Taste and See that the Lord is Good

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[0:00] Well, you can turn back to Psalm 34, and that's section 4 to 10, that's really going to be out of focus. But as a text, I think we'll take the latter part of verse 10 there, so if you look at Psalm 34, verse 10.

But those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. Now this particular psalm is of course a psalm of David, which we see from the outset, and it is one of the psalms that's designated or categorised as a thanksgiving psalm.

David is very thankful here, very thankful for a very recent and a very real deliverance that he has experienced. And in this psalm we see that David has learned to continually praise God.

He continually praises God. It is no matter what happens, no matter what he's been through, or indeed what he might still go through, he has learned in all things to praise God.

The praise of God will continually be on his lips. And David is a man who has been through quite a bit, even in this stage of his life.

[1:19] He's constantly fleeing from danger. And he's going from one danger and one trouble to another. He's running away from one thing and ending up in all kinds of other difficulties and all kinds of other troubles along the way.

It's this kind of cycle, constant cycle almost, of running and hiding from one place to another. It's a degree of turmoil going on in his life.

And we know something about the historical context here because this psalm has a title to it. Not all psalms have titles to it, but this one does.

And the title gives you a bit of insight as to whereabouts in the life of David that this particular psalm was penned. And we see that this was a time when David changed his behaviour before Abimelech, who drove him away.

And he went away. He departed. Now, it seems that what's in view here is the narrative of what we read earlier on from 1 Samuel 21.

[2:31] In that narrative, King Saul has started his persecution on David. He wants to kill David and attempted it before and failed. But now he's chasing him wholeheartedly.

And David, he runs away. He flees. And quite amazingly, he flees to the king of Gath. That's one of the Philistine kings. The king of the Philistines.

And that in itself is quite strange. You'd think if he were going to run away to anywhere, it wouldn't be the Philistines. After all that David has been involved in with the Philistines. But that's what he does.

He goes to the king of Gath. This king called Achish. And that poses the first interpretive challenge for us. Because the title of the psalm says that the king was called Abimelech.

Now, that's fairly easily understood. Because Abimelech, literally in Hebrew, that just means son of the king. And it's quite widely established now that amongst the Philistine kings, they would be referred to as Abimelech.

[3:36] Like a title. A wee bit like Pharaoh in Egypt. They'd all be, it's like a kind of a dynastic title. They'd all be known as Pharaoh. And these Philistine kings, they were often known as Abimelech.

So, it seems almost certainly from this title here in the psalm, that the narrative in mind is that of 1 Samuel 21.

Because you notice there in the title it says that David changed his behaviour. Now, the idea there, the interpretation there is really this idea of pretending madness.

And that's exactly what David did in 1 Samuel 21. He came up with this plan to pretend to be mad. To pretend to be insane. And because of that, he was able to run away.

He was able to flee from the king of Gath. Now, that's not to comment on the moral correctness of what he did there. But that's what David did.

[4:36] He pretended to be mad and he was able to flee. But David knew that it wasn't through his own cunning, it wasn't through his own plans that he was freed. He knew that it was actually God.

It was the Lord that had delivered him. And then that's how he gives us a psalm or prayer of thanksgiving here. So, this is very much a case of David jumping, I suppose, out of the frying pan and into the fire.

Now, that's what's going on in David's life here. He's going from one difficulty straight into the other. Running away from King Saul, fighting himself with the king, the Philistines, and then having to run away from him.

So, there's a great degree of turmoil in David's life here. His safety, from a merely human perspective, is precarious at best.

He has no safety. He has no place of safety. He has no haven that he can go to. He has no place where he can call home. There may be a few people with him at this stage.

[5:41] They might not be. We know later on that he had a band of people with him. But he may well at this stage be by himself. He has no one with him, no place of safety at all. Yet, here in this psalm, he is praising and lifting up the name of God.

Lifting up the name of his Lord. And you see that there in those opening verses. He praises God continually. His praise will continually be in my mouth.

And David is saying here, it doesn't matter what happens, no matter what dangers I face, my Lord, he will deliver me. And I will continue to praise him.

And that's what David does here. He focuses on the Lord. And, you know, if we were going through these kinds of difficulties ourselves, we would very quickly and very easily focus in on our own prominence and our own situation.

We would talk about the pit that we are in. The difficulty of the dangers that we face. Now, granted, David does do that later on. But not here.

[6:52] Not here. His focus is on the Lord. And you see that by just a number of times he actually repeats the name of the Lord. If you look at the psalm, Yahweh or the Lord is repeated pretty much in every single verse there.

I think it comes up 15 times. Constantly saying the Lord. And he does that for a reason. Because he's trying to point to the fact that he is praising the Lord. Not focusing on himself and his own difficulties, but looking to the Lord.

Other times in the psalms he'll use different words. God Almighty and Lord God Almighty. But here he just keeps using the covenant name of God. Yahweh, Yahweh, Yahweh.

Right through the psalm. And he's pointing, as it were, to the Lord. Because it's not really safety as such that David is seeking here.

He's not seeking comfort. He's not seeking, in the first instance, his own well-being. He's not seeking a hiding place as such from his enemy.

[7:55] He is seeking one thing. He is seeking the Lord. And that's what he's trying to convey here. I seek the Lord. And that's what I want to really focus on this morning with you.

This theme of seeking the Lord. And the blessings that come to those who have known us. Those who seek the Lord. And that is the key theme really there from verse 4 down to verse 10.

And you can tell that because of the way the psalmist uses the word seeking there. If you look in verse 4, he says, I sought the Lord.

And then down in verse 10. But those who seek the Lord. So he uses this word seeking. He top and tail the section. And the psalmist very often does that.

When you read through the psalms, he'll often repeat his key themes in that way. He'll highlight the theme using a word or a phrase. And then later on in the psalm, he'll come back to it.

[8:59] And he'll top and tail a certain section with that particular theme. And the psalmist is communicating to us there. He's saying, this is what I'm talking about. This is what I want to tell you about.

This is going to be my key theme for this section. And that's what this theme is here. Those who seek the Lord. And he's going to explain the blessings that come your way if you are those who seek the Lord.

And I want to look at three of those blessings with you here today. First of all, I want to look at answer prayer.

And then I want to look at angelic protection. And then I want to look at abundant provision. So, an answered prayer.

We're going to look at angelic protection. And then we'll look at abundant provision. So, these are three blessings. So, first of all, we'll look at answered prayer.

[10:05] And you see it there in verse 4. I sought the Lord and he answered me. And that reminds us that, first and foremost, to seek the Lord, we seek him by praying.

We seek him by calling upon him. You know, seeking the Lord is not a case of standing around and looking to see God appear in some way in your providence.

This seeking is not an inactive thing which we do and we just stand and looking around. It's an active thing. To seek the Lord is very much active. We seek him by calling upon him.

Because David doesn't say here, he doesn't say, I sought the Lord and I saw him. He doesn't say that. He says, I sought the Lord and he heard me.

He answered me. See, that shows us that to seek the Lord, we must call upon him. And if we are here outside of Christ, then that is true.

[11:09] If we are seeking the Lord, we don't just stand there waiting to see him. We need to actively go towards him and call upon his name. Ask him to deliver us.

But seeking is not just something the unbeliever does. And I think we get that wrong, don't we? We think that seeking is just something someone who is unconverted does.

We'll say he or she is seeking the Lord. But in the Bible, seeking is not used like that. Seeking is very much something, first and foremost, that the believer does.

David is, there's no question that David is converted yet. David is a believer. And here he is seeking the Lord, seeking his God continually.

And that's what we as the Lord's people must do. In fact, it's our greatest priority. Because Jesus, if you remember on the Sermon on the Mount, when he was teaching there, he said, Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

[12:15] Now again, we tend to think that verse is for the unconverted. We tend to think that's for those who are outside the kingdom. But it's not. That whole Sermon on the Mount is directed to the Christian.

It's directed to the Lord's people, his disciples. And he's saying to us, seek first. Not first in terms of time, but first in terms of importance. Seek as your first priority.

As the thing that's most important to you. Seek the kingdom of God. The things of the kingdom. And God's righteousness. So we as Christians, we are to seek God and we do so in prayer.

And if we seek him, he hears and he answers. That's the promise that he makes to us. And David, no doubt, feels very alone here.

He no doubt feels that sense of almost abandonment. He's, as I was saying, running from one place to the other. In a few days or weeks time, he's going to be hiding in caves.

[13:17] Hiding in the mountains. All these kinds of places. And this is a man who has been anointed as king. But he won't feel like a king. He won't feel like a king at all in this instance.

Rather, as verse 6 tells us, he feels like a poor man. This poor man we read there in verse 6. He cried out to the Lord.

And he's talking about himself there. But yet, although this poor man cried to the Lord, we read that the Lord heard him. You know, sometimes our familiarity, perhaps, with biblical language means that we miss out on really strong language like this.

And this is one of those occasions. Because this is a picture of a poor man. A lowly man. A man afflicted and running away.

A man who, in some ways, has nothing. And he's crying out to the God who has lifted up. The covenant God of Israel. The one who is the king of all kings.

[14:23] The highest being possible. And this poor man is speaking to such a God. You know, a poor man should have no audience with such a king.

Should have no audience with a king of that stature. Of the Lord. Of the king of kings. We should have, according to ourselves, we should have no audience with this king.

It is mind-blowing that we do. If we got an audience with Queen Elizabeth, we'd be amazed. We'd be amazed. If some poor man, some poor woman like we are, got an audience with a queen, we would be amazed.

How much more amazed we should be that we have an audience with a king who is much greater than Elizabeth. A king of all kings. God himself.

It's amazing. And, of course, as Psalm 116 points out to us, as we sang it earlier on, we know that he doesn't just hear from far away.

[15:25] It's not that God sends his angels and then they come and they listen to your prayers and then the angels go and they deliver them up to the throne room of God. In some kind of large-scale communication system.

As though God would answer us in an indirect and impersonal way. That's not the case at all. That's not the image that we have here at all. God, he comes and he bows his ear down and he listens to our prayers.

That's quite incredible. He listens and he answers them. He does it himself. He is listening. Now, he might not always give you the answer that you expect or perhaps not the answer that you want.

Perhaps he might delay his answer. But he always answers. He will always answer. He will always answer the prayers of his people.

And he will answer them according to his will. And as well, like Moses. Remember Moses when he was up on Mount Sinai and he spent their time with the Lord.

[16:34] He had an audience there with God. You remember when Moses came down from that mountain top. Remember his face? His face was radiant after being in the presence of the Lord.

And that's exactly what happens to us as Christians. And we see that there in verse 5. Those who look to him, they are radiant.

And their faces shall never be ashamed. We are poor men and women. But when we spend time with God in prayer, we don't come out thinking we shouldn't have been there.

We don't come out feeling ashamed that we were there. We might go in feeling a sense of humility. But we come out full of the joy of the Lord. We come out radiant, radiating the joy of God.

We come out saying it was good for us to have been there. And you can tell that on people. You can tell when there are certain people who are prayerful people. And they radiate.

[17:37] They radiate that joy of the Lord. And you can tell. These people have been in prayer. You can tell a prayerful man or woman of God. And you can tell it in their face.

And that's the blessing that we have promised here. Our faces will radiate. We will never be ashamed. So, those who seek the Lord, we give thanks for answered.

Prayer. But secondly, we give thanks for his angelic protection. Because, as I've highlighted a number of times now, the psalmist here, he's in danger.

We've seen that. We know that. He's in a lot of danger. Not only has he been delivered from danger, but he's got a lot of danger before him as well. But yet, in verse 4 there, he says he's been delivered from all his fears.

Delivered from every single one of his fears. Now, it's interesting to note here that the word, the fear, that's used here in verse 4, is a different Hebrew word to the one that's used later on for the fear of the Lord.

[18:44] This fear here in verse 4, this is more like akin to the word of terror. He's delivered me from all things that are horrifying to me.

And, of course, he's been delivered from terrifying situations in the past. But there's also an element of there being terrifying situations in front of him. But David is saying here that he's been delivered from all of these things.

Not only the horrific situations of the past, but the terrors that face him in the future. He's been delivered. Delivered from all of these fears.

Delivered from his anxiety at what might happen. And, you know, we are a people who are perhaps full of anxieties and fears.

We have lots of anxieties and fears for what might happen. What might happen to us in the future. We know not what lies ahead. And very often it's a mercy.

[19:45] In fact, it is a mercy from God that we don't know. But it fills us with a sense of anxiety and a sense of fear. And the Lord is saying here that he will deliver us from those fears.

We know what it's like to be like David here and jump from the frying pan into the fire. We know what it's like to go from one problem, one difficulty straight into another difficulty.

And life for many people is like that. It's like a hopscotch of very difficult and very trying providences.

But God promises us those who seek the Lord, he will deliver us from all of our fears. No matter what your fears might be, those who seek the Lord, they are delivered from these things.

And that raises a question. How are we delivered from these things? It's easy to say that, but how are we? Well, we are because we don't go through these troubles alone.

[20:50] The Lord provides us, in verse 7 there, with an angelic protection. The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear him.

So, who is the angel of the Lord? Who is it that encamps us all around? Well, there's generally speaking two views to this, two interpretations that you could hold.

But I actually think both those interpretations actually come together. I think they actually are one interpretation. And I'll try and explain that in just a moment.

But first of all, let's go back to earlier on in the Old Testament. And this phrase of the angel of the Lord. Because that's a phrase that appears quite often.

The angel of the Lord appears from time to time in the Old Testament narratives. Famously, he's there in Exodus 3 with Moses in a burning bush.

[21:54] In that narrative we read that the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire. And even earlier than that in Genesis, the angel of the Lord appeared to Abraham on Mount Moriah.

And in both those cases, and other cases as well, the angel of the Lord is clearly spoken of as being divine. The angel of the Lord is in some way God himself.

But the problem comes when at other times the angel of the Lord is spoken of as someone who's in some way distinct from God.

Distinct from the Father. And you get that in Gideon. That's one example of it. When the angel of the Lord appears to Gideon. And the angel of the Lord, when he's speaking to Gideon, he says, The Lord will be with you.

And he's speaking about the Lord as though he was not himself the Lord. So it sounds as though almost the angel of the Lord here is distinct in some way from God.

[22:57] So sometimes the angel of the Lord is very clearly spoken of as God. And other times the angel of the Lord is spoken of as someone who's distinct from God.

And in my mind there is only one possible solution to who that could be. Think about it. This is an appearance of a man. A man who at certain times claims to be God.

And yet in another way is distinct from God. There is only one option to who that could be. This is a title for the pre-incarnate Son of God.

A pre-incarnate appearance of Christ himself. Because he appears as a man. He is God. And yet distinct from the Father.

It is the Lord Jesus. Christ, this pre-incarnate of Christ himself. When I say pre-incarnate by the way. Just to clarify that. I just mean by that pre-incarnation.

[24:01] So it's an appearance before he actually became the incarnate man himself. So pre-incarnate just means an appearance of Christ before he actually became a man.

So this is what the angel of the Lord is. Certainly in many of the passages of the Old Testament. So this suggests perhaps that the angel of the Lord who's encamping around us and guarding us is none other than Christ himself.

That's one view. The other view of this is that it's not just Christ but it is the angelic hosts. The angels themselves. The angels of God.

The messengers of God who are encamping around us. And we sang that in Psalm 91. We sang that the Lord does send his angels to keep and protect his people.

So you're left with a dilemma. What is it? Is the angel of the Lord Christ? Or is the angel of the Lord a reference to the host of angels that are protecting us?

[25:05] Well, I think both are true. Both are true here because the language of this verse is very much military language. It's military language.

It's a picture of encamping around. Encamping around us. These angels in military formation encamping around us. And any army has a commander.

A commander in chief. And who is the commander of the army of the Lord? Well, that's quite straightforward, isn't it? It is Christ. It is the Son of God.

And we know that from Joshua 5, 14. Because remember there a man appears. And we know later that this man is referred to as the Lord.

But this man says, I am the commander of the Lord's army. So what you have here in Psalm 34 is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ as commander and chief of the army of God's angels.

[26:05] With the legions of angels encamping all around you, protecting you and keeping you as the Lord's people. That's quite a powerful thought indeed.

You know, we don't always see these angels. In fact, we don't see them at all. We don't always realize that they're there. But they are.

They are there. It's like the servant of Elisha. Remember that narrative when Elisha and his servant are there. And an army of enemies come their way.

And the servant is scared. The servant is scared. He feels that they're outnumbered. There's a large army facing them. And they have no one on their side. And Elisha prays.

He says, Lord, open his eyes. Open the eyes of my servant. And the servant's eyes are opened. And he sees a whole army of angels surrounding the mountain.

[27:06] An army of chariots of fire and horses. A fierce army of the Lord's angels. You see, we are quick to identify our enemies.

We do that very well. We always identify when the devil is at work. We always identify when the devil is near us. Very quick to see our enemy. But we are not so quick to see the Lord's help.

The Lord's angelic protection of us. And it's worth noting here as well that I mentioned the two words for fear in this passage.

But the word for fear here in this particular verse is different to the one before. This word for fear is used to speak of this kind of relational reverent fear.

Those who fear the Lord, it's this kind of loving relational reverent fear that speaks of a spirit of devotion and a spirit of loving obedience.

[28:11] That's what this kind of fear is. This kind of fear, sometimes we speak of it flippantly. We say, you know, someone scares you. You say, well, you put the fear of God in me.

Sometimes use that phrase. But that's not what the fear of God, the fear of the Lord in the Bible is meant to convey. The fear of the Lord in the Bible is this relational, loving obedience to God.

It's not a fear that makes you jump and run away. It's the opposite. It's a fear that draws you in. That draws you in with humble reverence. So, you who fear the Lord today, you who come before Him with that humble reverence, you have a legion of angels protecting you.

And you have the commander-in-chief himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, at the helm, guarding and encamping around His people. So, those who seek the Lord enjoy the blessing of answered prayer, angelic protection, and lastly, and quickly, abundant provision.

So, not only is the Lord standing a distance, protecting us with His angels, but He comes near us. He comes near us and He nourishes us.

[29:29] He gives us food. He provides for us. And He does so abundantly. To the point where we don't lack a thing. And you see that in verse 9.

Those who fear Him, they have no lack. And David calls on us here in this psalm to come and to taste and to see the goodness of the Lord.

And what does it mean to taste the Lord? Well, that means that we have to come and encounter and experience Him ourselves.

Only then will we know His goodness. You know, I could hold a cake in front of you here today and I could tell you how good this cake is. I could tell you how sweet it is. I could tell you that there's no cake in the whole of Baris or Lewis as sweet as this cake.

But I could speak about the cake all day long. And I could tell you about how good that cake is. But that's not the same as actually tasting it yourself. You need to taste it.

[30:33] You need to experience it. And only then will you understand just how good it is. And that is exactly what it's like with the Lord.

You know, we can hear all about how good God is. Preachers of the world can preach about how good God is. And we can go into all the details of what He does and how He does it and explain the goodness of the Lord.

But that is not the same as you actually experiencing it yourself. It's one thing to hear about something. It's another thing entirely to taste and experience it yourself.

And that is what we do as the Lord's people. That's what we do. We come and we taste. We don't just hear what someone else has to say about it. We come and we taste it ourselves.

We take of the Lord's provision and His goodness. And words can't explain that. Words fail to explain that. Sometimes someone might ask you, what's it like to be a Christian?

[31:39] I don't know if you've ever had that question. What's it like to be a Christian? And that's a hard question to answer. Because you can try and explain the joy of having sins forgiven. You can try and explain the great joy of having the love of the Lord in you.

You can talk about this living hope that you can have. You can talk about the joy of having a sense of protection and eternal security. And you can talk about all of these things.

But you feel as though your words are failing. You feel as though your words are not able to convey just how good it is. And you get to the point where you say, you need to taste it yourself.

The only way that you're going to know how good it is to be a Christian. The only way that you're ever going to know how good it is to taste of these things. Is to come and actually taste it yourself.

To come and experience it yourself. And some people, they have a sweet tooth. They get a taste for sweet things.

[32:44] Perhaps especially at communion seasons when there's lots of sweet things around. And people can't get addicted to sweet things, can't they? They get a sweet tooth indeed.

But the Christian, the Christian has a craving and a taste for something far better than literal food. We have a craving and a hunger and a thirst for God and His goodness and His righteousness.

That's our diet, isn't it? That's the diet that sustains us. And where do we go to find food for this diet? What store do we go to?

We don't go to Coop or Tesco. We don't go to any store in our land or in our country. We go to the greatest storehouse in the whole of the world.

We go to this storehouse of the Word of God. Because this food, this spiritual food here, it never goes off. This spiritual food, it never spoils.

[33:46] It never goes out of day. This spiritual food here, it always satisfies. Always. But it's a strange kind of satisfaction.

You know, if you think about literal hunger and thirst. If you're literally, physically hungry and thirsty, what do you do? You eat something and you drink something. And you have hunger and you're thirst, it goes away.

It might come back later on in a day. But for that time it goes away. But this spiritual hunger is slightly different. Quite different actually. When we get a taste for this food.

When we get a taste for the goodness of God and His Word. It satisfies us. But at the same time, it doesn't get rid of our hunger. It produces more of our hunger. You become more and more hungry for the things of God.

It's when you stop tasting. It's when you stop going to the Word. That you begin to lose that hunger. So you see, it works the opposite way to physical hunger.

[34:48] It's when you stop tasting it. That you begin to lose the taste for it. Lose the taste for God. Lose the taste for His Word and His goodness. And we have to ask ourselves today.

Are we losing the taste for God's Word? And we need to diagnose that if that's the case. Because if we are losing the taste for it. It's because we are not coming and tasting it regularly enough.

We need to come and taste and see. And then that hunger for His Word will continue to grow. And of course that's literally what you've done over this weekend.

You've come to the Lord's Supper. And you've literally tasted, haven't you? You've taken the bread. You've taken the wine. Along with the preaching of Christ crucified. And it has nourished you.

And that should, rather than satisfy your hunger so that you don't have a hunger for these things anymore. It should build your hunger. You should be going away from this weekend more hungry than you were coming into it.

[35:47] Hungry for the things of God. Hungry for the Word of God. Hungry for God's goodness. So come and taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

And then you have a reference there to the lions, don't you? Those young lions. And those young lions, they're a symbol of strength.

They are a ferocious predator. Ferocious hunter. And the reason the psalmist raises this illustration of a young lion is because if there was a fangler, or if something happened, they would be the last beasts that you'd think would go away hungry.

They could find food anywhere. They are great hunters. But the psalmist is saying here that even if things were so bad that even the young lions had no food, yet the Lord's people, those who seek the Lord, they will always have this abundant provision.

So we come today in thanksgiving to God. Thankful because as those who seek the Lord, we have this answered prayer, this angelic protection, and this abundant provision.

[37:05] That is yours today if you are those who fear and seek the Lord. And I hope and pray that is the case for every one of us in here.

Today. Amen. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, you are indeed a good God. A God who is full of goodness.

A God who is ready to fill us with an abundance of supply. But Lord, if we are beginning to lose our taste for your world. If we are beginning to lose our taste for being in your house.

Our taste for being in the place of prayer. Then Lord, revive a hunger within us. Give us a hunger and a thirst for your righteousness. Help us to come to your word anew, afresh.

And feed us, O Lord, and keep feeding us. We do you thanks for all that we receive from your hand. All the blessings of this weekend. And the blessings that we see here in this great psalm of thanksgiving.

[38:11] May it be the testimony of each, every one of us that we experience these things ourselves. So cleanse us in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Well, we're going to close by singing to God's face. Then that's Psalm, Psalm 34.

Psalm 34. Let's go to Psalm 34. Let's go to Psalm 34. Psalm 34. Psalm 34. Psalm 34.

We'll sing from the beginning down to verse Mark 10. So that covers the verses that we are really looking at today.

God will I bless all times. His praise my mouth shall still express. My soul shall boast. In God the meek shall hear with joyful mess.

[39:08] So we'll sing a verse for one down to verse Mark 10. To God's praise. God will.

God will. God will.

God will.

God will. God will.

God will. God will. God will. God will.

[41:06] God will. God Niekos. God aucune transparence. God.

God■ hide. For those of us that do Him fear And empty liveness O taste and see that God is good Who trusts in Him is blessed Fear God is his Not but in fear Shall be with want to rest The lions young may hungry be

And they may lack their food But faith and truth is safe The Lord shall not make any food In the grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Continue with you now and forevermore Amen