

Psalm 34 Series Part 1

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- [0 : 00] David and Goliath, you really can't beat it when it comes to Bible stories. It's a cracker, we could say. I wonder if you've ever imagined being David approaching Goliath.
- So, for a moment, indulge me if you haven't done so yet. Imagine that you are David on that occasion, on the battlefield, approaching Goliath. The odds are stacked against you. You're a nobody against a giant of almost mythical proportions. And the man has never tasted defeat. But you fear nothing.
- You know you're going to vanquish your foe. You practically salivate in anticipation of victory and your elevation to national hero.
- Now, maybe this is a boy thing, but it's some fantasy. Of course, for David, it was no fantasy.
- [1 : 05] It really happened. He really did beat Goliath of Gath with his helmet of brass. But what happened next?
- The immediate aftermath is a very sweet one for David. We've read some of it. The praise of the people.
- The adulation of the damsels. And the much-remembered ditty. Saul has slain his thousands. And David his ten thousands. To begin with, the gratitude and recognition of the king.
- The friendship, deep and pure, of Jonathan. And of course, as in all good stories, especially true stories, he gets the girl, Michal.
- The gorgeous, beautiful daughter of King Saul becomes his wife. And a right royal wedding, I'm sure, it was. Now, if this was a Hollywood production, the critics would slate it for being unrealistic and not true to life.
- [2 : 20] But I ask again the question, what happened next? Well, the whole edifice of success and its many trappings begins to crumble for David.
- Jealousy rears its ugly head. And it is the jealousy of a king. No doubt many were jealous. But the jealousy of a king is particularly dangerous.
- And it was no ordinary jealousy. It was an insane, barbaric, homicidal jealousy that consumed a salt.
- And so, David is in danger of his life. He must flee from all he holds dear. His family, his beautiful bride, his soulmate, Jonathan.
- We're told that he wept bitterly on departing from Jonathan. All the comforts and privileges of the royal house soon to become a distant and perhaps torturing memory.
- [3 : 24] And David begins the life of an outlaw. Where to run? Where will this fugitive turn? To whom can he turn? He is bereft of all human help and consolation.
- And in a twist, both bitter and dripping with irony, he seeks refuge in Gath. That's right. Goliath of Gath. The same Gath.

Out of the proverbial frying pan, methinks, heading to Gath for refuge. And so it turns out, death looms large.

The grave stares David in the fates. And this final fate, as it were, he cunningly avoids by, as we have read, feigning madness before the king of Gath.

And so this provides him the opportunity to escape death and his flight continues. And that flight, for the moment, ends, in as much as we've read, ends ignominiously in a cave designed for beasts, not men.

[4 : 42] How are the mighty fallen? From damsels salivating before the all-conquering hero to David salivating before the king of Gath.

From the acclaim of God's chosen people to the mockery and disdain of his Gentile enemies. From the palace to the cave. How are the mighty fallen?

And where is God? Where is God in this precipitous fall that David is experiencing? Can you imagine how David might have felt?

Can you imagine the words he might have directed to his seemingly indifferent Lord? Try just for a moment to imagine what he might have said to God.

Well, in fact, we don't need to imagine. Because David has left on record his response. We're going to read in Psalm 34. In fact, we'll read the whole of the psalm.

[5 : 50] And the psalm is presented to us precisely as David's response to these circumstances that he was living through. We read there at the beginning of the psalm in the introduction.

It's on page 561 of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech. Who drove him away and he left. So here we have it.

We don't need to imagine. David has provided for us his response to deep affliction. To great danger. To awful suffering.

How does he respond? Well, let's read the psalm. I will extol the Lord at all times. His praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord. Let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

Glorify the Lord with me. Let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord and he answered me. He delivered me from all my fears.

[6 : 49] Those who look to him are radiant. Their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called and the Lord heard him. He saved him out of all his troubles.

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him. And he delivers them. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Fear the Lord, you as saints.

For those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry. But those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. Come, my children. Listen to me. I will teach you the feet of the Lord.

Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days. Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil. To cut off the memory of them from the earth.

[7 : 48] The righteous cry out and the Lord hears them. He delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

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. This is David's response.

As he languishes in a cave. Being sought after by Saul. We want to consider this psalm. And it's a long psalm. There's much in it. So we are going to take a few weeks to do so. We are going to begin today by considering two sections.

[8 : 52] One this morning and one this evening. And this morning we'll consider the first three verses of the psalm. And I want you to do so very much with this context in mind of the occasion when David penned the psalm.

Because it informs so greatly the psalm itself. And we are able to profit so much from it when we appreciate the circumstances in which he wrote it.

How does David respond to a crisis? We have much to learn from this babbling lunatic.

At least the one who feigned such lunacy. Much to learn from this post-diluvian cave dweller. Much to learn concerning this most critical of matters.

The worship of the living and true God. And so let us learn. In these first three verses that we'll be considering this morning. Of David's song of praise.

[10 : 15] He addresses three matters concerning the worship of God. No doubt, depending on how we consider the verses, we could identify more. But three that I want to highlight.

Three matters concerning the worship of God. The when, the how, and the who. When are we to praise God? How are we to do so?

And who is to engage in this worship? So let's consider these matters. And again, I stress and encourage you to do so very much having in mind the circumstances that immediately precede the penning or composing of this psalm.

First of all then, when are we to praise God? Well, what does David say in verse number one? I will extol the Lord at all times. His praise will always be on my lips.

David's answer to this matter is very clear. It's very explicit. When are we to praise God? We are to do so at all times. His praise is always to be on our lips.

[11 : 20] And notice that the idea that is being suggested here is not simply all the time, but at all times in the sense of in every circumstance.

In every circumstance. What David says is whatever your circumstances, whatever your affliction, however difficult it is, the road that you are traveling along, it is a fitting and an appropriate time to extol the Lord, to praise His name.

And of course, this affirmation of David carries such huge weight in the light of what we have discovered concerning his circumstances. David is not sitting comfortably in his palace penning a poem.

David is not enjoying all the benefits of being a great king served on hand and foot. And so he scribbles away these lines that sound nice to sing and play along with his harp.

No, this is a man who has lost everything. This is a man who is being pursued for his very life. This is a man who is suffering greatly. And it is this man who instructs us, who encourages us, who expresses himself in this way, I will extol the Lord at all times.

[12 : 44] His praise will always be on my lips. David does not praise God only on being delivered, though he most assuredly does so on being delivered.

He praises God while he is running for his life, while he is gripped by fear at his impending fate. We've already sung Psalm 56, which was written by David on the same occasion or in the same circumstances.

And listen to what he says there in verses 3 and 4. When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise.

In God I trust. I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me? When I am afraid, I will trust. When I am afraid, I will praise.

But then very revealingly, that same portion of Psalm 56 suggests to us that this trust-inspired praise, when he is afraid, serves to dispel his fear.

[13 : 55] When he clings on to God in the midst of the affliction and the suffering and the fear and the terror and praises his God, in so doing, he experiences his fears being dispelled.

When are we to praise God? What of us? Let us praise God in the dark tunnel and not only on emerging into the light.

Let us worship God while struck down with illness and not only when healing has been granted. Let us exalt God while struggling with hurt and rejection and broken relationships and not only when restoration is granted.

But how is this possible? This is surely a difficult thing. And it is a difficult thing. How is this possible? Perhaps David can help us a little in answering this question.

I think for David it was possible to extol the Lord at all times, for the praise of God to ever be on his lips, for certainly two reasons that I think are suggested or identified in this psalm.

[15 : 10] First of all, there was in David a conviction concerning the goodness and power of God and God's commitment to David, to him. In Psalm 56, again, which I've commented and noted was written at the same time.

David poses the question, what can man do to me? You see, he's surrounded by wicked, dangerous, evil men seeking his great harm and yet he triumphantly poses this question, what can man do to me?

They can't touch me. You see, he is assured and he is persuaded and he is convinced that God is with him and that God will protect him.

His assurance and his praise is grounded in the conviction that God is with him and his ultimate and inescapable destiny is to walk in friendship with God always.

And there is no circumstance that can frustrate that divine intent for David. It's not that David has this intention or commitment though he does, it's that God has this intention that David would walk in friendship with him.

[16 : 33] And so, David's ability to praise God in every circumstance is grounded in that conviction that he has concerning God's faithfulness and God's goodness and God's power and very particularly God's commitment to David.

And this is necessary for us. Are you persuaded, are you convinced concerning God's commitment to you? That his commitment to you as his child if you are a Christian, if you are trusting in Jesus as your Lord and Savior and as such have become part of the family of God, are you persuaded concerning God's commitment to you?

I'm not asking at this moment regarding your commitment to him which can be very fragile and very fickle but are you persuaded concerning his commitment to you? For his commitment to you is unshakable.

And as we grasp this truth then we are helped in this difficult matter of praising God in all circumstances. But David is able to praise God in all circumstances not only because of his conviction concerning God's commitment to him but it is also aided by David's own formal, established, and solemn commitment to God.

David himself has responded to God's love and he has committed himself to God again in Psalm 56 which we've sung part of. We read there in verse 12 I am under vows to you O God I will present my thank offerings to you.

[18 : 19] You see David says whatever the circumstances however adverse however dangerous however miserable the circumstances I have made vows to you my God and I will fulfill my vows.

There was no get out clause in the vows that David made. The vow wasn't well I'll praise you if things go well I'll praise you when you bless me. No, the vow that David made was to praise him always.

He has made a commitment to God and he must keep that commitment. Recently we've had folk in the congregation who have got married. I had the privilege of being involved in Sandy and Helen's marriage and their vows were taken.

And can you imagine if one or other when things get tough say oh well I'm not going to keep these vows anymore because things are difficult. No, vows have been taken. And so in the difficult times they must be kept so with David.

Even in the cave, even being pursued by Saul, even as he loses the friendship of those he loves most or in any case the enjoyment of that friendship. He has made a commitment to God.

[19 : 27] And so this helps him to be true to that commitment and allows him to express himself in this way I will extol the Lord at all times.

His praise will always be on my lips. When are we to praise God?

But secondly as we move on to verse two, why are we to do so? What is the reason for our praise? And David is very clear that the reason for his praise is God himself.

My soul will boast in the Lord. Let the afflicted hear and rejoice. But very particularly as we begin to consider this, my soul will boast in the Lord.

The worship of David is grounded in and directed to the person of God. grounded in the perfection of his attributes. Grounded in the contemplation of his glory and majesty and power.

[20 : 38] Grounded in the appreciation of his grace and love. And for these reasons it is praise that will of necessity be enduring for these things do not change.

My soul will boast in the Lord. You see again the circumstances in which David pens these words throws great light on this determination of David.

What is his alternative to boasting in the Lord? Well he could boast in himself. Is this really an option for a man living in a cave?

Is this really an option for a man who feigns lunacy before his enemies? Can he really boast in himself? Perhaps when he had slayed Goliath there would have been the temptation to boast in himself.

He would have been foolish to do so. And he was spared from doing so. But now will he boast in himself? If his praise is a function of his own success then it will be a fickle thing.

[21 : 45] If it is to be heard only when all is well with David then it will soon cease. But his boast is in the Lord. The unchanging eternal living and true God.

And so we ask the question what of us? May our boasting be in the Lord. But if our boasting is in the Lord we will always have cause to boast.

If our boasting is in any other then we will soon fall short of reasons to boast. Notice also how this discovery of David that his external circumstances however dismal and painful and desperate do not lessen the glory and the worthiness of God to be worshipped is to serve as an encouragement to fellow sufferers.

Again we turn to the verse my soul will boast in the Lord let the afflicted hear and rejoice. It is as if David is saying you are also suffering greatly as I am.

Maybe he has in mind his fellow sufferers who we are going to make mention of just in a moment who are with him there in the cave. And he says to them you are suffering greatly I'm suffering greatly we're all suffering greatly but though you are suffering greatly this does not exclude you from the opportunity to participate in praising the Lord you also can join with God's people in praising his name in the midst of your suffering you are not excluded because of your predicament you are not excluded because of your pain you're not excluded because of what you're going through and is not the praise of the afflicted of especially sweet savour in the courts of heaven is that not so so we have the when of David's praise and indeed of our praise the why but finally also in verse 3

[24 : 01] David informs us concerning the who of worship who is to engage in this worship we read the verse glorify the Lord with me let us exalt his name together David now invites others to join with him in the praise of the Lord he is not content to sing alone he is not prepared to accept that others will remain silent he is not prepared to look on indifferent to others failing to praise God perhaps because of the suffering or affliction that they are enduring suffering affliction are not to silence those who are created for and called to the worship of God and so David invites and he has such moral authority to do so glorify the

Lord with me let us exalt his name together to whom are these words of invitation and exhortation addressed this is the question that we're wanting to answer who is to engage in this worship well David clearly does so but he invites others who does he invite who is he inviting well we can say and rightly so that in God's providence these words of invitation have echoed through the generations and today they are heard by this modest gathering here in Aberdeen and so these words are addressed to us they are addressed to you you are invited glorify the Lord with me let us exalt his name together who is to engage in the worship of the living and true God you are you are called you are invited you are challenged to do so whoever you are this is the invitation that is extended it to you and this invitation indeed we might call it a command demands a response how will you respond to this call glorify the

Lord with me let us exalt his name together but I want to just for a moment consider the original audience we are part of the audience so God has determined it but there is an original audience and again our consideration of when David writes this psalm is very helpful in informing us where is David when he writes this psalm well we can't know with absolute certainty the location but it seems reasonable given what we have before us that he is there in the cave still in danger still a fugitive still in desperate circumstances delivered in a measure certainly from death in Gath but still in a very difficult place and he pens these words and who are his fellow cave dwellers which is really the point that I want to get to as we draw things to a close well we've read in 1st

Samuel and we can do so again just to remind ourselves in 1st Samuel chapter 22 and verses 1 and 2 we're told who is with David there to whom I think we can reasonably conclude David addresses this invitation for the first time 1st Samuel chapter 22 verses 1 and 2 David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adulam when his brothers and his father's household heard about it they went down to him there and then what do we read all those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered round him but as other versions translate the final adjective discontented bitter in soul all who were in distress all in debt all who were bitter in soul these are those who make up the congregation to whom David addresses these words glorify the Lord with me let us exalt his name together what a motley crew the scum of the earth is what many would have considered them the rejected and oppressed and marginalized they are the ones

David calls to worship not the beautiful people in Jerusalem not the movers and shakers in the palace the distressed the discontented the bitter in soul praise God that it is so praise God that to such this invitation is extended to the likes of you and me are you in distress glorify the Lord with me are you in debt or discontented let us exalt his name together are you bitter in soul join in offering sweet praise to the Lord but this reality of those who are called to worship by David also constitutes a challenge to us to those who by grace are part of God's family it constitutes a challenge that we would go out into the highways and byways to reach a hurting suffering city with the call to worship to reach the distressed and the discontented and the bitter in soul not only those here present but those outside and there are many that the distressed would see

[30 : 05] Jesus the man of sorrows and familiar with suffering and find in him the one who suffered in their place on Calvary's tree that the discontented would see Jesus and find contentment and satisfaction in him our perfect and sufficient savior that the bitter in soul would see Jesus and as they put their trust in him might know the healing of their bitter soul and rejoice in the Lord I will extol the Lord at all times his praise will always be on my lips my soul will boast in the Lord let the afflicted hear and rejoice glorify the Lord with me let us exalt his name together let us pray let us pray for now