

**“The LORD Listens”
Psalm 34
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
8.8.21
Sermon #110**

Psalm 34

**Of David, when he pretended to be crazy before Abimelech,
who banished him so that he left.**

1

I will bless the Lord at all times;

his praise will always be in my mouth.

2

I praise the Lord—

let the suffering listen and rejoice.

3

Magnify the Lord with me!

Together let us lift his name up high!

4

I sought the Lord and he answered me.

He delivered me from all my fears.

5

Those who look to God will shine;

their faces are never ashamed.

6

This suffering person cried out:

the Lord listened and saved him from every trouble.

7

On every side, the Lord's messenger protects those who honor God; and he delivers them.

8

Taste and see how good the Lord is!

The one who takes refuge in him is truly happy!

9

You who are the Lord's holy ones, honor him,

because those who honor him don't lack a thing.

10

Even strong young lions go without and get hungry,

but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

11

Come, children, listen to me.

Let me teach you how to honor the Lord:

12

Do you love life;

do you relish the chance to enjoy good things?

13

Then you must keep your tongue from evil

and keep your lips from speaking lies!

14

Turn away from evil! Do good!

Seek peace and go after it!

15

The Lord's eyes watch the righteous,
his ears listen to their cries for help.

16

But the Lord's face is set against those who do evil,
to eliminate even the memory of them from the earth.

17

When the righteous cry out, the Lord listens;
he delivers them from all their troubles.

18

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted;
he saves those whose spirits are crushed.

19

The righteous have many problems,
but the Lord delivers them from every one.

20

He protects all their bones;
not even one will be broken.

21

But just one problem will kill the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be held responsible.

22

The Lord saves his servants' lives;
all those who take refuge in him
won't be held responsible for anything.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

You may have noticed the peculiar superscription to the Psalm. And if we're being honest, the reason why I chose Psalm 34 instead of the other scriptures prescribed from the Revised Common Lectionary was because of the peculiar superscription. I had no idea David did such things. I remember his fleeing King Saul. I remember his fleeing Absalom, when there was a civil war. But, if I had heard a story about David pretending to be crazy, I'm

certain I would've remembered it. And I wonder how many of you have heard this story.

The story today's psalm points to is 1 Samuel 21:10-15. David is on the run from Saul. It hasn't been long since David was anointed by the Prophet Samuel, defeated Goliath, and developed his relationship with Saul's son, Jonathan. David is not a mere shepherd boy any more. He's a warrior. He's anointed. The Spirit of the LORD has come upon him and no longer rests on Saul. In fact, the Spirit departed from Saul. And Saul is angry. And Saul is unrelenting in his obsession to hunt David down. So, for the sake of argument, let's also say David is closer to being a young adult than the boy shepherd the Prophet Samuel anointed.

As David continues his evasion of Saul, he comes across the King of Gath, a neighboring kingdom. David's reputation precedes him. Already have the people sung "Saul has killed his thousands, but David has killed his tens of thousands!" The kings from other lands have heard about David's victory over Goliath. And a servant of Gath's King has outed David at this moment. And David realizes this could end very badly for him. What's he to do?

He gets creative. David pretends to be crazy. He leaves scratch marks on every surface he encounters as he is brought into the city. Drool rolls down his chin and he continues to act insane. Once the king sees him, he becomes more frightened at the situation than David! The king asks his servants in 1 Samuel 21:14-15:

"Can't you see he's crazy? Why bring him to me? Am I short on insane people that you've brought this person to go crazy right in

front of me? Do you really think I'm going to let this man enter my house?"

The LORD allowed David to escape.

I say all of this because scripture never takes place in a vacuum.

Always look around the verses you are studying and the chapters as well as where the specific book falls in the order of the Bible.

And for the Psalms, look at the superscription. It reveals so much information.

Psalm 34:1-10 is centered around the past acts of the LORD through the individual. It is a testimony to God's love. "I sought the LORD and he answered me. He delivered me from all my fears!"

In these ten verses, we bear witness to the work of God in this person's life, but we are brought into the drama, too, because we have experienced this. We have experienced fear and heartache and we have experienced God's power to calm our fear and soothe our heartache. Yet, when we cry out to the LORD, as the psalmist exclaims, we will not be ashamed. There is no shame in asking for God's help because we cannot do it on our own! We need God. Totally. And once we feel that overwhelming peace that passes all understanding, we can truly proclaim Psalm 34:8 "taste and see how good the LORD is!"

Psalm 34 doesn't stop at the individual's testimony. Questions are asked in 34:12 to the broader audience: "Do you love life; do you relish the chance to enjoy good things?" This is a teaching moment. And the testimony from the first ten verses lead us into

these verses. If we do love life and if we relish the chance to enjoy good things, then we must keep our tongue from speaking evil, we must do good, and we must chase after peace! Our actions are not just left between two parties—individual and God—but, with each other AND with God.

Then, at verse 15 we have another shift. We get a description of who righteous people are. They recognize they can't and God can. They understand that they are not masters of their own destinies, but their destinies rest in God's hands. If evil seems to prevail, we are told that the memories of evil people will fade from the earth. They will not and cannot last. But the righteous? God listens to them.

Will the righteous be spared of trouble? No. Psalm 34:19 tells us that the righteous, too, encounter difficulties. But, they do not face them alone. And the difficulties do not have the final word. God does. And God will not hold the righteous responsible. Those who have continuously attacked the righteous will be held accountable for their actions.

Psalm 34 takes place within the larger story of David's journey to replace Saul as king. But, this psalm is placed within that smaller, but no less important, side story when David was about to be captured, but he was able to use some creativity because the LORD's Spirit rested on him. God was right there with him. God wasn't going to allow David to be destroyed. Sure, David was going to feel the heat of the moment, but God had it taken care of.

For us, I think we can look at this psalm whether it's with a fresh outlook or perhaps for the first time and recognize God's work in our lives through thick and thin. We have a testimony. We know our own stories and we, like the psalmist, can share them with others and use our stories to teach others about God's wonderful work in the world. And as we teach each other through the sharing of our testimonies, we remember that we are never alone. God keeps a watchful eye over us not because God keeps score of our screwups, but because God loves us and listens to our prayers—joys, laments, and everything in between.

Friends, continue to seek the LORD in all things. Continue to lift your gaze toward God and not yourselves. The chaos around us may afflict us for a moment, but it doesn't have the final word. God does.

Siblings in Christ, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.