

"The Lord Heard"

Psalm 34

This psalm is an acrostic psalm: each verse starts with a subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet (with the exception of the vav, with the last verse taking the place of that letter, the reason for which is unknown).

The title of this psalm is very specific: "A Psalm of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed" (1 Sam. 21:12-22:1).

The wording of the title does not mean that this psalm was written when those events occurred necessarily, but they could be (and most likely are) just referring to the event as the occasion and reason for it. Whether written at the time or at a later date is not really as important as the content of the psalm showing that God is there to hear us when we call, and in this case, calling out of duress.

The psalm is, however, a psalm of praise rather than one of despair. David is found praising God for his deliverance, even though part of the problem he had was of his own making. Among other things, this psalm is a testimony of the mercy of God.

The promise of answered prayer is found throughout this psalm and gives us some guidelines that, if followed, will strengthen our faith in God as we pray. We are called upon, as we serve the Lord to several things as found in our text.

I. CALLED TO MAGNIFY THE LORD - vs. 1-3

There are five words in these three verses that speak to the same topic: recognizing the greatness of our God.

A. "Bless" - vs. 1

1. This word is used 75 times in the book of Psalms alone.
2. As used here, the word means to hold or call holy; to extol (to lift or hold up) as holy, divine, gracious.
3. "I will bless the LORD" - something we choose to do.
4. "At all times" - means what it says.

B. "Praise" - vs. 1

1. The only way this word is translated in the King James Bible is with the word "praise." It is derived from the Hebrew word הלל which is where our English word "hallelujah" is derived.
2. It has the idea of adoration and thanksgiving for blessings we have been given and is the parallel to "bless" in the first line of the verse.
3. The word is often used in connection with singing.
4. "His praise shall continually be in my mouth" - our praise for the Lord should never stop being heard from our lips. Similar to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17), we are not literally to be praising and singing non-stop but there is never to be an occasion in our lives that would cause us to stop praising Him.

Philippians 4:4

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.

C. "Boast" - vs. 2

1. This is the word הלל that was the root of the previous word for "praise," demonstrating that all these words are connected to point to the same thing.
2. The idea of the word is to make shine - our soul, our innermost being, shall set itself to make the LORD shine above all else through our praise to Him. We should consider it our chief work (Clarke).
3. "The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad" - this is one of the reasons we are to praise God: it's so others can hear and rejoice with us.

D. "Magnify" - vs. 3

1. This is a word that means to make great or to promote.
2. This is in a verb form (piel imperative) that is intensive and demanding.
3. David changes from the first person singular and the intense desire to praise the Lord himself to first person plural, inviting those around him (the "humble" of verse two) to lift up the LORD together in praise and make Him great among the people.

E. "Exalt" - vs. 3

Another word that means to raise or lift up, emphasizing how we are to make the Lord known to those around us.

II. CALLED TO TRUST THE LORD – VS. 4-8

- A. Vs. 4 – when we seek the Lord in prayer and we see Him answer, it will encourage us to pray and trust Him even more.**

David may be referring here to the time when he was in trouble with Abimelech and made himself look insane, showing how he came to depend on the Lord for his deliverance rather than his own conniving means.

- B. Vs. 5 – David references the “humble” from verse two in this verse and connects his praising God for all that He has done for him with his seeking the Lord for deliverance and how those that were watching how he would react to the situation were greatly benefited from his testimony of praise.**

- C. Vs. 6 – David again seems to be referring to his situation with Abimelech and refers to himself as “this poor man.”**

1. The idea behind “poor” is one of suffering, whether in a state of poverty, oppression, or misery from some other cause. In this case, it was because of the desperate situation in which he found himself.
2. “And the LORD heard him” – are we in a place where we can be that confident in our prayers being heard and answered?
3. “And saved him out of all his troubles” – even those he got himself into.

- D. Vs. 7 speaks about “the angel of the LORD” encamping all around those that “fear him.”**

1. Whether this is a Christophany - an appearance of God the Son in the Old Testament - or not has been a subject of debate for a very long time. The term is used fifty (50) times in the Old Testament (only three times in the book of Psalms - here and twice in the next psalm), and in most cases it's speaking of God the Son in human form. Since the context doesn't indicate one way or the other, I'm inclined to view this as a Christophany, considering verse twenty (20) is quoted in the New Testament in the account of the crucifixion of Christ, making this, at least in part, a Messianic Psalm.
2. Whether a created angel or the Uncreated Angel, the truth of the verse doesn't change. The Lord is going to be our guard against the enemy and will deliver us when we need to be delivered.

E. Vs. 8 begins with "O taste and see that the LORD is good"

1. David has changed from first person experience to third person, imploring God's people to learn from his testimony of trusting God that He is real and that He is available for all to call upon in trust.

That's what's meant by "taste and see" - it's the experience of tasting that's in view. It has to do with testing by experience - put God to the test, so to speak and see if He isn't beyond anything "good" we could ever imagine.

Malachi 3:10

¹⁰ Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that

there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

2. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in him" - God will honor those that have courage and faith enough to put their trust in the Lord, even if they haven't seen Him work in the way they need Him to now.

III. CALLED TO FEAR THE LORD - VS. 9-14

A. The fear of the LORD, as found in the previous psalm (33:8), as used here, is defined as standing "in awe of him" - recognizing who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do for His saints that live a life demonstrating they "fear Him."

B. Vs. 9-10 - fearing the LORD the way we should, will lead to a life without concern or anxiety for the things we need.

1. Vs. 9 - "there is no want to them that fear him."
 - a) The word for "want" here (מְחִסּוֹר) is one that is referring to a lack or a need, not to those things we simply want but don't need. The word itself indicates what is needed because of a lack, or what is required to meet a need.
 - b) This doesn't mean we will have everything the world has, or that we can demand God give us all that we want unless that "want" is based on fearing Him and having what we need to faithfully serve Him.

"All their needs will be abundantly supplied.

Sooner or later all their real necessities will be met, and God will bestow upon them every needed blessing. The statement here cannot be regarded as absolutely and universally true - that is, it cannot mean that they who fear the Lord will never, in any instance, be hungry or thirsty, or destitute of raiment or of a comfortable home; but it is evidently intended to be a general affirmation, and is in accordance with the other statements which occur in the Bible about the advantages of true religion in securing temporal as well as spiritual blessings from God." (Barnes)

Psalm 23:1

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Psalm 37:4

⁴ Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

Matthew 6:31-34

³¹ Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

³² (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

³³ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

³⁴ Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Philippians 4:19

¹⁹ But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

2. Vs. 10 is a contrasting parallelism between "young lions" that "lack and suffer hunger" and those that "seek the LORD."

- a) The reference to "young lions" is to be seen as a literal reference and then applied metaphorically to the life of those that seek the Lord - that fear Him.
- b) Simply put, even the young, healthy, robust lions, the strongest beasts of prey, most capable of providing for themselves, will at times lack and suffer hunger.
- c) Applied here in the contrast - those that seek the Lord because they fear Him, even when they are not the most powerful or the richest or have any ability to provide for themselves, will "not want any good thing" because of their faith and trust in the Lord.

C. Vs. 11-14 - in the call to fear the LORD, these verses give some helpful guidance on the outcome of doing so.

David is the teacher here, calling children, the most moldable of society and culture, to learn something of value that will help them both fear the LORD as they should as well as live a life that is pleasing to the Lord.

- 1. Vs. 11 - if we want the benefit of what learning to fear the LORD provides.
 - a) "Life" - long, healthy, prosperous life is in view.
 - b) "Loveth many days" - expands on "life" - not just long life but an enjoyable one as well.
 - c) "That he may see good" - expands on "loveth

many days.”

2. Vs. 13-14 give the children, the teachable, the ways to that life in the fear of the LORD.
 - a) “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile” – much is said in the Bible about what comes out of our mouths. This is fairly self-explanatory. To speak “guile” is to speak in a way that is intended to be deceitful and hurtful.
 - b) “Depart from evil” – means what it says – get away from and stay away from.
 - c) “Do good” – literally the opposite of doing “evil.”
 - d) “Seek peace, and pursue it” – as opposed to power, position, and prosperity. Peace with God, the peace of God, and peace with others should be our goal.

IV. CALLED TO WORSHIP THE LORD – VS. 15-22 (ESP. VS. 18)

- A. Worship isn’t just a position of our body or something we do – it is deeper than that, and these verses allude to that.**
- B. Vs. 15 references the “cry” of the righteous and that the eyes are on them, and His ears are open, listening for that “cry.” Part of worship is just this – coming to God as an inferior to a Superior and asking for help.**
- C. Vs. 16 is the antithetic (oppositional) parallelism to verse fifteen (15). As “the eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous,” “the face of the LORD is against them that do evil.” Just as He’s watching the righteous, the ones that do good as opposed to evil, and listening for their plea for help, He’s**

standing in opposition to the wicked, and their destruction will be complete one day - "to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth."

D. Vs. 17 restates verse fifteen (15) and confirms their deliverance "out of all their troubles," particularly those caused by the enemy.

E. Vs. 18 is another aspect of worship found in these verses - it shows the attitude we are to have in our worship of the LORD.

1. "The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart" - broken because of sin and failure to demonstrate love to God as one should.
2. "And saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" - deliverance from the guilt and power of sin comes to those that are truly understanding of the condition they are in.

To be of a "contrite spirit" is to be crushed in spirit, which is what the word for "contrite" literally means - destruction of an object that is crushed into powder or pulverized to dust.

3. If we come to God with a brokenness from sin, knowing its crushing power, its overwhelming force, we will know what it means to worship.

F. Vs. 19-21 speak of the help that true worship can bring - a true understanding of who God is.

1. Vs. 19 - no matter the affliction, nor the quantity of them, deliverance is ours, whether here and now in this life, or eternally in heaven, victory is

ours.

2. Vs. 20 is that Messianic reference I mentioned earlier.

John 19:36

³⁶ For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.

Although it is that, it also has a relativeness to what David is saying in this psalm. In our deliverance, God has the ability, and often does, deliver us from physical ailment and destruction. This is speaking somewhat metaphorically for that physical protection that is spoken of often in the psalms.

3. Vs. 21 is the contrast to vs. 20 – just as assuredly as the righteous will be protected, the evil will be destroyed. God is our Rock and our Fortress.

G. Vs. 22 is another reassurance to the child of God, to the righteous, that He will never be forsake.

Conclusion: This is a wonderful psalm that once again shows how close our God is to us and how willing He is to help us in every situation of life we face. As we seek to magnify the Lord, trust in Him for our deliverance during the trials of life, learn to fear Him the way we should as His child, and worship Him with a broken spirit and contrite heart, we will be well on our way to understanding our relationship with Him in a more profound way.