



# Psalm 34

## How to Worship When God Rescues | Psalm 34

July 17, 2022

Ethan Ezikian

### I. Introduction

Let's pray.

*Our Father in Heaven, I stand with the psalmist in awe of your goodness. Lord, we hang all of our hope on you because you have acted to rescue your people and redeem your people so that we might be free from condemnation and know you as our refuge. Holy Spirit, I ask that you would do what only you can do in these next moments - open our eyes to your truth, take us past intellectual agreement, and bring us into experiencing and knowing with certainty - tasting and seeing - that you are good. Teach us, Lord. Amen.*

Well, if you don't already have your bibles open to Psalm 34, I'd love for you to grab them and get your eyes on this text. If you want to hold a book in your hands instead of reading from a device (which I highly recommend), we have bibles at the communion stations or at the connection station and if you don't own a bible, that's our gift to you. Take it home and read it!

### Laying the Groundwork

While you get there, I want to take a bit more time to lay a groundwork for where we're heading for the rest of the summer. To do that, I'm going to run the risk of totally losing your interest by reading a long-ish quote. It's a quote from a speech given by an author named David Foster Wallace. Wallace was an award winning author who was famous for his kind-of postmodern, penetrating storytelling. In 2005 he gave a commencement speech at Kenyon College that's become quite famous. And this quote from Wallace is striking because he's giving his speech outside of the church, outside of Christian subculture, as a secular person, speaking to secular people and yet his insight about the human condition harmonizes so well with the message of the bible. This is what he said to that graduating class:

*...there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship...is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough... Worship your body, and beauty, and sexual allure... And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you... Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear.*

*Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful, it's that they're unconscious. They are default settings. They're the kind of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day...<sup>1</sup>*

Now there's a lot going on in that quote (and I wonder if you resonate with his description of what it feels like to worship money, or beauty, or power, or intellect) but the thing I want to put my finger on right now is that David Foster Wallace, this nonreligious person, is making the argument that Christianity would make, and that I want to make to you right now: "There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship" (DFW).

And the invitation of Christianity is to believe that the reason worshipping all of these other things ends in despair is because we were created to worship God and God alone; that our worship of other things is rebellion against God's good design; and that the only way to real joy and peace is come back into alignment with God's design by trusting Jesus Christ to wash us clean of our sin and purify us so that we might worship the holy God and, in doing what we were created to do, find true life! Christianity says, no matter who you are, your life revolves around worship, and you are invited to worship Jesus - to make him the center of your life, to quench your spiritual thirst through him instead of worshipping something that will "eat you alive."

### **Why Are We in the Psalms?**

This is why we're spending the rest of the summer in the book of Psalms. The Psalms (which are a curated collection of ancient Hebrew poems, songs and prayers written for God's people) in a nutshell the Psalms teach us how to worship God. And we need this - even within the church - because even within the church we are confused about worship. Christians (myself included) use this word in confusing ways. We'll talk about going to "worship" like it's a place or a service, then when we're participating in the service we would say we're worshipping, but then afterward if we weren't vibing with the music we might say, "I couldn't worship today." On top of that there is a whole genre of music called worship. So, if you're tracking, that means when you went to worship and were worshipping, you couldn't worship during worship because you weren't vibing with the worship. We use that word in pretty funny ways, right? Like imagine how confusing that would be for an outsider who knows nothing of churchy culture if they came into the world of Christianity! Then on top of that, there's this biblical perspective that kind of drops a bomb on all this that says worship is more than a service or a song or a feeling. Instead it's orienting your whole life around Jesus.

But the Psalms help us in all of this confusion. They help us by centering us on the gospel, putting truth in our mouths, shaping the posture of our hearts, and modeling for us a faithful embodied response to God's glory. So in every confusing way we use the word worship, the Psalms meet us and teach us. The Psalms teach us in our outward posture and in our inward heart attitudes; in our gathered worship on Sundays and in our scattered lives of worship throughout the week. At every level they help us to come into alignment with our created purpose to worship God by teaching us how to worship God faithfully. And so the unifying theme throughout the next few weeks as we spend

---

<sup>1</sup> David Foster Wallace, *This Is Water* (<https://fs.blog/david-foster-wallace-this-is-water/>)

time in the Psalms is that each Psalm will teach us “How to worship” as individuals and as a church family. How to worship when God is Silent, how to worship when we sin, how to worship when we doubt, how to worship when we are weary...

And today we're starting in Psalm 34 and we're going to see that Psalm 34 teaches us how to worship when God rescues.

## II. Background On Psalm 34

So let's look at Psalm 34. Now, in some of your Bibles there might be an italicized line or a bolded line above the chapter that looks like a title. In my bible it says, “Taste and See that the Lord is Good.” Those are headings written in by the publisher, not a part of the psalm. But before the lines of the poem begin, there is a superscript line that is a part of Psalm 34 that says, “Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away” (1). So this kind of superscript isn't present for every psalm, but here in Psalm 34 we're given a bit of information on the front end. It tells us that David is the author of this psalm. And it tells us what was happening when David wrote this psalm. We can read about David changing his behavior before Abimelech in 1 Samuel 21. I'm going to give you the cliff notes version, but before that let's make sure we all know who David was.

David was Israel's most important king. About 75 of the 150 psalms are attributed to David. The Bible calls him a “man after God's own heart.” He loved God and He was the man that God chose to become king over Israel. Before he ascended to the throne, David was a shepherd and there was another king over Israel named Saul. Saul was not a good king. He failed in his most important duty - to obey God. And when Saul heard that David had been anointed and called by God to be king, he tried to hold onto his power. David became famous in the land when he killed Goliath the philistine champion and then became a commander in the army. The people would sing a song about David: “Saul has struck down his thousands and David is ten thousands.” So David had won the favor of the people and Saul became jealous of David. So jealous that he tried to have David killed many times.

Now I don't know if I even have a way to empathize with that, it's so far outside my experience. What would you do if the king of your land wanted you dead? Maybe run far away as fast as you can? That's what David did. He ran for his life from King Saul and in desperation (to get out of reach from Saul), he ran to the land of his enemies. And if you remember, David isn't so popular with the Philistines either because he killed their big time champion Goliath and defeated their armies. And some of the servants of the Philistine king recognize David and bring David to their king. So he has gone from Danger to even more danger and he's afraid and so he decides to pretend to be insane. He messes up his beard, he lets saliva run out of his mouth, he scratches the walls. And when the king sees this he decides it's not worth killing a mad man, and David escapes from there to a place where he can rest.

So imagine being on the run - feeling so threatened at home that you decide to run to your enemies, then immediately being taken out of the frying pan and put into the fire. David's life has hung in the balance and God has rescued him from being killed at the hands of Saul and killed at the hand of the

Philistines and he finally comes to a resting place where he can process everything that has happened to him. And instead of patting himself on that back, he recognizes that his plan - the place he thought would be his ideal refuge - was a disaster, but God in his mercy rescues him from his own foolish plan and from his enemies. And after God rescues him from his enemies, David pens this Psalm to worship the one who rescued him.

Before we start to look at David's psalm I want to ask you: where have you run to when you've needed rescuing? What has been your refuge when you've been hard pressed by your difficult marriage? By your stressful job? By your worry for your children? By your disappointment in yourself? By your scary diagnosis? Or by your depression? Have you run to distraction through entertainment or through substances or busyness? Have you run to control by inflexibly scrambling to make sure you've planned and prepared for every aspect of your life and ruling over the people in your life? Have you run to people? Have you run to isolation? I really want you to think about this. Identify one or two things that you have made your refuge when you've wanted rescuing. I want you to have these in mind because I want you to compare your rescuer to David's. As we move through the psalm, I want you to ask yourself if you could write a similar hymn of praise to the things that you run to. Do the things you run to lead you to the kind of joy that David testifies to? I don't want to hide my agenda from you. My goal is for you to see the things you run to like David looked at his flight to the Philistines - something he thought would rescue him that led to even more disaster. Something that God has to rescue you out of.

So let's look to the psalm and as we do, I want us to see five ways that Psalm 34 teaches us to worship when God rescues.

### III. Praise Him

Verses 1-3. David writes, <sup>1</sup> "I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. <sup>2</sup> My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. <sup>3</sup> Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!" (1-3). The first thing that Psalm 34 teaches us is that **when God is your rescuer, you praise him.**

The things that you talk about most reveal what has your heart and David's heart has been taken over by the God who has rescued him, so he blesses the Lord, praises the Lord, makes his boast in the Lord, magnifies the Lord, exalts his name. David recognizes that he has not been strong enough to save himself. This is why he says, "let the humble hear and be glad." The humble are those who know they need help! And because he has seen the end of his strength and experienced God's power to save, he gives all his approval and admiration in glad worship to God! And David praises God at all times because everything he's just experienced has taught him that no matter how desperate the situation, it's in God's hand.

This is an invitation to you, follower of Jesus! Maybe you've made the connection already, but let me say it plainly: God has rescued David from the hand of his enemies and if you're a follower of Jesus in the same way (times a million) God has rescued you. You were not just like David in danger of death, you were dead in your sin, but God in his love and mercy has rescued you by making you alive with

Christ who conquered our enemies on our behalf. So bless the Lord as all times! Let his praise be in your mouth in every season. Because you could do nothing to save yourself, boast in his power and grace to save you. And, like David, invite others to magnify his name with you.

#### **IV. Testify to His Salvation**

As David invites others to praise God with him, he turns to them to tell his story of being rescued. Look at verse 4-7: <sup>4</sup> I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. <sup>5</sup> Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. <sup>6</sup> This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. <sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

The second thing Psalm 34 teaches us is that **worshiping God when he rescues us includes testifying to his salvation** - telling others the story of how God rescued you! David is saying to those who are with him that his praise isn't on my lips all the time for any arbitrary reason. He's saying, "I have a reason to praise him. Join me! Here is my experience and it can be your experience too!"

Your testimony of God's work in your life is not meant to be private or personal or kept to yourself. The stories of God's rescuing work are a banner God has put into your hand to wave in the middle of a battle. You're in the fight of faith alongside your brothers and sisters and the battle gets confusing and everyone is tired and the enemy is strong and the battle lines are confusing, but God has given you a flag to wave to rally your comrades in arms, to strengthen your heart, to strike fear into the heart of they enemy. The stories of God's faithfulness in your life are tools that he has placed in your hands to glorify his name, build up the church, and share the gospel. And it's not even hard. You might think a testimony is a long retelling of your whole life's story and how you came to know Jesus, and it can be that, but you can also testify to what God has been up to in your life in 15 seconds. If you're a part of our Go Groups, we've talked about 15 second testimonies. Here's the formula for a 15 second testimony: There was a time in my life when \_\_\_\_\_, then God showed me \_\_\_\_\_, and now \_\_\_\_\_. So for me I might say, "There was time in my life when I felt sad and angry and hurt and believed nobody noticed and then God showed me that in Jesus I am seen, that I wasn't passed over or forgotten and now when I'm hurting I know he is with me and I can run to him." And then, you can say, "do you have a story like that?" And if you're talking to a Christian you can listen to their story and just like that the church is encouraged in if you're talking to someone who doesn't follow Jesus it's an opportunity to share the gospel!

This is what happens when God rescues us! Part of worshiping him is testifying to his salvation!

#### **V. Preaching the Goodness of God**

Then after David testifies to what God has done for him, he calls us into the same experience and certainty that God has given him. <sup>8</sup> Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! <sup>9</sup> Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! <sup>10</sup> The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing."

This is the high point of the psalm and it teaches us that worshipping God when he rescues us includes preaching the goodness of God. And by “preaching” I don’t mean delivering a sermon so much as I mean exhorting and beseeching one another. Stoking up the flames of affection for God to trust in his promises. That line “taste and see” means experience and be certain that God is good and those who take refuge in him lack no good. Remember where David is writing from. He’s in a place of rest, but he’s still on the run. He’s actually hiding in a cave - and yet David’s eyes have been so opened to God’s goodness that he can write, if God is your refuge, you lack no good thing whatever your circumstance! Worshipping a God who rescues us means preaching this truth to one another and even to your own heart.

## VI. Teaching the Fear of God

After David reaches this highpoint in his Psalm he makes a turn and calls us to fear the Lord.

<sup>11</sup> Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. <sup>12</sup> What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? <sup>13</sup> Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. <sup>14</sup> Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

In the first ten verses of the psalm, we were learning from David’s *example* - as he overflows with praise - how to worship a God who rescues. Now it’s as if David turns to us to actually instruct us. He’s teaching us that a life that has been rescued by God, that has benefitted from God’s goodness goes hand in hand with a life of fearing the Lord. And when the Bible talks about fearing the Lord, you have to know it doesn’t mean that we are terrified of God in a way that makes us hide from him. It’s an awe a reverence toward God that drives us to go toward him. David’s calling us to set aside the things that are sinful against God and call us out of alignment with God’s good rule. Set aside the things that eat us alive and bring our lives into accord with his plan and lead us to live. The apostle Peter makes this same point in 1 Peter 2. He actually quotes Psalm 34 when he says, “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander... <sup>3</sup> if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.” (1 Pt 2:1-3). Both Peter and David aren’t teaching that our good behavior can earn God’s blessing. They’re reminding us that a life lived in response to God’s rescue means offering the actions of your life on the altar of worship to God. Romans 12:1, “...in view of God’s mercy...offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (NIV).

This is what David is calling us to: to fear the Lord because he has rescued us!

## VII. Cling to the Care of God

David finishes the psalm by listing the ways God cares for those whom he has rescued. And before I read this last section again, I want to call attention to the fulfillment of all these promises of care: David lived at a time in human history when God’s people clung to his promise of redemption, but had only seen shadows and fortastes of God’s salvation. They put their faith in that which was not yet seen. We can read this psalm as people who have clearly seen God’s plan of rescue play out in Christ.

David tasted and saw God’s goodness, Jesus is the whole feast of God’s goodness. It’s in Jesus that God has answered our cry for help and saved us out of our troubles. It’s in Jesus that we’ve been

delivers. It is in looking to Jesus that our faces become radiant. It's in Jesus that God encamps around us and protect us! It's because Jesus has rescued us that we who follow him can say, no matter our circumstance if we have Christ we lack no good thing. It's because Jesus has rescued us that we run toward the Lord with awe and holy fear and offer our lives in worshipful obedience to him. It's only because Jesus Christ took our sin to the cross and endured the affliction that we deserve that we can be cleansed from our sin and rescued from the enemy of death, and promised no condemnation forever. And it's because we believe these things that we can read the last seven verse of Psalm 34 with so much hope in the care of God for his people. Look at these verse with a Christ-colored lens with me.

<sup>15</sup> The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. <sup>16</sup> The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. <sup>17</sup> When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. <sup>18</sup> The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. <sup>19</sup> Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. <sup>20</sup> He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. <sup>21</sup> Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. <sup>22</sup> The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Because God has rescued us in Jesus Christ, we can worship him clinging to his care for us.

## VII. Conclusion

So I started the sermon by making the argument to you that everybody worships. That it's not a choice between worshiping and not worshiping, but a choice of what you will worship. And then later I asked you to consider what it is that you run to when you need rescuing. I wonder if you made the connection that those things that you run to (distraction, control, people) - those are the things that you worship. And those are the things that will eat you alive! Those are the things that can't deliver on their promises. And the goal undergirding this message has been to paint a picture of Christian worship that is birthed when God rescues us through Jesus!

No matter who you are, Christian or not, there is bent in our hearts to choose our refuge and run to them for rescuing like David ran to the Philistines. And just like David we get there and find more destruction. And there is a call here in this Psalm to cry out to God for rescue. The good news is that he has answered the cry for help of all of humanity in Jesus. So Come! The invitation is to test him in his promise! Come and experience his care for his people! Come taste and see that he is good! And worship him as a God who rescues!