

Psalm Sundays

Text

Psalm 34

Topic

We are told that this is “A Psalm of David When He Pretended Madness Before Abimelech”

Title

“No One Knows What It’s Like to be the Madman”

Dustin Hoffman for *Rain Man*.

Geoffrey Rush for *Shine*.

Edward Norton for *Primal Fear*.

Robin Williams for *The Fisher King*.

Brad Pitt for *12 Monkeys*.

Billy Bob Thornton for *Sling Blade*.

It’s a partial list of actors who were either nominated for, or who won, an Academy Award for their portrayal of a mentally challenged or mentally ill person.

We don’t normally think of King David as an actor. That’s too bad, because he was a good one. He once won the Abimelech Award for portraying a madman.

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The introduction to Psalm 34 reads, "A Psalm of David When He Pretended Madness Before Abimelech, Who Drove Him Away, and He Departed."

(BTW: Abimelech is a dynastic title, like Pharaoh. The Abimilech the psalm refers to is Achish).

Let me read the full account, recorded in First Samuel 21:10-15.

1Sa 21:10 Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath.

1Sa 21:11 And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying: 'Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands'?"

1Sa 21:12 Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath.

1Sa 21:13 So he changed his behavior before them, pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard.

1Sa 21:14 Then Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me?"

1Sa 21:15 Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this *fellow* to play the madman in my presence? Shall this *fellow* come into my house?"

An award winning performance, for sure; but a sad one spiritually. It was birthed out of fear.

When a believer gives in to fear, he or she is acting like a madman. We may not foam at the mouth, but Heaven sees us as forgetting to fear only God.

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I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 You Can Be Delivered From Your Fears**, and **#2 You Can Deliver Hope To Those Who Fear**.

#1 - You Can Be Delivered From Your Fears (v1-10)

Commentators are split as to whether or not David's madman act was his own desperate idea or God's unusual strategy. I'm saying it was David's fail because of fear since the message of Psalm 34 is him being delivered from fear.

Psa 34:1 A Psalm of David When He Pretended Madness Before Abimelech, Who Drove Him Away, and He Departed. I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise *shall* continually *be* in my mouth.

Psa 34:2 My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear *of it* and be glad.

Psa 34:3 Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together.

David was certainly addressing saints in every generation. He did, however, have a live audience for whom he performed this psalm. "Let **us,**" he said, "exalt His Name together."

In the sequel to his madman performance, David became the captain of a rebel alliance. Here it is from First Samuel 21:1-2.

1Sa 22:1 David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. So when his brothers and all his father's house heard *it*, they went down there to him.

1Sa 22:2 And everyone *who was* in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone *who was* discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him.

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These downtrodden men were the “humble who [heard] of it and [were] glad.” It was they who “[magnified] the Lord together” with David. This psalm was one of their anthems.

Psa 34:4 I sought the LORD, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears.

Spoiler alert: David just gave us the secret of being delivered from fear. You talk to the Lord and He hears you.

What do you say to the Lord? Psalm 57 records what David said. Here are the opening verses.

Psa 57:1 To the Chief Musician. Set to "Do Not Destroy." a Michtam of David When He Fled from Saul into the Cave. Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, Until *these* calamities have passed by.

Psa 57:2 I will cry out to God Most High, To God who performs *all things* for me.

Psa 57:3 He shall send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth His mercy and His truth.

Quick summary: David came to his spiritual senses. He remembered God's promises of mercy, refuge, and providence. He believed God.

David remembered who he was. He had been anointed the next king of Israel. Though outwardly that seemed preposterous, it must occur.



Are you in Christ? Believe God. Remember who you are. You are beloved of God. Saved; being saved day-by-day; ultimately saved when you are resurrected or raptured.

You are a recipient of God the Holy Spirit. You are His Temple individually; we are His Temple collectively.

Psa 34:5 They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces were not ashamed.

This is so beautiful. "They" refers to the 400 men who rallied to David. In debt; distressed; discontent. Shattered lives - probably by their own bad decisions. No hope of changing their circumstances by hard work. Outcasts all. Yet received by David, and thus by the Lord.

David didn't post on Craig's List, looking for mercenaries. This was God. I say the Holy Spirit prompted these men to go out to David. They trusted in mercy.

Part of God's deliverance of David was to grant him ministry. He remained a fugitive, on the run, in danger. But David could thrive in his adversity by serving the Lord.

I digressed. What is so beautiful? David's men looked to God and their faces were "radiant." It doesn't mean they were literally radiant - like nightlights in the cave. It's a way of saying that they reflected the glory of the Lord.

Something like we read of ourselves: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (Second Corinthians 3:18).

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We might say, both of them and of us, we are transformed. Transformed as God renews us day-by-day. Transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Psa 34:6 This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard *him*, And saved him out of all his troubles.

David was referring to himself. He was the "poor man." While he was quite literally poor, he most certainly was talking about his spiritual condition, which was fear. Compare his walk some years earlier. As a teen, he was incredulous that no Israelite would accept the giant's challenge to one-on-one combat. He did - killing Goliath easily in the Lord's strength.

BTW - Something I didn't tell you is that, when David fled to Gath, he had Goliath's sword with him. The fearless had become fearful.

David said that God "saved him out of all his troubles." Not! He was still a wanted, hunted man, with Bobba Fett seeking the bounty.

We need an expansive definition of deliverance. It is an oft-used, perhaps over-used explanation, but that's because it's a good one. It is this: God is faithful and will deliver you *from* all of your troubles, or *through* all of your troubles.

In the Tom Hanks film, *Castaway*, he preserved a FedEx package through his ordeal, eventually delivering it once he was rescued. It was symbolic of his hope he would be delivered. The package was delivered - but it was *through* the trouble, not *from* it.

(BTW: There is a lot of speculation on the contents. Some say that box contained a fully charged, satellite phone. They should add that, as a stinger).

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Your hope is that, one day, you will be delivered from all trouble. Mean time, like David, you're delivered through it.

Psa 34:7 The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them.

The Angel of the Lord was an appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament. Don't be confused by the title, "Angel." It means *ambassador*, or *messenger*. Jesus is no angel, as the letter to the Hebrew Christians makes clear. He came to Old Testament saints as Heaven's ambassador, to deliver His message to them in Person.

Did David see Him? Or was he merely referring to the common knowledge that His angelic forces were always encamped around God's people?

It sounds like David had forgotten to factor in the unseen realm. Once his fears were overcome, and he feared only the Lord, he was reminded of the mighty resources that were deployed on the behalf of the saints.

Again, I am quick to point out that the realization of an encampment of angels didn't deliver David from trouble. But he knew he'd be delivered through it.

Psa 34:8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD *is* good; Blessed *is* the man *who* trusts in Him!

The thing I like most about cooking is tasting the food along the way. As we walk with Jesus, we get tastes of the feast that awaits us at His coming.

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Nonbelievers cannot “see that the Lord is good.” They think Him evil, or neutral. We know that He is not. We know about sin, the Savior, and salvation. We know that He is longsuffering, not willing any should perish eternally.

Psa 34:9 Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! *There is no want* to those who fear Him.

Psa 34:10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good *thing*.

The “young lions” are... Lions. As in Asiatic Lion. David was making a comparison from the natural world. It’s similar to Jesus’ comments about how much more God cares for you than the sparrows.

Those who “seek the Lord” is another name for believers. They shall not “want” is explained as “not lack[ing] any good thing.” By “good” we understand that all things, both good and bad, work together for the good by our loving Savior.

There was an especially evil orc in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. As the orc forces approached Gondor, Gothmog said, “Fear. The city is rank with it.”

This is a season “rank with fear.” A.W. Tozer said, “A fearful world needs a fearless church.”

You can be delivered from your fears. Talk to the Lord; He hears you. Fear God rather than man. Believe God. Remember who you are.

#2 - You Can Deliver Hope To Those Who Fear (v11-22)

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If you are like me, at this point you are ready for the precise steps you must take to overcome fear. We always want to do something - as if it were up to us to live-up to God's standards without His help.

David doesn't provide a "How To." He describes what you act like as a believer, and he compares you to nonbelievers who have no power to walk with the Lord.

Psa 34:11 Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

The madman was gone. Immediately David was restored and could teach others to fear God rather than man.

Psa 34:12 Who is the man *who* desires life, And loves *many* days, that he may see good?

Psa 34:13 Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit.

Psa 34:14 Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.

Psa 34:15 The eyes of the LORD *are* on the righteous, And His ears *are open* to their cry.

We can miss the main point by approaching these verses as if they were some sort of bullet points, following in order. The place to start understanding what David had in mind is with verse fifteen.

"The righteous" is a term for believers. In the Bible we read that you believe God and He declares you righteous. It is how God saved people before Christ came; it is how God saves people after Christ came. Because Jesus became our Substitute on the Cross, God can remain just but also be the Justifier of those who believe (Romans 3:26).

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The righteous man or woman is transformed day-by-day by yielding to the Holy Spirit. Your part is to “cry” out to the Lord, knowing He hears you.

The righteous man or woman looks and acts like the description in verses twelve through fourteen. We don’t do those things to become righteous. We are declared righteous and are enabled to do those things.

Next, ways of life are presented:

Psa 34:16 The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

Psa 34:17 *The righteous* cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles.

“Cut off the remembrance” doesn’t mean nonbelievers are forgotten the moment they die. It seems to be a euphemism for their death and destiny. It will be as if they never lived in terms of eternity. While believers enjoy the radiant presence of God forever, nonbelievers are confined to outer darkness in the Lake of Fire.

The “righteous” can be certain God hears them. He WILL deliver you out of all your troubles. But that deliverance is your final, ultimate deliverance. Your hope in that final deliverance - that is something that will help you overcome your temporary fears.

A title can sometimes be all you need; you might not have to read the book. Dave Hunt wrote, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?* It immediately communicates that believers have become less heavenly minded. The less

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heavenly minded you are, it follows that you have a more worldly mind; *i.e.*, things of this world are your prerogative. That is a formula for fear.

Psa 34:18 The LORD *is* near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.

Think of David, in the cave, surrounded by the four hundred. This verse reads like an Old Testament altar call to those men. He preached to them in this psalm, and probably with other words. He let them know God was "near," that they could therefore have a relationship with Him. "Broken" and "contrite," they chose the Lord.

What is the very first thing you should tell a new believer?

Psa 34:19 Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.

That's real. It's honest. AND it is full of hope.

Psa 34:20 He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken.

The apostles applied this to Jesus' experience on the Cross, making this a Messianic Psalm. Did David know? His men? Think about it. They knew this was not a promise for them to claim. I'm sure many of them had experienced a broken bone. Or they knew folks whose bones suffered breaks. Any thoughtful person would conclude that there was more going on in these words. Whether they knew it was about their future Messiah or not... I don't know.

Psa 34:21 Evil shall slay the wicked, And those who hate the righteous shall be condemned.

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Psa 34:22 The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.

Very 'altar-callish.' Do you want to remain condemned? Or will you choose to believe God and not be condemned?

Long lines. Hoarding. Aggressive behavior. "Fear. The world is rank with it."

God CAN deliver you from all your fears. Believe it; believe Him. Set your mind by Heaven's news regarding your future.

Then tell others that they, too, can be delivered from fear.

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