



World Christian Fellowship

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Psalms 34.

Do righteous suffer?

Psalms 34:1-22, *I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. ²My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; The humble shall hear of it and be glad. ³Oh, magnify the Lord with me, And let us exalt His name together. ⁴I sought the Lord, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears. ⁵They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces were not ashamed. ⁶This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, And saved him out of all his troubles. ⁷The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them. ⁸Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him! ⁹Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. ¹⁰The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing. ¹¹Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. ¹²Who is the man who desires life, And loves many days, that he may see good? ¹³Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit. ¹⁴Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it. ¹⁵The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And*

His ears are open to their cry. ¹⁶The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.¹⁷The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles. ¹⁸The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. ¹⁹Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the Lord delivers him out of them all. ²⁰He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken. ²¹Evil shall slay the wicked, And those who hate the righteous shall be condemned. ²²The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.

Background of the Psalm:

The events that inspired David to write Psalm 34 are found in **1 Samuel 18-21**.

David had killed Goliath and was the hero of all Israel. Saul was jealous as, due to his disobedience, Samuel had prophesied that his kingship would be given to another (15:28).

In Saul's mind David's the main contender so his life was under threat. Due to Jonathan's friendship David escapes, but he's in a desperate situation and makes a bad decision.

Abimelech the priest is nervous when David turns up as word had probably got out that Saul made attempts on David's life.

But David spins a story that he's on a 'secret mission' and needs provisions and weapons. The priest only has the consecrated bread but is assured that David and his men have all behaved themselves. He also has Goliath sword. Having got food and a weapon David is on his way. But David has lied and has looked to his own ingenuity rather than looking to the Lord!

Looking to put some distance between Saul and himself David heads for Gath in Philistine territory.

Perhaps he was thinking he can hire himself out to King Achish as a mercenary. But the problem of being the hero of all Israel is that David is easily identified by the King's officials (21:11). David, in desperation, pretends to be mad in the hope that the King will think he's a harmless loony and fortunately it works.

The King has David thrown out and David escapes to the cave at Adullam where he is among family and where various people in trouble or with grievance (probably against Saul) join him (22:1-2).

The structure of the Psalm:

- David praises God for his deliverance the benefits of that deliverance (**1-10**).

- The tone of the Psalm changes from a prayer of praise to a sermon (**11-22**).
- The fear of the Lord – how it is practised (**11-14**).
- The Lords attitude towards those who follow him which is seen in their deliverance **15-22**).

Imagine a day when Christians are being increasingly marginalized. They are not yet being physically persecuted in the west, but everywhere they turn, they are being insulted.

They are maligned.

They are regularly slandered.

Seems to be growing.

Among the influential, Christianity is not trending. If anything, Christianity is being increasingly blamed for various problems perceived in society.

The apostle Peter wrote to Christians in similar circumstances. They were not yet being physically persecuted, but they were facing the world's growing disapproval.

Insults,

slander,

cold shoulders.

Where did Peter turn, when he set his mind to put pen to paper and write them a letter?

He turned to Psalm 34.

Twice 1 Peter quotes Psalm 34.

1 Peter 2:3 and 1 Peter 3:10–12.

Which leads some scholars to think that Peter may have meditated at length on Psalm 34 as he prepared to write to these early Christians in their sufferings.

This makes sense.

The key link between Peter's Day, and ours, and Psalm 34 is

V 19, *Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the Lord delivers him out of them all.*

Prepare for Affliction

Seeing how Peter uses Psalm 34 helps us see the richness of what David is doing in Psalm 34. As Peter saw, Psalm 34 prepares us to suffer. It is not only a call for God's people to celebrate with David his deliverance from affliction, but also, as we do so, to prepare ourselves for our own afflictions, whether already present or coming.

V 1, *I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*

Why say "at all times"?

Because there are times when praising the Lord might seem unusual, or at least unexpected, times when we assume praise might cease.

When would that be?

Hard times.

Afflictions.

Yet, David, having come through such an affliction and says that he will bless the Lord at all times.

- Not just in the good times, when praise is easy.
- Not just when all seems right with the world.
- Not just those times, but at all times.

- When under threat,
- When it's hard,
- When it's uncertain.
- When it's painful,
- When it is pandemic,

Then, at that moment, in the downs of life, in the trials, in the pains, in affliction, there's all times David is talking about.

That's the context in which we should read verse 8.

V 8, *"taste and see that the Lord is good."*

1 Peter 2:3, *if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

Peter is appealing to what these embattled believed themselves have experienced in affliction — the very thing David calls us to in Psalm 34, to taste and see, in affliction, in the bad times, that the Lord is good.

To trust him against all odds.

Lean on God.

Rest in God when there seems to be no way out.

When things are bad, taste and see that God is good.

So, with that help from the apostle Peter on how to read this psalm, consider four truths from Psalm 34 for us in our generation, and in this pandemic.

1. God's people will suffer (V 19–22)

V 19, *Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the Lord delivers him out of them all.*

Don't move on too quickly.

Jesus said to His followers about afflictions.

John 16:33, *These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*

The apostle Paul went around to his church plants, as he gave them the basics of the Christian life.

Acts 14:22, *strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."*

To the Thessalonians, Paul writes about their afflictions.

1 Thessalonians 3:3–4, *that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. ⁴For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.*

Being God's people, "the righteous," is no promise of earthly ease. In fact, with it comes promises of affliction and not just "some" but "many." "Many are the afflictions of the righteous."

So, we might say that is poor treatment from an all-powerful God toward his people.

Why bother being righteous?

Verses 21–22 make clear that affliction serves two contrasting purposes for the righteous and for the wicked, for God’s people and for his enemies.

Verses 21–22, *Evil shall slay the wicked, And those who hate the righteous shall be condemned.* ²²*The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.*

Affliction ruins the wicked. It’s the end of their story.

But affliction makes the righteous and is not their end.
It reveals their true colours.

It has a humbling effect, rather than hardening effect.
Affliction has a purifying effect for the righteous, while having a punitive effect for the wicked.

The wicked will be condemned at the final judgment.
The righteous, though afflicted and through affliction will not be condemned, but the Lord Himself will redeem their life.

Who are “the righteous “in verse 15?

Who are God’s people, his “servants” in verse 22, his “saints” in verse 9?

Psalm 34 tells us far more about God's people than that they are righteous, but also what makes them righteous.

V 2, *My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; The humble shall hear of it and be glad.*

V 5, *They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces were not ashamed.*

V 7, *The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them*

V 9, *Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him*

V 8, *Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!*

V 22, *The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.*

V 10, *The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing.*

V 14, *Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.*

V 18, *The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.*

So, as the whole psalm implies, and as verse 19 makes explicit, God's people will suffer.

The afflictions of the righteous are many.

In our Church we take this with utter seriousness. We do not pretend that Christianity frees us from afflictions in this world.

In fact, we assume it brings more, for now, not less. Many afflictions.

Peter tells his readers.

1 Peter 4:1, *Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,*

1 Peter 4:12-13, *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.*

Expect it. Prepare for your heart for it.

Let us be armed.

Let us not be surprised.

Let us be ready to taste and see, in the bad times, how good our Lord is.

2. God's people "do good" while they wait (V 11–18)

The assumption is that deliverance from affliction does not come immediately. God is not the genie of the lamp who fulfills wishes the moment we ask.

He is God Almighty.

He rules the universe without our counsel.

He freely chooses to rescue the righteous, and does so on His timetable, not ours.

Verses 11–18 provide a dual clarification for the righteous in their "many afflictions."

First, the promise of divine rescue is not a promise of immediate rescue. Waiting in affliction is part of what makes it affliction. God means for his people to endure in suffering that doesn't go away right away.

1 Peter is explicit about this call to wait on God's timing.

1 Peter 1:6, *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,*

Meaning longer than you want, but small in relation to eternity.

1 Peter 5:6, *Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,*

1 Peter 5:10, *But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.*

So, first clarification: the promise of divine rescue is not a promise of immediate rescue.

Second: affliction and suffering are no excuse for evil. Rather, as we wait for God's rescue, Psalm 34 calls us to "do good."

Psalm 34 has two big parts.

Verses 1–10 is the call to worship and testimony time (I cried for help, God rescued me, rejoice with me).

Verses 11–22 are the teaching time (he shares lessons).

Verse 11 starts the new section.

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

Then, David appeals to us, to our desire for life (when death threatens) and for many days (when they seem few) and to see good (when facing evil).

What does David say?

Find your way to cope?

Lament?

Grumble?

Be authentic and air your grievances with God?

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

In other words, the pains of affliction are no excuse for evil.

The affliction of a pandemic, or unjust treatment at work, or childhood trauma, or being insulted because of your faith, is no reason for God's people to act like the devil.

Affliction is no excuse for gossip, or sinful anxiety, or sinful anger, or spiritual apathy.

In fact, affliction is a call, to God's people, for precisely the opposite.

A pandemic is no sign from God that we are on a break, and you have an excuse to be spiritually slack.

Rather, affliction rings in the ears of the righteous as a call to “do good” all the more, to keep our tongues from evil, and our hearts from unbelief.

Will our lights really shine and give glory to our Father in heaven, or not?

So, not only do the righteous face many afflictions, and wait in those afflictions, but they do good while they wait. The righteous are righteous in affliction. The righteous are righteous when threatened.

Peter to reach for this psalm to encourage his readers.

He says, to insulted, ill-treated Christians.

1 Peter 2:12, *having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

1 Peter 3:10-12, *For “He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. ¹¹ Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let*

him seek peace and pursue it. ¹²For 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.”

So David says to his people, and Peter to his, and now this psalm and 1 Peter say to us, affliction is no excuse for sin. In fact, affliction is a fresh call to do good.

A question for us all, in this moment, is what good are we doing as we wait in your affliction?

Have you let this affliction become an excuse or cause for sin, or spiritual apathy?

Are you doing good to others as you wait?

Have you done good, rather evil, as you have waited?

What might God be calling us to, in the weeks ahead, in our fatigue, as this affliction drags on?

3. God rescues his people resoundingly (V 20).

Resoundingly. Not barely, but fully and finally.

V 20, *He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken.*

But includes all the seemingly over-the-top language in the psalm.

Did you notice all the “alls” and “nones” of Psalm 34?

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

V 4, I sought the Lord, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears.

V 5, They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces were not ashamed.

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

V 9, Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him.

V 10, The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing.

V 17, The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles.

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

V 22, The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.

Delivered from all fears, all troubles, all afflictions.

Does God always deliver the righteous?

Answer:

V 19-20, Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the Lord delivers him out of them all. ²⁰He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken.

The most obscure part of this psalm for us today because we no longer attach much symbolic significance to bones.

But in the Bible, bones have all sorts of figurative meaning, depending on context. We not only hear of “flesh and bone,” referring to the human body, or to kinship, or of bones being buried, bones being the last remaining part of the body once the flesh has rotted or been consumed.

Seeing bones, through the skin of someone living, is a sign of starvation or sickness or wasting away. Bones also refer to the deepest part of humans.

Psalm 6:2, *Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled.*

In Genesis and Exodus, two strange mentions of bones.

First, there are no more famous bones in Scripture than Joseph’s. The book of Genesis ends with Joseph making the sons of Israel swear to bring up his bones from Egypt to the

promised land when God delivers them (**Genesis 50:25**). When Israel makes its exodus, the pledge is fulfilled.

Exodus 13:19, *And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you."*

Not just Genesis, but the book of Joshua also ends with Joseph's bones.

Joshua 24:32, *The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph.*

In the New Testament, Hebrews celebrates this as a great act of faith.

Hebrews 11:22, *By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.*

How is it an act of faith?

In the very midst of it all, just breaths before the mention of Joseph's bones in Exodus 13, comes instructions about the Passover lamb in Exodus 12.

Exodus 12:46, *In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones.*

There is something sacred, it seems, about the bones. But the picture is not yet complete.

Then we come to Ezekiel 37 and his vision of a valley of dry bones. The bones being the remaining part of bodies that once lived. The dry bones represent death, and yet not utter devastation. Something remains. Bones remain.

God tells Ezekiel to prophesy, and flesh returns to the bones, and then breath returns to the restored bodies, and an army of God's people is raised from the grave.

In other words, intact bones, kept bones, unbroken bones, represent the hope of resurrection. God, in his perfect timing, will reassemble the bones, and restore the flesh, and give breath, and bring dry bones back to full life with resurrection power.

Psalm 34, God keeping the bones of the righteous is a promise of resurrection. He keeps them to restore them.

Resurrection does not mean no death. In fact, it requires it. You must first die to be brought back to life again. Just as deliverance does not mean no trouble. There must first be trouble before you can be delivered from it.

So, Psalm 34 does not say the righteous won't die, that they won't suffer in the flesh, and die in the flesh.

But it does promise that God will raise them.

All their bones will be kept which is figurative, not literal. Not one will be broken.

A righteous man may indeed break bones and even die with broken bones. The point is God will keep his bones is that God will raise him.

God will put him back together and give him flesh again and breath again. Affliction, even if it kills him, will not defeat the righteous in the end.

The reason Joseph cared about his bones is that he believed God would raise him back to life one day.

The reason God instructed his people not to break the bones of the Passover lamb is that one day God would raise the true Passover Lamb back to life.

John 19:36, *For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken."*
reports, at the death of Jesus,

If we know the meaning of bones, we say at that point in John's Gospel (if it hasn't already been clear enough), Jesus is going to rise. He won't stay dead. These unbroken bones are a sign.

God is keeping them. God will raise them.

Does God always deliver the righteous?

The answer is a resounding yes!

From all fears.

From all troubles.

From all afflictions.

God will keep all his bones. Not even one will be broken. Which means there will be fears, troubles, afflictions, even death and there will be resurrection on the other side.

God will deliver his people not in their preferred timing, but His.

If we only knew, in our afflictions, however severe, what a resounding rescue we have coming, we would be so much more ready to bear up under our momentary trials.

4. God's people celebrate Him together. (V3)

V 3, *“Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!”*

What does it mean to “magnify” God?

It does not mean to make him look bigger than He is. As if when we gather to sing His praises, we make Him look big.

That would be to magnify like a microscope. A microscope takes tiny objects and makes them look bigger than they are so that our weak eyes can see them.

Rather, when we join our voices (and lives) together in praise of our God, we magnify Him like a telescope. Telescopes take massive objects that look small to our frail, human eyes and make them look more like what they really are!

Enormous beyond our capacity to comprehend. That is more like the magnifying we do when we gather in worship, and the kind of magnifying we do, for each other and for our world, through our words and our lives.

God is enormous beyond our capacity to comprehend.

Glorious beyond our ability to fully appreciate.
Powerful beyond our capacity to measure.

But tragically, God often seems small to our frail and fallen human eyes.

We do not see Him as HE is.

We need help.

From David.

From Peter.

From each other.

We gather weekly as a church for that kind of magnification.
To remind each other what's most real, most precious, and glorious.

In our lives, and through our words, we want to magnify the truth and beauty and worth of God in Christ to each other, and to a world that does not see reality as it should.

Magnified in Our Gladness

There's one last component here we can't overlook.

David is not just reporting the facts.

Psalm 34 is not a detached, objective report.

David is celebrating. He is boiling over. He has tasted God's goodness in bad times. He is happy.

God is not so magnified in our words, and our lives, when we simply report the truth, as He is when we rejoice in Him.

When we are glad in Him, He looks good.

When we celebrate Him and His goodness to us, and all fear him and seek Him, He is magnified.

Especially when we taste and see He is good in the midst of many afflictions.