

Psalm 34

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

- ¹ I will bless the LORD at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
- ² My soul will make its boast in the LORD;
The humble will hear it and rejoice.
- ³ O magnify the LORD with me,
And let us exalt His name together.
- ⁴ I sought the LORD, and He answered me,
And delivered me from all my fears.
- ⁵ They looked to Him and were radiant,
And their faces will never be ashamed.
- ⁶ This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him
And saved him out of all his troubles.
- ⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him,
And rescues them.
- ⁸ O taste and see that the LORD is good;
How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!
- ⁹ O fear the LORD, you His saints;
For to those who fear Him there is no want.
- ¹⁰ The young lions do lack and suffer hunger;
But they who seek the LORD shall not be in want of any good thing.
- ¹¹ Come, you children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
- ¹² Who is the man who desires life
And loves length of days that he may see good?
- ¹³ Keep your tongue from evil
And your lips from speaking deceit.
- ¹⁴ Depart from evil and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it.
- ¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
And His ears are open to their cry.
- ¹⁶ The face of the LORD is against evildoers,
To cut off the memory of them from the earth.
- ¹⁷ The righteous cry, and the LORD hears
And delivers them out of all their troubles.
- ¹⁸ The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
And saves those who are crushed in spirit.
- ¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
But the LORD delivers him out of them all.
- ²⁰ He keeps all his bones,
Not one of them is broken.
- ²¹ Evil shall slay the wicked,
And those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
- ²² The LORD redeems the soul of His servants,
And none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned.

David the Psalmist: This Psalm is ascribed to David, the poet, singer, and king. King Saul and his supporters hunted David, to kill him. They chased David into the wilderness, where David slowly gathered those who supported him and trusted God and believed that he would one day ascend the throne.

v.4 – 10: David seems to tell the story of God delivering him from Abimelech using the story of God delivering Israel from Pharaoh. God's "angel" (messenger) delivered Israel. God met with Moses on Mt. Sinai and his face was radiant (Ex.34).

v.11 – 14: David seems to think of himself as a "new Moses" giving commandments after a deliverance, because God gave the first Moses commandments on Mount Sinai after the deliverance from Egypt.

Discussion Questions

1. Read the episode in 1 Samuel which is included in the notes. What do you notice about how David describes the experience poetically that is not in the narrative? Collect observations.
2. Notice how in his opening introduction in v.1 – 3, David moves very, very quickly to call for other people to worship alongside him. He doesn't often do this. Why might he be doing it this time?
 - a. Because there are people joining him in the cave in Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1 – 2). There is a kingdom forming around him, as he “became captain” over them.
 - b. Because there is something about this experience that reminds David of God delivering Moses and Israel out of Pharaoh's hands, back in the Exodus.
3. Let's make sure we understand why David uses the story of the Exodus deliverance to describe his story.
 - a. In v.4b, David says that God “delivered him from all [his] fears”
 - b. In v.5, “they looked to Him and were radiant.” Who is the “they”? And what experience is this?
 - i. “They” are “the humble” in v.2b who join David to make the “us” in v.3.
 - ii. Did their faces glow with light and glory like Moses' face did on Mt. Sinai? Not that we know of, literally. But it's a literary expression of
 1. Meeting God and being intimate with Him
 2. Seeing God work and deliver His people so that He can encounter us, and we Him
 3. Participating in a covenant like the Sinai covenant, but this time it is the Davidic covenant
 - c. In v.7, why does David speak of “the angel of the Lord” in the Psalm, when the narrative of Samuel does not mention any angel?
 - i. The “angel of the LORD” was a phrase used to describe “the LORD” in the Pentateuch:
 1. ^{Gen.16:7} Now the angel of the LORD found her [Haga] by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur...¹⁰ Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her...¹³ Then she called the name of **the LORD** who spoke to her, ‘You are a God who sees.’ (Gen.16:7 – 13)
 2. ^{Gen.22:11} But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ ...¹⁵ Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven,¹⁶ and said, ‘By Myself I have sworn, declares **the LORD**...’ (Gen.22:11 – 16)
 3. ^{Gen.31:11} Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob,’ and I said, ‘Here I am.’¹² He said, ‘...¹³ **I am the God of Bethel**, where you anointed a pillar...’ (Gen.31:11 – 13)
 4. ^{Gen.32:24} Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak...³⁰ So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, ‘I have seen **God** face to face, yet my life has been preserved.’ (Gen.32:24, 30; cf. Hosea 12:2 – 5)
 5. ^{Gen.47:15} He [Jacob] blessed Joseph, and said, ‘The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,¹⁶ the angel **who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads**; and may my name live on in them... [the angel received prayers] (Gen.47:15 – 16)
 6. ^{Ex.3:2} The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush...⁶ He said also, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look **at God**. (Ex.3:2, 6)
 7. ^{Ex.14:19} The angel of **God**, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. (Ex.14:19; cf. Ex.13:21 – 22; 33:14 – 15)
 8. ^{Num.22:31} Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed all the way to the ground [the angel received worship]. (Num.22:31)
 - ii. Possibly, David “saw” or intuited the presence of God with him. And it is also accurate to call God's personal presence an “angel” or “messenger” of God.
 1. It has to do with God immanent and God transcendent.
 2. For example, when God descended into the temple in 1 Kings 8, Solomon said that God dwells in the temple now, yet can God be contained? That is the

connection between God immanent and God transcendent. No specific appearance of God exhausts God, or fully discloses the omnipresence of God. God is both “here” and “far beyond here.”

- iii. More probably, though, David uses this phrase, “the angel of the Lord encamps” as an expression, calling back to the Exodus passage and other passages, *whether or not we see a specific manifestation of God*.
 1. David believed that God’s anointing of him to be king means that God will protect him – although it is not a license for him to sin or be stupid. So for David, the protection and deliverance at any time before his enthronement was an expression of God’s protection!
 2. Does God protect His people like this today, after Jesus has come and sent us on his mission? Yes and No and Yes.
 - a. Yes in the sense that it could happen. Many people – especially missionaries, it seems – can tell stories of God protecting them.
 - b. No in the sense that it is not categorical and it is not guaranteed to any specific person. David was unique because God anointed him to be king of the Jews.
 - c. Yes in the sense that “your life is hidden with Christ in God, and when Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:3 – 4). So God protects the fundamental aspect of who we are, and holds it in the place that is closest to him, in his very bosom, in the Son (John 1:18). And what we see of ourselves right now is not even who we will be. Since who we will be is truly who we are, then “Yes, God protects His people” but in a different way than He protected David. God protected David from dying. God protects us from death as we go through it, for God will bring us out the other side, with Jesus.
- iv. In v.8, David says, “Taste and see that the LORD is good.” Why “taste”? Can we “taste” God?
 1. Well, not literally. But “tasting” is something you have to do when you are close. You can’t be distant from something edible or tasty, and expect to taste it. God comes close enough that you can taste God.
 2. Tasting is also about experience and participation. David does not say, “Look and remember,” or even, “Read and memorize.” David calls us to directly experience and participate in God. Let God nourish us.
 3. David might be thinking about the manna story in Exodus 16. God fed Israel after delivering them. Tasting the manna was the physical expression of tasting God’s goodness in a larger sense. Possibly, David was breaking bread with people in the cave of Adullam, saying, “Taste and see that the LORD is good.”
4. After David praises God for delivering him from death (v.4 – 10), he points to God delivering us from evil (v.11 – 14).
 - a. Why does David suddenly shift to teaching, and reminding us of God’s commandments?
 - i. Probably because it’s practical: God was gathering a community of people around David. These people sound dissatisfied and maybe traumatized. So there needs to be appropriate boundaries and standards for how to treat people, and revere God.
 - ii. Probably because there is a retelling of stories happening here. When God delivered Israel out of the reign of Pharaoh, God gave them commandments through Moses. So now that God delivered David and others out of the reign of Abimelech and even Saul, God gave them commandments through David.
 - b. In v.12, David appeals to people’s desire for life and love of “length of days.” It sounds like God helps you survive and live a long time.
 - i. At the very least, hopefully you love your own self. After all, God made you in His image, and you are precious in God’s sight. There is no shame in wanting goodness for yourself.

- ii. But also, “that he may see good” is the goal of having a long life. And “good” is God’s goodness to one’s self and the community and the creation. It is the peace and shalom God intends.
 - c. In v.13 and 14, David talks about speech and actions, words and deeds.
 - i. Perhaps most important is v.14b, “Seek peace and pursue it.” David had done that. He felt utterly surrounded and threatened in the court of Abimelech. But he did not try to use violence or even negotiate from a posture of strength, by making promises to Abimelech about the future, even though David could have, if he believed God would make him king. Not that Abimelech would have believed David, necessarily. So David pretended to be insane, and even be someone else.
 - ii. By doing that, David displayed patience and trust in God. David didn’t want his followers or people loyal to him to attack Saul, or threaten the peace. Somehow, David understood that God would be able to do all this peacefully.
 - iii. What’s the difference between seeking and pursuing something? Seeking sounds slow. Pursuing sounds fast. Seeking sounds intellectual, like solving a puzzle about where something is. Pursuing sounds physical, like running after something that you don’t want to get away.
 - iv. How do we pursue peace, especially in the body of Christ?
 - 1. Seek to resolve issues with integrity and quickly.
 - 2. Not allow other people to just gossip to us about their discontent, but encourage them to reconcile (Mt.18:15 – 20). If they are trying to make us third parties to a conflict, we need to remind them that our job is to pursue peace.
 - 3. Help bring about understanding between people.
 - 4. Not allow lies and deceit to stand (Ps.34:13).
- 5. How does the LORD help His covenant partners?
 - a. His eyes are towards the righteous
 - b. His ears are open to their cry
 - c. H delivers them out of all their troubles
 - d. Is near to the brokenhearted
 - e. Saves those who are crushed in spirit
 - f. To preserve all their bones, which probably means their foundational strength
 - g. To redeem their souls, which probably means ultimately to save them from the grave, which stands in contrast with the evildoers being condemned to die an ordinary mortal death
- 6. How does the LORD set His face against evildoers?
 - a. To cut off the memory of them from the earth
 - b. To let their own evil devour them
 - c. To let them be condemned, which probably means mortality and death will overtake them.