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Series: Summer in the Psalms
Message: A Close Call

Transcribed Message
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Psalm 34

I know even in light of what I just prayed about that we can all look back on our lives and at different points we can see that there was a circumstance or situation that we would call a close call. Something happened that disaster was averted. Something happened that could have led to serious injury or even something worse than that. But by God's grace and providence, that didn't occur. We look back on those situations and those times and we realize that if something had been just a little bit different, if the timing had been just a little bit different, if our presence had been just a little bit different in that circumstance, things would've looked very different. Just a couple weeks ago in New York City a crane just collapsed off of a skyscraper. Only 11 people were injured. That could've been an incredible disaster. There are videos that are made of close calls, situations where something appeared to be a disaster and yet it was averted. In David's life, he experienced more than a few close calls and he tells us about it in Psalm 34.

When we turn to that psalm, we want to see that as David walks us through this psalm we need to see with eyes of faith. We need eyes of faith to see things differently when life takes an unexpected turn. Psalm 34 this morning. Let's do what we've done for these past weeks. Let's introduce the psalm and do a little bit of a background on this 34th Psalm. This is an acrostic psalm. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet and here the Spirit of God has David write this psalm. Each of the lines begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet – one that we don't know exactly why that was not included. But there's another acrostic psalm in which the same thing happens. One of the letters is left off. But it's probably an acrostic psalm that enabled the memorization of that psalm to be a little bit easier. In our vernacular and our terminology we would say it highlights the fact that from A-Z God is a faithful God. That's part of what David is putting forward here in this 34th Psalm.

This is a thanksgiving psalm. At least the first part of this psalm is a thanksgiving psalm. As we've seen before, there are some of the psalms that are combined together. The first 10 verses of Psalm 34 is definitely a thanksgiving psalm. The second part can be a wisdom psalm in which David is going to give instruction. This instruction and this particular psalm is linked to Psalm 56. If you just look at Psalm 56 and you see the superscription of the 56th Psalm, it says "To the choirmaster according to the dove on far off Terebinths, a miktam of David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath." That is the same thing that is happening here in Psalm 34. These two psalms are actually speaking of some of the same thing.

What they're speaking of is the historic account that this is tied to which is found in 1 Samuel 21. Psalm 56 and 34 are tied to the historical events that take place in 1 Samuel 21. What happens in first Samuel 21? I'll give you a summary of it. In 1 Samuel 21 Saul is in all-out attack mode against David. He wants David dead. You remember at the top of the playlist of the songs in Israel at that time was the song that said Saul has killed his thousands, David has tens of thousands; and that provoked Saul to such jealousy that he was determined to see that David was killed. So David is on the run. In that instance of running, he comes to the priest Ahimelech. Ahimelech is not to be confused with Abimelech who is not to be confused with Achish. All of those different people are in play here. Ahimelech is the priest. David comes to him and he lies to him and he says I'm on the king's business. He wasn't on the king's business. He was running from the king. He demanded that the priest you'll remember give him the table of showbread which the priest did. Then David says to the priest give me the sword of Goliath. Remember when David killed Goliath he gave the sword to the priest. Now he wants the sword back. So the priest gives him the sword. Then David proceeds to flee from the boundaries of Israel and he goes into Philistia and he goes to the city of Gath. Now who is from Gath? A guy named Goliath is from Gath. So here comes David, running from Saul, making one bad choice after another, not trusting God at all in the midst of this circumstance, and he decides that this best move is to go to Gath and go to Gath carrying the sword of Goliath. While he's there, and evidently it didn't take very long for the servants of the King to realize this is David who killed our guy Goliath, David fears for his life not just from Saul but now from King Achish. So he begins to pretend

like he's insane, and he does all kinds of things to indicate that he's lost his mind. King Achish says I've got enough people in my circle who have lost their mind and are insane. Send this man away. His life was spared and David escaped out of Gath, and he goes and runs and hides in the cave of Adullam. That is the background story of what's going on here.

Psalm 34 and verse 11, which we'll see later on, but just notice: "Come, O children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord." That is David in a sense speaking to himself. He's preaching to himself because he has not feared the Lord. In fact, in this whole series of incidents that I just shared, he has feared man more than he has feared the Lord for sure. This is the setting that we find when we come to Psalm 34. So let's look at a psalm for every season.

The first half of the psalm, which by the way as we've seen before, the first half is so different from the second half that many scholars who do not have a high view of Scripture say this is again just two psalms that have been stitched together into one, except of course we know that's not true because it's an acrostic psalm that fits beautifully with David's purpose here. But the first half of the psalm is a thanksgiving psalm and the first half is an invitation to us to worship. So let's follow through on these first 11 verses. I look at the first 11 verses and it's like a call to worship, and it's a testimony time.

It is a call to worship and it's a testimony time. Some of you remember testimony times when people just stood and gave testimony to what the Lord had done in their life. and those were oftentimes very encouraging. The only scary part was you never knew what somebody was going to talk about or say. But back in the day there were often testimony times. That's what David is doing here. He is saying this is a call to worship but it is more than just a call to worship. I want to give testimony to what God has done in my life.

He's going to tell us three things about God. The first one is that God is awesome. God is awesome. Look at the first three verses: "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 here and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!" What do you get when you read those first three verses? When I read

those verses I just have a sense of energy out of that. don't you? There is passion behind what David is saying in this call to worship. It's the kind of passion that we should bring when we come together here. It's the kind of energy that we should bring when we come to declare how awesome our God is, how great our God is. So he starts off with that and you can just sense David's heart yearning to worship God in this way. It begins with gratitude. Obviously, it is a thanksgiving psalm, but it begins with gratitude.

This is a psalm in which David says I will. There's a determination here. He is determined to do this. It is so easy for me to complain even in the midst of blessing. It is so easy to complain even when God is bringing blessing into our life. we see it so often in the storyline of the Bible, don't we? God takes care of his people. The whole Old Testament story line seems to be filled with stories with the children of Israel and how God provided oftentimes in incredible and amazing ways. And the children of Israel complain. it wasn't quite what they wanted. It wasn't good enough. It wasn't this. It wasn't that. That is often I think where we find ourselves. Here David says I'm not going to do that. I'm going to offer thanksgiving. I'm going to lift up my voice in praise to God. I am determined to express my gratitude for who God is.

Then secondly, there's a continuous nature to his gratitude, isn't there? He says I'm going to do it at all times. I'm going to give thanks. I'm going to give gratitude at all times. It's not unlike Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 when he says rejoice always. Rejoice always. Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God for your life in Christ Jesus. If you looked at the 34th Psalm and you just went through and underlined every time you saw the word all or always – that sense of the continuous nature of his gratitude. Six times it appears here. Why do you suppose we need to be reminded over and over and over again that we are to bless the Lord at all times, that his praise should continuously be in our mouth? Why do you suppose David the psalmist feels compelled to tell us that this is to be something that we are to be doing continuously?

I suppose the answer is number one because we need it. We need it. We need to be reminded of that just as the children of Israel. I think the other part of it is simply because it's hard. Life is hard. Life sometimes is hard. Oftentimes it's hard. The first response that we have isn't necessarily to have a heart of gratitude, to have a heart of thanksgiving as Scriptures call for us. It doesn't always feel like we want to give thanks.

In fact, sometimes it seems very illogical but Scripture is clear. We don't give thanks, we don't express gratitude, David says, just when things are going well, just when it's good. We're to do it all the time.

Notice thirdly, it is focused. I want you to see the focus is upward. This spirit of gratitude, the spirit of thanksgiving just notes in these verses how that upward look is explained to us by David. He said he is going to bless the Lord at all times. His praise. It is in the Lord. It is to magnify the Lord. Let us exalt his name together.

And notice who can do this. Who can do verses 1 through 3? It's right there in the text before you. Who can do it? The humble. The humble can do it. It's the humble that can do this. This focus on God, on who he is, on how he has provided, it's the humble that can do it. The double minded person is unstable, James says, in all his ways. He can't do it. You can't do it if on the one moment you're trusting God and the other moment you're trusting self, or the one moment you're either trusting in the Lord and the next moment you're focusing on yourself or your circumstances. You can't give gratitude in the way that David is calling for us here.

Remember how often Jesus would critique the religious leaders about worship in particular. In one of the statements that Jesus made in Matthew 15 is a quote from Isaiah when he said you worship me with your lips but your hearts are far from me. That is what David is speaking to here. God receives gratitude and thanksgiving and praise from the humble of heart. He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Micah 6:8. It's the things that God has told us that we are to do. We're to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God. David puts before us this idea that our God is awesome and because of that we express our gratitude and thanksgiving. We do it continuously. We are focused on him – not on our self, not on our situation, but on him.

Then notice this last thing. It's personal worship and it's corporate worship. It's personal and it's corporate. The humble hear. The humble see. The humble recognize what God is doing on their behalf. They respond in gratitude. Then what do the humble want to do in expressing gratitude to God and giving thanks to God? What do they want then? They want other people to join them. They want others to join them. There is personal worship and corporate worship. Don't you think it's a fair statement to say that our personal worship is a preparation for corporate worship? Wouldn't it be fair to say

that our deficiency, our lack of personal worship impacts our corporate worship? Don't you sense that as David is at this point of expressing his heartfelt gratitude and his heart is passionate for giving that praise back to God, don't you sense as we said at the beginning that there's an energy here that is growing out of his personal relationship with God? It flows out of his heart and he wants other people to join in. That's what we should want too. We should want others to join in and give praise and celebrate with us the awesome nature of our God. So first of all, we worship God because he's awesome.

Secondly, notice we do so because he is able. He is able. Verses 4-7. Let's note these verses together: "I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed." This poor man. David often referred to himself like this, and he wasn't talking materially, although at this point in his life he certainly could have fit into that category because he was living on the run. But he's talking about poverty of spirit. Almost like when Jesus said blessed are the poor in spirit. David uses that analogy. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all of his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them." I want you to see four things here.

First of all, notice there's trouble. There's a problem. There is trouble. It's what David has found himself in. That is the point of verse 4: "I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears." He is desperate but he is not despairing. He knows where to turn. He's in trouble but he doesn't tell us in this psalm the nature of this trouble. He doesn't describe it at all. In other places he does, but in this particular instance he just made the statement in passing. I've got trouble in my life. yeah, you do have trouble in your life. you've got a couple kings that want you dead. You found yourself foolishly in the town in which Goliath lived whom you have killed. All of these things spelled trouble for him, but he doesn't speak of any of those things. Why do you suppose he doesn't give any hint or indication of any of the things that might cause him to be afraid or fearful or a sense of trouble? I almost wonder in this part of the psalm, which is a thanksgiving psalm, I almost wonder if he doesn't want it any way to detract or distract from who God is. The awesomeness of God. The fact that God is able. He wants his focus and our focus to be completely on the Lord.

Then you notice there's prayer. There's prayer. Look in verse 4. He sought the Lord. In verse 5. I look to him. In verse 6. I have cried out to him. So there's prayer. It doesn't sound like, as David expresses this in this section of the psalm, it doesn't sound like he asked one time and then quit. It sounds very much like the way Jesus taught about prayer. Jesus often taught about the persistence of prayer. He often taught us to be persistent. We have to ask but we shouldn't ask just one time as if to say well I've asked him and I'm just waiting for the answer. No, God wants us to continually ask. That's what he has told us. To the one who asks and keeps on asking. To the one who seeks and keeps on seeking. To the one who knocks and keeps on knocking. There's something that we're learning in this process of dependency. We're learning dependency on God. We're crying out to him. Jeremiah 29:13. You will seek me and find me when you seek after me with all your heart. With all your heart. It is not one and done. Now certainly there's rescue. There's deliverance. There is salvation. You have answered me. You have delivered me. You have saved me. That's David's testimony.

Now what he does with that testimony then fourthly is he gives witness to it. There's witness. David is giving his testimony to God's faithfulness and God's deliverance and God's rescue and God's salvation. We never stop learning, and I take it that we are never to stop sharing what we're learning. We never stop learning. We never stop sharing what we're learning. This is a plug for getting involved in a smaller group setting. Jump in to the community groups come August 20th. Join one of the Bible studies that will kick off this fall. Get into a smaller group. You learn together. You pray for each other together. You share what God is doing together. There's great encouragement in that. That's what David is modeling for us here. There's trouble, yeah. There's prayer, yeah. There's deliverance, yeah. There's witness to that. You learn. You share.

David's circumstances, it should be noted, didn't just change immediately. Yes, he did get out of Gath so he was rescued in that sense, but Saul still wants him dead. He is still living on the run. He has no place to call home. at this point of the writing of the psalm, he is living in the cave of Adullam and in fear for his life. his circumstances haven't changed completely or dramatically and yet here he is. He's giving witness to

that. He has pointed out that God is the one who has delivered him even though he is on the run.

Look at verse 7. Very interesting. “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them.” If someone ever said you why do you think there are guardian angels, this would be a potential verse that might speak to the fact that there are within the angelic world angels that are assigned and to give protection and to give safety and to watch over. In this particular instance, it actually says the angel of the Lord. The angel of the Lord. We know that in the Old Testament most of those references are to the pre-incarnate appearance of Christ himself. This picture that David gives to us is drawing back the curtain a little bit into the spiritual realities.

There's no better example of that than in 2 Kings chapter 6. You remember that when Elijah passed the baton to Elisha. Elisha is now God's prophet over Israel. In 2 Kings 6, God had been giving word to Elisha about the troop movements of the Syrian or the Aramaean army. Every time they moved, Israel was in position to be in a better place. The king was like somebody is telling them this and we need to find out who it is. Word comes to the king ultimately that it is this prophet Elisha who is getting information. So the king of Syria sends his army. They surround the little city/town of Dothan where Elisha and his servant are. Remember the servant gets up in the morning and goes out to draw water at the well. He looks out and oh my goodness, there's an army surrounding us. We're dead! He runs back to Elisha and says we're finished. It's over. We're captured. Remember what happens? Elisha says to God, open his eyes. Let him see the reality of what you're doing. He goes back out again and God pulled back the curtain even more and he sees that standing between themselves and the army of the Syrians is in fact the army of God. That's what David is testifying to here in the 7th verse. God's protection. God's care over us. God is able to take care of because he is awesome.

Now look thirdly. God is good. God is good. Verses 8 through 10. “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! The young lion suffers want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.” Now we've seen double blessing. We've already got the double blessing. That was a couple weeks ago. Now we

have a double O. It's 8 and 9. We have a 008 and 009 not a 007. It's a 008 and a 009. Eight and 9 are parallel to each other. Oh, he says. This is the expression that he's giving of what God is doing. And what does he want out of that expression? He wants us to taste and see that the Lord is good. He wants us to taste and see. He wants us to enjoy God.

Why do you suppose he says taste and see that the Lord is good? Why wouldn't he say study and see that the Lord is good? Meditate on the fact that the Lord is good. All kinds of possibilities. But in fact, he says taste and see that the Lord is good. I wonder if one of the statements that John Piper's kind of known for doesn't fit here. When Piper says, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him." God is most glorified in us. We live to bring glory to God. How do we best bring glory to God? When we're most satisfied in him. Our satisfaction is in him. It's not in other things or other people or circumstances. It's in him. I think maybe that's what David is pointing to us here.

This desire that we are to have is then a desire for a personal encounter with God. It's a personal encounter with God. We say, and it's a cliché, but it's real. It's true. We say we're not about religion but we're about a relationship. We don't want to be caught up in just some religious formality, but we want to be in a personal relationship in which we understand that we are having a personal encounter with the living God who is awesome, who's able, and who's good. That's what he is saying to us here. Taste and see. Experience the goodness of God for ourselves. It happens when we take refuge in him. It happens when we fear the Lord, when we reverence him, when we're in awe of him. The point is you can't taste and see the goodness of God while you're trusting in yourself. You can't taste and see the goodness of God if there's pride that's dominating your heart. It all goes back to his statement that this is available to those who are humble before God. We're walking in humility.

Look at all the verbs that speak of God-reliance. He sought. He looked. He cried out. He fears. He tastes. He takes refuge in. When we do all of those things, we lack no good thing. We lack no good thing. What does that mean? I have everything I want. Is that the promise? It's the promise of the prosperity teachers. It is the promise of the "name it and claim it" teachers. But that's not the promise of the psalmist and it is not

the promise of God. God never promises us if we name something and we claim it, it is ours. He never promised that if we just think all positive thoughts our life is going to be beautiful and perfect. That is foolish. It's not real. It's not true. Life is hard. You don't change the circumstances of your life by just thinking a positive thought. We all know it's certainly better to be more positive than it is negative, but that's not what David's promising. He's promising us that we will lack no good thing in the sense that God in his sovereign providence knows exactly what we need when we need it and he will provide it in that time frame. That's what it means. In some cases, it's not even the time frame of our earthly life. In some cases, it's the time frame that will cause us to look on into glory. Romans 8:28. We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. 2 Corinthians 4 17 and 18 Paul talks about this light affliction, this momentary light affliction that I'm suffering. It doesn't feel so light. it doesn't feel so momentary. But he says there is an eternal weight of glory for those who walk with God. That's what I believe David is pointing us to here, this personal encounter with God.

Now the second half. We're going to move quickly through the second half because brunch is awaiting us. But notice it's an invitation to wisdom. An invitation to wisdom. God's way is best. Verse 11: "Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord." By the way, that is the theme verse of Psalm 34. The theme for the whole psalm revolves around verse 11. "Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it." If you didn't know what book of the Bible we were reading, what book would you guess this was? It starts with a P, ends with an S and it's next to a book that starts with a P and ends with an S. Proverbs. Doesn't it sound like Proverbs? It should because this is a wisdom psalm now. This is a psalm of instruction. This is David saying this is the way; walk in it. This is God's way. His way is best. So that's the whole theme of that 11th verse. Children, listen. Let me teach you. follow God's way. Walk in God's truth.

It takes courage. It takes courage today to walk in God's truth. It is going to take more courage because the battle rages, and the battle and the intensity of the battle for

the hearts and minds and souls of men and women is only going to increase in the end days. That's where we're living. Those are the times we find ourselves. Proverbs 14:12 says there is a way that seems right to a man but the end is the way of death. That's our culture, my friends. They are so convinced that they've got it all right but they're walking the foolish path, and the end is the way of death. In this section of verses going back to verse 8 and verse 14, there are 10 imperatives. Ten imperatives or commands for how it is that we walk in God's way.

Secondly, God's watchful eye. Verses 15 through 18: "The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all of their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." God does really listen and God does really care. That's what David says. Important truths to remember because what David is experiencing, what we experience, often requires that we wait upon the Lord. We saw that back in Psalm 27. We're going to wait on the Lord. Here it is again. This requirement that falls to us as we walk the way with God. In those times when we're tempted to think that God is not listening, God doesn't care, God isn't concerned, here's the psalmist giving us testimony that yes, you trust him. You walk with him. You stay the course. You wait on him and he will be faithful. That's the point of verse 18. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and he saves the crushed in spirit.

Then lastly, God will provide. Verse 19: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned." This, my friends, is the long view. This is the long view. This is the view we're to take. We're not to be shortsighted. We're to be looking at the long view. It takes us beyond the present moment and it says yes, the ultimate hope, the eternal hope is waiting for us. Life with all of its difficulties, with all of its hardships, with all of its heartaches, God is going to one day make it all right. Affliction will not win. God himself will win.

Verse 20 is literally fulfilled in Christ. He keeps all his bones. Not one of them is broken. John 19. When the soldiers came to the cross and they broke the legs of the two men on either side of Christ, they came to Christ, and it is not simply some happenstance that Christ's bones were not broken. That was the statement of the psalmist. That was the promise of God. Not one of his bones would be broken. It's not technically right to speak of Christ's body as broken for us. Yes, in a sense it was. We understand. but his bones were not broken and they were not broken because that was the promise of the psalmist that was fulfilled in the life of our Lord. In fact, you can go beyond and say Jesus not only fulfills verse 20, Jesus is the fulfillment of the entire psalm. Psalm 34 finds its fulfillment in the life of our Lord because Jesus is a better David. He is better than David. He is the ultimate one.

Two words and we close. Verse 22. There are two words that I want you to underline. The word "redeems" and the word "condemned". The Lord redeems the life of His servants. None of those who take refuge in him will be condemned. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans chapter 8.

What do we take away? Let's you and I be counted among the righteous. When you look at this psalm – the righteous are humble. The righteous look to him. The righteous fear him. The righteous take refuge in him. The righteous seek him. The righteous turn away from evil. The righteous do good. Here's the good news. The righteousness that we need is the righteousness that God provides. The righteousness that we need to stand in the presence of a holy righteous God without condemnation is only possible when we stand clothed in the righteousness of Christ. That righteousness comes to us through the gospel. The gospel says for all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The wages of sin bring death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. We offer you the greatest gift this morning you will ever receive – the gift of eternal life. It is a gift that comes to you by the grace of God. All you have to do is agree with God that you've sinned, that you've fallen short of his glory. There's nothing you can do to earn heaven, salvation, his merit, his favor. It's all found in Christ. I believe and trust that what Jesus did was enough.

Let's pray. Father, we declare our allegiance to you as we have already sung this morning. We declare again, Father, our heart's desire to be counted among the

righteous. To recognize and realize that to be closed in the righteousness of Christ is the greatest experience that anyone could ever enjoy. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. Father God, we pray by your Spirit, open hearts to this glorious gospel this morning. Bring to faith those whom you have chosen. Bring to faith those who believe and trust Jesus as their Savior. We pray in Christ's name, amen.