

Being an Authentic Church

Session 4

May 5, 2024

Worshiping God

The Point: When we worship God together, we experience joy in His presence.

Session Passages: Psalm 34:1-3,8-10,15-18

The Setting for Psalm 34. After David had killed the Philistine giant Goliath (1 Sam. 17), he became a hero to his people (18:6-7). However, King Saul became jealous and tried to kill David (vv. 8-11). Eventually David fled to Gath, one of the Philistine cities (21:10-15). When King Achish's servants informed the king of the high regard with which the Israelites viewed David as a warrior (v. 11), David then feared for his life and pretended to be insane. His pretense worked and he was sent away from Gath (1 Sam. 21:12–22:1).

Psalm 34:1-3

Connection to The Point: David praised God for His greatness.

Bless (v. 1). The literal sense of the Hebrew word described bending or kneeling as in worship. In Scripture sometimes people bless other people (Gen. 27:25-29; 1 Sam. 25:33). However, the usual form of the verbs for blessing imply that true blessing can only come from God. David used this word to indicate giving honor to God for who He is and for all that He does to care for His people. David wrote that he would respond to God in this way “at all times,” implying that he would do so regardless of the situation.

The Lord (v. 1). Throughout this psalm David used God's personal name *Yahweh*. *Yahweh* is the name God revealed to Moses at the burning bush (YHWH; see Ex. 3:13-15). This name stresses God's unique personal, covenant relationship with His chosen people (Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 5:1). *Lord* is a substitution for God's name *Yahweh*. The substitution follows the practice of the Jews, who substituted the word *Adonai* (meaning “lord” or “master”) for *Yahweh* because they feared saying God's name lest they mispronounce it. When *Lord* occurs (in small caps) it is an indicator that the word being referenced is *Yahweh*.

His praise will always be on my lips (v. 1). Using Hebrew parallelism (parallel statements emphasizing the same thought; a common style of poetry in the Psalms), David emphasized his words with synonyms for both “bless”—*praise* and “at all times”—*will always be on my lips*. To praise someone is to proclaim the excellence of that person. Blessing and praising God should be a daily habit among believers for all that God does for them.

Boast (v. 2). To *boast* is to praise. In this context it refers to praising God. The term “hallelujah” comes from this word and literally means “praise Yah[weh].” Scripture warns against bragging about ourselves and admonishes people to only boast in the Lord their God (Jer. 9:23-24; 1 Cor. 1:28-31). David knew this. He realized that his deliverance from King Achish was not due to his own ability but only to God's gracious intervention.

Humble (v. 2). The Hebrew term for *humble* is also used to describe those who are “lowly” (Ps. 76:9), “poor” (Isa. 61:1), or “oppressed” (Ps. 9:12). David had been oppressed when he was running from King Saul and facing danger in Gath. But instead of bragging about his acting ability, David demonstrated a humble spirit as he praised God. He hoped that by

sharing his testimony of how God had delivered him that others like him—*the humble*—would join him in worshiping the Lord. We follow David’s encouragement as we meet with other believers to worship and praise God.

Hear (v. 2). To *hear* is to listen in a way that leads to obedience. Those who heard David’s praise of what the Lord had done for him would realize God’s greatness and exalt Him (v. 3).

Glad (v. 2). To be *glad* is to be joyful and leads one to rejoice or make merry.

Proclaim (v. 3). The Hebrew word for *proclaim* was used in a physical sense of making something to grow, for example, letting one’s hair grow long (Num. 6:5) or raising children (Isa. 1:2). This term came to include the figurative sense of praising or extolling someone’s character or accomplishments. That is how David used this word here after God rescued him from his enemies.

Exalt (v. 3). David used another instance of poetic parallelism, “proclaim” . . . *exalt*. David repeated his call for others to join him in praising God. The Hebrew term for *exalt* means to lift up in the sense of proclaiming someone’s high status or qualities.

His name (v. 3). In biblical times *names* were more than just titles and identifiers. They also pointed to the desired or actual character of a person. For example, the angel told Joseph to name Mary’s son “Jesus” (which means “the Lord saves”) “because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). In Psalm 34 David was probably referring to the unique and awesome nature of God’s character and His amazing works.

Together (v. 3). David’s desire was that others would join him in praising and exalting the Lord.

Psalm 34:8-10

Connection to The Point: David thanked God for the good things He provided.

Taste and see (v. 8). After calling on others to join him in praising the Lord, David shared his account of God’s delivering him from danger (vv. 4-6). He concluded his testimony with a statement of what he had learned from his experiences (v. 7). He then used two physical images to illustrate a spiritual admonition. David urged his audience to put God to the test by depending on Him when they needed help. That was the idea of *tasting*. David knew that when they had experienced God’s gracious provision, they would gain personal knowledge of (*see*) God’s gracious character and unlimited power.

Good (v. 8). The Hebrew word for *good* was used in spiritual sense to describe what is morally right. Of course, God not only knows what is morally right and pure; He is the perfection of all that is true and holy. Perhaps David also was implying that God is good because He can always be trusted to do what is right. Those who trust God (“taste”) would learn from their experience (“see”) more about God’s good character. Peter quoted from this passage when he urged those who had put their faith in Jesus (and thus experienced the Lord’s goodness) to continue to trust Him as they sought to grow in their faith (1 Pet. 2:2-3).

Happy (v. 8). The first psalm opens with the Hebrew word for *happy* (Ps. 1:1). Proverbs 29:18 uses this word in a similar way. Both passages state that this kind of happiness comes from the habit of trusting and obeying God (Pss. 40:4; 89:15; 112:1; 119:1).

Takes refuge (v. 8). While God loves all people (John 3:16), only those who trust (take refuge in) Him will experience His gracious and fully adequate provision. Thus David urged others to follow his example and put their trust in the Lord. They would then be happy as God met their needs and cared for them.

His holy ones (v. 9). The basic idea of the Hebrew word *holy* is to identify that which is uncommon or sacred (set apart). Because “The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth” (Isa. 40:28) who is set apart from His creation, He is uniquely holy. However, God also makes people holy as He purifies them and calls them to His service (Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:15), for example, Aaron and the other priests (Ex. 29:44). Peter wrote that God has chosen believers to be “a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9). Those who put their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord become part of God’s “holy nation” by sharing in the righteousness Jesus provides (2 Cor. 5:21) and being adopted into God’s family (Eph. 1:3-6). In addition to receiving this holy status, God also calls His saints to conduct themselves in a holy manner (1 Pet. 1:14-16).

Fear (v. 9). The Hebrew term for *fear* can mean to be afraid of someone or something. For example, Moses told the Israelites, “Don’t be afraid” of God after they had experienced displays of His power on Mount Sinai (Ex. 20:20). However, Moses then told the people to “fear” God. The difference in the two attitudes depends on a correct perception of God. At first seeing God’s display of power caused the Israelites to be afraid that He would use His power to destroy them. But when the people saw God’s power through the lens of faith, they were able to respond with reverence (*fear*), worship, trust, and obedience. In verses 11-14 of Psalm 34, David taught his listeners how to demonstrate their “fear of the Lord” (v. 11).

Lack nothing (v. 9). From his own experience David knew that God was both able and willing to take care of His people. However, David also knew that God’s people must believe in and trust Him. Note how David urged the people to respond to what they already knew about God: “Taste and see” (v. 8), take “refuge in him” (v. 8), “fear the Lord” (v. 9). When God’s people trust and obey Him, they will lack nothing that they truly need in order to serve Him. Both Jesus (Matt. 6:33) and Paul (Phil. 4:19) stressed this same truth.

Young lions . . . those who seek the Lord (v. 10). Strong *young lions* might go hungry when they were unable to find game. However, those who *seek* (trust and obey) the Lord will always have what they truly need (Ps. 23:1-4). Reemphasizing what he had said (in 34:9), David assured those who fear the Lord that they “will not lack any good thing” (v. 10). Therefore, they can and should always be thanking, praising, and exalting God for His faithful care and for the good things that He has provides (1 Thess. 5:18).

Psalm 34:15-18

Connection to The Point: God watches over His people and hears their cries for help.

The eyes of the Lord . . . his ears (v. 15). When the biblical authors wrote about God, they often described Him using physical images, such as “eyes” or “ears.” This is known as using anthropomorphic language. Other biblical examples include His “right hand” (Ex. 15:6) and “the arm of the Lord” (Isa. 53:1). We know that “God is spirit” (John 4:24) and has no physical body. The biblical writers used these human images to convey spiritual truths, such as the fact that the Lord sees our needs and hears us when we pray.

The righteous (v. 15). Scripture teaches that God is righteous in what He does (Jer. 9:24; Dan. 9:14). God gave the Israelites His law (encapsulated in the Ten Commandments, Ex. 20) so that they knew how to live in a covenant relationship with Him. Those who sought to live in obedience (though imperfectly) to God’s law were referred to as being *righteous*. One of the themes of the book of Proverbs is that the wise will seek righteousness because God always

takes care of those who are righteous (Prov. 11:30; 18:10). Ultimately, God sent Jesus to be the perfect fulfillment of His law (Matt. 5:17) and the complete, final sacrifice for sin (Heb. 9:24-28). Under the new covenant inaugurated in Jesus's atoning sacrifice, through our faith in Christ God exchanges our sinfulness for Christ's perfect righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 2:8-9).

Eyes . . . are on . . . ears are open (v. 15). God is all-knowing (omniscient), so He knows all that occurs within His creation. However, David emphasized that God pays particular attention to and cares for the righteous.

Their cry for help (v. 15). Not only does God observe what is happening to the righteous, He is always listening for their cry for help. David was referring to the time when he "sought the Lord" and God "answered" his cry and "rescued" him (v. 4). Later in his life David encouraged the one "who is faithful" to pray (Ps. 32:6), knowing that God would protect and deliver him (vv. 6-7).

The face of the Lord (v. 16). David used another human way of describing God's constant awareness of our thoughts and actions. When someone turns his face to us as we talk to him, we know that we have his full attention. When the righteous cry out to the Lord, they always have His full attention.

Set against those who do what is evil (v. 16). *Evil* refers to that which causes adversity, affliction, calamity, misery, mischief, and grief. Just as God is aware of the prayers and actions of the righteous who obey His commands, so too He is aware of those who in their rebellion and arrogance follow their own evil ways. However, God is *set against* the unrighteous. Rather than receiving His blessing, they will ultimately receive His judgment (Matt. 25:31-33,41-46).

Remove all memory (v. 16). To *remove* means to cut off. The Hebrew term was used to describe the making of a covenant, during which an animal would be sacrificed. The animal was cut into pieces and those making the covenant walked between the pieces (Gen. 15), swearing that if the parties making the agreement broke the covenant may they be cut to pieces just like the animal. Though God is the God of love (Ps. 32:10; 1 John 4:8) and mercy (Lam. 3:22; Heb. 4:16), He is also the God of justice (Ps. 45:6). We all want to be remembered after we are gone. That is why we create tombstones. However, David pointed out that not only will God execute His justice against "those who do what is evil," He will also erase *all memory* of them from the face of the earth.

Cry out (v. 17). To *cry out* in the Hebrew literally means "to shriek." The righteous seek the Lord for their deliverance. While we can always cry out to God in our individual prayers, we can also meet together to share our needs and to pray for one another (Eph. 6:18; Jas. 5:16). We should follow the example of the first believers to meet and ask for God's guidance and power (Acts 1:12-14; 20:36).

The Lord hears, and rescues them (v. 17). David referred his listeners back to his testimony (v. 4) and completed his thought that God always sees and hears the cries of "the righteous" (v. 15). Not only does the Lord see and hear, He acts in His limitless power to answer their prayers. To *rescue* means to snatch away or deliver from one's enemies.

From all their troubles (v. 17). One of the basic guidelines for correctly understanding the message of each Scripture passage is to clarify the context. If we fail to follow this guideline, we could assume that these words mean that faithful believers will never have to suffer, at least not for very long. Some use passages like this to teach that we must simply believe and pray, and God will heal all our diseases, provide every material thing we want, and give us great success in every endeavor. The problem is that such a concept fails to take into account the context of such verses in light of other passages of Scripture. Though Job was a righteous man (Job 1:1), he suffered greatly (chaps. 1-37). Though Paul faithfully fulfilled his mission as the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul suffered greatly for the gospel (2 Cor. 11:24-29), and God even allowed Satan to attack him with a thorn in the flesh (12:6-9). Though He is God in the flesh (John 1:14), Jesus was rejected by God's chosen people (vv. 10-11) and suffered throughout His earthly ministry, eventually dying on a Roman cross (Matt. 27:33-50). The overall message of Scripture is not that our prayers are our ticket to getting all we

want (Jas. 4:1-3). Rather, the clear message of the Bible is that we are to love God with every part of our being (Matt. 22:37), seek His will (6:10) and His righteous ways (v. 33a), and trust Him to supply what He considers to be our true needs in ways that bring Him the most glory (Matt. 6:33b; Phil. 4:19). David went on to say that the “one who is righteous has many adversities” (Ps. 34:19).

The Lord is near (v. 18). Other people may fail us in our times of need. However, those who stay focused on the Lord (v. 5), who fear Him (vv. 7,9,11), and who consistently choose the way of righteous living (vv. 13-15) can be confident that the Lord is always near (v. 7) and ready to answer when they cry out (v. 17).

The brokenhearted . . . those crushed in spirit (v. 18). Both of these phrases could refer to a physical kind of suffering. However, here they probably point to an inward brokenness caused by the kind of undeserved oppression such as David had faced from King Saul.

He saves (v. 18). As Christians, when we hear of a person being saved, we initially think of an individual being saved from their lost and sinful state by putting their faith in Christ (Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9). However, in Old Testament times the Hebrew term referred to being rescued from difficult and dangerous circumstances, particularly those caused by powerful enemies (Job 5:15; Ps. 59:2). To be saved by the Lord meant to know His *shalom*, His peace—experiencing an overall state of well-being (Num. 6:24-26).