

“When Difficulties Come ...”

Psalm 34

When you read the apostle Peter’s two letters you read a lot about how to live for God in suffering and trials. And yet it was Peter who told Jesus, the first time Jesus said that He was going suffer many things at the hands of the religious leaders and be killed in Matt. 16:21, ‘Never Lord! This shall never happen to you!’ Then Jesus rebuked him saying

“Get behind me Satan. You are a stumbling block and you do not have in mind the things of God.”

One of Satan’s most successful lies that we as Christians fall for many times is the idea that our suffering is not part of God’s plan. Peter grew spiritually and eventually recognized that we can expect this and even quoted our Psalm this morning, Ps. 34, to help us deal with difficulties in our life. He also wrote in his second letter, 1:3

³ His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

We will find everything we need from God to handle in His Word our difficulties when they come. And that’s why we have Psalm 34. Psalm 34 was written by David, the title suggests that he wrote this, while running from King Saul’s attempts to murder him, he ran to Gath for protection, only to realize he wasn’t going to get any help from Goliath’s home town – so he pretended to be insane and the King drove him away. The account is found in 1 Sam. 21. Yet the Psalm is written in broad language that allows each of us to throw in our own problem and find Godly wisdom on how to apply it to our situation.

The Psalm was written as an alphabetic acrostic, each verse beginning with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet (of which there are 22), except he leaves out a letter between v. 6 and v.7 and so in the last verse he has to start it with a letter he’s already used elsewhere, meaning he may have wanted to emphasize the last verse as a summary point. In an age when few people could read and even fewer had copies of scrolls for themselves, it would serve as a tool for memorizing the psalm.

So David praises God for delivering him from his trial, which is always a good place to start.

¹ I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.

² My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

³ Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.

But notice he moves from praising God himself to inviting fellow God-fearers to thank God with him for getting through his trials. When difficulties come we are often inclined to isolate ourselves when what we need to be doing is ...

Getting Together to Thank God
(34:1-3)

Our difficulties, trials and suffering are not just about us nor are they just for us. When we share with others an answer to prayer we invite others to praise God with us. When we ask others for prayer we are inviting them to come alongside us in our difficulties so we can support one another and glorify God together. David's deliverance result in a vow-like expression to praise God at all times – which even during trials is important. The word extol is literally "bless". How do we bless God? To bless someone means to speak well of for their benefit. Does God need our 'blessing'? Not in the sense that he needs our affirmation to be encouraged because He's down, but He appreciates being encouraged and glorified when we speak well of Him in front of others. Other believers need to hear us praising God to encourage them to do the same during their difficulties. Yet even more so do those who don't know God need to hear us speak well of God and give Him the credit for how He's working in our lives. The majority of people around us speak ill of God so they desperately need to hear us speak well of Him so they might get to know Him too.

David invited others to join Him in extoling, praising, boasting, rejoicing, glorifying and exalting His Name together. Meaning getting together with others informally or formally to speak well of God, for His glory but also our encouragement. And when we do that we will give a reason why we feel like rejoicing in Him, as David now explains in the Psalm in vv.4-7. As he begins to give some details of what God did for Him he reminds us of our need to ...

Share with others How God is Working in Your Life **(34:4-7)**

In v. 4 and 6 he gives a summary of his story:

*'I sought the Lord ... this poor man called'
'The Lord answered me ... the lord heard him'
'He delivered me from all my fears ... He saved him out of all his troubles.'*

In his difficulties and troubles which caused him to be afraid, he prayed to God and God answered his prayer through rescue. And in vv.5 and 7 he speaks to his audience to encourage them to do the same:

*'Those who look to Him ... those who fear Him'
'They are radiant ... their faces are never covered in shame'
'The angel of the Lord encamps around them ... and He delivers them.'*

David understands that when we tell our stories that

My story can help your story

When we share with each other how God is working in our lives we encourage one another because we're not alone. We strengthen one another (if they prayed and God heard and I need to pray to God) and we remind ourselves of God's truths; His face shines on our face; He is always with us. The angel of the Lord was often equated with the actual presence of the Lord Himself (or possibly a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus). Either way, God is with you.

Haven't you found that to be true? Someone tells you about a problem they had, how God got them through it. That encourages you and draws you both closer to God and each other. Not just one on one but in a group setting too. Because we all have this false impression that everyone else is fine

and not struggling with anything right now. Yet when one member in a group starts to share it usually starts a domino affect, and we are all encouraged by it. Your story is not just for you. Our stories affect everyone else's story. God created us for community.

As David continues to share how God worked in his life he uses that as a teaching tool – as we all can – to ...

Encourage One Another to Trust God in Their Trials **(34:8-21)**

This is what he does with the rest of the psalm; encourage the reader to make God their refuge at all times but especially in their difficulties. Why?

Because he knows and will meet our needs (vv.8-10)

⁸ *Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.*

⁹ *Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.*

¹⁰ *The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*

Now David challenges the one in difficulties that God is worth trusting. 'Taste' means to prove by experience. Tasting implies trying, giving it a chance, but you have to hang in there by faith believing God is able and will help you. 'And see' is the response to the tasting. Try trusting God and you'll see for yourself He is fully capable of responding to your need or problem. He will be your refuge, a place where you can find shelter, peace and have your needs met.

Then he issues another challenge to fear God. Fearing God is equated with obeying God. You respect God for who He is and what He can do therefore you do what He says because He also promises to look out for you. Obedience isn't blind. It has its positive rewards. He uses an analogy from nature. Lions (some translations say young lions meaning those in the prime of their life fully capable of hunting for prey and meeting their own needs), sometimes fail to find food and go hungry. God never fails. Those who seek the Lord will lack no good thing; that which God defines as what we need for our good. That word 'seek' means to make a request because you've thought seriously and long about its ramifications. This isn't a casual request but I've thought through what I need and I have no resources to handle it and I know from studying the way God works and what I know about Him that He is my only option.

With that in mind David now exhorts the reader to keep doing this. Keep studying, keep praying, and keep living as if you believe every Word God says. So he gives a number of practical exhortations to

Stay faithful to Him because He is faithful to you (vv.11-14)

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

¹² *Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days,*

¹³ *keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.*

¹⁴ *Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.*

David invites his audience to listen. The word for 'listen' is the very familiar Hebrew word 'Shema' which means listen carefully in order to obey. So David has some practical action steps to take when difficulties come for the follower of God. We know this is the case because he wants to

teach them about the fear of God and we already discussed that fearing God means to obey God because you know Him, love Him and want to please Him in order not to suffer the discipline of disobedience. All these admonitions will help us to remain faithful to God who hasn't abandoned us in our difficulties, even though we sometimes feel like He has. This is the challenge David is throwing out at us. God is faithful. He is your best and only true refuge in difficulties. He will remain faithful to you, but He expects us to keep trusting Him. What are some ways that will help us do that?

¹² *Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days,*

All of us! Sometimes obedience to God results in not making rash decisions which might shorten your life. Even worry and anxiety have been proven to shorten your life or make your life less enjoyable because you won't trust God with your problems. Maybe David was alluding to his rash decision in running from Saul to go to the King Achish of Gath for refuge. By the way when David showed up at the gates of Gath he had Goliath's sword with him. He must have realized the stupidity of his decision and pretended like he was a madman and by the mercy of God it worked and he sent him away.

So remaining faithful to God is sometimes as simple as watching your words (v.13) and turning away from doing wrong (v.14). You would think God's people wouldn't need to hear that repeated but, yes we need to hear it because we say dumb things and do dumb things.

David wraps up his song about trusting God in difficulties by

Remind Each Other of Who You Are **(34:22)**

Three times in these last 7 verses David calls God's people the righteous. That is how God sees us. We who believe in His Word are called righteous. Abraham believed God and He credited to Him righteousness. We are declared righteous by God not because of doing right things as if to earn His favour but by acknowledging His way is the right way. The way of faith alone and trusting in what God says in His Word is true. So, God calls us righteous even when (like David) we make poor choices at times. And even when we experience difficulties, suffering or trials.

¹⁵ *The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry;*

¹⁶ *the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.*

God sees us and hears us. He pays attention to us. His eye is never off us because he is always with us.

¹⁷ *The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.*

God will ultimately deliver us from all our troubles. He is sovereign. He allows us to go through difficulties to mature us and help us grow. This verse states that the righteous will not be spared from troubles as Jesus affirmed in John 16:33; *"in this world you will have much trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world.* Meaning, this world is temporal and short. Eternity is forever. If God has our forever future already planned out for us, surely we can trust Him for today and tomorrow.

¹⁸ *The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

God has His eye on us, whom the world rejects. God knows and hears our cries of pain and hurt. Jesus wept over the death of Lazarus, over the city of Jerusalem, touched the lepers when no one else would, forgave the sexually immoral when everyone else was ready to accuse and condemn. He is our rescuer. And it seems David felt the need to remind us that we will experience difficulties in life when he reassures us in v.19

- ¹⁹ *A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;*
²⁰ *he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.*

Our privileged position with God doesn't mean privileged treatment. That come sin eternity. But there is deliverance waiting for us because our Deliverer, Jesus, will return one day and show the world who is King.

David may have been using hyperbole when he said God wouldn't even allow our bones to break but it does become prophetic as John quotes this in John 19:36 that none of Jesus' bones were broken on the cross, when normally they should have been.

David reminds us of the future of the wicked; they are their own enemies.

- ²¹ *Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned.*
²² *The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.*

Redeemed here means deliverance from our difficulties but it foreshadows how redeemed will be used of Jesus' paying for our sins because when we accept Christ we are declared righteous and no longer in a position of condemnation. He is our refuge.

This is what God says about and does for us in our difficulties, but do we believe it? Our inclination is to say 'Of course I believe it'. Then why do we worry? Why do we get anxious in our difficulties? Why do we try to find our own sources of refuge – finances, people, entertainment, diversions – before we go to God? If we believed this we would do it.

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

So is this another Sunday morning of self-deception? Or is this a morning of living by faith? We read earlier in 2 Pet. 1:3

³ *His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*

God has given us the knowledge that we need this morning in Psalm 34 to help us handle difficulties in our life. Will we keep it to ourselves and hide it from others pretending that life is fine or will we get together with a few people and look to God together? Thanking for the many blessings in our life, sharing how He's working in our life, encouraging one another to trust God in whatever difficulty we find ourselves going through and challenging one another to remain faithful to God because He's always faithful to us.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivvet@rideau.net