

A few years ago Jim Brown, a pastor from Louisiana, shared a lesson with his congregation that he learned on the subject of trust. In telling them the story about how he learned to fly a plane, he said: “When I was learning to fly, my instructor told me to put the plane into a steep and extended dive. I was quite unprepared for what was about to happen. After a brief time the engine stalled, and the plane began to plunge out-of-control. It soon became evident that the instructor was not going to help me at all. After a few seconds (which seemed like eternity), my mind began to function again. I quickly corrected the situation. Immediately I turned to the instructor and began to vent my fearful frustrations on him. He very calmly said to me: ‘There is no position you can get this airplane into -that I cannot get you out of. If you want to learn to fly, then let’s go up there and do it again.’ At that moment God seemed to be saying to me: ‘Jim, Remember this. As you serve me, there is no situation you can get yourself into - that I cannot get you out of. If you trust me, then you will be all right.’”

Because God is sovereign over and above all things, there is no situation we can get into that God cannot get us out of. King David, who wrote this psalm, truly understood what it meant to trust in God. We see this in Psalm 16 when King David joyfully wrote that he could *trust God* would protect him in times of struggle - and in Psalm 25 when King David confidently wrote that he could *trust God* would guide him in times of difficulty. Today in Psalm 34 we find David gratefully praying because he believed he could *trust God* to rescue him in times of trouble regardless of the situation.

In looking at the heading of Psalm 34 we read of the context from which David wrote these words. *“Of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.”* The title places this psalm in 1 Samuel 21:10–14. Fleeing for his life from King Saul, David sought refuge with the Philistine king of Gath, called by his personal name, Achish, but in this psalm we read of his royal name as a Philistine king, Abimelech. Soon, however, David’s *safety* with the Philistines changed to *detention* as they recognized who David was and realized what a valuable hostage they had. David was a great military leader with an impressive battle record – and he feared for his life if Abimelech found him out. And so in order to protect himself David pretended to be wildly insane; God intervenes and Abimelech is so unnerved by David’s behaviour that he chastises the servants for allowing David in his court, and David is allowed to flee with his life. Now if we only had this account in Samuel, we would say that King David was rescued because he was cunning and clever. But this psalm tells us David saw it much differently; he saw God’s sovereign fingerprints on *everything* that happened. God rescued him from a situation that David truly could not get out of.

Psalm 34 is a record of David’s thoughts and prayers when he was going through this time of trouble. The words of this psalm clearly reflect the heart of someone who is not relying on themselves but who instead is putting their complete trust in God. In Psalm 34:4-8 David wrote: *“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. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!”* The contrasts of helplessness and trusting faith we read of here are testimonies we can relate to. Life is often filled with troubles and struggles - whether it be about our marriages, our children, our relationships, our careers, our health, our plans, our finances, our doubts, our fears and even our churches. And in our desperation we cry out to God in prayer – and again and again God protects and guides and rescues. But our human experience tells us that sometimes when we desperately cry out in prayer God doesn’t protect, guide and rescue. At least He doesn’t seem to do so in our time and in our way. If we were to base our trust in God by our human experience, we might come to the conclusion that God can be inconsistent, either because we are not doing something right or God is incapable of what we ask him to do. But neither is true.

I have always said that our feelings are great friends but terrible counsellors. In the same way human experience can be good teacher – but it may not teach us the truth about God. The truth is God is sovereign; He can do anything He wants to. And the truth is we are not God; God can do whatever He wants to do with us or without us. In an extremely, difficult life-threatening situation, David did what he thought he should do, but then he also desperately prayed for God to intervene and help him. *This time* God rescued him from *this situation* and he gratefully praised God for doing so. In Psalm 34 David tells us why he believed he could trust God to rescue him in this time of trouble.

I. David first prayerfully proclaims that he could trust God to rescue him in his time of trouble because God is worthy of our praise: *“I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. 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 34:1-3). David begins this psalm with a vow, or a promise: *“I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”* Here David promises to persistently, *“at all times”* - even in the possible death grip of Abimelech - to praise God, rather than to praise his own personal cunning and cleverness of escape and rescue.

David is also telling us that God is worthy of praise not based on a specific event in life but *“at all times”* in any circumstance and every situation in life. Paul says the same in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”* King David promises he will joyfully praise God *without ceasing* in all situations because He is worthy of praise. While verse one stresses the *frequency* of David’s praise, the second verse reveals the *focus* of that praise: *“My soul makes its boast in the Lord.”* David is not focusing his praise on the deliverance he has experienced, but rather on the One who delivered, who rescued him. Here we see God is both the subject and the object of David’s praise. David is so grateful that God has rescued him that his soul boasts *“in the Lord”* so others who are afflicted might also rejoice: *“let the humble hear and be glad.”* David wants others who are struggling to know and praise the joy of God’s power to rescue them.

Verse three calls us to the fellowship of praise: *“Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!”* Praise can be private, but that is not the kind of praise the psalms speak of. When David publicly praised God in worship, he did so in order that all of God’s people would join him in worshipping the God who is worthy of praise! Just as we are leading you in worship today, David urges his fellow-worshippers to join with him in magnifying the Lord so that God’s name would be corporately exalted in us all and through us all together. Praise God that we trust Him to rescue us in our times of trouble – He alone is worthy of our praise!

II. David secondly proclaims that God had proven Himself worthy of praise as David gives grateful testimony to the reality that God will rescue us in our desperate time of greatest need: *“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). Aside from our own experiences with God, there is nothing more powerful than hearing how others have been rescued by God in their time of need. Again, David humbly acknowledges it was God who rescued him from his difficult struggle; God *“answered . . . and delivered.”* David tells us that God delivered him from all of his *“fears.”* What is significant here is that David is *not* stressing his deliverance *from the danger being executed* by Abimelech; what David *is* stressing is his *deliverance* from all of his *“fears.”* There is no doubt that David expected he would find himself in dangerous situations. Those who are committed to living for God will find themselves opposed by evil and living against the grain of the world. Jesus himself said: *“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account”* (Matthew 5:11).

In verse 19 David writes: *"Many are the afflictions of the righteous."* The righteous of God should expect affliction. But God promises He will deliver His own out of dangerous situations - just as He removed David from the hand of Abimelech. But sometimes *the way* God delivers His own out of dangerous situations is simply to *be with* us in our dangerous situation. In Deuteronomy 31:6 Moses told God's people: *"Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."* David prayed he would be delivered from his "fears" - so whether he was removed or remained in a dangerous situation, his countenance would reflect his trust in God: *"Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed."*

David understood that even if he was rescued, that wouldn't stop his "troubles." The Philistines would continue to despise the Israelites; when given the opportunity. Abimelech would come after David again. Followers of Jesus do not live their lives devoid of trouble. Yet God promises he will protect us by saving and delivering us from being *defeated* by our troubles: *"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."* Our protection in times of trouble is the *presence of God* - "the angel of the Lord." In any circumstance and every situation we can praise God knowing that He will save and deliver us when we humbly and desperately seek His presence in our time of greatest need.

III. Thirdly David gives powerful testimony that God will rescue us when we humbly fear 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. Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. 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 34:8-14). In this section David begins speaking about the fear of the Lord by proclaiming the goodness of the Lord: *"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!"* God is worthy of praise because *"the Lord is good"* to all of us because as fallen sinners we all are fully deserving of God's condemnation and wrath. We are so "blessed" because we can *"take refuge in him!"*

Those whom David exhorts to *"taste and see that the Lord is good"* are co-worshippers with David who have come to worship God with him. The blessings which they are encouraged to experience are those which David himself has experienced. Yet we can infer from verses 8-10 that the majority of God's people whom David knew were not experiencing the fullest blessings of God - because David here is exhorting them to *"taste and see that the Lord is good."* David was addressing the people who claimed to know God but who did not have a joyful, vibrant, passionate, trusting relationship with God.

"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." We read here that those who "fear the Lord" (who are fully committed to love, obey, and worship God) will lack nothing. In other words, when we truly do trust in God we will *"lack no good thing."* The "fear" spoken of here is the fear that drives us to trust in things or people or ourselves rather than God - because we fear God will not give us what we need. This is the fear God spoke of to Isaiah: *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand"* (Isaiah 41:10). When we truly fear the Lord, we understand and worship the reality that He is the source, the fountain of all good things. We must fight the fear that drives us to self-sufficiency and self-dependence and instead cry out with humble prayers of gratitude that God will rescue us from ourselves and bless us with God-sufficiency and God-dependence when we fully trust in Him for all good things. Only when we are willing to admit that our fear that God will not more than give us every good thing that we truly need - will we then be humbly satisfied in God and joyfully content with God for everything that happens to us and everything we are given in this life.

“Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. 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” (Psalms 34:11-14). While the definition of the “*fear of the Lord*” is more extensive than what we read in these few verses, David gives us some practical insight in telling us that the “*fear of the Lord*” is not something you merely learn about - in that the fear of the Lord is also *something you have in your heart and something you live out*. What comes out of our mouth (“*tongue . . . lips*”) reveals where we are with God. Jesus himself said the same: “*What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person*” (Matthew 15:18).

What is significant is that David brings up the issue of “*speaking deceit*” here, for that seems to have been a predominant characteristic of his life as he fled from Saul. In the fact that he *deceived* Abimelech into thinking he was insane revealed that David feared Abimelech more than he feared God. To look at it another way is to see that David is telling us that when he feared Abimelech more than God, he was more concerned with pleasing Abimelech than he was with obeying God. Fearing God involves acting consistently with God’s character and God’s commands – and David did not do that. What he writes of here about fearing God is what he had already experienced himself. The “*fear of the Lord*” also means we must “*turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.*” Not only must we guard our mouth, speaking the truth rather than “*deceit*” - but we must also depart from evil and practice what is right. We must aggressively seek peace. David failed here as well. The very fact that David ran from King Saul and was willing to go to war in partnership with Abimelech against his own nation of Israel reveals he was not a peace-seeker. David did not seek peace with Israel because he feared Abimelech more than God. When we fear people more God we will be at war. The fear of the Lord involves acting consistently with God’s character and with His commands.

What this means for us today is that at some point we each must stop and be willing to draw a line in the sand and determine that with God’s help we will no longer live the way that we have been living. Each one of us has issues in our hearts and lives we need to surrender to God. May today be the day the “*fear of the Lord*” stops us from walking down the path we’ve been walking on for too long; stops us from thinking the thoughts we know are not pleasing to God; stops us from saying the hurtful, destructive things we’ve said about others; stops us from worshipping the people and things that are taking up our time and wasting our lives. “*Turn away from evil and do good.*” God will powerfully rescue us when we humbly fear Him; may we all “*seek the Lord*” and “*lack no good thing.*”

VI. Fourthly and lastly David gives personal testimony to the reality that God will care for those who fully trust Him. *“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. 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. 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 34:15-22).

David speaks of the “*righteous*” four times here. The Bible defines the “*righteous*” as those who *fully trust in God*. We are “*righteous*” not by what we do but because we fully trust in the righteousness of God we have been given through Jesus Christ. When we fully trust in God He cares for us; our total trust in God and His loving care for us defines our relationship with Him. God’s eyes and ears are ever attentive to the cries of the “*righteous*” while His face is against the “*wicked*” – those who do evil. The “*righteous*” total trust in the Lord is evidenced by their cries to Him for deliverance; in contrast to the pride and arrogance of the wicked, the “*righteous*” are humble and broken hearted.

David is telling us that the “*righteous*” are those who are desperately dependent upon God, looking to Him and Him only for deliverance rather than trusting in their own strength. This is what David learned in his struggles with Abimelech. *Human cleverness did not save David when he acted insane; he was saved by God’s grace in response to David’s humble prayer for rescue.* David was saved in spite of his cunning because God mercifully answered David’s humble cry to be rescued. God cares for those who fully trust Him. “*The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.*” In time of their deepest need, when the “*righteous*” cry out, God hears, responds and rescues them.

“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. 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 34:19-22). Here we read that God’s care for the righteous also extends to protecting and rescuing them from the sin and evil and wrath of others. But we dare not suggest that God’s care promises that the righteous will not struggle and suffer. But even when God does keep us in our afflictions, He will ultimately deliver us from all adversity. The extent of our protection by God is stressed in verse 20: *“He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.”* While by *implication* this verse was ultimately fulfilled in the death of Jesus on the cross, its *meaning* comes from the context of Isaiah 38:13 where the prophet describes the defeat and despair of one who has been overcome by adversity. David tells us that this will not be the case of those who fear the Lord.

The focus then shifts in verses 21 and 22 from God’s care for the righteous in protecting and rescuing them from the wrath of men – to God’s care for the righteous in protecting and rescuing them from the wrath of God. In contrast to the righteous who will be delivered from all affliction- the wicked will be slain by affliction, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. These verses describe the destruction of the wicked from both sides – from their own wickedness, and from God’s wrath. But *“the Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned!”*

The word “redeems” is significant here as it suggests that the forgiveness of those who take refuge in God is not without cost. From the New Testament teaching we know that we are redeemed, not by the shedding of the blood of animals under the Old Testament law, but by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. What this means is that we are the “*righteous*” not because of anything we have done – but all because of what Jesus has done. By his sacrificial death on the cross we are redeemed, forgiven, and made righteous before God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us: *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* God redeems our lives when we take refuge in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour; our relationship with him is our righteousness.

Job 5:7 tells us that *“man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.”* This is our life as fallen sinners who live in a fallen sinful world. Job understood that; he knew trouble like most people know their beds. He experienced more trouble than we could ever know. Nate Wilson writes that Job “was pushed down under the waves” of that trouble “all the way down until his wife was cursing and his pious friends were rebuking him, down until his children were gone, his wealth was gone, his health was gone, down like a submarine dropping into cold nothing , dropping toward his crush depth, toward the absolute breaking point of his righteousness, down until all he had was . . . The Whirlwind. Only two men and one woman have ever lost more than Job.” Adam, Eve and Jesus. Jesus was born to trouble. Even though he was “the Son of God” - even though “he was innocent. He’d done nothing to deserve trouble. Jesus was born in a motel barn. To a teenage mother still slandered to this day. To an adoptive father who many believed (and believe) to have been a . . . nitwit. Jesus, the Word made physical, the Man born for trouble we cannot comprehend, was placed in a trough. He would trigger (but escape) a genocide. And he was just getting started. He would experience betrayal, profound brutality, and death . . . he had come for exactly that reason.”

We will all die someday too. The Bible tells us *“the wages of sin is death.”* But it also goes on to say that *“the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23). We need not fear death when we truly trust in Jesus. This is what a middle-aged pastor with cancer told me last week. Even though he is dying, even though he will leave a wife and three children when he does go home, his sparks will fly upward to meet Jesus in the midst of his trouble. The reality of sin and death reveals that truth. This is the key to what happened to David in Psalm 34. David was not delivered from the hand of Abimelech because of his cunning or cleverness but *because of his relationship with God*. David feared the Lord. When David sinned by not trusting God through his pretending to be insane, it revealed that he had allowed his fear of the Lord to wane, replacing it with the fear of man. God graciously delivered David, not due to his righteousness, but because of his relationship with God. In response to God’s merciful deliverance, David’s fear of God was renewed. As a result David prayed grateful praises to God for being rescued by God. He urges us to do the same in this psalm of prayer.

In Psalm 34 David proclaimed that God had proven Himself worthy of praise. He prayerfully gives grateful testimony to the reality that God rescues us in our desperate time of greatest need; he then gives powerful testimony that God will rescue us when we humbly fear Him; he then gives personal testimony to the reality that God will care for those who fully trust Him. The truth is that on our journey from this earth to eternal glory we will often face times of trouble. But we can gratefully praise our most sovereign God with the knowledge that even in the midst of our afflictions, we can confidently cry out to God, knowing that through Jesus Christ He rescues us from all of our troubles.

“But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.’”
Isaiah 43:1-3

We live in a world today where many people allow their lives to be limited by the fears of criticism, hurt, and disappointment. Since terrorists stepped to the front of the stage over a dozen years ago our lives are restricted by the fear of another disaster. But in spite of such restrictions our greatest fears have come to pass not so much by terrorists - but trouble continues to come and sparks continue to fly upward in the form of financial crises, moral decay, war, natural disasters and broken relationships. We are ever more becoming a culture of fear. But in Christ we need not fear. David praised God and experienced release from his fears. With Jesus we can practice preventative medicine against fear by praising God at all times and in all situations. There is no situation we could ever get into that God could not sovereignly get us out of. And when He does not take us out of those situations, God promises He will be with us and care for us - even in death. If we trust God, everything will *ultimately* be all right.

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

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