

Psalm 34

June 5, 2022



SCRIPTURE

- ¹ I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.
² I will glory in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.
³ Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.
⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.
⁵ Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.
⁶ This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.
⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.
⁸ Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.
⁹ Fear the LORD, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing.
¹⁰ The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.
¹¹ Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
¹² Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days,¹³ keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies.
¹⁴ Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.
¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry;¹⁶ but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to blot out their name from the earth.
¹⁷ The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.
¹⁸ The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.
¹⁹ The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; ²⁰ he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.
²¹ Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned.
²² The LORD will rescue his servants; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.

COMMENTARY

The incident mentioned in the title of the Psalm is found in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. It relates David's deliverance from King Achish of Gath. Although an unusual account of deliverance, this psalm praises Yahweh for rescuing the psalmist. The content of the psalm is not tied to the specific event, so it could be used in a general way by God's people.

34:2 "Boast in the Lord" is best defined in Jeremiah 9:23-24 where it means to "understand and know" Yahweh, which is further explained as knowing that Yahweh

shows “faithful love, justice, and righteousness on the earth.” In other words, it is knowing who God is and what He does, having a personal knowledge and experience of Him through trusting in Him.

34:5 “Look to” is another way of expressing trust in time of need (145:15) and is equivalent to “seek” in some contexts (Isa. 31:1).

34:6 A person who is in need and prays to Yahweh often identifies himself with the oppressed. The term can also designate someone who is humble or, in the more negative sense, humiliated. The word for “afflicted” (‘ani) is closely related and is often in parallel with the poor. There is not a strong distinction between these since it is assumed that the poor were the weakest and most helpless in society and were often the objects of oppression by stronger and more influential persons. Therefore, the term “oppressed” in the psalms should not be limited to economic hardship alone.

34:7 “The Lord’s angel” can also be translated as “messenger of Yahweh.” In most contexts there is a distinction between God and this angel. For example, in the story of Gideon, the angel of the Lord vanished (Judg. 6:21), but Gideon continued to speak to Yahweh (Judg. 6:22-24). This seems to indicate that they were different. However, in other contexts the angel of the Lord spoke as if he were God Himself (Gen. 22:11-12; Ex. 3:2). In this sense the angel could be a theophany (an appearance of Yahweh).

Christian tradition has often identified such angels with the pre-incarnate appearances of Jesus Christ, but as noted above, this does not work in every instance. It is best to treat each context on its own merit and not impose the same meaning in every text. The connection between the “Lord’s angel” and military imagery (note the word camps) appears elsewhere to show that Yahweh fights for His people (2 Kings 19:35). The “commander of the Lord’s army” in Josh. 5:13-15 may also be related to this angel.

34:8 “Taste” can mean “judge” in the sense of determine for oneself (Prov. 31:18). “See” most likely carries the same sense in order to reinforce the concept.

34:9-10 God cares for His people more than the rest of His creation (8:5-8). Other texts use the argument that if God cares for His creation, He will care for mankind (104:14-15) and especially for His own people (Matt. 6:28-30). “Lack nothing” also appears in the context of Yahweh’s role as a Shepherd in 23:1.

34:11 The identification of the psalmist’s listeners as children recalls a common wisdom motif of parents instructing their children (Ex. 12:26; Deut. 6:6-9) and shows that Psalm

34:11-14 form a wisdom section in this psalm (similar to 32:8-9). To be taught to fear the Lord is preferable to learning it through experience. Fearing the Lord is where wisdom begins (Pr. 9:10).

34:16 “Wipes out all memory of them from the earth” is another way to describe annihilation.

34:18 “Brokenhearted” and “discouraged” further develop the image of oppression, although the emphasis in these terms is on internal suffering. Yahweh is near those who are broken and humble (51:17) as opposed to those who have “hearts of stone” (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26).

34:20 Broken bones are often symbols of physical affliction (51:8; Isa. 38:13) or oppression (Mic. 3:3). God protects His own from these dangers.

34:21-22 “Evil” (ra’ah) can mean disaster and calamity as well as the abstract concept of evil. Note how this contrasts with goodness and faithful love pursuing the person who trusts in Yahweh (23:6).

MAIN POINT

For the righteous, “good” is not defined by circumstances but instead by the God they follow.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

How does our culture define “the good life”?

How would you say the Bible defines “the good life”?

David wrote Psalm 34 when he was on the run from King Saul and was hiding in the territory of the Philistines, whom Israel was at war with. When David was caught and brought before the king of the Philistines, he pretended to be insane in an attempt to get the king to let him live. Miraculously, David’s plan worked and he wrote Psalm 34 to recognize God’s hand in delivering him and to praise God for His goodness.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

- HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 34:1-10.

Have you ever been tempted to doubt that God is good? What situations in life contributed to those doubts?

Was David's life good at the time he wrote Psalm 34 by our culture's standards (vv. 2, 4, 6, 17)? Why or why not?

Despite the current state of his life and recent trials, David says, "I will boast in the LORD" (v. 2). Why do you think David is able to praise the Lord so freely and passionately in the midst of trying circumstances?

David not only boasts in the Lord in the midst of his afflictions, but wants us to join him in praising God (v. 3). He commands us to "taste and see that the LORD is good." How might the trials and difficulties in our lives help us see and experience the goodness of God more deeply?

- HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 PETER 1:3-9 AND 2:1-3.

Peter, in his first epistle, quotes Psalm 34 eight times--it was likely that he had the Psalm open and was meditating on it as he wrote this letter. Peter helps us see how Jesus makes us able to taste and see that the Lord is good.

What does Peter say brings great joy in verse 6 (see vv. 3-5)?

Peter indicates in verse 7 that God has a plan for the trials that He lets believers face. What is that plan? What is God doing in the hearts and lives of believers as He lets them face trials?

How might standing firm for Christ in the midst of trials result in "indescribable and glorious joy" (v. 8)?

What does Peter say believers will do if they "have experienced the Lord's kindness" (Peter is referencing Psalm 34:8)?

- HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 34:11-22.

Why might verses 16-17 and 21 be important reminders when we are tempted to question the goodness of God?

Read John 19:34-37. How did Jesus fulfill Psalm 34:20. Why is this important?

None of Jesus' bones were broken not only to show us one of the many ways Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecy, but to show us that Jesus is the fulfillment of the entirety of Psalm 34. In other words, Jesus is the One who makes us able to taste and see that the Lord is good.

How does Jesus make us able to taste and see that the Lord is good?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What difficult situations and circumstances are you or your family currently facing?

How might you “taste and see that the Lord is good” in the midst of your trials?

Idols are not always bad things, often they are good things that we value more than God. What are some good things in your life that could become idols?

How might studying God’s Word help you better “taste” the Lord’s goodness? What step could you take this week to make God’s Word a priority?

PRAYER

Pray that your group embraces trials and difficulties as opportunities to grow to treasure Christ more. Thank God for letting us taste and see that He is good through the gift of His Son. Ask God to help us trust the goodness of God even if our circumstances are less than good. Pray that in so-doing, we might point others to Christ.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group members to look ahead to next week’s scripture passage:

June 12, 2022 --- Psalm 51