing — no friends, no army, no armor, no position, no resources — and he has made some bad decisions, like going to Gath, and those decisions have gotten other people hurt, like the priest at Nob.

We can imagine what this poor man cried.

Lord, help! King Saul wants me dead. And what is David’s praise? I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

Lord, help! I humiliated myself in front of my enemy. And what is David’s praise? Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.

Lord, help! I am here hiding in a cave, alone. And what is David’s praise? The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

What an astonishing testimony of praise. He is still in the cave, still hungry, still hunted. His circumstances have not changed — but he has.

David’s rock bottom was just one more Goliath to slay. In 1 Samuel 17:45, on that field of battle, David said to Goliath of Gath, “*You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel.*” David is doing exactly that here in his great time of need. He faces this new giant in the cave of Adullam not with a sling and a stone, but with praises to the Lord: “*I will bless the LORD at all times.*”

“Oh, Taste and See”: An Invitation to Fear the Lord

And now, after his own testimony of praise, David turns and looks at you and me, and invites us to magnify the Lord with him:

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

Think of a time when you tasted something wonderful — an exceptional meal, a dessert that made you close your eyes. What do you say? “*You have to try this.*” Or when you see something breathtaking — a view, a sunset, something that stops you in your tracks. What do you say? “*Would you look at that.*” When we experience something truly wonderful, there is a deep instinct to share it, to draw others in, to say: *come and taste this too.*

That is David here. He has experienced the goodness of God, and now he invites you to experience it as well. *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!*

So how does one taste and see the goodness of God? Notice what David says: by taking refuge in him. This means to place yourself in his care and to depend upon him. It means to bring to the Lord the things that frighten you. It means to follow him in the places where obedience feels costly. It means to trust him more than you trust yourself.

I read verse 10 as David’s own confession that trusting in himself did not work. The young lion — that is David, doing things his own way — suffered want and hunger. But now he turns to the Lord and conclaims: *those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*

So how does one move from trusting in oneself to trusting in the Lord? David tells us:

Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. (Psalm 34:11)

The phrase *the fear of the LORD* is the great Old Testament theological statement that holds together everything David has been doing and inviting us to do with him — to seek the Lord, to take refuge in him, to taste and see that he is good. And now David tells us he is going to teach us how to do it.

So, David — how does one fear the Lord? Teach me.

What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good?
Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. (Psalm 34:12–14)

Is that it? That is the lesson? Where is the overwhelming sense of awe, the trembling reverence, the recognition that God is the Creator and therefore sovereign over all things? Is it not these things that constitute the fear of the Lord? I think David would say yes to all of that — but his lesson plan tells us that having the right knowledge, or even having the right emotions, is not enough on its own.

To fear the Lord, in all of its theological weight, means two things.

First, to fear the Lord means to trust him. This is what verse 13 is teaching: *Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.* Here is how I connect speaking truth to

trust. The great lie of Eden — told again every single day — is that you will find what you really want outside of God's will. *"You'll be much happier if you eat this."* It is a lie about God: *He is not really good, because he is holding back on you.* And it is a lie about yourself: *You do not really need God.* Every act of deceit, at its root, carries one or both of these lies somewhere inside it.

The connection to trust is this: when I tell the truth, I am trusting God with the consequences. I do not have to manipulate the situation, protect myself with deception, or take matters into my own hands. I can speak truth because I believe God is good, God is present, and God can be trusted with my life.

Second, to fear the Lord means to obey him. *Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.* Trust and obedience together define what the Bible means by faith. Faith is not merely a mental exercise. It is believing who God is and what he has done — that is trust — and then living your life in that trust — that is obedience.

Slaying the Lies: Truth at Rock Bottom

We come now to the end of the psalm, and we get to see David doing exactly what he has been teaching — trusting in the Lord rather than in the lies of the world. He does battle against the deceptive giants of shame, loss, humiliation, sin, loneliness, and failure, and he does so with truth. What I want to do here is take the truth David speaks and set it against the lies the world offers in its place.

The first lie goes like this: *God is either not good or not powerful. If he were both, all your prayers would be answered exactly as you want. Therefore, you can depend on no one but yourself.*

Here is the truth:

The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. (Psalm 34:15–17)

God is good. God does hear. The Lord does save. And if you really care about your life, you will place it into the hands of the God who hears and delivers.

The second lie: *God is absent. God does not care. God is not for you. If he really cared, you would not be suffering — you would not have lost that job, gotten that diagnosis, or buried that person you loved.*

Here is the truth:

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. (Psalm 34:18–20)

Notice what the truth says: *Many are the afflictions of the righteous*. The lie says that if God is good and cares for you, the righteous would not suffer. But right here in God's word, as plainly as it can be said, we are told: *many are the afflictions of the righteous*. No one alive today is promised a life without affliction. To say that the reality of suffering is proof of God's absence or lack of goodness is simply a lie.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous — but in those afflictions, *the LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit*. When you are suffering, you are never alone. When you are hurting, the Lord is near. And *the LORD delivers him out of them all*. The hurt and heartache will come to an end. No matter what you are going through, the goodness of God has not left you — he is near, and there is the sure promise of deliverance.

We get a hint of the depth of that promise in verse 20: *He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken*. Do you know where that verse is quoted in the New Testament? John quotes it in his account of the crucifixion — John 19 — as he describes what happened after Jesus died on the cross. John has made the connection between these promises and their fulfillment in Jesus. How do I know that God draws near to me when I am hurting? I know it because he drew near to us in Christ — the Son of God, the Word made flesh. How do I know I will be delivered out of my afflictions? I know it because Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross for me, was placed in a tomb, and rose again. And because he rose from the grave, I too shall rise.

The third and final lie is the one we tell about ourselves: *Your life belongs to you. You must find your own way, define your own truth, pursue whatever seems right to you, and ultimately save yourself. Trust yourself. Follow your heart. Be true to yourself.* And underneath all of that is the oldest lie of Eden: *You do not really need God. You can decide for yourself what is good.*

Here is the truth:

Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned. (Psalm 34:21–22)

Notice that both the righteous and the wicked experience affliction. Verse 19 says, "*Many are the afflictions of the righteous.*" Verse 21 says, "*Affliction will slay the wicked.*" The difference between the person who trusts the Lord and the person who does not is not that one suffers and the other does not. Everybody suffers.

Following Jesus does not exempt you from cancer. It does not mean you will never lose someone you love. It does not mean your children will never disappoint you or your heart will never break. The difference between the righteous and the wicked is that one takes refuge in God, and the other does not. And for those who do not take refuge in God, David says plainly: their affliction slays them. Death has the last word.

But for the servants of the Lord — those who take refuge in him — affliction may wound you, humble you, frighten you, and even bring you to the end of yourself. But it cannot finally destroy you, because *the LORD redeems the life of his servants*.

The word *redeem* means to ransom a person who is trapped in bondage, held in slavery, caught in debt, or standing under condemnation. And those who take refuge in the Lord are redeemed.

This is another reason, I think, why John looks to Psalm 34 as Jesus hangs on the cross — not only because his bones were not broken, but because John realized that the redemption of the Lord was happening before his very eyes. A little more than a week before the crucifixion, as Jesus and his disciples were drawing near to Jerusalem, James and John — thinking Jesus was about to be crowned king — asked him to grant them the seats of honor at his right and left hand in his glory. Jesus told them plainly: *you have no idea what you are asking*. And then he said this: “*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45). John, standing at the foot of the cross, was now watching that ransom be paid — the redemption of all who would take refuge in him.

The promises of God are fulfilled in Christ.

Conclusion

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

Whatever cave you are in, whatever affliction you are facing, whatever fear you carry — take refuge in him. Trust him. Follow him. The God who redeemed David is the God who has redeemed us through Jesus Christ.

So today, respond to his invitation. If you have been trusting yourself, turn and trust Christ. If you have wandered, come home. If you are afraid, take refuge in him. Entrust yourself to the One who gave his life as a ransom for you.

Taste and see that the LORD is good.