

Psalm 34 Littlebourne 20 October 2024 PH

Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left.

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 broken-hearted 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.

This psalm is headed - when David pretended to be insane before Abimelech. King Saul was jealous of David. In 1 Samuel 19 he promised he would not put David to death, but later while David is playing his harp or lyre, Saul tries to spear him, but David eludes him and escapes. David was married to Michal, younger daughter of Saul who pretended David was ill, so he could put some distance between him and Saul. David fled to Samuel in Naioth, and all the soldiers sent to capture him ended up filled with the Holy Spirit, even Saul who came after no one returned. A few days later when Saul had calmed down, we see in chapter 20 he is annoyed that David isn't at the table to eat in his usual place, and demanded someone kill him. David fled on his own to Nob, when the priest Ahimelech lived and gave David the sacred showbread as there was nothing else to eat. Then he fled again to Gath, where he pretended to be mad in order to be let into the city. Abimelech was probably the title of Achish the king of Gath, who sent him packing as he seemed to be insane. Killing him or sheltering him in his city would result in trouble as king Saul would probably attack the city whatever he did with David.

Matthew Henry summarised this psalm

- 1. He praises God for the experience which he and others had had of his goodness ([v. 1-6](#)).
- 2. He encourages all good people to trust in God and to seek to him ([v. 7-10](#)).
- 3. He gives good counsel to us all, as unto children, to take heed of sin, and to make conscience of our duty both to God and man ([v. 11-14](#)).
- 4. To enforce this good counsel he shows God's favour to the righteous and his displeasure against the wicked, in which he sets before us good and evil, the blessing and the curse ([v. 15-22](#)).

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Whether David pretended to be mad, or whether he was being hunted down by King Saul, his focus was on God. David would praise God always. Because of his faith, he would want others to share in worshipping God with him. In the New Testament we are urged not to neglect meeting together (Hebrews 10:25) as some do, but encourage one another. David was on his own this time, but later he had his band of mighty men, fierce warriors, who worshipped God together. Uriah the Hittite was one of them and his Hebrew name means “the Lord is my light”.

⁴ *I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.* Going on from the what the mighty men did, we see that they went forward in battle, and did not consider retreat an option. Bravery is the confidence that comes from being delivered from fear. Fear in the Bible has two meanings: fear as in being afraid, and fear as being in awe because of unbeatable odds. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10) because we are right to be afraid of what God can do to us when we go astray, but also right to be in awe of God because he is beyond all we can possibly understand, yet because we can seek him, follow his ways, be forgiven and clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, we can be released from fear to adoration and be enveloped in his love.

⁵ *Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.* Can we say this applies to us? The radiant bit! Shame implies guilt, and most of us aren’t looking guilty until we do something wrong. The Hebrew word nahar for “radiant” in the NIV means cheerfulness. Other translations have “*radiant with joy*” and the King James “*They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.*”

⁶ *This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.* David was in trouble and was saved – he had a few life threatening situations – from the time he fought off both a bear and lion as a boy tending sheep to challenging a giant Goliath, being pursued by Saul, fighting battles, threatened by his own son, and late in life when he foolishly called for a census. We all have times of trouble, and calling on God for help has enabled many of us to be overcomers, because God heard our prayers. That’s the first six verses thanking God for his goodness.

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.*

The next four verses are promises for those who trust in God. Safety, security, provision, and blessing. How wonderful is it to know that the angel of the Lord surrounds us, and protects us. The angels are in heaven praising God, but they also come down to watch over us and to protect us. It takes faith in Jesus to be reliant on him, and David’s life, with all its ups and downs, illustrates that putting trust in God had results. David is remembered as a man after God’s own heart, despite his flaws. We are the same... full of flaws but nonetheless chosen by Jesus as a royal holy priesthood of believers.

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.*

The next four verses are advice for all of us: love the Lord, be truthful, do good and seek peace. When we are young we are in our learning phase... new things are soaked up and learnt. In older

age, we may think we know the answers that the young have not yet found, but those answers have to be in line with God's way and God's will. *"Without vision the people perish, but he that keeps the law, happy is he."* Proverbs 29:18. Another translation *"When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild. But whoever obeys the law is joyful."* (NLT).

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These last eight verses reinforce the need to follow God's ways and point out the results of ignoring them. We can have confidence that God hears our prayers and that he watches over us, while the wicked may prosper, but in the end will be dealt with. Like so many psalms the message is repeated and reinforced - the Lord hears us and delivers us from our troubles... not just some, but all! Four times in this psalm does it say the Lord will deliver us or rescue us from trouble. The psalm moves on to encourage the broken hearted and crushed in spirit, and says we may have many troubles from which we be delivered. Jesus says in John 16:33 ³³ *'I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'* We all will have troubles. Looking to Jesus who has won the victory over death and sin, we can have assurance that we will not stand condemned before the throne of God, and at that time whatever troubles we had in life will be gone.

So what does this psalm say to us?

Praise God in all circumstances for he is good – his love endures forever and he will never forsake nor leave us.

Trust in God and know that his love endures forever and that he will never forsake us nor leave us unprotected.

Keep in mind the Word of God, his promises, his wise advice and seek him in times of need. Let us be those who do good and seek peace.

Whatever happens, the Lord is with us and we can be assured of our salvation – because Jesus is Lord and whoever believes in him will be saved.