

This morning we continue our summer sermon series. A Summer with the Word, Bible passages to learn and live by. Today we are looking at Psalm 34:8, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.'

I love reading the Psalms because in the Psalms I find an outlet for many different emotions. The Psalms give comfort and strength when we are going through times of trial – Psalm 23, 'The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want'. They also allow us to express our feelings of frustration and anger as in Psalm 22 verse one, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?' Psalm 34 enables us to express another emotion, that of thanksgiving.

The first three verses of the psalm are an invitation—a call to worship. It begins with David lifting his heart in worship to God. He says, 'I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.'

David wanted to praise the Lord "at all times". He said praise '...shall continually be in my mouth.' It is easy to praise God when the sun is shining and everything is going well, but David wanted to praise God at all times, in all circumstances. The Apostle Paul says something similar to the believers in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 18, 'give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.' Paul, like David, is not saying we should give thanks for everything that happens to us, but rather that we should give thanks in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. Even in difficult and trying circumstances we can give thanks and we can learn to trust.

This psalm, like many in the Psalter, begins as personal praise and then spreads as it is shared and joined by others. What was individual devotion is now sung by many as corporate worship. David is not content to praise God by himself for his rescue—he wants the people of God to join him. As we help and encourage others to look to God, to acknowledge God and praise him; as we share what God has done for us to encourage others to look to him and trust in him, God is glorified.

In verses 4-6 David shares his testimony. He says, 'I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed. This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble.'

When we find ourselves in difficult situations what do we do? Do we say, "God, I thought following you would be easy"? "Why am I going through these difficulties? What is the point of going to church? What is the point of praying?" Notice what David did. He sought the Lord. He looked to the Lord. He called out to the Lord. And what did God do? God answered him, took away his fears. God gave him a radiant smile. God rescued him from his troubles; and God is able to do the same for us. As we look to him, we too can have radiant faces rather than sad or miserable faces; reminding me of that lovely hymn, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim In the light of his glory and grace." As we turn our eyes towards Jesus, even in the middle of trials and hardship, we begin more and more to reflect his radiance and attractiveness. One good reason we can be radiant, even when facing trials and hardships, is the fact that the Lord is with us. In verse seven, David says, 'The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.' This is a truth we easily forget.

In verse eight, David invites his followers, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.' David wanted them to experience what he knew to be true, that the Lord is good. David's testimony can be our testimony. His invitation to others 3000 years ago is the invitation we can give today. It is the Gospel invitation – 'taste and see that the Lord is good'. We have to taste, to believe, before we discover that the Lord is good.

Tasting is one of our five senses. Seeing is another. We see the goodness of God powerfully displayed in the created world. Remember in Genesis 1, after each creative act, God "saw" that it was good. And at the end of the creation story, God saw that creation was not just good, but that it was "very good." Psalm 34 encourages us to experience God for ourselves and to open our eyes and see the goodness of God that is all around us.

Verse eight ends with the words, 'Happy are those who take refuge in him.' The word translated here as 'take refuge' means "to hide oneself"; bringing to mind an image of a small child wrapped in its parent's arms -- protected, warm, loved. The result? Happiness. The word 'happy' occurs twenty-five times in the Psalter. Some translations render the word as "blessed," others as "happy." Another option is "content." Taking refuge in God -- being protected, warm, and loved -- can result in a deep, inner sense of contentment, a feeling in the very depth of our being that all is well. Content, indeed, are those who allow themselves to be wrapped in the arms of God.

Finally, David says in verse nine, 'O fear the Lord, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want.' To 'fear the Lord' means to have a right attitude to God in our everyday life, to reverence him and obey him from the heart. David is not talking about a cringing fear of someone cruel or someone who is very strict. No, to fear the Lord is learning to live in wonder and awe of our amazing God, the One we love to obey and the One we fully trust.

If we put God first in our lives, if we get our priorities in the right order, the Lord promises that we will "lack no good thing". This doesn't mean we will always have what we want. It doesn't mean that all our prayers will be answered in exactly the way we might expect. But it does mean we can trust the Lord to take care of us. He is our loving Heavenly Father. 'O taste and see that the Lord is good.'

Let us pray, Almighty God we ask you to guide and inspire us to put aside our differences as we seek to serve you. Help us to reach out as the Body of Christ to all who remain outside, especially those who feel unworthy or too sinful. Give us through your grace opportunities to invite them into our fellowship so that they may taste and see that the Lord is good. In Jesus' name, Amen.