

Taste and See the Lord Is Good

Psalm 34

Mission Presbyterian Church – February 14, 2016

Introduction

- Old fable about live fish put in pan to fry. One of the fish convinces others to escape by jumping out. They do, but find themselves on the hot coals of the fire beneath the pan.

Moral: when avoiding present danger, do not enter into even worse peril.

Fable based on idiom – common saying – that we have to this day: “out of the frying pan into the fire.”

Describes a situation going from bad to worse.

Describes David’s situation that is the background for this psalm (1 Sam 21). Fleeing from Saul, who is trying to kill him, David fled to Gath, where Abimelech was king.

Gath where Goliath from. King’s servants remember. David hears about it and is “much afraid.”

Pretends to be insane, making marks on gate and letting spit run down his beard.

King has David expelled, who flees to cave of Adullam.

- Read that story and struck by David’s cleverness, inventiveness – acting skills! – in getting out of Gath.

But David here in Ps 34 credits God with his escape. Writes psalm of praise and thanksgiving.

Psalm is a good example for us how to praise God in all things, even when we have helped ourselves.

One final barrier to achieving goal – one goal, one desire – of seeking after God, being with Him, seeing His beauty, and knowing Him.

That barrier is again ourselves – but this time not our own sin, but our own strength and cleverness. Helps us realize that in all things, even when we ourselves have the wisdom and intelligence and skill to help ourselves, that it is really God Himself who is helping us, God Himself who is saving us.

- Look at psalm this morning in that light.

Psalm itself defies outline but does have structure: acrostic (but with one letter missing, and tacked on verse at the end).

So look at in themes: the trouble David is in; how God has answered/helped David; how David responds.

David's Trouble

- We can read 1 Sam 21, few short verses, and see how David got into, and out of, trouble.

But way he describes it in psalm is a bit different. Clues in a few verses.

- Verse 4 - fears

David describes himself as being delivered from all his fears.

1 Samuel 21 does describe David as being “much afraid.” So this rings true with story.

Don't often try to imagine how biblical character in story is feeling in sermons because so often speculative and/or manipulative.

But here we know. David is afraid. He is very afraid.

Think of his situation: his own king – whom he rescued, whose daughter he is married to, whose son is his best friend – his own king and father-in-law is trying to kill him.

And apparently only place David can think of to flee to safety is city of king where Goliath lived, giant whom David defeated so famously.

David's fears had to be great to drive him to Gath.

But of course people recognize him and begin to complain about him to the king.

If king sees David as enemy then he is likely arrested and executed.

Imagine being in that situation. Terrifying!

And maybe you've experienced – or are experiencing – a frying pan into the fire situation. Never pleasant, and can be quite distressing.

David is there, and his life is at stake.

- Verse 6 – poor man

David refers to himself as “this poor man” who cried to the Lord for salvation.

David not talking about money or possessions. He is poor because he needs salvation from his troubles.

His poverty is not material, but his dire situation. It is existential. Life or death.

In French (jr. high) we learned a saying: pauvre petit. Poor little one. Could be said in sympathy or sarcastically. What a poor situation you are in.

David saying something similar about himself. I am a poor one because of my dire situation.

- Verse 18 – brokenhearted and crushed in spirit

Given the above it is understandable that David's heart is broken.

He is the Lord's anointed, the next king.

So much good has turned to so much that is bad, dangerous, life-threatening.

David has been to the emotional/spiritual peak (Goliath, Michal, Jonathan); now he is in the emotional/spiritual valley.

We get it, we understand...if David was happy and full of joy before no wonder in this current situation his heart feels broken.

We also have been in situations where our spirit is crushed. You may be working hard, doing the right things in life, and people or situations/things rise up against you.

Instead of reward for good get what feels like punishment. When reward and work don't match it can crush your spirit.

David seems to feel that way, too. I've been doing right, fighting Israel's and the Lord's enemies, serving my king, and what do I get? My life in danger...

Why try? Why make the effort? These are the questions of a crushed spirit.

- Verse 19 – many afflictions

Descriptive term, but tells us how David sees his life, and again we can understand.

His king and father-in-law wants him dead, and has tried to take his life.

He had to flee with nothing, he and his men hungry and without provisions.

Now he is holed up in an enemy city, hoping he won't be killed.

The only way he can think of to save himself is to pretend he is insane – something he is certainly not – scratching at doors and drooling on himself.

How humiliating!

- But there are some positives as well:

Speaks of humility in verse 2, of fearing the Lord in 7 and 9 and 11, of being righteous in 15 and 17 and 19 and 21.

David is afraid, poor, afflicted, brokenhearted and with his spirit crushed.

Yet he has not turned away from following the Lord: he is still humble, fears God, and seeks to live righteously.

Is that how we respond in difficulty? Often tempted to lash out, strike out – talked about vengeance before...

David instead seeks the Lord's help.

The Lord's Deliverance

- And the Lord helped him.

Again, this is a striking feature of this psalm.

We know the story. We know what happened. How David acted crazy – almost forced the king to drive him out of his sight.

Clever David! Smart David. Creative David.

We love these kinds of stories. Heroes saving the day, others and/or themselves, by clever solutions.

Doctor Who. Brisco County Jr. MacGyver. Robin Hood. Brer Rabbit. Aesop's Fables. So many other examples...

We cheer them and celebrate them and give them ribbons and medals and remember them, "immortalize" them in stories that we pass on from generation to generation.

Emulate them. Learn from them.

But David turns attention away from himself and to the Lord. Sees not himself doing the saving, but God as savior.

Verse 4 – the Lord delivered him

Verse 6 – the Lord saved him

Verse 7 – the Lord delivered him

Verse 8 – the Lord gave him refuge

Verse 17 – the Lord heard and delivered

Verse 18 – the Lord saved the crushed in spirit

Verse 19 – the Lord delivers

Verse 22 – the Lord redeems the life of his servants

- It would be easy to apply David's story and deliverance as an example of the Lord helping those who help themselves.

But that is NOT how David applies it. He gives all the credit to the Lord. No mention of his own ideas or activity.

Problem with "the Lord helps those who help themselves" is 1) that it is not biblical, 2) it takes our eyes off of the Lord to focus on ourselves and our wisdom and our efforts.

Better: the Lord helps those who cannot help themselves, who cannot save themselves, who won't save themselves.

- Don't know why David doesn't claim any credit, gives it all to the Lord instead.

Just know that he does.

Powerful example: too easy to take credit ourselves, get puffed up and proud and self-reliant.

Every good gift is from God above (James 1:17). Every one. Even if we had some part in obtaining it.

All the credit goes to God. Gets us out of the way, out of the picture, and helps us pursue that one desire, that one request (Ps 27:4): to dwell with God, see His beauty, and know Him.

David's Response

- Because David sees God as his deliverer, takes focus off of himself and turns it to his Lord, he naturally turns to praise of God.

David's response to God's work is twofold: to praise God and to teach others about Him. Two go hand in hand in this psalm.

- Verses 1-3 – opens in praise, personal praise: I will bless, His praise in my mouth, my soul boasts...

Invites others to join: magnify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together.

What has God done for you?

Response should be praise. No real argument here.

But in addition...response also include inviting others to praise with you. Do not neglect, both as witness to non-believers, but also as an opportunity for the people of God to join together in praise.

We are a body, and supposed to rejoice together. Don't withhold from other brothers/sisters reasons for praise. Keep silent = deprive them of opportunity to praise God = depriving God of praise.

- Verse 5 – look to the Lord and be radiant; face not ashamed.

Quite a claim from a man with drool soaking his beard. Despite outward circumstances, still see the Lord as conferring blessing.

- Verse 7 – points to the Lord's protection, an angel encamped around (probably angelic host); surrounded with protection.
- Verse 8 – taste and see the Lord is good

Physical reality of the goodness of the Lord. Tangible. Can taste it, see it.

You're blessed if you take refuge in Him.

- Verse 9-10 – fear and seek the Lord, and you will not lack any good thing

Circumstances – again – may not be evident (in Gath in danger, or in cave in Adullam).

But for David, the Lord's protection in itself is a good thing to give thanks for, and perhaps the only good thing that matters.

Because if you have that, you do not lack anything.

- Verse 11-14 lesson quoted by Peter (NT reading)

What is fear of the Lord? Let me teach you.

Want what is good and a long life – what man doesn't?

Turn away from evil.

Do good.

Seek and pursue peace.

Peter applies to living the Christian life, being blameless in our walk with God, so that when trials come they won't be because of our own sin, but from God's and our enemies who hate Him and hate us.

Description of David's life to this point.

- Verses 15-18 and 21-22 – remember how the Lord treats the righteous and the wicked (book 1 theme from Psalm 1)

The Lord sees the righteous, hears them, is near to them.

The Lord's face is turned against those who do evil. He cuts them off, condemns them to death.

The Lord redeems the life of the righteous, not a single one who takes refuge in Him will be condemned.

Here again one of those outrageous claims made in the psalms that should make us stop and think about.

No condemnation for those who take refuge in the Lord? None? Really? What about sin? We all sin, after all, and the Scripture and the Psalms acknowledge this.

And of course sin makes us guilty. Who is this guilty person who is not condemned?

Well, David tells us: the one who takes refuge in the Lord.

David knows God as a God of mercy, forgiveness, steadfast love.

David is not just looking to God for rescue from the king of Gath, protection from Saul.

David knows he needs forgiveness for his sin, and the only one who can give it is the judge of all men, God Himself.

His joy is as much for this rescue, this deliverance, as for deliverance from his predicament in Gath.

This sin is not something from which David can save himself. So of course he praises God and calls on others to do the same.

How does God accomplish this rescue? David does not know, in detail. But here again in Ps 34 God gives David a prophetic insight.

There is a righteous one coming whose bones will not be broken. A sacrifice that keeps all its bones – that keeps all His bones.

John applies this to Jesus (John 19:36), the sacrifice who, dying on the cross did not have His bones broken, but poured out His blood for us and our salvation. Took the condemnation that was ours and made it His. Took the penalty of death and we deserve and made it His.

Did this so that we might have life instead – life without condemnation. A gift of God received only by faith, not by any effort or good works or cleverness on our part.

Don't get distracted admiring your own efforts.

You and I have much in common with David, though not to the same degree. Our hearts are often broken, spirits crushed. We have fear and sorrow.

If we are wise we are also keenly aware of our own sin, and our inability to rescue ourselves from it.

If we are wise we cry out to God for deliverance, for salvation, for refuge.

Do this and live. Do this and you will taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Blessed are all who take refuge in Him!