

Psalm 34 Series Part 6

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[0 : 0 0] Trouble, trouble, nothing but trouble. Life can be like that sometimes. And that was certainly the experience of the psalmist as he shares his experience with us in the psalm that we've been thinking about on and off over these past few weeks. And this evening, particularly as we would consider the final verses of the psalm. And if you would open your Bibles with me to Psalm 34, it's on page 561 of the church Bible. And we'll read these closing verses of Psalm 34, the verses that we'll be thinking about this evening. Psalm 34 and verse 19, we read, as follows, A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all. He protects all his bones. Not one of them will be broken. Evil will slay the wicked. The foes of the righteous will be condemned. The Lord redeems His servants. No one will be condemned who takes refuge in Him. Well, as we do reconnect with this psalm, with Psalm 34 following a wee break, it is these final four verses that we've just read that we will be considering. And just to refresh our memories, or for those who haven't been present on previous occasions, to give you a little bit of the background, we have been considering this psalm, Psalm 34, in the light, very particularly, of the circumstances in which it was composed. And those circumstances are revealed to us, are identified for us in the introduction to the psalm. There you can read, in the beginning of the psalm, we read, of David, the psalm of David, he composed the psalm. And then we're given the circumstances when he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left. And just very fleetingly to locate that explanation, it was following David's great victory over Goliath.

He had slain Goliath, and as a result, he was very popular among the people in Israel, and that resulted in the great and the deep jealousy of King Saul, as he saw that this young man, David, was more popular than he was. And that jealousy found violent and vicious expression in Saul seeking David's life.

And so David had to flee for his life. He had done nothing wrong, and yet he had to flee for his life, and it reached the extreme of him having to seek refuge in Gath, the very location from where Goliath hailed, who he had slain. But there, there was to be no refuge, not surprisingly, and he had to flee.

And the means by which he did so was, as the psalm suggests, or the introduction to the psalm suggests, by pretending to be insane. And he was thrown out of the court of King Abimelech, and he headed to the caves. And it would seem that the psalm was penned as he was there in that very difficult situation, fleeing for his life, seeking refuge in the caves with a group of his friends.

Now, as we've been considering the psalm, we've noticed, I think it's fair to say, that those circumstances shed a great deal of light on what David says, the manner in which David expresses himself. It allows us and helps us to better understand what he writes, as we appreciate the occasion or the circumstances in which he found himself. And I am persuaded that even that very brief introduction, introducing us to his circumstances, will once again, this evening, help us to better understand these final verses of the psalm. What I want to do this evening is focus our attention on three big themes in these verses. They are four relatively brief verses, and yet there's much there that could occupy our attention. But the way I want to consider these verses is, as I say, identifying and thinking in turn of three big themes that we find. And the three themes are as follows.

[5 : 0 2] First of all, tribulation. Just a fancy word for trouble. Many troubles. Big trouble. Tribulation. The first theme. The first matter that David deals with in these verses. The second theme, big theme, is the theme of deliverance. Deliverance from these troubles. Deliverance from the tribulation that he speaks on. And then a third big theme that is touched on in these verses is a theme that is not a very pleasant one, but one that nonetheless we must face and deal with. And it is the theme of condemnation.

So, we have these three themes. Tribulation, trouble, deliverance, and condemnation. All of them dealt with, in a measure, in these verses that close Psalm 34. Well, let's think, first of all, of that first great theme, the theme of tribulation. The beginning of verse 19, a righteous man may have many troubles.

Or as other versions of the Bible, I think more helpfully translate this phrase, many are the troubles or many are the afflictions of the righteous. And just in a few moments, I'll explain why I think that is perhaps a more helpful translation or manner of expressing these words of David. Many are the troubles, many are the afflictions of the righteous.

What can we say of these troubles? What do we learn, even in these few words that David expresses? What truths are revealed in these words of David? Many are the troubles, many are the afflictions of the righteous. Well, I want to notice three things that I trust will be helpful to us who, as men and women, are subject to troubles also. I don't think anybody here could say, well, I live a trouble-free life. I don't know what trouble is. That is something that is completely alien to my experience. If that is your experience, then please, I'd love to speak to you. After the service, it would be a very revealing conversation to meet somebody who has no troubles, no afflictions. But I doubt very much if any such person exists. So, it's a very relevant matter to consider. What does God say? What does the Bible say about this matter of trouble, of problems, of suffering, of tribulation? Well, in these verses or in these words, in this one sentence, at the beginning of verse 19, I want to notice three things. Clearly, what we're going to see isn't an exhaustive treatment of the matter of trouble as the Bible would comment on it. But we will identify three aspects.

[8 : 01] The first thing, it is this, that troubles are the lot of the righteous. We have already, on previous occasions, and time doesn't allow us to revisit what we've done in the past, but we have already considered, in the light of the whole teaching of Scripture, of the Bible, who are the righteous? Who are these people described as the righteous? And very briefly, we simply remind ourselves of what we discovered, that the righteous are those who, those sinners, for we are all sinners, have been made righteous by Jesus Christ as they have put their faith in Him. One picture the Bible uses is of those who, by trusting in Jesus, have been clothed with His righteousness. And so, though they are sinners, they have become righteous, they have been made righteous. We can't go further on that matter this evening. But what David is saying is that these people, the righteous, those who are trusting in

Jesus, those who are disciples of Jesus, those who are the friends of Jesus, those who are the brothers of Jesus, the Christ ones, they are victims of trouble and tribulation. That is their lot. That is their portion. That is what they should expect. The Bible makes very clear, and here David makes very clear, that there is no special dispensation for those of us who are Christians. It's not the case, oh, we are Christians, and God loves us, and so we are spared trouble. We live a trouble-free life. That is evidently not so. Simple observation would confirm for us that that is not the case. But here we are being told very clearly and very specifically that it is not in God's purposes that His people, those whom He especially loves should be spared trouble. No. Very clearly we are told a righteous man may have many troubles.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous. No special dispensation, no promise of an easy ride, no farewell protection from affliction. Indeed, it would seem that quite the reverse is the case. What is implicit in what the psalmist is saying is that the righteous very particularly will suffer many troubles. What he seems to be suggesting is that the righteous will suffer in greater measure, will suffer more trouble than others often. And as we recognize this to be so, even if at this point we don't fully understand why that is so, if we recognize and accept that this is so, then that should help us not to be surprised when we who are trusting in Jesus are overtaken by troubles of many kinds. Nor should we be unduly discouraged when we endure troubles and difficulties and suffering and pain of many kinds.

Troubles are the lot of the righteous. That's the first thing we can say. But the other thing that we can say that is found in this sentence of the psalmist and that we've already hinted at but we want to explicitly highlight is that these troubles are many. A righteous man may have many troubles. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. Now many in what sense? How should we understand this claim or this statement that many are the troubles of the righteous? Well, I think we can understand many in two ways.

[11 : 44] Many in their nature and many in their number. When we say many in their nature, this is to recognize that the nature of troubles and afflictions can be very varied. One clear distinction that

can be made in terms of the troubles that the righteous will endure is the distinction between those troubles that the righteous endure because they are righteous and those troubles that the righteous endure that are the common lot of humanity that all men and women suffer or endure in one measure or another. We can maybe just briefly develop that. Troubles, afflictions because we are righteous. This was the experience of David. As David writes this psalm, why was he suffering? Was he suffering from a migraine? Was he suffering because he'd lost his job? Was he suffering because he'd had a fight with his wife? Those things that all of us can maybe endure or suffer at some time in our experience? No. He was suffering because of his faithfulness to God. He was suffering because he was not willing to do that which would be displeasing to

God. He was suffering because of the fact that he was a righteous man. And Saul couldn't abide this righteous man in his face. And so, he wanted to get rid of this righteous man. He wanted to extinguish this righteous man. He was suffering because he was righteous. And today, there are many in that situation, there are many who are persecuted for their faith in Jesus. There are many in other lands whose very life finds itself in danger because they name the name of Jesus. There are many who, unlike us, who can gather freely and confidently and publicly, must gather in secret for fear of those who would do them violence simply because they are Christians, because they are righteous, because they trust in Jesus.

And they suffer for that reason. That is the nature of their affliction. But even closer to home, though we, of course, recognize and indeed give thanks to God for the great freedoms that we do enjoy, we do recognize that there are those who, closer to home, maybe some of you who have known and experienced what it is to be marginalized or ridiculed because of your commitment to Jesus Christ, because of your refusal to go with the flow and simply do what others do. Because of your loyalty to Jesus, you find yourself suffering in one way or another. That is also the experience of some. So, these troubles that the psalmist speaks of are many. They're many in their nature. They can be because we are righteous, but also, of course, and we don't need to dwell on this. As Christians, we suffer, we experience those trials, those troubles that simply are part of being human, part of being men and women. Ill health, physical ill health, mental ill health, fraught relationships, family conflicts, money problems, and, well, we could go on and on and on. There is no distinction, really, between the Christian and those who are not Christians. We are all prone to these things. Many are the troubles of the righteous. Many in nature, but also many in number.

And there's no need to dwell on this. David is simply saying that we will have lots and lots of troubles. One is overcome, and another confronts us. One seems to be receding, and another creeps up unaware to trip us up.

[15 : 33] It never rains, but it pours. There are many troubles that we are subject to. So, this tribulation that David speaks of, it's the lot of the righteous. They are many. And finally, and this really ties in with what we've been saying already, and so we won't dwell on it. They are certain. They are certain. And this is more helpfully brought out by the manner in which, as I was suggesting earlier, the English Standard Version and some other versions of the Bible translate this phrase, many are the afflictions of the righteous. In the church Bible that we have, we read, a righteous man may have many troubles. And perhaps that word may would suggest, well, he may, but he may not. But this doesn't seem to be at all what the Psalmist is suggesting. What he is saying is that this is certain. This is the norm. This is what happens. This is the way it is.

Righteous men will have many troubles. We live in a sin-sick world. We are ourselves, and we are surrounded by sinners. The creation itself in which we live is under bondage to sin and groaning under the curse of the fall. This is a troubled world that we live in. You don't need to be some very incisive social commentator to come to that conclusion. We all know that it is so. This is a troubled world, and troubles are our daily diet. They are certain. Now, it is true, and this is a matter that sometimes is difficult to understand, and I imagine we are not intended to fully understand. It is true that in God's inscrutable providence, some suffer much more than others. Among the righteous, there are those who suffer deeply and intensely, and others who by God's grace are largely spared the suffering that others endure. For some, the pain is deep and intense and unremitting, and some of us, again as I have suggested for reasons that we don't know and we probably are not intended to know, are spared what others endure. I wonder how we are to respond to that if you are in that situation where by God's grace you are spared in great measure. Perhaps the suffering, the affliction that you see that others have to face. How to respond? Well, perhaps at one level there is

or there ought to be an element of gratitude to God for His mercy, but I think perhaps more importantly there is a call to identify and suffer with those who are more deeply afflicted. This is surely the intent of the image that we are given of what it is to be part of the Christian church, part of the body of Christ, that if one member suffers, all suffer. We are to weep with those who weep. We are to suffer with those who suffer. And indeed, if it is the case that I am able, or that you are able to look on impassively at the suffering of a fellow believer, then we would be well advised to ask ourselves if we are part of the body at all. But if we are part of the body and others suffer, then we must suffer with them. So in that sense, no one is spared, even if that trouble or that affliction does not come directly, as it were, to our plate. But being part of that body, we are to suffer with those who suffer. Troubles are certain. That's the first big theme that we have as we focus just on this first part of verse 19. A righteous man may have many troubles. They are the lot of the righteous. They are many in their nature and in their number, and they are certain. But the second big theme that we have here is the theme of deliverance. Listen to what David goes on to say.

We read there, a righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all. He protects all his bones. Not one of them will be broken. So this is the second big theme, the theme of deliverance. The somber affirmation of the first half of verse 19 is followed by this hope-inspiring but as the verse develops. But the Lord delivers him from them all. And as we think of this big theme of deliverance, again there's three things that I would invite you to notice in these words of the psalmist. Three things concerning this deliverance that is spoken of. First of all, that this deliverance is the Lord's work. It is the Lord who delivers the righteous from all their troubles. The Lord, the living and true God, personally takes responsibility for delivering his people. And I would ask you and I would encourage you to be encouraged by that. Whatever your trouble is, whatever your affliction is, however deep your pain, however intense your affliction, the Lord himself takes responsibility for granting you deliverance in his way and in his time. He knows your trouble. He feels your pain. He understands the whys and the wherefores that you are completely oblivious to and may be deeply confused by. Not so the Lord. He knows. He understands. He feels. And he is not silent.

He rather delivers. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him from them all. It is the Lord's work. And the other thing we can notice is that this work of the Lord is a personal work.

[21 : 51] He delivers him from them all, David affirms. And of course, David here is speaking out of the fountain of his own experience. He has been delivered. He has experienced the Lord's delivering hand in his life and in times of trial and danger, indeed, as he is currently facing. So this is not some theological treatise on the subject of suffering. No, this is him out of his own experience sharing with others what he has experienced. He personally was delivered by the Lord. And so it is with us.

He delivered David. And he will deliver you. This isn't simply some blanket promise that you must try and cling on to. No, this is a promise directed to you. If you are the Lord's, if you, as you have placed your trust in Jesus as your Savior, are clothed in his righteousness, if you are among the righteous, then this promise is for you. The Lord delivers him from them all. He will deliver you. From all your troubles. And the third thing we can say about this deliverance is that it is exhaustive. The Lord delivers him from them all. From them all. Yes, they are many. Yes, they are varied. Yes, they are complex. Yes, they are without number, perhaps. But the deliverance that is promised is exhausted. There is no trouble too complex, no problem too profound, no sin too heinous, no body too broken, no trial too trivial to remain beyond the promise of deliverance. But the Lord delivers him from them all.

Now, this all sounds very dandy. But also, does it not perhaps sound completely removed from reality?

[23 : 56] You see, it sounds wonderful what the psalmist says, the Lord delivers him from them all, from every trial. But is that actually what happens? Is that what you experience as a Christian? Have you experienced wholesale and exhaustive deliverance from all your trials? It just doesn't seem to accord with reality.

Where is that divine hand stretched out to help and to rescue from that deep and dark place that you find yourself in? This is a problem. How can we respond to this problem, to this difficulty? Well, I think two things need to be said.

First of all, we have to recognize how God delivers, the manner in which God delivers. And we have to recognize that often, in this life in which He has placed us, so often the means of deliverance is by giving us the grace to stand and to trust while the trouble rages.

The means of deliverance so often is not removing the trouble. It's not quelling the pain. It's not making the trouble disappear miraculously, as we would like to happen. But rather, it is God's way to grant us the grace to stand, the grace to resist, the faith to carry on believing, even in the midst of the trial. We have to bear that in mind, this matter of how God delivers, but also the question of when God delivers.

Yes, we do look forward to ultimate deliverance of all our trials. But so often, in God's purposes, that deliverance will be experienced at some point in the future, at a time that God decides and that God determines. Indeed, we must recognize. And again, simple observation confirms that there are some trials that persist until death itself, and indeed death itself is God's means of deliverance from those trials. But that does not make the deliverance any less real. Now, perhaps the mocker would look on and say, well, that's a very clever way of getting out of the problem. God doesn't seem to deliver. You say, oh, well, He delivers at death. Well, the mockers may mock, but the reality is this, that that is indeed the manner in which God chooses to deliver us from some of our trials. And we stand submissive to His perfect and loving will for our lives. So, yes, there are times when this would seem to be a promise that is difficult to experience and indeed even to believe. But let us be very clear. The Lord will deliver you from all your troubles. He promises to do so, and He is the one who keeps all His promises.

[27 : 14] Now, this promise of deliverance that is stated very clearly there in the second half of verse 19 is then illustrated with an example in verse 20. And the example that is given is, at first sight, perplexing. But on closer examination proves to be very revealing. What is the example that the psalmist gives? An example of the Lord delivering Him from all His troubles? Well, there in verse 20, he states, He protects all His bones. Not one of them will be broken. Now, I say this is a perplexing example because, again, we have what seems to be a disconnect in the sense that this would appear to be simply not true if we would apply it to all the righteous. There are many righteous who have suffered broken bones, indeed, who have suffered broken bones at the hands of enemies of God and who have had stones rain on them and who have had their bones smashed in many pieces. And so we read this and we say, well, it sounds wonderful and it sounds lovely and it sounds great, but it's not the way it is.

And so I say perplexing the example that is given. He protects all his bones. Not one of them will be broken. How are we to understand this example that the psalmist gives? Well, I think we can understand it at two levels. The first level is simply this, that what we have here, I think we can reasonably affirm, is the personal testimony of the psalmist. The psalmist is speaking out of his own experience. Yes, the truths that he arrives at are truths that are applicable to all.

There are principles that can be applied to all of us. But the examples that he gives, and this particular example he gives, is of his own experience. The psalmist is saying, Saul has been trying to kill me. The whole of his army has been chasing me. All the weaponry of Israel has been against me. And yet, here I am. Not a bone has been broken. Not a bone has been broken. I have every bone hole in my body. The Lord has delivered me. The Lord has protected me. That was his experience.

Now, for others, that will not be their experience. For others, the Lord chooses not to protect them in that way. But it was David's experience, and he shares it with us. So, we can understand it at that level.

But perhaps, and we can say more than perhaps, more significantly, these words that David pens as he closes this psalm, these words announce prophetically the experience of the one whose suffering would secure our ultimate deliverance. We've read earlier on in the service in John chapter 19, the death of Jesus, the account of his death. And there in John chapter 19 and in verse 36, we find John the evangelist, inspired by the Holy Spirit, recognizing that the fulfillment of these words, he protects all his bones. Not one of them will be broken, finds its ultimate fulfillment in the experience of Jesus.

[30 : 35] We read the passage. The soldiers wanted to accelerate the death of the three who were crucified there. And the manner of doing so was to break the bones of their legs that they would no longer be able to breathe. And so, they do so for one thief, they do so for another. But when they come to Jesus, they don't do so. Why? Because he's dead already. It's not necessary. And John,

inspired by the Spirit of God, is able to identify in this situation there at Calvary, a fulfillment of these words.

Of course, the big question there, and one in a sense we've already just answered is, why were his bones not broken? What was it? What were the circumstances that allowed him to be protected in this way? Well, he was dead. He was delivered unto death. We're speaking here of the deliverance that we as the righteous enjoy. Well, when we speak of the one who hung on Calvary's tree, he was the one who was delivered unto death. Delivered to death by his Father, that he might in his death secure your deliverance, our deliverance, from sin and its wages and consequences.

So, we have this second theme of deliverance. The Lord delivers the righteous from all their troubles. And the manner in which he does so, the means by which this is possible ultimately, is the death of Jesus in our place, that in that death we might know deliverance, ultimate and complete deliverance. But there's a final theme, a third theme that we just want to comment on briefly.

This is the theme of condemnation that is developed, that is touched on by David in the final two verses of the psalm. We could ask the question, is tribulation and deliverance the full picture? Okay, there is tribulation for the righteous, but they are delivered. So, that's the end of the story.

But that's not the end of the story. Condemnation, unpleasant though that word may be, and unwilling though we may be to even think about it, condemnation is, if you wish, the flip side of deliverance.

[33 : 08] Now, time will only allow us to notice one fundamental aspect that is very clearly dealt with by the psalmist here, and it is this. As we think of this matter, this big theme of condemnation, the one matter we want to just notice, and it's at the heart of what David is saying, is that there is a clear line drawn in the sand between those who are condemned and those who are spared condemnation. That much is very clear in these two verses. Verse 21 speaks of those who are condemned, and verse 22 speaks of those who are spared condemnation. And the big question, the question that isn't a philosophical question, it's not some theological nicety, it is a matter of life and death, it is a matter of huge import for you this evening. The big question is, on what side of that line do you stand? Do you stand with those who will be condemned, or do you stand with those who will be spared condemnation? Well, who are those who are condemned? And what is it, or who is it, that condemns them? Well, the psalmist is clear there in verse 21. He says, evil will slay the wicked, the foes of the righteous, the foes of the righteous, the foes of the righteous will be condemned. The condemned are those described as the wicked. And notice that they are condemned by their own evil. I think this is hugely significant there. Notice the manner in which the psalmist expresses himself, evil will slay the wicked. Their own evil condemns them. There is a very real sense in which the wicked condemn themselves.

The Lord takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He takes no delight in casting anybody into a lost eternity. There is a very real sense in which the wicked cast themselves into hell.

Evil will slay the wicked, their own evil for which they are personally responsible. And who are the wicked? Are they some small group of very nasty evil people that, of course, none of us are part of? Well, the wicked are all those who are not righteous. All those who have not yet been made righteous by Jesus. All those who are not clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Such are the wicked. There's no middle ground. There's no neutral territory where you're neither one nor the other. No. If you're not righteous, if you're not trusting in Jesus, then this is where you stand.

And your ultimate condemnation will be not because God is mean, not because he is cruel, but you yourself will be responsible for your condemnation. Evil will slay the wicked.

[36 : 09] But finally, who escapes condemnation? Well, the psalmist answers that question for us. The Lord redeems his servants. No one will be condemned who takes refuge in him. And what better note on which to close? What better note on which to close even this very solemn matter of condemnation, this wholesale and inclusive promise to all? No one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.

If you take refuge in the Lord, if you trust in Jesus, then you will not be condemned. And who are those who take refuge in him? Well, they are those and only those who recognize that they are in danger. If you consider that you are in no danger. If you consider that all is well and that you have no need of a savior, then you will not take refuge in him. You will see no need to do so. But if by the working of the Spirit of God you are conscious of your condition as a sinner, you are conscious that you stand condemned before a just God, then I would urge you that you would seek refuge in the

only one who can provide you with that refuge. Cling on to this wonderful promise with which this psalm concludes.

No one, and that includes you, no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him. But you must do so. You must take refuge in the Lord. And the manner in which you will do so is as you recognize your need of a savior. And as you would call out to Jesus, that he might be your savior. That he might forgive your sins. That he might invite you into the family of God, reconciled with God in friendship with the Father. Put your trust in him. Seek refuge in him and you will not be condemned. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father.