

Taste and See Psalm 34

Words of praise and blessing to God are easy when life is good. But how could David have written a psalm so full of joy and gratitude at such a low point in his life? Oh, when he was only a boy, the prophet Samuel had promised he would one day be King of Israel, and he had been well on his way to achieving that lofty goal. He had been made a general in the army of King Saul, and Saul had given his daughter Michal to David in marriage.

But then Saul turned on him, seeking to kill him. And by the time David wrote this psalm, he was so desperate to escape that he had even tried to find refuge among the Philistines, by pretending that he had lost his mind. But even they had driven him out. Even his enemies wanted nothing to do with him.

David's story is a little too familiar, isn't it? For how many setbacks have we experienced lately? All those funerals during the winter. Then in mid-March the coronavirus came calling, shredding our state's economy just the way the boll weevil did back in 1909. Our biggest cities are riven with the kind of violence we haven't seen since the late 1960's. And just when we were making so much racial progress in Claiborne County, an effort to remove the Confederate monument from in front of the courthouse threatens to drive white folks and black folks apart once again.

So, how can we bless the Lord today, with all that's going wrong around us? How can we magnify and boast in God in such desperate times? Well, how could David do those things?

Well, he started by thinking about what God had done for him in the past. In verses 4 and 6, he remembers the times when he had sought the Lord and cried out to God. He remembers how God had delivered him and saved him so many times before – perhaps he was recalling how God had protected him while he was guarding his sheep, or maybe he was thinking about his famous fight with Goliath.

But in verse 5 David reminds us that he is not the only one God has helped in this way. In fact, in verse 7 he points out that the Lord protects and rescues all those who fear Him. And that's what David promises to teach us to do in verse 11 – to fear the Lord even more than all the threatening problems that surround us.

And this sort of remembrance, recalling how God has blessed us in the past, is a good thing for all of us to do as well. For even though the boll weevil destroyed the cotton economy of the South, so many other crops began to take its place, eventually forming a broader foundation for even greater prosperity. And even though our country was riven by racial violence in the 1960's, the broader conception of freedom and equality that replaced Jim Crow has brought all of us tremendous blessings. And however terrible the Spanish Flu was back in 1918 and 1919, most people survived even that fearsome plague, which vanished as mysteriously as it had arrived.

But let's face it – just knowing our history won't make today's problems disappear. Sure, it helps to remember what God has done for us in the past, but how can we be sure He will help us today?

Well, David moves on to remind us of the promises of our God. He says we should focus not just on what God has done for us in the past, but on what He will do for us now.

So, are you or your loved ones unemployed or underemployed, and worried about money? Verse 9 reminds us that those who fear the Lord will not be in want of any good thing. Are you brokenhearted by grief? Do the problems all around us make you feel as if your spirit has been crushed? Verse 18 reminds us that the Lord is near to you, and he will save you.

In other words, the true answer to so many of today's problems is not a "what" but a "who." That's the reason we join David in blessing and praising God, even in the face of viruses and violence in our streets. That's the reason we boast in the Lord and magnify His name, instead of giving ourselves credit for whatever solutions to our problems may come our way. It is God Who delivers us. It is God Who redeems us. And so we trust God's promises to help us today not only because of what He has done for us in the past. We trust God because of Who He is, yesterday, today, and forever.

And yes, one of the ways that our Almighty God promises to solve our problems is through His perfect justice. David reminds us in verses 15 and 16 that God is opposed to evildoers, even while he always hears the cries of the righteous. God is not neutral where it comes to the wickedness in the world. He is a ruler who takes sides.

And that's why David continually links God's protection to our obedience. If we want to live long and healthy lives, David says in verses 13 and 14 that we should obey God's commands. We should speak only what is true. We should depart from every kind of evil and seek peace with one another. Fearing God, indeed trusting God, finds its fullest expression in doing God's will instead of our own, in following God's ways instead of our own inclinations.

But if all that's true, if our God is a God of justice and righteousness, how can sinners like us find comfort in Him? For either individually or collectively, we have not been a particularly faithful people, have we? We know all too well that so many of our problems today are the result of poor choices that we and our ancestors have made over the years.

This is certainly true on the national scene. Sure, we changed all the laws way back in the 1960's, removing the legal barriers that prevented black folks from full participation in American society. But what did we do about our attitudes, the distrust and suspicion and even hatred that all too often remains on both sides of our racial divides? How well have we all done in trying to understand how our clothing and manners and symbols might be seen by others? Have we emphasized the many things that we have in common, or have we chosen to dwell on the things that divide us?

And what about our personal lives? How much of our present physical or relational pain is due to our own short-sighted or selfish decisions? How much of our health and strength have we squandered on things that have no eternal significance? How can sinners like us place our trust in a God Who is just and righteous?

We find a hint in verse 20 – “He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.” This is not just a promise of personal safety. It is a foreshadowing of the cross of Jesus Christ. The accounts of Jesus’ crucifixion tell us that although Jesus was cruelly mocked and beaten, although he was nailed to a cross, and although a Roman soldier pierced his side with a spear after he had died, none of his bones were broken in the process. This psalm of David, written 1000 years beforehand, thus points to the cross, reminding us that Jesus would pay the perfect sacrifice for all who would trust in Him.

And so, the reason sinners like us can look to the Lord in the midst of our greatest problems, the reason we can have confidence in a God Who is Almighty and righteous and sovereign is because Jesus has already paid the penalty all our sins deserve. Jesus has lived in our place a life of perfect obedience. Because none of His bones were broken, we can bless the Lord and give Him praise and magnify His name. It is the name of Christ in which we boast. It is the work of Christ in which we trust.

And that is why we come to the table to taste and see that the Lord is good. That is why we take refuge in Him and are blessed. In Christ, God has met our deepest needs and has satisfied our greatest hunger. Truly, those who seek Him shall not be in want of any good thing.

But if we take comfort that this psalm points to the death of Christ, that means all its wonderful, comforting promises also had to apply to Jesus, right? But how can that be? For when He cried out to the Lord, “Why have you forsaken me?” the Father still left Him on the cross. No, Jesus wasn’t delivered from those who tormented and afflicted Him – He died, just as His enemies wanted Him to.

So, how did the Father deliver Jesus? How did the Father save Jesus? How did the Father rescue Jesus? How did the Father redeem Jesus? How did the Father lengthen Jesus’ days? By His resurrection on the third day. The Father kept all these promises to Christ and many more – but only after He died and rose again.

And in the face of all our trials, we must remember that God may choose to keep His promises to us in the same way. Yes, He has helped us in the past. Yes, He has promised to deliver us and to save us and to rescue us and to redeem us and to lengthen our days. Yes, He has accomplished everything necessary to secure all these blessings through the cross of Christ. And He will keep all those promises to all who trust in Him – but not necessarily right now, and not necessarily in the way we imagine. God may in fact choose to reserve some of our blessings for the life eternal, in the same way that all those blessings awaited Christ as He died on the cross.

But the good news is that as we come to this table, as we come to taste and see that the Lord is good, we come to share not only in the crucified Lamb of God, but in the

risen Christ. We come to participate not only in His perfect sacrifice on our behalf, but in His triumph over the power of sin and death. We come not only to receive forgiveness but to receive cleansing. The good news is that, by faith in Christ, we don't have to wait for all the blessings of eternal life. As Jesus becomes one with us and we become one with Him, those blessings can be ours right now.

So, no matter what's going on in our lives, no matter what's going on in our world, let's bless the Lord at all times. Let's fill our mouths with the praises of the One Who has died for us. Let us boast in the One Who has conquered the power of sin and death. And let us magnify and exalt His name, not just with our lips, but with our lives of humble trust and obedience to Him, sharing in the blessings and the reality of His resurrection life.