

Psalm 34 – The LORD Hears! (part 1 of 3)

Introduction – This is one of the few psalms among the 150 psalms that provide the reader with a context. The context is "A *Psalm* of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed." David was anointed by the LORD as the next king of Israel after King Saul. King Saul found out and was obsessed with thwarting the will of God in David's life. Killing David was the best way to stop God since he knew that he could not touch God. Therefore, David had to endure the persecution and hatred of King Saul who used all the power at his disposal as king to capture and kill David. David had to flee for his life by hiding in all the cities and caves in Israel. But it was to no avail as King Saul was relentless in his pursuit. Everywhere David went, someone would report to Saul where he was hiding. Saul would bring his elite soldiers numbering in the thousands to capture David. Finally, David had to hide outside of Israel in enemy territory to stop Saul.

The foreign territory that suited David was the Philistines. The words in the context are found in **1 Samuel 21:10-15** (KJV), "And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath. **11** And the servants of Achish said unto him, *Is not this David the king of the land? did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?* **12** And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath. **13** And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. **14** Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore *then* have ye brought him to me? **15** Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this *fellow* to play the mad man in my presence? shall this *fellow* come into my house?"

Achish was the name of the King of Gath. Abimelech is not a name but a title, just like Pharaoh is not a name but a title for the king of Egypt. David had to pretend to be a mad man to get himself out of trouble; otherwise Achish would kill him where he was. He feigned madness to save himself and his men from being killed by the larger Philistine army of Achish. Although David employed the manner of man by feigning madness to save himself and his men, he knew that the real help was from the LORD. David fulfilled his human responsibility at the spur of the moment and did not tempt the LORD by challenging Achish to kill him. David was the LORD's anointed and was invincible until God's will in his life was fulfilled! This act of David is not a license for believers to lie or cheat to get themselves out of trouble. David deceived out of fear and it was wrong for him to do what he did. God kept David safe not because of his fear and deception but because God's plan for his life to be the next king of Israel was not completed yet. God used David despite his transgression, just as God is using all of us today despite our transgressions. God does not condone sin.

David testified of God's nearness in his life despite his lack of faith and lie in order to save himself. David learned his lesson and he penned this psalm as a testimony of that.

I. **The Praise from Being Heard (vs. 1-3)** – David began this psalm by blessing the LORD. Men like David, who are God's children, are able to bless the LORD. The word “bless” has the idea of praise. David praised the LORD for saving him and protecting him. When a believer like David realized that despite his lack of faith and transgression the LORD still wanted to bless and use him for His purpose and glory, he could not help but bless (praise) the LORD. We know this because David added the frequency of his blessing - "at all times." It was not only in times of plenty and safety when anyone can praise the LORD but even in times of failure and disappointment. When a believer like David, who loves the LORD with all his heart, fails the LORD, he will surely repent and draw closer to the LORD! When he experiences the LORD's forgiveness and comfort, he will spontaneously bless the LORD with heartfelt thanksgiving and gratitude. It definitely includes this particular context of fear that led to deception to get out of trouble instead of trusting in the LORD. David had a personal relationship with the LORD who is his Lord and Saviour. He had entered into a covenantal relationship with the LORD when he accepted Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour. This word is used 16 times throughout this 22 verse psalm. The emphasis is not on the power of the LORD, otherwise the word used to describe the LORD would have been God. In fact, the term "God" is not used here at all!

Using synonymous parallelism, David emphasized his great desire to praise the LORD continuously in all that he said, wherever he went and in whatever conditions he found himself in. The grace and mercy of the LORD is the basis of David's praise; he knew he had transgressed and yet the LORD still protected him from King Saul and the Philistines! Hiding in Philistine territory because of Saul's unceasing pursuits was a torment that would crush anyone's soul. Yet David was kept safe by the LORD and he knew it.

Verse 2 (synthetic parallelism) – Thus, David testified that his soul would make her boast in the LORD. The word for "boast" is where we get the word "hallelujah." It means to rave and tell the world with gusto how great the LORD is. The person whom David wanted to emphasize was the LORD and not himself. David was a great man and a great king. The nation of Israel looked up to David and viewed him as one of the best, if not the best, king Israel ever had. Yet David declared without hesitation that he wanted to boast in the LORD! He knew that he was nothing without the LORD. It was the LORD who made him to be who he was. It was the LORD who gave him life, and the privilege to serve as a shepherd and later as the king of God's people, Israel! This is the sort of humility that all believers need to have in order to praise the LORD in a manner that is pleasing to Him. Half-hearted and sporadic praises whereby God's glory is shared with the believer is robbing God and shows contempt to God. God will reject such half-hearted worship. Humility in the believer who is used by the LORD is the essence of genuine praise.

Using synthetic parallelism, David revealed that the humble would hear of his testimony of the LORD and be glad. The word "glad" means "rejoice". He was very happy that the LORD is praised and elevated and he was forgotten and reduced to nothing. This ought to be the same for all believers. That is why David declared that "the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad." Like-minded humble believers are able to identify themselves with a man like David. They will also boast of the LORD like David. They might phrase it differently but it is the same kind of humility that is real and can be felt in their lives. An example is John the Baptist who said that Christ must increase and he must decrease (John 3:30).

Verse 3 (synonymous parallelism) – When David boasted of the LORD, he did not want to do so alone. He asked all who are humble to "magnify the LORD with me." Those who have a dynamic and personal relationship with the LORD cannot keep it in and to themselves. They will want to praise the LORD publicly and will do so with as many of God's people, like them, as possible! This is the beauty and infectious nature of having a humble and genuine relationship with the LORD. This is a believer who cares only for the glory of God. He does not care for his own name but that the name of Christ is elevated above his own. David wanted his people of Israel to join him in magnifying, i.e. make great, the Name of the LORD. How can a believer make great the Name of the LORD? The only way to do it is to show the world how great a salvation God has done in his life in Christ. The old man has been replaced by the new man who is now in Christ. Old bad habits disappear and new godly habits are formed. He is able to stop his smoking addiction and removes all the paraphernalia associated with smoking from his life and home. He resolves his drinking issue by disposing all the alcohol at home. If he has shares in any vineyard or he owns a vineyard, then he will want to sell them and the vineyard as a new man in Christ. If he loves to gamble, he will stay away from all gambling temptations and replace his more available free time with Christian activities like attending Christian fellowships, church camps and Bible Studies. His addiction to computer games will cease henceforth and he removes the games from his computer to free himself from temptations to play. His colleagues at work will see the huge difference in his life because he is now more helpful and friendly, no longer motivated by money and promotion. He lives a holy life as a godly witness for Christ.

The believer gathers together with God's people in praise every Lord's Day which is now the most important day of his week. He delights in coming to pray with God's people. He spends time in church and he loves it because he is home with his God-given family. He knows that these are all God's children and he will spend eternity with them because of what Christ has done for all of them. There is an indescribable affinity that he has with these "strangers" whom he did not know before his conversion. Yet he feels closer to them than his friends and family whom he has known for much longer! This is how he magnifies the LORD; and it

is definitely not limited to three hours on Sunday, but it is a day by day joy and gladness because he is a Christian!

Using synonymous parallelism, David reiterated the wonder of exalting the LORD. To exalt the person of the LORD is to exalt His Name! We cannot separate the Name of the LORD which is Jesus Christ from the Person of Christ. To obey the Word of God is to exalt the name of the LORD!

II. **The Results of Hearing (v. 4-7)** – David's declaration is very significant. He shares his reason for praising the LORD! It is the fact that he sought the LORD and the LORD heard him. It is as simple as that. The word "sought" has the idea of seeking diligently till one finds. He will not stop and will not seek half-heartedly. His determination to seek the LORD has only one conclusion and that is until he finds Him. He will do whatever it takes to ensure that the LORD hears him. If he needs to repent of a sin, he will do so with all his heart. If he has to obey silently and continue to live the life of a fugitive without home and safety but only in the LORD, he will do it. If he has to stop murmuring and still praise the LORD despite the adverse circumstances of life, from living in a palace to living and hiding in caves, he will do it. David endured all that was thrown at him and more as he sought the LORD. The LORD will always hear the cry of His children, especially when they cry to him for help in time of need and from a position of holiness and humility, like David. Many of us equate hearing with action. When the LORD does not come to our aid immediately and the trial is prolonged, we tend to quiver with impatience. Impatience might lead to murmuring and we would cross the line to faithlessness. David waited and continued to seek the LORD till the LORD delivered him. And the LORD did!

Using synthetic parallelism, David added that the scope of the LORD help was to deliver him from all his fears! The verb "to deliver" means "to snatch away." The LORD will snatch fear away from David's heart! David was alone and in the foreign land of the Philistines who were mortal enemies of Israel and had also heard of David's greatness in killing many Philistines. To say that David had real reasons to be afraid is to put it very mildly! David had many fears: the fear of his parents being taken as hostages to lure him into the snare of King Saul; the fear of being captured and killed before God's will could be accomplished in his life; the fear of losing his wives and children; the fear of his men being killed as they trusted him and followed him; the fear of being cast away by God as his trials seemed to get from bad to worse. David hid insides caves in Israel, but he was in Israel. He hid in cities that he helped kept safe but they turned against him. As a last resort, he had to hide in enemy territory not knowing when the enemies would slaughter all of them as they were definitely outnumbered. The LORD delivered him out of them all. David had peace and best of all he experienced the real presence of the LORD in his life. All believers will also have this experience if they would also seek after Him with perseverance the way David did.

What do people fear the most in life? Is it not death? Believers need not fear death as death equals going home to our heavenly Father. Are you afraid of going home? Life in Christ on earth is a life of service. Death for every believer is the end of service. Going home to heaven is the time of sweet eternal rest from the hard labours of service for Christ on earth. It is joy and gladness and praise. Do not fear, for the LORD is always very near all His children.

Verse 5 (synonymous parallelism) – Using the third person, David exhorted all who would follow in his steps to experience seeking the LORD and having the LORD hear their prayers. The verb "to look" means "to look intently with delight." The perspective of a loving and gracious and personal LORD will bring deep joy to every heavy heart. David experienced a heart that was lifted to the heavenly realms of peace and safety where the LORD dwells. His heavy downcast countenance that was heavily burdened with fear was lifted and transformed into one of brightness and quiet content. The circumstances around David did not change. He was still hiding in dangerous Philistine territory. King Saul still wanted him dead at all costs. Yet David's face was lightened! He had changed from within his soul, his trust in the LORD had deepened and he was confident that the LORD would surely keep him safe till His will was accomplished in his life. No man could touch or hurt him without his heavenly Father's permission. This is true for all who are humble and who seek the LORD diligently.

The synonymous parallelism used by David states the same experience but from a negative perspective. The faces of believers who seek the LORD will never be disappointed. They will definitely find the LORD. The LORD will always come to the aid of His children regardless of the nature of the trial, the size and potency of the enemies. The LORD will surely deliver. In the case of David, his deliverance came when the LORD took King Saul's life in battle. David was anointed King of Judah for the first 7½ years and King of all Israel for the remaining 33 years of his 40 year reign. In the case of God's people now, the deliverance of the LORD could be like David's as long as their time of service unto the LORD is not completed. However, believers must also know that the LORD's deliverance could include being taken Home. By death the LORD frees His children from life's enemies and all the vicissitudes of life.

Verse 6 (synthetic parallelism) – To drive home the truth that the LORD will surely hear the cries of God's children who seek Him, David reiterated by saying, "This poor man cried, and the LORD heard *him*, and saved him out of all his troubles." The description "poor" does not mean poor in material things. It refers to humility of soul or poverty of spirit as the previous verses have already revealed. A genuine believer will possess a poverty of spirit, for that was the beginning of his journey of salvation in Christ as taught in His beatitudes in Matthew 5.

It is not any poor man but only the ones who are poor in spirit and have turned to Christ as Lord and Saviour who will be heard by the LORD!

As mentioned before in his own experiences, David stated here that this poor man's cries were heard by the LORD and He saved him out of all his troubles. This is the same as what he mentioned in verse 4. The difference is that in verse 6 David applied it to all believers who seek the LORD and are heard by Him.

Verse 7 (synthetic parallelism) – For the first time, the phrase "the angel of the LORD" appears. This phrase as used in the OT always refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason is that this angel of the LORD receives worship. If he is only an angel, he would not receive the worship of man. That the angel of the LORD received worship means that He has to be God. Since only the second Person of the Godhead can be seen, it had to be a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. Fallen angels would deceive man into worshipping them, like the Devil, but not good angels. David testified that the angel of the LORD encamps, i.e. surrounds by pitching a tent around all who fear the LORD. Since the LORD is all powerful, no one can come near the believer unless God allows it. All that happens in the believer's life are for his good, to strengthen his faith and deepen his trust in the LORD. He will experience physical, emotional and mental pain but these experiences are to drive him closer to the LORD. Believers need to depend less on self and more on Christ. Trials and persecution of all kinds are the means that the LORD will use to accomplish this bringing down of self in the believer's life. With deeper trust, the relationship between the believer and the LORD will strengthen and deepen, and the LORD can use the believer even more for His glory! The ones who fear the LORD are the ones who will not sin against the LORD. When they do sin, they will repent immediately because they fear the LORD.

The LORD's surrounding protection will definitely result in deliverance. As mentioned before, deliverance means that the trial will end one way or another. The end of this trial will make the believer stronger and the testimony of Christ in his life better, even in death! If the believer holds on to Christ cheerfully to the very end of his life, when he endures sufferings, all who see and know will be encouraged because they will have witnessed the power of a strong faith that enables a child of God to suffer so much for the LORD with cheerfulness of heart.

[To be continued]