

Introduction

1. Every Christian has a testimony. We not only have our testimonies of coming to faith in Jesus Christ, whether that be gradually as we grew up learning to take hold of the promises of God, or radically when God saved us later in life, but we all have daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly testimonies of how God has been at work in our lives – he has brought us through difficult seasons of life.
 - a. EX: Last week I had coffee with a lady whose son is in rehab for the 2nd time for drug addiction. And she was feeling at the end of her rope this past Saturday, and had one of the most difficult days of her life. But she told me that God inclined her heart to open Psalm 34, and she found words of hope and comfort in the midst of her pain. I told her. That is what I am preaching on this Sunday!
 - b. In the Christian tradition I was converted in, it was common for believers to share their testimony and to continue to share how God was at work in so that we could *together* praise God for his ongoing care. You see, good testimonies produce *worship*, not because they point people to ourselves, but a to God and his Amazing Grace in Jesus Christ.
2. Today we want to listen to David’s testimony that points us to God’s grace. Psalm 34 is not about his testimony of coming to faith, but it is about God’s *ongoing care* in his life. Here David, through his testimony, teaches us *what it looks like thank God in difficult circumstances*. He wants us to exalt the Lord with him as fellow pilgrims who are traveling through a sin cursed world to our heavenly home. There are two parts to this Psalm which are meant to invoke praise – 1st half hymn of thanksgiving (testimony), 2nd sermon on lively wisely in this world (teaching)

Thanking God in the Midst of Trials - HYMN of Thanksgiving

“I will bless the LORD at all times” (v.1)

1. What does it mean to bless the Lord? To Bless means – “to speak a good word *about* someone” – We understand God’s blessing toward us - God speaks a good word over his people when he blesses them – a Word of **favor!** But when we bless God we are not speaking a Word over him, but *about* him – his character and saving actions.
 - i. **Eph. 1:3** “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places!*”
2. Notice, David doesn’t bless the LORD because all is sunny and bright. This is not a thanksgiving Psalm because God has kept David from difficult seasons of life! But David thanks God for his ongoing preservation, deliverance, and sustaining mercies in every season of life! I will bless the LORD *at all times*.

His personal praise is meant to invoke worship in those listening in – “*O Magnify the LORD with me!*” David shares his testimony so that all of God’s people will praise the Lord! We can learn from this, and share how God is working in our own lives to get us through hard times.

This Was a Difficult Time (v.4-7)

1. David calls himself a **poor man** (v.6)– “this poor man”. Scholars note that this was one of the lowest points in David’s life. We learn about his difficult situation from the *superscription*. **14** Psalms are introduced by words that provide the historical setting of the Psalm
 - a. **1 Samuel 21** – describes how David was feeling from his great enemy, king Saul, and his circumstances were so desperate that he left his own a land and went to the coastal area of the Philistines to seek asylum with Achish, the king of Gath. GATH was the home of Goliath! The great warrior David killed just a few years earlier. When David noticed he was in danger in this land, he pretended to be a madman. His crazy behavior was reported to the King and Achish said, “*Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me?*” (v.15) So David escaped Gath and fled to the **cave** of Addulum, and that where this Psalm was more than likely written.
 - b. And so here in this lonely cave there are no friends. He has no weapons or armor. But he is in hiding w/ nothing. He’s brought utterly low.

2. But this is the setting of David's thanksgiving – "I will bless the LORD at all times" - even when I am **poor**. This Psalm is for poor people who find themselves at low points in life:
 - a. This Psalm is for you when you are **physically poor** at the end of life – suffering decay of the body.
 - b. This is Psalm is for you when you are stuck between a **rock** and **hard place** – For David the rock was king Saul, who sought to kill him, and the hard place was king Achish, the one he just fled from.
 - c. This Psalm is for **all** those who are brought low in this sin cursed world – David shows us what it looks like to THANK God from the lonely cave.

What's The Basis for Thanking God in the midst of Difficult Times? (v. 7)

1. Here in v.7 we step into deep waters. The basis of thanking God in the midst of trials in *not* that they all go away when we worship the LORD, but the basis of our thankfulness is the **personal presence** of God (v.7).
2. Now, there are some, including John Calvin, who see this verse as referring to the angels of heaven that *guard* and *minister* to God's people. That is a biblical reality – **Heb. 1:14** speaks of ministering angels that help Christian - God helps us and surrounds our lives with heavenly help that we can't see!
 - a. Think of **Elisha and his servant in 2 Kg. 6** – they were surrounded by mighty armies in Dothan – the King of Aram had sent his armies to surround the city because God had been secretly telling Elisha their military plans. When surrounded, Elisha's servant cried out – "*Alas, my master! What shall we do?*" Elisha answered, "*Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those ware with them.*" And Elisha prayed, and said, "*LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.*" Then *the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.*"
3. But here in our Psalm – I believe God wants to open our eyes not only to the heavenly hosts all around us, but to the **leader** of that heavenly army, which is the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice, v.7 is in the singular – **the** Angel of the Lord. Our Triune God revealed in the OT – draws near to his people through his appointed messenger and mediator, which is the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a. The Lord Jesus is explicitly identified with the angel of the LORD in **Joshua 5:14**, when he is revealed to Joshua just before he goes into the Promised Land with a sword in his hand– he is called "the **captain** of the Lord's Hosts." Joshua bows down and worships him, and this angel receives it. Therefore this angel David speaks of is the commander of the Lord's Army, the Lord Jesus Christ, who surrounds David with the hosts of heaven even in this lonely cave.
 - i. David experienced to some degree the **personal presence** of God revealed to him in Jesus Christ, his Good Shepherd.
 - b. APPL: Beloved church of Jesus Christ, what a comfort this is to us! The Lord Jesus is with his people! He is with you by the ministry of the **HS** – the Comforter. How much more can we find comfort in these verses – for we have **seen** God the Son – come to earth to die for our sins. We have heard his words that he would be with us always even until the end of the age.
 - i. Even now, in our trials when we re brought low, God is surrounding us with his merciful and gracious presence. HE is NEAR to SUSTAIN us!
 - c. God's personal presence is what gave David confidence to bless the LORD **at all times**. David's poor position didn't change, but his perspective changed – he knew God was with him. "*This poor man cried out and the LORD heard him....*" The promise of prayer is not that God will change our circumstances immediately, but he will sustain us and transform our situation with his presence.

David Ends This First Section With a Call to Worship (v.8-10)

"Taste and see that the LORD is good!" (v.8)

1. This is **experiential** language isn't it – God doesn't want a *long distance relationship* with you. He isn't some impersonal divine supervisor in the sky just making sure things don't get too out of hand on earth.

But God who is seeking worshippers, and is adopting into his home sons and daughters through Jesus Christ! Right now, he is near to ALL those who call upon him in truth.

- a. **“Taste and see he is good.”** ILL: it’s been really warm outside – sometimes you crave a good soda pop, like a cocoa cola. Or for some of you adults it’s a cold beer or chilled white wine. But it’s one thing to know a lot about cocoa cola, and it’s another thing to drink it. The creators of cocoa cola never intended that you go on Wikipedia to learn about its history, its genetic contents, and how it is made, and leave it at that. That’s not their main goal. They want you to take a cold can out of the fridge, crack it open, and taste it. Experience it!!!
 - b. **The same is true with God** – you can grow up learning lots of things about God – but God’s **revelation** is meant to bring into a **living relationship** with him. God sent his son, to take on flesh and blood, and die for sinners at the cross. It wasn’t some impersonal doctrine that died for you – but one who was truly man, and truly God. Our Lord Jesus died in order to bring us to God, that we might taste and see that he is good!
 - i. *****Have you tasted and see that God is good?** If not, call on to him today – Say, “Lord, help me to experience in the core of who I am your goodness and grace. Show me Christ personally – his cross, his sacrifice, and his love.” The Lord is near to all who call on him in truth!
2. It’s no wonder this Psalm is often quoted at the celebration of the **Lord’s Supper** – because there we are reminded of the living communion with have with God. God is meant to be tasted and seen! Enjoyed and delighted in! **“Those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.”**
 3. So David shares his testimony of God’s deliverance, and then he changes his tone and begins to instruct God’s people.

David as Pastor (v.11-22)

1. SHIFT in the Psalm for worship and praise to teaching and instruction. This SERMON section fits the genre of the wisdom literature, like Proverbs. Every good testimony teaches us something. When someone has experienced God’s grace in hard times, we want to listen to their wisdom because there is **weight** behind their words. Well, v.11-22 are wise instructions based on David’s personal experience.
2. **“Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD”** (v.11). Here, David teaches us how to live wisely in this sin cursed world.
 - a. The fear of the LORD here doesn’t have to do with being scared of God. There is the fear of God and the fear of the Lord and these are a bit different. The fear of God has a restraining function in people’s hearts to keep them from doing something sinful – Abimelech in **Gen. 20** – pagan king feared God and didn’t touch Sarah. But the Fear of the Lord has to do with having **reverent mind toward God**. A sense of **honor** for God, so that you walk before him in holiness and righteous. Mindset and way of life – fearing God and walking in his ways.
 - b. David teaches us that this pattern of life that brings blessing (c.12-14)!!
3. Do you want to be HAPPY??? Of course, all of us here want to be happy. All of us want to see good in our lives. But how do we enjoy days full of true happiness?
 - a. David says, to fear God and live for him leads to blessing. SATAN would have us believe the exact opposite. He said to Eve in **Genesis 3** – **“Has God said?”** “God is hiding things from you. His ways are restrictive and not good.” He paints God in a different light – making him look like the devil and not a generous Heavenly Father.
 - b. But the **FALL** reminds us that God’s ways bring life, and Satan’s ways only bring death, shame, and regret. David says, if you are living apart from God’s will – in any kind of sin, don’t be deceived, it will bring death to your soul. **“The face of the LORD is against those who do evil.”** Those who follow their own laws, and the ways of this world, set themselves in opposition to God, and in opposition to their own well being. He calls us to live in the Fear of the LORD.

- c. *“Keep your tongue from evil and your lips for evil, depart from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it.”* Our words and our deeds are connected with each other. The Fear of the LORD is to be the mindset we have all throughout our lives. But take note of this...

Fearing God doesn't make us immune to difficulty (v.19-22)

“MANY are the afflictions of the righteous” (v. 19)

1. C. Craigie writes, “The fear of the Lord is indeed the foundation of life, the key to joy in life and long and happy days. But it is **not** a guarantee that life will be always easy...It may mend the broken heart, but it does not prevent the heart from being broken; it may restore the spiritually crushed, but it does not crush the forces that may create oppression.”
2. There are many today who teach what is called a **theology of glory** – “Come to Jesus and all of your problems will be fixed!”
 - a. Jesus will heal your marriage. Jesus will heal your body. Jesus will cause material prosperity to come into your life. God is offered to people as a kind of therapy – he will bring stability, morals, and sense of purpose into to your life.
 - b. But there is **no** theology of glory for David in this Psalm. Becoming a Christian doesn't mean an easy life! *“Many are the afflictions of the righteous.”* What this Psalm teaches us a **pilgrim theology**. What it looks like to pilgrimage in this sin cursed world to our heavenly home, where we will worship God forever. David teaches us how to thank God in our afflictions b/c of God's promise & presence!
 - c. WHY are the righteous afflicted? **Calvin** – “If they were exempted from every kind of trial, their faith would languish, they would cease to call upon God, and their piety would remain hidden and unknown. It is, therefore, necessary that they should be exercised with various trials, and especially for this end, that they may acknowledge that they have been wonderfully preserved by God amidst numberless deaths.”
 - d. Our trials help bring out and **cultivate** our faith in God as well as Christian character. Faith. Dependence. And Thanksgiving to God! That is what God is teaching you in your trials. As the famous Preacher, Charles Spurgeon put it, “I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages”

For David, “I have learned to bless the LORD **at all times** - even from this lonely cave with my enemies pursuing me. Because even these afflictions cause me to be closer to my Savior.”

“None of his bones are broken” (v.20)

1. This text is quoted in **John 19:36** and is connected to the CROSS of Christ. After suffering persecution from pagan kings and his own people, our Lord was brought not to a lonely cave, but to a bloody cross.
2. *“But none of his bones were broken as he hung there.”* The Father **delivered** Jesus. If the Father, after pouring out the full measure of his wrath on his Son for our sins at the cross, delivered his Son from the grave by raising him from the dead, then how much more can we be comforted that God will deliver us who are hidden in Christ.
 - a. The Lord surrounds his people now with his presence, and he will deliver his righteous saints from all of the afflictions that they endure in this life.

Conclusion

1. People of God, you have reasons to bless the Lord even now in the midst of your afflictions. The Lord *hears* your cries as you pilgrim through this sin cursed world and call out to him in your many afflictions.
2. And so may we walk before the Lord with thanksgiving and bless him at ALL times, trusting in his Word of deliverance v.22 - ***“The Lord redeems the soul of his servants, and none of those who trust in him shall be condemned.”***