

TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD

PSALM 34

Main point: God's goodness should be our praise, our hope, and our motivation for joyful obedience to Him.

INTRODUCTION:

Before we read Psalm 34, I want to set up the context, because it will help us picture what moved David to write this incredible psalm. And it may be a bit of a surprising context to you.

- *Superscript—A Psalm of David when he feigned madness before Abimelech, who drove him away and he departed.*

The superscript recalls 1 Samuel 21:10-15. David had become somewhat famous as a young man after killing the Philistine giant, Goliath of Gath. He became a servant of King Saul. However, Saul became insanely jealous of David and tried to kill him. So, David fled. He first ran to Nob—where the Tabernacle and priests were at that time—where he was given Goliath's sword. Then, for reasons not explained, David fled on to, of all places, the Philistine town of Gath. Why is that strange? Because Gath was Goliath's hometown, David was Goliath's killer, and he was now carrying Goliath's sword!

Well, not surprisingly, David is recognized, and that means he is in trouble. So, the only thing David can think of is to play the insanity card. He acts like a crazy man, scribbling on doors and drooling down his beard. Surprisingly, his ruse works, and instead of being killed, he is simply driven away from Gath.

For us, it is almost a humorous story. But, this was serious for David, because after he escapes the situation, he pauses and reflects on what happened, and what a close thing it was—how it was only God who saved him from certain death. So, he pauses, reflects, and writes this magnificent psalm all about God's goodness.

Main idea: God's goodness should be our praise, our hope, and our motivation for joyful obedience to Him.

Read Psalm 34.

- A. God's goodness defined
- B. God's goodness experienced

EXPOSITION:

A. GOD'S GOODNESS DEFINED

God's goodness is one of His attributes. It is part of His moral/ethical character.

- **Berkhof**—"He is in every way all that He as God should be, and therefore answers perfectly to the ideal expressed in the word "God"."

- **Grudem**—"The goodness of God means that God is the final standard of good, and that all that God is and does is worthy of approval."

In other words, we don't judge God as good or not, because we are not the standard. God is the standard of good; He defines what is good. Our job, in a sense, is to understand what He is like and what He approves—and as we do that, we come to see the beauty, glory, and perfection of true goodness.

1. God is good in His being.

- **Psalm 106:1**—Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
- **Luke 18:19**—And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone."

2. God is good in His actions—in all He does.

- **Psalm 119:68**—You are good and do good; Teach me Your statutes.
- **Psalm 73:1**—Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart!
- **Genesis 1:31**—God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.

3. God is the source of all good.

- **Psalm 84:11**—For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.
- **James 1:17**—Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

In the end, we see that the Bible says God is good, does good, and gives good to all His creatures, but in particular, to those who trust in Him. But, His goodness is not something that can be truly understood or appreciated at a merely intellectual/theological level; that's why David says, "you just have to taste and see that the Lord is good." You have to experience His goodness in your life to know what it really means. "God is so good; God is so good; God is so good, He's so good to me."¹

B. GOD'S GOODNESS EXPERIENCED

1. God's goodness elicits praise. (vv.1-3)

If the theme of the whole psalm is the goodness of God, then verses 1-3 introduce and set the tone for the whole psalm—it is all about praise and thanksgiving to the Lord who is good.

¹ Paul Maki, *God Is so Good, God Is so Good*, 1970

a. **Continual praise (v.1)**

David loudly declares that he will always and continually bless and praise the Lord. Why? Because the Lord is always and continually worthy to be praised. The Lord never has, never does, and never will do anything that diminishes His worth, glory, power, or might. Therefore, He is always and forever worthy to be praised—no matter what situation we find ourselves in.

- **Augustine**—“When shall I ‘bless the Lord’? When He blesseth thee? When the goods of this world abound? When thou hast great abundance of corn, oil, and wine, of gold and silver, of servants and cattle; when this mortal health remaineth unwounded and sound; when all that are born to thee grow up, nothing is withdrawn by immature death, happiness wholly reigneth in thy house, and all things overflow around thee; then shalt thou bless the Lord? No; but ‘at all times.’”²

Trusting in God’s goodness means trusting that His sovereign hand has allowed you to be in whatever situation you are in right now, and that He is still with you, will never leave you nor forsake you, and can use this very situation to strengthen and sanctify you. Therefore, we can praise Him at all times. Jesus, our Lord, modeled this in His life. And we are to imitate Him.

b. **Correct praise (v.2)**

David wants to make sure that God gets all the credit. The Lord alone is worthy of praise. David was a hero in many respects—think of his epic battle with Goliath. Yet, he would not boast in himself, because He knew that the Lord did it all. David made some odd decisions, to say the least, in fleeing to his enemies for safety. He knows that he only escaped because the Lord intervened and rescued him. David cannot boast in himself, but he will boast in the Lord, and all the humble (poor, afflicted) who hear about it—those who can identify in some way with David’s affliction and fear, and who have learned the same lesson David has about not boasting in themselves—they will rejoice in the Lord along with him.

c. **Corporate praise (v.2)**

David invites all who know that God alone is worthy of our praise and boasting to join along with him in corporate worship of the living God.

Application

Can you identify with David at all? Have you ever found yourself in a really sticky situation—a really bad or uncomfortable place—perhaps because of your own unwise or bad choices, or even sin? And there seemed to be no way out. But then God did something that you never could, and He brought you out of that miserable place. What was your response? What *is* your response? You are invited to magnify and exalt the Lord together with David and with everyone else who can testify of the Lord’s work in their life.

² Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms, Psalm XXXIV*

But some of you might be in that bad, miserable, seemingly hopeless situation right now. What you need to know and be convinced of is that God is good all the time. He is good to His people. Let's find out how.

2. **God's goodness relieves our fears. (vv.4-7)**

Here, David gives personal testimony of God's goodness and why he is praising Him. He speaks of how he was afraid—terrified for his life, his well-being—but then how God delivered him from his fears and how he can do the same for you, as well.

a. **Do not fear, for He hears us. (vv.4, 6)**

The first way God relieves our fears is by hearing and answering our prayers.

"I sought the Lord" (v.4). In the Bible, to "seek the Lord" is not like a game of hide and seek where you hope you might find Him if you happen to look in the right place. Rather, seeking the Lord assumes you know where He is, and you come to Him in utter dependence. To seek the Lord is to come to Him in prayer and acknowledge you need Him, and you want Him. It is to cry out to him the way David did, *"This poor/afflicted man cried"* (v.6) to the Lord. To seek the Lord is to know you are poor and not able, but He is able; He is your only hope, joy, and salvation.

David sought the Lord in this way. And what was the result? *"He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears"* (v.4). And in verse 6, *"the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles."*

And what do you know? The eternal, omnipotent God of all creation, who calls us to come to Him in prayer and dependence, actually hears us and answers us, even delivers us from our fears! Why is it that sometimes we are so surprised when God answers our prayers? Jesus said, *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you"* (Matt.7:7).

Application

We need to learn to ask God and believe that He is willing and able to deliver us. Yes, we must ask according to His will, knowing that His ways are higher than ours but, trusting in His goodness, keep asking and believing that however He answers our prayers is good and right.

b. **Do not fear, for He is with us. (vv.5, 7)**

The second way God relieves our fears is by ensuring His presence. He is with us!

The Lord is near. Look to Him and be radiant. Jesus said that He is the Light of the world. The downcast face that looks to God in the face of Christ will be lit, will radiate as we gaze on His beauty and goodness and glory, and will not be ashamed anymore.

- ⁷ The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him.

"The angel of the Lord" is usually a reference to God, Himself. Or even to a preincarnate appearance of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Christophany). Sometimes He appears as a messenger. Sometimes He appears as a divine warrior who protects His people from their

enemies. When David says, He “**encamps around those who fear Him,**” He is saying that God, with His host of angels, is always present to protect His beloved children.

Application:

So, God’s goodness relieves our fears because we know that He hears us, answers us, and is present with us. But we must seek Him the way David did—cry out to Him in admission of our weakness and confident that He hears us and will answer us in the best way, because He is good. And ask Him for the faith to be confident that He is with us at all times and in all places.

3. God’s goodness satisfies our desires. (vv.8-10)

This is the heart of the psalm. The declaration that the goodness of God satisfies the desires of all who take refuge in Him. He calls on us to “**taste and see that the Lord is good.**” This is not about taking a sip of God—trying Him out to see whether you like Him or not.

The kind of tasting David is talking about is drinking Him all in—submitting your whole life to God and experiencing Him working in every part of your life for the rest of your life. Then, you will experience His provision; He will satisfy you with every good thing.

We desire much, don’t we? We want a lot. Our desires often consume us, and drive us—often to do sinful, harmful things. But desire is not, in and of itself, a bad thing. God gave us desires. It is only when we twist, distort, misdirect, or misapply God-given desires that they become sinful, and God is dishonored in our lives.

- God has given us the desire for food—good. Total disregard of what and how much we put in our bodies—harmful.
- God has given us a desire for our wife or husband—good. Seeking to fulfill those desires outside of marriage—sinful and harmful.
- God has given us a desire to worship—good. Applying love and worship to anything above God—sinful and harmful.

We have to look at desires rightly, biblically. We have to understand that every blessing and good thing given is from God. He is the source of all good things. Therefore, He must be our highest desire.

- **Psalm 73:25-26**—Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

4. God’s goodness motivates our goodness. (vv.11-14)

David now takes on the role of the wisdom teacher—much like his son, Solomon, would do extensively in the book of Proverbs.

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

"Fear of the Lord"—We could spend several sermons on this topic alone, as the Bible uses this term extensively and in various contexts. In wisdom literature, *"the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom"* (Prov.9:10). The fear of the Lord is "obedient devotion,"³ "submission to His way."⁴ It recognizes who God truly is, and therefore takes everything He says utterly seriously—giving Him the reverence, honor, and glory due to His name in every aspect of your life. Therefore, part of what it means to fear the Lord is to do good as our good Father commands and enables us.

What does a life of fearing the Lord look like?

a. Guarding your speech (v.13)

It sounds easy, but guarding your speech is one of the hardest things to do.

- **James 3:8**—But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

"Speaking evil"—to say anything harmful about or to others (gossiping, slandering, insulting, humiliating). God hates this kind of talk. This is how the world talks, but it has no place in the fellowship of God's people.

"Speaking deceit"—Do not lie or bear false witness is one of the fundamental laws, Ten Commandments, that God gave His people. Lies tear down, destroy, and dishonor others so someone else can gain. And God hates it.

- **James 1:26**—If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

b. Rejecting sin (v.14a)

Turning your back on what God says is evil, wrong, and sinful. Hate what God hates. As John Owen said, "be killing sin or it will be killing you."

c. Doing good (v.14a)

It is not enough for us to reject sin—to turn our backs on evil. We must complement that with doing good. In this, we imitate God, who is good and does good. He wants us to be like Him and do good in the world, our families, our schools, our communities, and our jobs.

- **Galatians 6:9-10**—Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.¹⁰ So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

d. Pursuing peace (v.14b)

We are not to be rabble-rousers—people who fan the flames or cause dissension in the church or the world, or who take pleasure in argument for argument's sake. We have been saved by the

³ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), p.753

⁴ Willem A. VanGemeren, *The Expositors Bible Commentary, Revised Edition: Psalms*, eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), p.326

Prince of Peace; Who has made peace with God for us and who has given us His peace so that we can be peacemakers and so imitate God.

This then, is, in part, what it looks like to fear the Lord:

- To guard your speech
- To reject sin
- To do good
- To pursue peace

And our motivation for living like this is God's own goodness. Because He is so good, my whole life is lived before Him and for Him, according to His good pleasure.

5. God's goodness embraces the brokenhearted. (vv.15-18)

David now returns somewhat to his theme in verses 4-7 as he again brings up the comforting truth that God hears and sees His people, who are the righteous when they cry to Him. The picture is that of the righteous, God's own children, being afflicted by evildoers, but because they know their God, they cry to Him for help. And He delivers them.

But verse 18 adds another dimension to this theme. This is the righteous, the saved, who are "**brokenhearted**" or "**crushed in spirit.**" These are those who are nearly undone, crushed by loss, grief, or the guilt of their own sin. They are at the bottom of the well and have trouble seeing any light or any hope of rescue.

It is to these that God promises not just His presence, but His nearness. Some of you have felt this, or even are feeling it now. In the midst of the worst pain, grief, or guilt, God is nearer to you than ever before. Sometimes, the pain or grief numbs us from feeling much of anything—but you can still take Him at His Word. If you belong to Him, He is there, near, close—holding you up, listening, drying your tears, working in you and all around you to strengthen and lift you up. This is God's goodness. He embraces the brokenhearted.

6. God's goodness is our hope. (vv.19-22)

Although it sounds like a paradox, David unabashedly proclaims, "*Many are the afflictions of the righteous*" (v.19). I thought the righteous were blessed? Indeed, they are, but that does not at all mean that we are spared afflictions. In fact, often, Christians are more afflicted because they are Christians. And yet we know that God causes all things to work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom.8:28). He has a plan and purpose for every affliction He allows to come upon us.

And so, we can trust Him to deliver us out of them all. Does that mean that soon I'll be out of this financial mess, or that this relationship will heal, or that God will just make my life hunky-dory all the day long? Nope, not at all. God does not promise to deliver us in that way quickly, or even at all, in this life. But what He guarantees and promises beyond a shadow of a doubt is our final deliverance.

This is our great hope—though the wicked shall be condemned on the day of judgment, *“The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned”* (v.22).

He does not say “some of those” who take refuge in Him will not be condemned, or even “most of those” will not be condemned. None. Zero. Not a single person who takes refuge in Him will ever be condemned! This is God’s goodness to His people—it includes His love, mercy, grace, and kindness toward us.

But how is this possible? David was a great sinner, and he knew it. The Bible says that you and I are all sinners and fall short of His glory (*Rom.3:23*); we are all unrighteous; we are all “the wicked;” we all deserve eternal condemnation.

Verse 20 provides us with a clue to the answer, *“He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken.”* This verse was fulfilled literally in David’s descendant, great David’s greater Son—the Lord Jesus Christ (*read John 19:31-37*).

It is this event—the crucifixion of Jesus, the Messiah and Savior of the world—that guarantees our hope that none who take refuge in the Lord will be condemned. For on the cross, Jesus bore our condemnation and died in our place. He condemned sin in the flesh (*Rom.8:3*), taking the penalty of our wickedness and sin upon Himself and imputing His perfect righteousness to our account. This is the greatest exchange made in the history of the world.

- **2 Corinthians 5:21**—He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Because of Jesus’ work on the cross, Paul could write, *“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* (*Rom.8:1*). The New Testament equivalent, then, of taking refuge in the Lord, is being “in Christ Jesus.”

This, then, is the apex of the goodness of God towards His people—that He gave His Son for us, so that we could take eternal refuge in Him, never having to fear condemnation, but rather to be guaranteed His everlasting love.

FINAL APPLICATION:

What then shall we do? Taste and see that the Lord is good. And in response:

- See His goodness and praise Him.
- See His goodness and give your fears over to Him.
- See His goodness and find the satisfaction of all your desires in Him.
- See His goodness and fear Him and walk in His ways.
- See His goodness and recognize His nearness in the darkest of times.
- See His goodness in the cross, and hope in His salvation by trusting in the Savior, His own Son, Jesus.

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