

Psalms of David

Psalm 34 – The LORD heard me and saved me

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Have you ever had a narrow escape? I remember driving up the M1 on my way back from a trip to London. Suddenly a lorry swerved out from the inside lane and caught the car in front of me. That car spun 360 degrees and ended up in the outside lane whilst the lorry ended up in the inside lane pointing the wrong way. I still do not know how (humanly speaking), but I made it between the two vehicles unscathed. It was only afterwards that my legs turned to jelly at the thought of what might have been.

In Psalm 34, David might have felt very similar. Surrounded by danger he had emerged unscathed and so turned to God in praise. As we continue our series on some of the Psalms of David, I would like to think about the Psalm under a series of five words beginning with C. First, the context, then the call, the challenge, the comfort and finally the Christ.

Before we look at the context it is worth just commenting on the fact that Psalm 34 is an acrostic Psalm – that is each verse begins with a different letter that progresses through the alphabet. This is lost to us in our English translations, but it is certainly true in the original Hebrew.

Why did David do this? It was not that he was just showing off. I think it is because he intended this Psalm to be memorised and using his a, b, c would make this easier to learn. At Easter 2025, we had a children's club and encouraged the children to learn a memory verse during the week. It was a joy to hear a two-year-old, running round saying the verse by the end of the week. If he lives to be a hundred and two, he will probably forget most of what he learns at school or which videos he enjoyed on YouTube. However, Scripture, and hymns learnt at that age have a habit of sticking for a lifetime. What a fabulous investment of time.

(For information, the other acrostic Psalms are 9, 10, 25, 37, 111, 112, 119 and 145).

The Context

A text, without a context is a pretext – or so the saying goes, which is no doubt correct if a little highbrow. Happily, for this Psalm, the introduction gives us the precise circumstances which lead to David composing Psalm 34. We read

A Psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed”.

It is worth just taking time to read 1 Samuel 21: 10 – 15 to help us understand what had happened.

Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said to him, Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying: Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten

thousands? Now David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. So, he changed his behaviour before them, feigned madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard. Then Achish said to his servants, Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me? Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?

In fear of his life at the hands of king Saul, David had fled to the Philistine territory. Out of the frying pan into the fire as the saying goes, he was recognised by Achish, the Ahimelech or king of Gath. Having so recently killed the champion giant of Gath, Goliath, David's life truly was in danger and so he pretended madness. No king wants a court of fools and so Achish sent him away. David left to find sanctuary in the Judean wilderness.

I wonder how often do I look for sanctuary in the wrong places? Things may be difficult and so I cheer myself up with a little retail therapy, book a nice holiday or submerge myself in a favourite hobby. Now I don't want to guilt-trip anyone here. There is nothing wrong with these things in moderation, but problems are never solved by running away from them. The ordinary pleasures of this life may help us endure difficult times but perhaps today, we will learn about our true source of help in times of difficulty and danger. In running from Saul and then from Achish, David was hardly setting an inspiring example of leadership. Yet often it is when we come to an end of ourselves that we begin to see God at work, moving the situation so that good can come from it.

If we ask ourselves the question where David went next, we find our answer in the next chapter.

David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. And everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So, he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him (1 Samuel 22:1 – 2).

At the cave of Adullam, David would learn that his God was great enough to provide for him. It was there that all who were in distress, in debt and discontented would find help and relief. Far from being alone, David was becoming a leader and inspirer of men. From these most unlikely of beginnings, David's kingship was born. As a footnote to the story, in chapter 23, verse 13, we read:

So David and his men, about six hundred arose and departed.

I still remember my father, speaking on this incident exclaiming, "How's that for church growth!" Well, his theology might have been a little imprecise but how inspiring that within the space of a chapter enormous growth had taken place, 400 had become 600. We bemoan the lack of growth in our fellowships, but we must never forget that we follow the One who is able to build up.

Perhaps then, it was whilst David was in the cave at Adullam or looking back on those days that he was inspired to write Psalm 34. The God who had delivered him from danger and established his position was a God that was worth following and telling others about.

The Call

I will bless the LORD all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear

of it and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together. I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him and delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! Oh, fear the LORD you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing (Psalm 34:1 – 10).

David wanted what he had learnt by experience to be the habitual course of life for those who would follow him. As a father to his children, he would instruct them, and in this section, we get a three-fold call to praise, to trust and to fear the LORD. Nor should we view this as suitable for Old Testament times, but things have moved on now. In Hebrews chapter 13, verse 15 we read:

Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

In every generation praise is an appropriate response to God. We certainly have so much cause to be a thankful and praising people. Sadly, too often, I deliberately choose to dwell on the negative, the problems. I would rather be miserable. I do not mean in any way to minimise the problems that we pass through – David's situation had been pretty hopeless humanly speaking. However, we do have a choice as to what we allow our minds to dwell upon. It will take effort to move our thoughts from the problems to the praise, but we do not lack for reason to do so.

In verse 2, David says he will make his boast in the LORD. The Hebrew word for boast is "halal" from which we get our word Hallelujah! Were we able to ask David "What gets you up in the morning?" he would doubtless reply that it was crying out Hallelujah to God.

This world has all sorts of things that makes them cry out in praise. We live just a couple of miles from Anfield, the home of Liverpool Football Club. On a quiet evening you can hear the fans in full voice praising those eleven men who bring such joy. I have to ask myself whether my neighbours around the church I worship in ever hear my voice singing Hallelujah on a Sunday morning. Do I inadvertently give the impression that LFC are a greater cause for praise than LJC?

Just for a moment imagine that this life was all there was. We were lost sinners with no hope of forgiveness, and after death extinction. How utterly meaningless. I could make my life nice now – probably at the expense of others – which would not make me a nice person. Or I could make the lives of others better – probably at personal cost, for no reason. No wonder, Solomon, as he considered a life without God was led to describe it over and over again as meaningless. Hallelujah indeed that we are in Christ. That He has saved us and destined us for glory. Hallelujah again that He is with us, we are indwelt by His Spirit, and we are on our way home.

Maybe it is because I am British. Maybe it is because of my spiritual traditions, but I don't tend to be very spontaneous in my church experience. A polite "Amen" at the end of a prayer is about as good as it gets. Perhaps a little more enthusiasm would not be out of order.

David certainly had had cause to fear. Death surrounded him – at the hands of Saul or the Philistines. However, he had learnt that his God was able to deliver him from all his fears. We may fear growing old, and the loss of independence and health. We may fear the economic situation. We may fear the geopolitical events that make headline news. We live in a world that is consumed by fear. No wonder there is a mental health crisis. The solution to our fears is not to be delivered out of them, only to wait for the next one to strike! No, our hope is that we are encamped all around by none other than God Himself. The writer to the Hebrews could say in chapter 13:5-6,

He Himself had said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

So we may boldly say:

The LORD is my helper; I will not fear.

What can man do to me? Here is real confidence, life changing confidence and it ought to be the daily reality in each one of our lives, though I have to say it is definitely a work in progress in my life! There is not a situation in life that I go into alone for He is with me. He has allowed every situation for my good – in mysterious and as yet unknown ways maybe – but undoubtedly, He is with me. It is alright not to understand the “Why’s” of life. All I need to do is to trust the One who does.

The challenge

Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD . Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken. Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous shall be condemned. The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned (Psalm 34:11 – 22).

It would be wrong to view faith as a “get out of Jail free” card! Critics may claim it is all “pie in the sky when you die.” David makes it quite clear that this is not the case. For sure, there are real benefits that should make us praise Him. But there are equal responsibilities, and in this section, David highlights some of them. Those who followed him were to keep their tongues from evil, and their mouths from speaking deceit. David knew from bitter first-hand experience where such actions led. At the start of 1 Samuel chapter 21, as he fled from Saul, he had deceived Ahimelech and the priests to give him food and supplies. That later led to their deaths at the hands of Saul. He had then deceived Achish. These things weighed upon his conscience and gnawed at his soul. David knew that deceit may work in the moment but leaves a lifetime of regrets. What is more, he knew it dishonoured God, displaying a lack of trust. So, he would challenge his followers to be known for their truthful words and honest actions. They were to actively depart from evil and positively do good.

Life should not just be defined by what we do not do – although there are plenty of things that may fall into that category for the Christian. We are to be known for the good that we do do! Non-Christians really want to see a faith that works in this life. The promise of the Lord’s blessing is to those who are living in obedience to Him. Whilst we do have a gracious God, it is particularly to the righteous that His ear is open. We cannot live a life of pleasing self, and then when things go wrong expect Him to bail us out and come to our rescue. Wrong living has consequences, and whilst there is always a way back to full fellowship with Him, and His people, He may not remove the consequences of our sin. So, the challenge is to righteous living.

Righteous living is no guarantee of an easy life either. In fact, verse 19 almost suggests the opposite:

Many are the afflictions of the righteous.

We must not be surprised when life is difficult. To faithfully follow Christ is to mark oneself out as the object of devilish attack. However, we do have the assurance that “the LORD delivers him out of them all.” Now this needs a little explanation. Did God deliver His Son from the cross. Well on the one hand a cursory look would think not – after all, Jesus died. Yet in glorious resurrection, He now fills a place far more glorious than He had here upon earth. Or did God deliver Paul from prison and execution. Again, one might think not. However, his prison epistles have done far more across the centuries than any amount of missionary journeys would have accomplished. Were we able to ask Paul now if he felt cheated by the life path God planned out for him, I know that he would laugh that the question was even asked.

The comfort

The Apostle Peter certainly found Psalm 34 a source of comfort for there are several echoes in his epistles of thoughts that we find in this Psalm. For instance, in verse 8 we read:

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good. Blessed is the man who trusts in Him.

In 1 Peter 2:3 we read,

If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Or more directly verses 12 – 15 are quoted in chapter 3:10 – 12. It is good for us to make what we read in the Scriptures a part of our experience. No wonder David wanted his readers to memorise this Psalm. Now there are at least four reasons for comfort in the Psalm.

First, the Lord knows and sees. So much of what we do may be misunderstood and unnoticed by this world. However, we have a God who knows all that is done for Him and sees all. In the most trying of circumstances, He is watching over us.

Second, He hears and is near. Occasionally I have thought that I would love to visit my father’s grave and just chat over a problem with him. My wife thinks that is a bit daft, for he would neither hear and he most certainly is not where his tombstone stands. However, my heavenly Father is always near, and He always hears – even the silent tears of the heart. He hears the unintelligible thoughts that don’t even make sense in our own heads but which makes perfect sense to Him.

Third, He delivers. If not from them then through the most difficult of circumstances. I can look back on my parenting and know there were times when I let my children down. At least on some of those occasions it was not because of malign intent but simply because I did not have the answer. However, I do not think that when the lives of all believers are reviewed, there will ever be a charge against God that “You let me down then!”

Fourth, He redeems the righteous. What a joy to know that we belong to Him. As such we are immensely precious to Him. We are that pearl for which He sold all that He had – though we may not feel like it. At Dunkirk, some were left behind. In Afghanistan, some of the materials were left behind after the American and British withdrawal. At the end of time, not one of us will be left behind. Nothing that has been done for Him will be forgotten. None of us will be too unimportant to be remembered and taken safely into His presence.

The Christ

It is always a good habit to get into to look for Christ in all the Scriptures, for they speak of Him. In that respect, Psalm 34 is no different. There are at least two instances that deserve our attention. In verse 6 we read,

This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him.

Though materially, David would soon inherit a kingdom and through conquest become powerful and hugely rich, I do not think that he ever lost the sense that he was “a poor man.” In Psalm 8:4 he could exclaim:

What is man that You are mindful of him?

However, there is One who,

Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

In the same way that we cannot hope to comprehend the richness of His Person and position in eternity past, as He was daily the delight of the Father, and ever in His bosom, so we cannot enter into the poverty that He experienced. This was a poverty beyond the material. For sure Jesus said,

Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.

He also asked to be shown a coin when he had to respond to a question about the payment of taxes to Caesar. However, there was a poverty that ran far deeper as He emptied Himself (see Philippians 2:7,8). We may well wonder at the Son of God being wearied by His journey, or being thirsty but I think it goes even beyond this. He truly became “this poor Man.”

Psalm 34 verse 20 is a remarkable verse:

He guards all his bones: not one of them is broken.

This on the surface speaks about the daily care that God has for His children and His general protection. Of course, as poetry, it is not to be taken as a cast-iron guarantee that a believer will never have a fractured ankle or a broken arm. However, in the case of the Lord Jesus it really was that not a bone of His body was broken. This was in keeping with what we read concerning the Passover lamb in Exodus 12:46:

In one house it shall be eaten: you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones.

This sacrifice was to be made carefully and with due reverence to the life that would cover their sins and ensure their safety for another year. As our Passover Lamb, God ensured that His sacrifice was made in just such a perfect way, in spite of the hostility of sinners surrounding the cross.

In John 8:59 we read:

Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

Further in John 10:31 we read:

Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him.

However, stoning would have broken His bones most certainly. That was not the path that God had decreed for His Son. Finally, In John 19, we see the Roman guards wanting to hasten the execution and so they broke the legs of the two thieves crucified next to Jesus but when they came to Him “and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs” (v.33). Such glorious perfection, even in death, as the Father jealously stood guard over His Son, our Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God’s providing. John notes that this was so that the Scripture, that is Psalm 34:20, might be fulfilled. This is the same God in whom we can have perfect confidence.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on Psalm 34 – ‘The LORD heard Me and saved Me’ in the series Psalms of David, T1431.

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