

Sacred Songs, Life Lessons

After the Storm

Psalm 34

May 26, 2024

HDBC

When Marquis Boone first heard the gospel song “Biblical Love” by J.C., he listened to it five times in a row. *This is crazy*, he said to himself. What amazed him was not the song, but the artist. The person singing *Biblical Love* was not a person at all.

J.C. is an artificial intelligence (AI) that Boone and his team created with computer algorithms. Boone said his interest in creating a Christian AI musician began when he started hearing about AI artists in the pop music genre. He said, *I really just started thinking this is where the world is going and I'm pretty sure that the gospel/Christian genre is going to be behind.*

Christians, he said, are too slow to adopt new styles, new technologies, and new forms of entertainment—always looking like late imitators. For him, it would be an evangelistic failure not to create Christian AI music. Boone said, *If we don't want to grow with technology or we don't want to grow with this. I think we're going to miss a whole generation.*

My initial reaction to this is not positive. I don't want to be negative or dismissive, but there is something about this that causes me to have a check in my spirit. I'm not against AI and the many positive uses that it brings. But when it comes to music, especially worship music, I'm suspect. I'm not sure we need to be diving deeper into technology, especially when it comes to our interaction with God and with other believers. We can use technology to enhance our worship, and we do. But when it comes to music as an act of worship, I prefer words, melodies and rhythms that come from human hearts who are in tune with the heart of God. The idea of a non-human machine created worship songs just doesn't resonate with me.

The greatest worship songs ever written are found in the Bible.

They are compiled in a songbook with the simple title, ***Psalms***. These were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but also by individuals who were experiencing real life, with all its ups and downs. The songs found in Psalms are full of emotion, conviction, and theology. The lyrics reflect the raw reactions to experiences that come with living in a broken world.

We can relate to them. We can find ourselves in them. But most importantly, they lead us to see our Creator as a gracious, benevolent, loving God, who desires our worship. They reveal God as the healer of our pain, the redeemer of our souls, and the one who delivers from every fear.

They are powerful, relatable, and beautiful. We would do well to spend as much time with them as possible. To this end, we are in a series called ***Sacred Songs, Life Lessons***. Today let's study Psalm 34.

The Historical Setting

We don't know the historical setting behind all the psalms. In this case we do. As we noted last week in Psalm 3, we gain some clarity when we read the superscript above verse one. Read it.

This is a reference to the events recorded in 1 Samuel 21. David was running for his life from King Saul. Saul had thrown a spear at David, attempting to pin him to the wall. Not a good sign! So, David hit the road and kept some distance between he and his antagonist. Saul had sent teams of assassins to kill David. So desperate was David that he even went to Gath.

Gath was one of the five main cities of the Philistines. It was Goliath's hometown. David had killed Goliath some years earlier. They knew who he was. They had not forgotten. To make matters worse, he was carrying the sword of Goliath. This was the sword David had taken to separate his head from his body. That was the ultimate humiliation for a warrior, to be executed publicly with your own weapon. Now David came strolling back into Goliath's hometown, carrying that famous sword.

The people quickly recognized David and reported him to the king. David was trying to escape danger by hiding from Saul but he had stepped into a very dangerous situation. Out of the frying pan and into the fire. He quickly realized that he was in a bad spot and was at the mercy of the king. So desperate was he that he acted like he had gone insane. Scratching at the gate of the city and drooling like a madman. The king fell for the ruse and instead of killing David, he had him evicted from the city.

David was so impressed with the way God protected him in this situation that he actually wrote two songs about his experience. Psalm 34 and 56. Psalm 56 records the prayer he uttered while in danger in Gath. Psalm 34 is the song of praise for his deliverance. We see four movements or stanzas in this song. They include two invitations and two testimonies.

Read Psalm 34

1. An Invitation to Worship God (1-3)

The foundation for David's invitation to us is the faithfulness of the Lord in delivering him from his enemies. Because of what God had done David declared that he would . . .

Bless the Lord – Doing something that pleases/benefits God

Praise the Lord – Expressing worship to God outwardly.

Boast in the Lord – Tell God and others how great God is.

Taken together they all reflect David's intention to worship and exalt the Lord, both inwardly and outwardly. We most often think of God *blessing us*, and He does. But we can also bless Him.

We bless Him when we express our worship to Him.

We bless Him when we surrender our wills to Him.

We bless Him when we pour out our hearts to Him in prayer.

We bless Him when we reject temptation and embrace holiness.

We bless Him when we recognize Him for who He is.

We bless Him when we call on others to know Him.

We praise Him when we speak of His great characteristics.

We praise Him when we sing glorious songs to Him.

We praise Him when we raise hand, bow knees, lift eyes.

We boast of Him when we speak of His greatness.

We boast of him when we speak of his provision.

We boast of Him when we speak of His forgiveness.

We boast of Him when we remember His deliverance.

David was committed to these things in a perpetual basis. Note the phrases ***at all times*** and ***continually***. This was not a short-term commitment that David was making. These things would become part of the regular pattern of his life. They would be as natural to him as eating and sleeping, working and resting. And David understood something about worshipping God. It's better with others.

So, he invites his original readers and all who would follow, including us, to join him in exalting the Lord in worship. See it in verse 3. We are invited to ***magnify the Lord*** with him and to ***exalt his name together***. Worship can be done privately, but it is so much better when it is shared with others who are also worshipping God. There is a contagious element to worship.

We are more likely to worship when others around us are worshipping. So, here is a small takeaway for you and me. The extent to which I worship God when I come to church is not just about me. If I worship Him freely, I will encourage others to do the same. If I am unwilling to worship, I negatively influence others in the same way. **That's invitation number one.**

2. A Testimony of Deliverance (4-7)

David then offered some details about his recent experience in Gath. It was his testimony of how God delivered Him. I see three things that are simply and directly stated. **Almost like dragnet . . . just the facts.**

David sought the Lord. Deliverance began when David recognized that He could not save himself. He needed help and the help could only come from God. Maybe, as he absorbed the sights and sounds of Gath, memories of his experience with Goliath came flooding back. If they did he surely would have remembered that God was a mighty warrior who could win any battle, defeat any enemy and deliver from any danger.

God answered and delivered. God stepped in and rescued David from a precarious situation. Note that God not only delivered David from his enemies, He delivered him from his own fears. I'm not sure who they are whom David references. Most likely a small entourage that was with him. They saw what God had done. They witnessed the hand of God as he confused the mind of the king and made a way for David to escape. When God acts, other people notice.

David learned an important principle. The angel of the Lord *encamps* around those who fear Him. God is constantly watching and is ready to help. He is not far off with a need to come running. He is camping around those who fear Him. **A good reason to fear the Lord!**

3. An Invitation to Experience God (8-14)

David then offers a second invitation. It is an invitation to ***taste the Lord***. A creative and artistic way of inviting us to ***experience God***. That's what tasting is. Tasting is one of the great gifts from God.

I did a little research on the process of tasting. Here's a summary.

The pleasure of taste starts with the taste buds and ends with electrical signals reaching the reward centers in the brain. This is not just true of people; it is true of animals as well. All animals have taste buds, including those that live under the water. The catfish, for example, has taste buds virtually all over its skin, earning it the nickname "the swimming tongue." Flies, spiders, and fruit flies have taste buds on their feet. God is so creative and so cool to give his creation this sensation. It is one of the lesser acknowledged gifts from God.

It's one thing to see a good steak, to hear the sizzle of a good steak, and to smell a good steak. But none can compare with tasting the steak. You can only really know the steak when you taste it.

You can only really know God when you experience Him. And when you experience Him, you will know that He . . . is . . . good!

You can read about the goodness of God in the Bible. You can hear about the goodness of God in a sermon. You can assume the goodness of God when you hear testimonies of others. But you can't know the goodness of God until you experience Him. **Spurgeon put it like this. *We cannot by the most rational discourse perceive what the sweetness of honey is; taste it and you shall perceive it.***

David is almost like a salesman. The most important thing for a salesman to do is to close the deal, make the sale. One of the most important ways to do this is to brag on the product and convince the buyer of its worth. We are not selling God in that sense. But we are trying to convince people to just experience Him for themselves. David is pressing the argument in verses 8-12. Do you see it?

Hey, here's why you need to experience God.

You will find that you are blessed. (8)

He takes care of His people. (9-10)

David even offers to teach his hearers how to learn to fear God. (11)

Do you want to live a long and good life? You need God. (12)

In the final part of the song, David returns to a testimony format. In his previous testimony he described what God had done. In this last testimony he declares what God does, present tense.

4. A Testimony of What God Does (15-22)

In these verses I see no less than nine praise-worthy things that God does. Let me list them for you.

He watches and sees. (15)
He opposes the wicked on our behalf. (16)
He hears and delivers. (17)
He is near to the brokenhearted. (18a)
He saves those whose spirits are crushed. (18b)
He delivers the righteous. (19-20)
He defeats and condemns the wicked. (21)
He redeems souls. (22a)
He removes the condemnation for our sins. (22b)

Don't miss this. There is a progression of intensity in those nine things. As you work through the list you will notice that they move from pretty good, to really good, to really great, to outstanding.

By the time you get to the last two, they reflect the most valuation things God does for us.

He saves our souls. He takes care of our eternal future.

He has provided for us to live in Heaven with Him.

He makes us right with Him the way Adam & Eve were before they sinned.

He brings us back into His family as sons and daughters.

He removes the condemnation for our sins.

We will live eternally with Him, without the guilt and burden of our sins.

We will live eternally, surrounded by and engulfed in the purity of Jesus.

We will not mope around Heaven, weighed down by our guilt.

We will live free from penalty and guilt of sin, filled with joy & contentment.

In closing, I want to circle back to verse 8. *O, taste and see that the Lord is good.* I'm afraid most of us underestimate just how good God really is. In their book, *Soul Shift*, one of the authors relates a story of how he underestimated his father's generosity.

One time, my dad wanted to congratulate me on something I had accomplished in the sixth grade. He took me to K-Mart and made a wide sweeping gesture with his hand toward the whole store from the entrance. He said, "To congratulate you, I'll buy you anything in this whole store tonight." My eyes widened as I thought of the possibilities.

At the time, I didn't have a full grasp on how money worked or how much money Dad had. So I sort of limited things in my mind. I didn't even look at the huge stereo systems, expensive bikes, or anything that cost more than one hundred dollars. Instead, I chose a cassette tape case that was less than fifty dollars. I was content with just that case. It was more than I could afford myself, for sure, so I chose that one. It was nice.

Only many years later did I find out from Dad that he had one thousand dollars cash in his pocket that night. What's more, he brought his checkbook just in case that wasn't enough. In my selection, I limited his blessing in my life.

We do the same with the goodness of God. We grossly underestimate just how good He is because we fail to experience Him. So, I join with the songwriter, David, and invite you to taste and see that the Lord is good. Experience Him.

Source: Steve DeNeff and David Drury, Soul Shift (Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), p. 55