

Sunday School Lesson for August 11,2024 All Saints Anglican Church

Psalm 34 (ESV) [An acrostic poem like Psalms 9-10, 25, 37, 111, 112, 119 and 145]

Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away [I Sm. 21:10-15].

[1] I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

[2] My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad.

[3] Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!

[4] I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

[5] Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.

[6] This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.

[7] The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

[8] Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

[9] Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!

[10] The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

[11] Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

[12] What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good?

[13] Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.

[14] Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

[15] The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry.

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

[17] When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.

[18] The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

[19] Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.

[20] He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.

[21] Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

[22] The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Initial Impressions

- What strikes you or puzzles you about this psalm?
- What structure(s) do you see?
- What imagery?
- What repetitions?

Background:

Longman says, Psalms, p. 169, “The connection between the psalm and the historical situation is that the psalmist (like David in I Sm. 21) found himself in trouble. The psalmist called on God, and God answered his prayer and rescued him. If there is a connection, then calling on God does not preclude being proactive in working toward one’s rescue. Another connection is that David was afraid of the king (I Sm. 21:12), but the psalm teaches that the fear of God drives out fear of other, even powerful, people.”

Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, “Fear of God,” p. 277, “The fear of God is distinct from the terror of him that is also a biblical motif. Encompassing and building on attitudes of awe and reverence, it is the proper and elemental response of a person to God. This religious fear of God is a major biblical image for the believer’s faith. In fact, there are well over a hundred references to the fear of God in the positive sense of faith and obedience.

“What images should we associate with this mysterious ‘fear of God’? The actions most frequently associated with fear of God are serving God and obedience to his commandments. The fear of God is linked to wisdom and is part of the covenant between God and his people. To fear God is to be in awe and reverence of him and to trust him. Fearing God means hating and avoiding evil. It is not too much to say that fearing God is virtually synonymous with having saving faith in him. The fear of God is a fundamental quality of those who have experiential knowledge of who he is.”

Longman, *Dictionary of the OT* (W, P, W), “Fear of the LORD,” pp. 201, 204-05, **Conclusion**. “Fear is a virtue that leads to piety, praise and humility, since one who fears God recognizes that God, not oneself, is the center of the cosmos.”

Structure: [from different commentaries]

Longman, pp. 169-71,

- Glorify the Lord (1-3)
- God heard my prayer (4-7)
- Taste and see (8-14)
- God is for the righteous (15-16)
- God hears the prayers of the righteous (17-20)
- Consequences for the wicked and God’s servants (21-22)

Wilson, pp. 567-

- Invocation to praise Yahweh (1-3)
- Person testimony of deliverance (4-7)
- Proverbial instruction (8-22)
 - Taste (8)
 - Fear the LORD (9-10)
 - I will teach you (11-14)
 - The eyes of the LORD (15-16)
 - He delivers them from all their troubles (17-20)
 - Evil will slay evil (21-22)

Brueggemann, p. 133,

- Thanksgiving (1-7)
- Wisdom instructions (8-14)
- A reflection on righteousness (15-22)

Wilson, pp. 571-2, “As we have seen, what might appear to be an unorganized series of aphorisms does exhibit a certain order. The hearers are encouraged to take refuge in Yahweh (34:8) and to assume the appropriate dependence on him embodied by ‘fear of the LORD (34:9). This all-important relationship of ‘fear’ is defined as turning from evil (34:11-14), and the consequences of the response of righteous and wicked are illustrated (34:15-22) in order to encourage the righteous that dependence on Yahweh is the only hope for redemption.”

Commentaries

Longman, pp.168-72, *Context*. “While wisdom traits permeate the psalm, the prayer is one of thanksgiving. The psalmist, who identifies himself as a *poor man*, was rescued by God and now praises God and encourages his fellow worshipper to join him. The psalm is written in an acrostic form.”

34:15-16. “The psalmist is under no illusions. God cares for the righteous, but he will punish the wicked. By this observation, the psalmist thus urges his hearers towards a righteous life.”

34:17-20. “God helps those who psychologically and emotionally are vulnerable.... He answers their prayers for help. The psalmist realizes that the righteous may have problems, but he believes that the God will preserve them from all of them.”

34:21-22. “The psalm ends by stating the different consequences that await the wicked and the righteous. The former come to a bad end. Indeed, their own evil will result in their demise. On the other hand, the righteous who may suffer at present, will be rescued.”

Meaning. “The psalmist was a person who found his fears calmed in the *fear of the LORD* and he urges his fellow worshippers to do the same. To read the psalm in light of its title leads one to identify *this poor man* (v. 6) with David. However, the psalmist did not write the psalm as a memorial to a past event, but with the hope that later readers (including us) would identify with the speaker.

Broyles, pp. 168-69,

34:15-22. “Believers are given every confidence to entrust themselves to Yahweh, but they are not given guarantees of avoiding troubles altogether. Yahweh is presented as Deliverer, not as one who preserves his own from ever experiencing hardship. Trouble is a given. Its mere appearance does not signal a failure on Yahweh’s or the believer’s part....”

Wilson, pp. 566-72, ***Contemporary Significance***. **A righteous man may have many troubles.**

“The psalmist wants to make it clear that those who are called to bless Yahweh are not those who are beyond suffering and pain. To the contrary, they are described as the ‘poor’ (34:6), those who take ‘refuge in him’ (34:8, 22), who ‘cry out’ under oppression (34:6, 15, 17). They are ‘brokenhearted’ and ‘crushed in spirit’ (34:18), who must rely on God to ‘redeem’ them (34:22) and save them ‘out of all [their] troubles’ (34:6, 17, 19). They are the ones who in the *midst* of their trouble experience the blessing of Yahweh.

“Once again, to ‘fear God/Yahweh’ is to pare life down to its essential core: acceptance that one is completely dependent on God’s gracious, undeserved mercy. To experience that mercy in the midst of trouble is to know the ‘blessing’ our psalmist describes. To ‘lack nothing’ (34:9) or ‘no good thing (34:10) certainly does not mean never to be in want or never to suffer pain and uncertainty. Blessing comes precisely from acknowledging one’s dependence on God—that he alone is the refuge the psalmist seeks.

“This does not mean that we never suffer as a consequence of our own distorted decisions and sinful actions. Certainly alcoholism, uncontrollable rage, deceit, sexual promiscuity, and dishonesty—to name but a few of our sinful failings—can pay back severe and destructive consequences on us and all those around us. But to equate all suffering with the consequences of sin is to miss the point Jesus made so long ago, both in the account of the blind man and in the Beatitudes: The righteous suffer undeservedly, but in their suffering they have opportunity to glorify God and to receive his blessing.”