

A Song of the Saved

Psalm 34

Psalm 34:1-7 - *"I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; the humble shall hear of it and be glad.*

Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together.

I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them."

Background Notes

Psalm 34 could be entitled "A Song of the Saved." In the first half of this psalm, David praised the Lord for His goodness and deliverance, and then in the second half he exhorted his people to do the same.

You'll notice that there are twenty-two verses in this psalm. There are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and this psalm is one of the "alphabetic acrostic psalms," in which each verse in the Hebrew text begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet, from A to Z.

However, Psalm 34 is not a perfect acrostic because one letter is missing, as verse 21 begins with the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So verse 22, the last verse of the psalm, is not part of the alphabetic sequence and is probably meant to be a summary verse of the whole psalm.

The psalm's title says that it is a psalm of David, written *"When he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed."* The term "Abimelech" was a kingly title (like Pharaoh, for example), and it refers to King Achish of Gath. This occasion is described in 1 Samuel 21:10-15: *"Then David fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said to him, 'Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'"*

Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of the king of Gath. So he changed his behavior before them, pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard. Then Achish said to his servants, 'Look, you see the man is insane. Shall this fellow come into my house?'"

When we first read Psalm 34, we may not see the connection between the content of the psalm and the occasion of the psalm. What's the connection? The connection is that David is praising the Lord for taking care of him and delivering him, in spite of his mistake of looking for protection from Saul to Achish, a Philistine king, rather than trusting the Lord. Going to Achish for protection was not one of David's brightest moments. But in this psalm we see that David, realizing his mistake, prayed to the Lord. And the Lord delivered him!

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Believers should praise the Lord themselves for His goodness and deliverance.

In this doctrinal point we emphasize the word "**themselves**" for two reasons: first, our second doctrinal point will be about telling others to praise the Lord, and second, all too often we depend on others to praise the Lord for us (such as the pastor in his Sunday morning pastoral prayer, etc). We need to remember to **personally** praise the Lord!

How do we start our personal prayers? Do we start with praise and thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for providing His salvation? Or do we just skip to our requests?

David wanted to praise and boast in the Lord continually, so that the Lord would be magnified, and it would result in others praising the Lord (v3). This shows that David's praise of the Lord was public, and not just private. "Boasting in the Lord" means we should talk about the Lord in our conversations - not just talk about ourselves. As John the Baptist said about the Lord Jesus, "*He must increase and I must decrease*" (John 3:30).

In Psalm 34:4-7, David recounts his deliverance from the situation with King Achish. David was running scared because he **was not trusting the Lord** when he went to the land of the Philistines for protection (v4). But David and those who were with him finally turned to the Lord, and they and were not disappointed. Evidence of their trust could even be seen in their faces (v5).

In verse 6, David refers to himself as the "poor man" who looked to the Lord, and was delivered. How did the Lord deliver him? Verse 7 gives the answer: "*The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.*"

In the Old Testament, the Angel of the Lord was the pre-incarnate Christ, so the Lord Jesus Himself is our defense and security. I'd say that's pretty good security, wouldn't you? How can we not praise the Lord for His goodness and deliverance, as David did in Psalm 34:8-10 - "*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who trusts in Him! Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger, but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.*"

Even the young lions of the Judean wilderness, where David was living when he wrote this psalm, sometimes suffer hunger - but those who put their trust in the Lord lack nothing. Believers should themselves praise the Lord for His goodness and deliverance.

2. Believers should teach others to praise the Lord for His goodness and deliverance.

Psalm 34:11 - *"Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD."*

In verse 11, the word "*children*" probably refers to the men who were with David at the Cave of Adullam, where they hid after the Lord delivered them from David's foolish visit with King Achish and the Philistines. David now teaches his followers about the goodness and deliverance of the Lord.

Psalm 34:12-14 – *"Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it."* Verses 12-14 tell us what it means to fear the Lord. This is the secret of how to really "live the good life"! Notice the three commands in these verses:

- Control your tongue (v13)
- Separate from evil and do good (v14)
- Seek and pursue peace (v14)

In Romans 12:18 Paul the apostle said, *"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."* And the apostle Peter quoted Psalm 34:12-16 to emphasize that we should not return evil for evil, but be a blessing to others instead. *"Not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good. Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers, but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil" (1 Peter 3:9-12).*

Notice that Peter did not quote the last part of verse 16: *"to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth."* Why? The reason: that part of the verse will be fulfilled when the Lord returns to this earth in judgment.

In Psalm 34:17-19, David emphasizes to his listeners that the Lord hears every cry of the righteous and delivers them out of all their troubles. Notice in both verses 17 and 19 that believers are not delivered **from** troubles, but **out of** their troubles. There's a difference! In fact, verse 19 says, *"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all."*

Verse 18 should be an encouragement when your heart is broken, or your spirit is crushed. Look to the Lord and claim this promise: *“The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.”*

Let’s remember to teach others these truths. Believers should teach others to praise the Lord for His goodness and deliverance.

Practical Application:

Allow for “the fuller meaning of Scripture.”

Psalm 34:20-22 – *“He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken. Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous shall be condemned. The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.”*

“Allow for the fuller meaning of Scripture” is a principle of hermeneutics – a term that means interpreting Scripture properly.

When David wrote verses 20-22, he wrote in the context of the Lord’s care and deliverance of righteous people. Verse 20 emphasizes the Lord’s protection and preservation of the committed believer who is in severe and cruel opposition. It is not meant as a guarantee that Christians won’t suffer injury, such as a broken arm or leg - or even martyrdom. To apply an expression like this as a literal personal promise would be **bad hermeneutics**, and that’s why we’re using it as a practical application.

In addition, however, there is a fuller meaning to this verse. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle John quoted this Scripture in reference to the crucifixion of Christ: *“For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, ‘Not one of His bones shall be broken’” (John 19:36)*. At Israel’s exodus from Egypt, the bones of the Passover lamb were not to be broken (Exodus 12:46). As the true Passover Lamb, our Lord’s bones were not broken.

So in the **immediate** context of Psalm 34:20, we have a **general expression** of God’s protection of the believer. But the apostle John, the Spirit-inspired writer, provided a **fuller meaning** for this verse when he applied it in a **literal** way to the Lord. Breaking of the legs by the Roman soldiers was a normal practice to hasten death in crucifixion - but not one of our Lord’s bones was broken.

So when we’re interpreting the Word of God, we must realize that sometimes there will be a fuller or expanded meaning of Scripture - more than what we see in the immediate or general context.