

Insanely Blessed

By Don Green

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Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

This evening, we're going to kind of expand our perspective on what it means to praise the Lord as we study Psalm 34 together. It's a Psalm of praise but from a different kind of perspective than what we're used to thinking about. We tend to think about praise as being that time where we gather together and we're singing and Psalm 34 gives us a completely different perspective, one that is a much better filled perspective. You see that praise is connected to all of your life and we're going to see that as we go through this Psalm all too quickly as we are gathered here together on Tuesday evening.

Psalm 34, we don't know the occasion that prompts many of the Psalms, why David wrote them when he did, but Psalm 34 is different. In the inscription there we see that it is an incident from the life of David that prompted this Psalm. Look at the inscription. You can't really say verse 1 when you're addressing it in English, anyway, but it says that it is, "A Psalm of David when he feigned madness before Abimelech, who drove him away and he departed." Now, if you are not accustomed to reading through the Old Testament on a regular basis, that might not mean anything to you. For those of you that are familiar with the life of David, you'll remember this incident and we'll go back to refresh our memory because it's the setting for the Psalm and when we know the setting, it helps us to understand the text of the Psalm that we are studying.

So go back, if you would, to 1 Samuel 21. The inscription says that he feigned madness before Abimelech and Abimelech, just as you're turning there, was likely the name for the dynasty of the leader of the Philistines, not necessarily the man's proper name. The text that we see here has the king's personal name, Achish, and in verse 10 of chapter 21 of 1 Samuel, we see the setting for Psalm 34 when it says, "David arose and fled that day from Saul, and went to Achish king of Gath." So as you know, Saul persecuted David and often sought for his life. This was another one of those occasions and David fled from him and went to the land of the Philistines, particularly Gath which was a city of the Philistines. And in verse 11, the servants of Achish were concerned that David would be in their midst because they thought he would be a threat to their kingdom and so they speak to the king and say, "Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of this one as they danced, saying, 'Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands?'" They are saying, "King, you've got to understand that this man is a lethal warrior. We can't have him in our midst. You should take the opportunity and put him away."

In verse 12, David understood what they were doing. He was afraid and he "took these words to heart," it says in verse 12, "and greatly feared Achish king of Gath." So in verse 13, David "disguised his sanity before them, and acted insanelly in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard." He pretended to be a babbling fool in order to disguise his identity so that Achish would not harm him. "Then Achish said to his servants," in verse 14, "'Behold, you see the man behaving as a madman. Why do you bring him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this one to act the madman in my presence? Shall this one come into my house?'" He says, "This is just an insane man in front of me. Get him out of here. I don't want to deal with this. Don't trouble me with such foolishness." And where David was in the hand of this king and his life could have been in danger, his act of insanity was the means that the Lord used to deliver him from danger; by pretending to be insane, David deceived the king and thus escaped the harm that could have been in his way. So he was kind of between a rock and a hard place. Saul had been chasing him and now there was another king that was a threat to him and out of that compressed circumstance, David goes away and finds refuge in a cave and his life is no longer in danger. Psalm 34 speaks to and is David's reaction of praise as the Lord gave him deliverance in that episode in his life.

So with that little bit of background, go back to Psalm 34 and we'll just walk through the Psalm. David here is praising God and you know the general sense, those of you that are Christians, you know the general sense that David would be speaking from. You've been in a difficult situation, you didn't see the way out and then the Lord makes a way forward for you, and your enemies somehow just seemed to dissipate into the background without causing you harm or the other situation resolves itself and that which seemed like it was a great threat to you is gone. You realize that you're in a place of security once again and your heart is light and it is filled with praise to God because you prayed and sought the Lord and lo and behold he answered your prayers once again and your heart is filled with gratitude and joy and thanksgiving to God because he has proved himself to you faithful once again. Well, Psalm 34 gives voice to that kind of reaction to the Lord's goodness in our lives.

It's an acrostic Psalm, by which we mean this: each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet with one omission, and so it's kind of like going from A to Z in our language with 26 verses; this goes through the 22 verses of the Hebrew alphabet with one exception and so there is a structure that you can't replicate in English that is behind Psalm 34 and because it's acrostic like that, there is not the clear structure that you find in other Psalms based on themes. We're going to break it into three portions: verses 1 through 7, the call to praise; in verse 8 through 15, the commitment of praise; and then in the final verses, the comfort of praise. And through all of this, here's what I want you to glean out of it, this is what I want you to be looking for as we go through this Psalm together, I want you to see the multifaceted nature of praise, the multifaceted nature of worship to expand and deepen your sense of what it means to praise the Lord and to set aside and maybe to grow beyond a limited warped view that views praise as just one aspect of Sunday worship and to see it as a life response to God. That's what this Psalm calls us to.

First point: the call to praise. David is opening this Psalm by expressing his personal praise to God and as we read these first two verses, you should be entering into this and saying, "Lord, whatever else has happened in this day, I'm going to set aside these next 40 minutes or so and I am going to enter into the spirit of this Psalm. I am going to give you my praise as I hear the word preached. As I respond to your word, Lord, I am going to praise you as we go through this." That's the only proper way to respond to a Psalm like this is to engage it from the very beginning. It's more than just a technical or academic knowledge that we're trying to impart, we're trying to shape our hearts according to the word of God; we're trying to respond and become the people that God would have us to be. Well, if we're going to be like that, then we're going to be people of worship.

Look at what David says in the first two verses. He says,

1 I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

He just makes this open ended commitment to worship and says, "This is going to be, the fullness of my life is going to be handed over to honoring God with my very being." Verse 2,

2 My soul will make its boast in the LORD; The humble will hear it and rejoice.

You kind of have to love just the enthusiasm that David brings to it. He says, "My whole heart is given over for all time to praising and honoring God." And as he does it in response to this deliverance, David is mindful of this: David is mindful that the Lord had sovereignly steered the heart of that king away from intending harm to David. It wasn't that David's clever disguise was his grounds of deliverance, it wasn't that David wanted to boast in his own ingenuity and say, "Oh, I've really pulled one over on the king with that act." No, David goes straight to the Lord and boasts in the Lord who rescued him from danger and he says, "I'm just going to praise God all of my life." Is that where your heart is at? Is that the cornerstone? Is that the defining principle of your existence? Are you conscious of that, that my whole life is given over to praising this God, to boasting in him, to declaring his greatness, to living to his honor and glory? That's what it's like to be a Christian is that you're just mindful that your whole life is given over to this God. It's not a compartment, it's not a closet in the house someplace, it's the foundation, it's the structure, it's the roof, it's everything. This is the whole infrastructure of why we live is to be just like this, blessing the Lord at all times.

And David takes the happy occasion, notice this and all of us can learn from this, can grow from this whether we're in leadership, whether we aspire to leadership or whether you're just kind of walking through life, David is mindful that it's not simply that I walk and praise the Lord this way, he tries to draw others into it as well. There is an

evangelistic fervor in his praise because he calls others to join him in the worship. Look at verse 3, he says,

3 O magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together.

It wasn't enough for David to praise God himself, he wants others to join in the praise with him. And when Larry is up here leading singing, that's what he wants, he wants you to join in the praise. When the musicians are singing, that's what they want, they want you to join in the praise. When I'm preaching, I can promise you what I want is for you to enter into the spirit of what the text is saying and have your heart respond in honor and worship and trust and obedience to God. That's what Christians do, they want to draw others into it. It's not enough for me myself to just be content in my own little private circle, I say others need to join in. God is too great to be encapsulated in just one person's worship, others need to join in and that's part of the reason why we do what we do.

So David wants to expand it out and draw others into the worship with him. It's a call to praise. He says, "I'm praising God, you join with me in praising God." And as you move on in the Psalm, he explains why he is ringing the bell for worship; why he is sounding the gong and drawing people in. "Let me tell you why I'm praising God here in this instance. Let me tell you why you should join in on worship with me." In verse 4, he gives his personal testimony, he speaks of his personal experience of what the Lord had done for him. Verse 4,

4 I sought the LORD, and He answered me, And delivered me from all my fears.

"All my terrors. The things that had troubled my heart and the threats that I felt and the uncertainty and the insecurity and the sense of possible doom hanging over my life, and you know that from personal experience," he says. "I know that you know what that's like in life." He said, "I sought the Lord in the midst of those kinds of terrors and what did he do? He delivered me from all of them. He brought me from a position of fear to a position of safety, of deliverance, of rescue." And he says, "There are others that have been like this." Verse 5,

5 They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces will never be ashamed.

He said, "This is a common experience of the people of God to look to him and to find that he is faithful, that he delivers us in the midst of our struggles and weaknesses." And knowing that God is like that, having the experience of seeing God act personally on your behalf, brings a lightness, a joy, a strength and a shining to your countenance. He says, "Their faces will never be ashamed. They looked to God, he answered and they were radiant." So good is this God and if God is like that, what can we do but praise him, respond in worship? We can't act in indifference. We can't go through life sullen hearted and with our shoulders sagging. Not when God is who God is. Not when God is faithful to his people. There should be an energy that comes about from a recognition of who God

is; a gratitude for his faithfulness to deliver us that we recognize the hand of God when things go well for us in life and we respond and say, "God, you are sovereign over all of this. These pleasant safe circumstances in which I find myself are a result of your goodness and what can I do except respond in praise and blessing you?"

That's what Christians should be like. That's what you and I should be like, not dominated, animated by a spirit of fear, not being those who walk about with a sense of impending doom, always wondering when the next thing is going to go wrong; not looking at the future of our country with a sense of dismal fear because it's all out of our hands and it doesn't look too promising. That's not worthy of Christ. That's not the way Christians live. That's not the way Christians think. That's not what God has called us to. And you see, this gets very practical, doesn't it? This starts to shape the way that you view all of life. You say, "How could I go through sullen and fearful when God is who he is and when God protects and cares for his people? How can I be fearful? How can I be discouraged? How can I be like this? How can I join in with the rest of Christian pessimism? There's a contradiction in terms. That's an oxymoron." You say, "No. No, I'm not going to be like that. I know the Lord. I know who he is. I know the way he deals with his people. He has been faithful to me in the past. Do you know what? Going forward, no matter what else has happened, God is going to be faithful to me and that means he's going to be a God of deliverances to me and therefore what do I do? I praise his name with utter confidence about what the future holds." And with such a sense of serenity and commitment that we call others to join in the praise as well. That's what David is doing here.

Look at what he says there in verse 6, he says, "This poor man cried." At that episode in his life, David was pretty much alone. He was vulnerable. He was desperate. He had no earthly resources. He was not yet the man that he would become and he says, "I cried out and the Lord heard him," speaking of himself in the third person.

6 This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him
And saved him out of all his troubles.

Now, beloved, I want you to look at what David says and the terms that he uses for the rescue that God gave him from his terrifying circumstances and enter into the spirit of the faithfulness and the sovereignty of God as it displayed itself in the life of this one man who wrote this Psalm. Look at verse 4, "He answered me. He delivered me." Verse 6, "the LORD heard me. The LORD saved me. God answered me. He delivered me. He heard me. He saved me." He just expands on the verbs in order to express the fullness of the gratitude and the excitement and the satisfaction that he felt. "I prayed to God and he answered me in a decisive deliverance at exactly the time that I needed it."

And he goes on in verse 7 and he uses a military term, he uses a military picture to describe the protection that the Lord gives. Look at verse 7, he says,

7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him,
And rescues them.

There is protection around us. The angel of the Lord in other parts of the New Testament refers to a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. That may be what David has in mind here. It could be that he just has in mind the lesser supernatural beings that protect us, somewhat like happened in the life of Elisha. The point is this, he says, "God surrounds us with his protection. Those who fear the Lord, the righteous ones, those who belong to Yahweh are in a position of enjoying his protection that is motivated by his love and his faithfulness and which is enforced by his power." We are in an unassailable position of strength because of the way that God deals with his people. This is what God does. This is who God is. And the point of it all is this: because God is like that, because we enjoy his favor, because he is faithful and delivers us from our trials, we praise him. We acknowledge him. We ascribe glory and majesty and might and honor to his name as the overflow of the ever flowing fountain of our heart. His praise runs like blood through our veins. His honor, his worship is the air that we breathe in and that's what we're to be like. That's the call to praise.

Notice once again, go up to verse 1 again, David says, "I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." And so fearful, anxious Christian, I'm not here to rebuke you or condemn you or anything like that. I'm here to call you to a higher level of being, a higher level of existence, to enter into that realm which is ours by right. It is our prerogative to live that way and it is our responsibility to live that way. When you see the surpassing greatness of God and you understand something about the unfailing faithfulness that he shows to his people, when you take the time to look back over your Christian life with any sense of memory and say, "Do you know what? I remember point after point after point after point how God helped me and delivered me and provided for me," you say to yourself, "What can I do? I can't live this anxiety filled life." The praise of God drives that out. The knowledge that God is who he is, that he is faithful to his people drives it out. "I'm not going to tolerate having an anxiety-filled, depression-marred life as my existence because, not because I know how things are going to turn out, that's not the case. I'm not going to let myself be that kind of person because that is unworthy of my God and I have made a prior commitment that his praise will always be in my mouth and therefore because I trust him to be a God of deliverances to me when trouble finds its way in, I'm going to live with courageous confidence and reliance on him that is content to live as though I know the outcome before it happens because God is faithful to his people."

So I wouldn't be much of a preacher if I didn't ask you if that's... I understand that our experience ebbs and flows as we grow in these things, but what I want to know is, is that the cornerstone commitment of your heart? Is that who you are or do you tolerate something else to be the defining attribute of your existence? This is it. This is the whole ballgame. This is the sum total of existence that we are to aspire after, this great call to praise, and the only way that you and I can rightly respond to it is to say, "Yes, I will respond to God's word like that. I will be that man of verse 1 that says, I will bless the Lord at all times come what may and I don't need to wait to see how things turn out, I don't need to know the outcome of my trials before I respond. I'll praise him on the front end. Why? Because the circumstances are secondary to the greatness of the character of

this God." Any other life perspective is sinful because God is worthy. What is the greatest commandment? Matthew 22, "Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, strength and mind." No reservations. No hesitations. Nothing held back. No faithless doubting questions allowed to fester. This is a great call to a heart full of praise.

Now, we're going to move into maybe my favorite part of this Psalm which will last only until we get to the third part of the Psalm. Let's talk about the commitment of praise. The commitment of praise and this is an area where I think we all are going to grow in our understanding and our sense of what it means to live a life of praise, to praise the Lord in the manner that is called for here. Understand and remember that David has called us to praise in these opening seven verses and so that's the central defining theme. "Praise the Lord," he says, "and join me as I do." So the question is: what does that praise look like? Can I praise him without colored lights bouncing off the wall and without fog machines kind of working me up into an emotional frenzy? Well, actually that has nothing to do with true praise whatsoever. David defines the kind of praise that he is calling us to in verses 8 through 14, and it's far broader than the way that we normally think about this topic.

Verse 8, David says, he invites us in, he calls us in more deeply. He said, "Magnify the Lord with me," and now he says in verse 8,

8 O taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

This taste of which he speaks is something far more than finding a sample at the supermarket and getting a little couple of bites and saying, "Oh, that tastes pretty good." No, this is the taste that has in mind, he calls you to discover this in your own personal experience. It's a call to each one of you that you can enter into the same kind of glorious experience, the same kind of experiential knowledge and outworking of the faithfulness of God in your life. This is not reserved to a small circle of exclusive spiritual giants. David says, "Reader, taste. Experience for yourself. You'll find out that the Lord is good because he is blessed who takes refuge in the God of this kind of faithfulness."

Now, where does it go from there? He says, "Enter into this with your personal experience," what follows is not a mindless emotional reaction under the influence of too much music at too high a volume. No, he goes right to your heart. Watch this, beloved: he goes right to the totality of your existence; the totality of your being becomes your offering of praise to the Lord which is clearly seen by what he says in what follows. He says in verse 9, look at it with me, verse 9, Psalm 34:9, he says,

9 O fear the LORD, you His saints; For to those who fear Him there is no want.

He makes the fear of the Lord the central focus of following up on this call to praise. It's a call to fear God. It's a call to submit to him. Beloved, it's a call to obey him; to revere him; to honor him. And as you go through the rest of the Psalm, you see that it's also

bound up in this is a call to trust him and you'll see that as we go along. The goodness of God of which David speaks here in Psalm 34 is reserved to those who pursue him in a life of godliness and it is your life of godliness that is your response of praise to this God. Nothing else could possibly be adequate. No river of tears crying over your sins is sufficient. They can't wash away your guilt anyway. No Sunday morning worship three times out of four in a month is sufficient to respond to this God. No, the greatness of this God calls forth for a greatness of the response from the totality of your being and David says, "Taste. Enter into your experience. Fear him. Give him the response of loving worship of which he has deserved." And what we find will be the outcome of that? Look at verse 10, he says,

10 The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; But they who seek the LORD shall not be in want of any good thing.

Of all the animals familiar to the Israelites at that time, a lion would have had the greatest power of self-sufficiency and even a young lion in its strength would be an animal that almost always got what it wanted and yet even a great animal like that might find times of lack, there might be a time of exception for them. David says, "Look at the strength of that animal and realize that you're in a better position than that young lion is with his own self-sufficient power." Those who take refuge in the Lord finds that he provides for them in his faithfulness and so there is this settled confidence in the provision of God and, beloved, here's the thing: David says that that position of security, that certainty of the Lord's provision in his faithfulness is the birthright, it is the inheritance of everyone who trusts in the Lord like this; that God is no man's debtor. Those who give themselves to God fully find that he gives himself fully to them.

Now, jumping ahead and kind of going off on a tangent as I am want to do from time to time, what I just said was that those who give themselves fully to this God find that he gives to them fully in return. Isn't that what Christ did first for us? He gave himself fully. He gave himself completely to us in order to secure the most important thing of our being, the eternal well-being of our soul. He held nothing back and in his faithfulness to his people, he went all the way to Calvary to secure their well-being. That's what God is like. Do you know him like that? Do you trust him like that? Do you look beyond the day to day variations of life and realize the surpassing greatness, the surpassing love, the surpassing faithfulness of this God? Do you realize, beloved, that we serve no remote deity? That the God that we love and serve is not one who is disinterested and remote and uncaring and unconcerned? Do you realize that the God that you belong to as a Christian, that this God of the Bible revealed in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is a God of infinite care, of profound love, and unstinting faithfulness to those that belong to him? Do you know him like that? Do you trust in like that? Or do you harbor suspicions about his ultimate intentions for you? You say, "I'm not sure. You know, I don't know what God is going to do and I don't know if this is going to turn out good or not." Do you allow your heart to drift into questions and accusations against the goodness and love of God, resenting past events, episodes, failures in your life? Questioning whether God will get you out of this problem that you're facing now?

Beloved, not under the sound of God's word. Not under the authority of Scripture. You see, your life of praise must set aside those unworthy thoughts about God and realize that this God that you serve, this God that you know as a Christian, is a God of surpassing excellence. He is a God of boundless love to his people. A God of profound faithfulness who is perfectly able whenever it suits his purposes and whenever the timing is right in his judgment to deliver you completely and effectively in this life and certainly in the life to come. You see, we worship God for his sovereignty and rightly so, but this Psalm is saying this sovereign God is a God who is faithful to his people and his sovereignty is not an abstract theological concept, it is the certainty that combined with his love, his faithfulness, his goodness, his grace means that it's always going to come out well for you in the end. That your trials, your enemies, the opposition that you face at work, your financial difficulties, your health issues, your loneliness, is not the final word on your life. The final word on your life is the goodness, the faithfulness, the kindness, the eternal love of God and you respond to him in praise by saying, "I trust him for that. I rest my heart in that. I bank my future on that. I countenance no doubt that I'll be an exception to that." That is what praise is like, that kind of fear and trust.

But as David goes on, he gets even more specific about what that commitment of praise is. It's not just a fear of the Lord that issues in trust, but it issues into a holiness of life as well. Look at verses 11 and 12. He says, "Come, you children, listen to me."

11 Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

He speaks like a father speaking to children. It's like the wisdom literature in Proverbs where Solomon speaks in this way. He's speaking as a loving father to so-called children who would hear him, that would listen, from one who is in a position to give them spiritual instruction. David says, "Come and listen to my spiritual instruction. I will teach you with your well-being in my heart. I will teach you as a father teaching his child. Come and listen and I'll teach you the fear of the Lord."

Look at verse 12 with me. He says,

12 Who is the man who desires life And loves length of days that he may see good?

You want things to go well in your life, you want to devote your existence to something that is worthwhile and that will have a good return of the investment of life that you make on it? David says in verse 13, he says,

13 Keep your tongue from evil And your lips from speaking deceit.

This is echoed in 1 Peter 3 as well. He says, "Would you know this blessing of God of which I speak? Would you know by personal experience?" Remember, that's what he has called us to. He said, "Taste and see that the Lord is good. Enter into it by your own personal experience. This isn't something reserved for books and abstract studies. This

can be yours by your own personal experience," he says, and it's true and echoes throughout the walls of this room and over the internet to those of you listening on the live stream. David says, "This is open. This is available to those who would respond to God in the way that I am teaching and instructing you."

But it's no casual response. Would you know this blessing of God, would you join in the praise? What does that look like? What is the commitment that David calls us to? Look at verse 13,

13 Keep your tongue from evil And your lips from speaking deceit. 14
Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.

What is he saying? What is he saying here? Praise, here's what I want you to see, this is the center point of the message and this is the pivot point of spiritual life for you, especially those of you that have come from superficial spiritual backgrounds or even false backgrounds, those that promise salvation for a simple walk down the aisle and raise your hand in a service and just kind of reduce it all to a moment in time, response under the influence of emotion that has no lasting effect on your life. If you've come from that background, realize that the blessing of God is not for those who trivialize and make his presence in their life such a trite expression. Think of all the times in ministry where people have told me, "Well, yeah, you know, I prayed a prayer back 20 years ago. Or So-and-so has to be saved because they went forward when they were a youth." Let's not talk about the subsequent 40 years of their sinful living, you know, there was that little point of time. That's not what this is talking about at all. No, praise, a saving response to Christ involves a total handing over of yourself, a total commitment. It's not this trivial moment in time. David says, "If you want the blessing of God in your life, if you want to know the fear of God in your life," look at verses 13 and 14 again, "Keep your tongue from evil And your lips from speaking deceit." How do you enter into this blessing? Understand this: praise is more than a passing verbal expression that expires when the amplifiers are turned off. Praise of this sort, praise in the biblical sense – watch this – it is an orientation of life toward honoring God and separating yourself from sin. It's a life response that says, "I repent. I reject all of those things. I tolerate no deceit in my mouth. I tolerate no unconfessed sin in my life." Do you want to know this blessing of God? Do you want to know the fullness of what it means to walk with him and to know his blessing, his protection? David says, Scripture says, the Bible says, it's right there. "I'll teach you the fear of the Lord," and then what does he say? He says, "You watch your mouth. You refrain from wickedness and deceit. Be a man of integrity, a woman of kindness. Do good instead of living a cynical life full of insincere sarcasm and mindless boasting and cutting interactions with other people." David says, "Don't be like that and expect this kind of protection from the Lord. God gives his goodness to those who are pursuing with their whole heart a life of godliness."

He goes on. Notice at the end of verse 14, he says, "Seek peace and pursue it," just having the mindset of being a peacemaker in life. Jesus said in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God." You see, David has laid out for us a perspective of life that constitutes our response of praise that says, "Oh, I'll give all of

my mouth over to it but my mouth is simply speaking out of a fullness of heart, a fullness of life, that turns from sin and embraces holiness as the goal of my life." Would you know, would you want to be confident of the protection of God in your life? Understand this, what David is saying here, he says it's not a casual matter. There is a conscious – watch this – there is a conscious devotion to God in vertical submission and an outworking in horizontal life among men. "I give you all of my praise. I submit to you. I fear you. I trust you. And that spills over in the fact that I deal with men with integrity and in peace." David says, "That's the kind of fear that I'm talking about."

Do you know what? It's a high price. It's a high price. This is costly. This is nothing less than death to sin and self. It's a giving of the fullness of your affections to the God of the Bible and devoting your moral character to a pursuit of holiness. Those are the people who enjoy that kind of protection and if you're half-hearted and double-minded, James says, let's look over at James for just a moment. James 1:5, I hadn't intended to go here but it pops into my mind and take that as Scripture as being something worthy to lay alongside here. Notice that James is laying out this same principle of complete devotion in what he says in verse 5 and it's in the context of trials and experiencing the provision of God. James 1:5 says, "if any of you lacks wisdom," the context is in your trials, verse 2, "Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials," you want the protection of God, you want to know what to do in the midst of them? Verse 5, "if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach." Oh, do you see it again? I mean, James isn't quoting Psalm 34, he's just talking about God and the consistency of Scripture is showing that it came from the single divine mind of God saying the same thing about God even in completely different context. He gives to all generously and without reproach. God is so good, so gracious, so kind, so faithful. But if you want to know that, James says in verse 6, "you must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind." Verse 7, "For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

Beloved, if you want to know this kind of protection of God, if you want to walk in the fullness of the confidence of his protection, if you want to see his providential deliverance and experience the faithfulness of God on display, you want to know that, there is a commitment of praise that goes with it. God doesn't pass it out on the cheap. You don't find this at the spiritual Dollar General store. God calls for a wholehearted devotion. He says, "To those who give me that wholehearted devotion, you'll find I am a faithful God." But if you try to play both sides of the fence, you live a double life, you're really not committed, don't expect anything from the Lord. So we are brought face to face with what is the fundamental commitment of your heart; the fundamental commitment of praise is wholehearted devotion to this God: fear, reverence, trust, obedience, submission, praise, worship, faithfulness. God doesn't play games. As I often said when I was teaching the Sermon on the Mount years ago, Jesus teaches for keeps. So in this Psalm of praise we see God calling us to a complete commitment as the expression of the praise of our hearts in response to the unfailing goodness that he displays to us. David says, "Taste it. Enter into it. Make this your own."

Now, what's the reward of that commitment of praise? That brings us to our third point. This is my favorite part of the message. I know I said that about the first two points. What's the reward of that commitment to praise? Point 3: the comfort of praise. The comfort of praise and I would almost ask those of you that have walked with Christ for any length of time to stand up in affirmation of what Scripture says here. Almost. Don't do that but almost. What's the comfort of praise? What's our encouragement as we give that full commitment that Scripture calls us to? David describes it and says that God honors those who live a life of praise. This is wonderful. This is magnificent, to simply know that the God who created the universe and reigns over it and is directing every single molecule of existence to accomplish his purpose by the power that he has to subject all things to himself, to realize that that God is like what we're about to see is wonderfully excellent.

First of all, he cares for us. He cares for us. He calls us to a full life of complete devotion but in response, what's the reward of that? What's our assurance as we pursue it not knowing what the future on earth holds? Well, verse 15,

15 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous And His ears are open to their cry.

He cares for us in our distress. He sees our need. He responds to our cries. He's a sympathetic Savior, especially since the incarnation of Christ. We have a high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses and gladly does so, so good and kind and loving and involved is our God in the details of our lives. He sees the sorrows. He sees the hard rocky steps. He sees the steep climb of your loneliness and says, "I'm right there with you. This matters. I care." His eye is upon him.

Now, by contrast, verse 16,

16 The face of the LORD is against evildoers, To cut off the memory of them from the earth.

There is no in-between. You're either a person of full devotion like David has spoken about or you're in the camp of the enemy destined to have your memory perish from the face of the earth because you rejected devotion to this great and wonderful God. You're wasting your life if you're not completely devoted to the God of the Bible and Scripture says your memory will perish. The Lord is with you or he's against you. But beloved, speaking to those of you that are in Christ, if he is with you, it's so good. It's so perfect. He is with you through everything even in the words of the hymn that we sometimes sing, to sanctify to you, to set apart for blessing even your deepest distress.

Look at verse 17,

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.

Notice what's implied in that verse. God hasn't promised you a life of ease. It's implied in this entire Psalm that there will be troubles; that there will be times of fear; there will be times of uncertainty. The glory of this Psalm is not that you're excluded from those aspects of life in a fallen world, the glory of it is that the Lord is with you through it all. The Lord sanctifies and blesses that to the good of your soul and promises ultimate deliverance never, ever to fail.

So we expect the waves to come upon us, the exact nature we don't know but it doesn't matter because the transcendent thing is that this great God is with us, near to us. His heart, we could say, is with us and he cares for those of us crushed in spirit. You see, the promise is not prosperity and ease in this life. That's not it. And we would declare it and shout it from the highest point that the Lord would give us, that's not it. It, the goodness, the promise, the blessing is the superior promise of the Lord's presence with us as we go through those things. That's far better than an absence of struggle. The presence of the Lord is far infinitely superior to a life of gilded ease on a bed of rose petals.

Look at verse 19. David says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." If you're looking for an ease-filled life, the righteous life is not what you're looking for.

19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.

There is that word "all" again. Without exception.

20 He keeps all his bones, Not one of them is broken.

This is the text that is alluded to in John 19 about the crucifixion of our Lord. They didn't break his legs because he had already died. This wonderful keeping, preservation of the Lord, verses 19 through 20, but once again, David wields a two-edged sword. There is a warning to those of you who are not in Christ here today or listening over subsequent media. There is a warning embedded in this. Oh, the Lord keeps the righteous and praise God for that and praise God that I am in the midst of that and you who are there, you should be praising God, "Oh, he keeps the righteous! I praise his name for that!" But even as David is saying that, there is another edge to the sword that cuts those of you who aren't in Christ, that warns those of you who are not in Christ. Verse 21,

21 Evil shall slay the wicked, And those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

Take your pick. It's one or the other is the outcome of life. Either the full blessing of God or perishing in your own wickedness.

At this point in the Psalm, that alphabetic acrostic breaks off. He's gotten to the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet in verse 21 and so verse 22 kind of stands alone. It stands apart as if it were the whole lesson. It receives the emphasis here at the end. What can we

conclude about this? What do we who love the Lord take away from Psalm 34? Verse 22, we end on this note of serenity and confidence, this word of faith, this word of trust, this word of reliance. Verse 22,

22 The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none [no exceptions] of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned.

God is faithful to us. Christian, God is faithful to you without exception. He is with you through every trial of life and will deliver you many times in this life and certainly ultimately and completely in the end.

What can we say about this as we close? As we turn our attentions to the cross? Turn our attention to Christ? That lovely Lord Jesus. The supreme affection of the hearts of men. The loveliest man who ever walked on the face of the earth. The fullness of God incarnate. God in human flesh. The exact representation of the nature of God. The one who shed his blood for our sins. The one who is coming again. Resurrected from the dead now at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. Representing us as our brother in heaven. What can we say as we contemplate him at the end of this? Verse 22 that says, "none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned." The wonder of the way that this Old Testament Psalm in its own context a thousand years before Christ was just magnificent and yet it speaks to and it hints to even greater realities that we now know as New Testament Christians. Though you are a sinner falling short of the glory of God, even though your love is lukewarm and sometimes unworthy of such a great God, what can we say about Christ and this promise of no condemnation? We lift our hands in praise to him. Christ has covered us with his blood. Covered us in his righteousness. So fully, so completely that Romans 8:1 says, "There is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." No matter how imperfect and sinful your day has been before you came into this room tonight, Christ has you covered and you will not be condemned for your failures, for your sins. Romans 8:31 says, "If God is for us, who is against us?"

So, beloved, do this: don't look at life through the prism of your trials. Don't start and say, "Life is so hard, it's uncertain. I don't know how this is going to come out and I'm not sure if I'm going to make it another day." Don't do that. Don't live that way. Don't think that way. No, no, come to Psalm 34 and look at your God and realize and embrace his perfect, impeccable, unstinting commitment, his sure intention to carry you through every trial and deliver you safely into glory. That's the way to think about life and when God is like that toward you, you respond with a fullness of life that expresses the commitment of your mouth to praise with the assurance that God meets us more abundantly than anything that our hearts could ever present to him.

Beloved, have you come to Christ to give him this life of praise? If not, let me ask you a question: why would you delay? You see, it's more than just the thought of eternal judgment that should cause you to flee to Christ, there is that negative impact, for sure, but there is this positive promise. God says, Christ says, "Come to me and I will bless you just like this; that the fullness of this wonderful provision, this comprehensive blessing from God can be yours." The only thing holding you back is your own

stubbornness Turn to Christ. Turn from sin. Trust his blood atonement for your salvation and do you know what will happen based on the authority of God's word? I know for certain what will happen: you'll taste and you'll find that the Lord is good.

Let's pray together.

Father, we praise you for being a God just like what we have seen in Psalm 34. You redeemed the soul of your servants, none of those who take refuge in you will be condemned. May it be true of each one of us and may you help us live out a life that expresses the right commitment of praise, a fullness of devotion to you, death to sin and self, alive to God in our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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