

Psalm 34

1. I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall ever be in my mouth.
2. My soul shall glory in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.
3. O magnify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together;
4. I sought the Lord and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.
5. Look upon him and be radiant and your faces shall not be ashamed.
6. This poor soul cried, and the Lord heard me and saved me from all my troubles.
7. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them.
8. O taste and see that the Lord is gracious; blessed is the one who trusts in him.
9. Fear the Lord, all you his holy ones, for those who fear him lack nothing.
10. Lions may lack and suffer hunger;
but those who seek the Lord lack nothing that is good.
11. Come, my children, and listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
12. Who is there who delights in life and longs for days to enjoy good things?
13. Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from lying words.
14. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.
15. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are open to their cry.
16. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil,
to root out the remembrance of them from the earth.
17. The righteous cry and the Lord hears them and delivers them out of all their troubles.
18. The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and will save those who are crushed in spirit.
19. Many are the troubles of the righteous; from them all will the Lord deliver them.
20. He keeps all their bones, so that not one of them is broken.
21. But evil shall slay the wicked and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
22. The Lord ransoms the life of his servants
and will condemn none who seek refuge in him.

I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall ever be in my mouth.

Psalm 34 is a tremendous statement of the love and presence of God.

It begins with a hymn of praise, followed by a personal story of deliverance and then teaches the faithful about the meaning of the fear or reverence of God.

In the first part (vv. 1-3) to bless the Lord means to acknowledge his authority over every aspect of life. To exalt his name is to extol God by reciting his saving acts. We do that also today when we recite the creed or when we sing psalms and hymns, which speak of what God has done.

The second part (vv. 4-10) reveals the psalmist's experience of God's saving power. The psalmist has been delivered from some sort of anxiety, which has caused him considerable distress. This experience is available to all who come humbly before God. There is especially a strong image of tasting God 'O taste and see that the Lord is gracious' (v.8). We taste God today in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. where we receive the very life of God.

The angel or messenger of the Lord (v.7) may be the commander of the Lord's heavenly army as in the story of the taking of Jericho in the book of Joshua.

The last section (vv.11-end) contains teaching about the nature of God. Here the fear or reverence of the Lord is to be humble in his presence, a life marked by doing what God approves (good) and what leads to well-being (peace, v14 'seek peace and pursue it'). It is shown in honesty of speech, as in v. 13 'Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies', ideas which are seen again in the letter of James.

But there is no guarantee against trouble. Afflictions may cause a person to be broken-hearted and crushed in spirit. However, true life and security are at a depth which suffering cannot reach, and God's presence restores the person who has suffered affliction.

The wicked are destroyed by evil (suffering), because of the absence of God from their lives.

Jesus teaches his disciples that doing his work won't always be easy; they will be opposed and they will face persecution; but he will always be with them, they will be protected. After his resurrection, he says to them, 'And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' (Matthew 28, 20)

So those who choose the way of God will always be heard and their deliverance is assured. This psalm is a marvellous song of confidence in the presence of God in the world as it is. Many people have found God, not only when things go well, but also in the depths, when things are hard. They are lifted up into a place of security and protection; and that leads to an outpouring of praise of the God who never stops loving and who will never let us down.

Prayer (from new Every Morning)

Most merciful God, we pray for those who doubt your love;
for those who find it difficult to believe or to pray;
for those who have lost a faith they once possessed.
May the Holy Spirit enlighten their minds
and lead them into all truth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**