

HAPPY NEW FEAR

PSALM 34 DECEMBER 31, 2017

I've never really been a New Year's resolution person, but for some reason I'm always interested in them as a phenomenon. In fact, I learned this year that it's believed the practice dates back 4,000 years to ancient Babylon.¹

If you're a New Year's Resolution person, good luck to you. Maybe you're not into resolutions, but you love to plan. You've cracked open a brand new 12-month calendar, and have written in goals and plans for 2018 in an orderly, color-coded system.

Or maybe you're not looking forward to 2018 at all. Maybe on *your* horizon there are storm clouds gathering. Perhaps you're facing threats and hazards or heartache in the coming days.

No matter your state of mind this morning, we're glad you're here and God has promised to meet with you and reveal His incredible love for you. I want to set Psalm 34 before us today as a very *significant* piece of Scripture when it comes to looking ahead in life and living day-to-day. This is a passage that should make us sit up and take notice. It's an *important* passage. Obviously it's an inspired message from God to us. But this song glows particularly bright.

It is one of a few *acrostic* Psalms, meaning that each verse begins with consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It was meant to be *memorized*. When you get to the New Testament, we find this Psalm directly quoted by Peter and alluded to in various other Epistles. So, we can be confident that these are words worth consideration.

And they are *incredible* words. We've heard them already, but the more we listen, the more we realize: *We're going places in this Psalm!* This is a song talking about a *big* God who has *big* plans for His people. In fact, some of it seems too good to be true. But we can trust the content and we can trust the source, because God cannot fail. And here He used a man who could speak to us with *authority*. David was someone worth listening to. He knew what he was talking about when it came to living a Godly life and experiencing God's power and trusting in the Lord in the face of adversity.

So, let's see what David has to say. Beginning with the superscript:

Psalm 34 (superscript) - A Psalm of David When He Pretended Madness Before Abimelech, Who Drove Him Away, and He Departed.

You can read the narrative of this episode in 1 Samuel 21 and 22. David was in a dark period of fear and failure. He had fled from Israel, into the land of their enemies, and had just had a near-death experience. He makes it to a cave in the wilderness, with no help, no supplies, no answers, still a fugitive. But finally he stops and says, "What does the *Lord* want for my life?"² And from that moment of surrender came this song. In fact, it's more than a Psalm. John Phillips calls it a 'song and a sermon, devotional and doctrinal'. Looking at the backdrop of these verses the message is that no matter what you're facing, no matter how afraid you might be or how much you've failed, God can lay hold of your life *today* and do His work. In the dark of a deserted cave God found a man

¹ <https://www.history.com/news/the-history-of-new-years-resolutions>

² 1 Samuel 22:3

who was consumed with doubt and fear and yet this song of hope breaks through. That's the power of the Lord!

As we get into the text we should know, the *theme* of this Psalm is *THE LORD*. There's a lot for *us* - a lot of instruction, a lot of promise - but notice how many times His name is used. Again and again we see "the Lord, the Lord, the Lord." 16 times! This song is about the greatness of our God and the greatness of His work on behalf of those who *fear* Him.

The summary for our first stanza is: **A Plan For Big Praise**

Verse 1 says:

Psalm 34:1 - ¹I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise *shall* continually *be* in my mouth.

This is one of those verses like, "Pray without ceasing." Am I supposed to just walk around chanting worship songs and prayers nonstop? How can I have a normal conversation? Well, David is describing a mindset and the attitude of the heart. And the sentiment is more understandable when we read it as it's rendered in the Septuagint: "I will bless the Lord at every occasion."

What's important to note is that, this Psalm, which gives context to our past, anticipates the future, helps us prioritize life and lays out how to set goals and make our plans of action, starts with a *choice* to set our minds on the Lord and live a life of public worship.

So often we're sold the lie that if we were just thinner or richer or more popular *then* we would be happy. But that isn't a true formula. If it was then Robin Williams and Tony Scott and Chris Cornell wouldn't have ended their own lives. Instead, a life full of the blessings promised in this song starts with the *choice* to be in a growing relationship with God. The choice to offer our lives in worship.

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

The spiritual life is contagious. And we're reminded that what we're broadcasting has the potential to impact others, both positively and negatively. When David got to that cave and got his heart back in connection with God, his family and hundreds of others who were distressed and struggling were *drawn* to him and he was able to minister to them and lead them.

On a practical level, if you are looking into 2018 and wanting God to give you more ministry, just start by giving public thanks for what God has done in your life. We're told to *boast* in the Lord. We're to show Him off and exclaim His praise! It's a *light* we shine. And it's encouraging to me to know that even *basic* acts of worship in the Christian life can bear fruit for the Kingdom. Your happy singing can build up another person, but *not if you're silent!* God can use the smallest aspects of our devotion to do big things, but we've got to cooperate with Him.

Psalm 34:3 - ³Oh, magnify the Lord with me, And let us exalt His name together.

This first section comes to a close with an invitation for all of us to join in with the chorus. David has decided that he is going to bless the Lord, no matter what and because of that, when his life was shaken, praise spilled out. No longer was his heart filled with fear, it was filled with hallelujah. And he realized that this is the *necessary* foundation for the life of a believer. So, first things first, we're invited to take action and lift high the name of the Lord individually and in community.

The next stanza can be summarized as: **The Path To Deliverance.**

Psalm 34:4 - ⁴I sought the Lord, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears.

What a verse! This Psalm clues us in on just how needy we are. At least 6 times David confirms the fact that our God is a *Rescuer*. We don't need *help* in this life, we need *deliverance!* We need to be *rescued* from sin and from fear. But the good news is that there is a God who hears and moves on behalf of His people. If you are a Christian, *you are not alone!* You've not been left as an orphan. The God who made all of heaven and earth has bent His ear to hear your cries and your prayers and if you *seek* Him you will *find* Him. He is strong to deliver you from any fear and any foe and any failure.

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

David switches from singular to plural. Who are 'they'? *All* of the redeemed. You see, the power of God was not reserved only for David, or only for a few spiritual elites. Heaven's supplies are flung open for anyone who will seek the Lord. And when God works in a life like that, the result is *real* enlightenment. God illuminates your understanding. He lights up your life in a way that is conspicuous. In Acts 4, the disciples were dragged in front of their enemies. They had every reason to be afraid, but they were so full of joy and boldness and real enlightenment that it was clear to everyone that *they had been with Jesus*. Not because they were special (the passage makes it a point of telling us they were ordinary men), but because they had a real relationship with God and experienced His filling and His movement in their lives.

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

The poor, the afraid, the afflicted all have *immediate* access to God through Jesus Christ, the *Savior*. David had been trying to outrun his troubles, but the more he ran, the deeper in trouble he found himself. Salvation wasn't going to be found in a sword or a citadel, it was found when he finally called out to his Lord and surrendered himself.

Psalm 34:7 - ⁷The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them.

As David reveals the Lord to us in this song, we see more and more He is a God of *personal kindness*. He's a God of tender intimacy. Not only does He grant us access, He makes it a point to *listen* to us and to travel through life with us. We've just come out of the Christmas season, singing songs about *Emmanuel, God WITH us!* He surrounds us like a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings.

But notice the qualifier here: Those who *fear* Him. A person who does *not* fear the Lord should not expect any of these protections and promises to apply to them. Jesus explained that many will cry out to God, saying, "Lord, Lord, do this for us. Open up the gates and let us in the Kingdom!" But the Lord will reply, "I don't *know* you. You don't belong to Me. You don't love Me or fear Me." God's rescue plan is big enough for all the world. But a person cannot enjoy the power of salvation if he will not receive the Savior.

The third stanza, might be summarized as: **Partake Of God's Goodness.**

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

David has been speaking from personal experience, but now challenges the hearers to try it themselves. Just as no one can taste a food for us, neither can the Christian life be lived on behalf of someone else. If you watch someone eat, there's no flavor in your mouth, no nourishment in your stomach. This is a *personal* call to *personal* spirituality. Jesus explained in John 6, He is the Bread of Life. He is the Living Water. Our relationship with Him is meant to be a daily experience where we are nourished by the Lord down to our very core. And though some aspects of Christianity may be an acquired taste, we can be sure that we will never be let down because the Lord is *good*.

The mantra of the modern man is, "I just want to be happy." What's amazing is that the Bible gives a very clear path to fullness of joy and fullness of purpose and satisfaction. It lays out the secret to the happy life for all to see. Blessed (*oh how happy*) is the man who trusts the Lord. *Trust* in the Biblical sense is an active thing. It means to take refuge in God, to flee to Him for protection.

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

No want doesn't mean we email our Amazon wishlist into heaven and wait for it to be delivered. It means that those who fear God will have no *deficiency*. When we fear God, He becomes our sufficiency and He fills our lives with Himself and with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places.

We don't fear God for *His* benefit. It's not like God is Tinkerbell and that if we don't clap enough for Him His light will go out. God *deserves* to be feared, but when we orient our lives around Him and His will, *we're* the ones who benefit because God is full of generous grace.

David illustrates this idea in verse 10:

Psalm 34:10 - ¹⁰The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good *thing*.

Lions have one kind of power, but they're always on the prowl for their next meal. Here, David shows a great distinction. Animals survive, but God wants much more for us. Rather than simply *surviving*, the Bible tells us that Christ came to give us life more abundantly. When a person gets saved it's not just *from* Hell, it's *for* a whole new life, transformed by the power of God.

We partake of God's goodness through *tasting* and *trusting*. By *fearing* and *seeking*. It's all wrapped up together. God doesn't want our spiritual lives to be some sterile, transactional set of rituals. He's invited us into a personal, intimate relationship where we experience His goodness and His growth day by day.

The fourth stanza might be summarized as: **A Policy For Life.**

Psalm 34:11 - ¹¹Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

After hearing about the benefits that come through the fear of the Lord, David now takes us from the sanctuary to the schoolroom.

The fear of the Lord is a big topic for us to try to wrap our minds around. One single passage isn't enough for us to get all we need to understand it, but luckily the Bible is *full* of instruction and

example on the subject. Here David gives a short lecture that puts the fear of God into shoe leather (as J. Vernon McGee would say). The first step in understanding the fear of the Lord is simply to *listen* to what the Scriptures have to say about it. Now, in the Bible, “listening” means to hear *and* obey. And so, we know the Bible is teaching, the question is will we learn and obey?

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

As with so many of the invitations in the Bible, this one is open to anyone who wants in. God’s word unlocks these big secrets and puts them right on the bottom shelf for all of us to lay hold of. So, do you want to really live life with fullness and satisfaction? That’s a question each of us should pause to consider. Knowing what we know about the Christian life and the offer of God, do we *want* to live that life? Well, if the answer is yes, then David has more to teach us.

Psalm 34:13-14 - ¹³Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit. ¹⁴Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.

David starts with words, then moves to our immediate actions and then gives us big goals to aim toward. As usual, God’s work starts in the interior of a person. The first area of consideration is the *words*, which are formed by the mind and fueled by the heart. Instead of *deception*, this Psalm encourages us to be speaking *adoration* of our King. And, again, David can speak with the authority of experience. He had just come from a period where he had lied, several times, and with each he sank lower into failure. Now, he can say with confidence that deceit is *not* going to lead you where you want to go in life. In fact, it’s going to drag you down. Instead, we’re to turn away from evil and do good.

We note here that we cannot always *avoid* evil, but God has given us the power so that we can always turn away from it.

Instead of evil, how can we do good? How can we bring joy to others and give public thanks to God? How can we serve the Lord and exalt His name? There’s a *lot* of ways for us to do that. We can do good with our time, with our money, with our efforts, with our words, with our example.

Specifically, David encourages us to “seek peace and pursue it.” Of course we can apply that to our relationships and our communities, but we’re also reminded that Paul said in Ephesians 2 that Christ Himself *is* our peace. And so we are to turn from evil things, instead dedicating our lives to Godly things, pursuing Christ and not letting our love for Him slip away.

Our fifth stanza, beginning in verse 15, might be summarized as: **The Perception Of A Holy God.**

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

God is attentive. He watches and listens. But here David explains that if we want God’s attention, we must be *righteous*. Who are the righteous? We don’t become righteous through acts or works. We are *declared* righteous by the blood of Jesus Christ. It is through faith in *Him* that a person is justified and *made* righteous before God. Romans 3 says that God makes sinners right in His eyes when they believe in Jesus. That, and that alone, is what grants us access to Him in prayer.

By contrast, David says in verse 16:

Psalm 34:16 - ¹⁶The face of the Lord *is* against those who do evil, To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

God is love. That truth is on display throughout this Psalm, but the reality of judgement is just as true. God watches all the people on the earth. Those that He has redeemed have special access and promises and protections, but He sees and keeps a record of *everything* that is said or done on this planet. And the Bible is very clear: If you are not a Christian, God *loves* you, but He is *against* you. He *must* judge your sin. He can either do it at the cross or He will do it at His White Throne. At the cross you stand with Jesus. At the White Throne you stand alone and nothing will be able to save you. You will be cut off and endure the eternal penalty for your sin. Someone must bear that guilt.

And so the immediate question is: Are you in verse 15 or 16? It's your choice to make. Romans 10:13 echoes what David has been saying again and again in these verses: Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. That can be *you* today if you will call out to Jesus Christ. He *wants* to rescue you, but He will not do it if you don't want it.

The next stanza, beginning in verse 17, can be summarized as **The Personal Presence of God.**

Psalm 34:17 - ¹⁷The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles.

The unredeemed will be *destroyed*, the redeemed will be *delivered*. The difference is whether a person is justified by faith in Christ. Do you *trust* God and fear Him? And, if you are a Christian, do you trust God to order your life and be your King? Jesus isn't your insurance agent, He's your King.

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

From the greater scale to the smaller scale, God offers His personal presence to us. If you were trapped in a burning building, a fireman would come and risk his life to save you. And that is an incredible thing. But they're probably not going to *then* come and meet with you every day to help you through the grief of your loss. That's not their function. But notice here the presence of God. He is Rescuer *and* Comforter. He is a God of great tenderness and affection toward His people. He is *near* us, ready to hear, ready to move, ready to lay His hands on our lives and mend broken hearts.

In the final stanza, we're shown **The Product Of Godliness.**

Psalm 34:19 - ¹⁹Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

Things were going so well up through verse 18! So many promises! The banishing of *all* our fears and *all* our troubles. But now David comes to a close, not by saying *MAYBE* are the afflictions of the righteous, but *MANY*. David knew first hand that even the innocent will suffer, especially those who follow the Lord. But greater than all the problems of life is the promise of deliverance and the *power* of the Deliverer. You and I *will be delivered* from every sin and every suffering and every sorrow if not *immediately* then *ultimately*. We *prefer* the immediate, but that is not what is guaranteed. The ultimate deliverance is what God guarantees His people.

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

I've never broken a bone, but I'm sure many of you have, so what's the deal here? This promise is specifically applied to Jesus Christ later in the New Testament book of John. It's not a promise that no Christian will ever fracture their wrist, it is a prophecy for the Messiah and it is a poetic declaration that God's tender care for us extends throughout life, top to bottom, from our circumstances down to the very frame of who we are.

Psalm 34:21 - ²¹Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous shall be condemned.

Another very clear warning to anyone who refuses to go God's way. To stand against God's people is to stand against the Lord Himself and our God is a God of vengeance, He will repay the wrongs done to us for His sake.

By way of application, we note the fierce love that God has for His saints and that means that we should be developing that same kind of love for one another.

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

As the song comes to a close, a portrait has been painted of a comprehensive Savior. One that rescues from troubles, delivers us from fears, guards our lives, walks with us, and has bought back our souls. Though we, like David, will have times of failure, there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. So, rather than be condemned, we should be *commended* to continue afresh as people who fear God and pursue Him first, watching Him add to our lives the unspeakable blessings of heaven.

The key to all of it? Well, we've seen the route to take. We don't *merit* these gracious gifts. We don't generate them ourselves. We're simply told to fear God, to trust Him. To call out to Him in prayer. To learn from Him and obey what He has given us to do. We're told to respond in worship and public thanksgiving for all that God has done. As we live out this God-fearing life, the Lord hears. The Lord delivers. The Lord saves. The Lord camps with us. The Lord supplies. The Lord heals hearts. The Lord redeems. These are the promises of Psalm 34.

Perhaps you've heard the words of this song and they're just too much for you to swallow. Maybe you're even a Christian and you find yourself thinking, "But what about my fears? What about my troubles? What about my deliverance? The Lord hasn't made good on these promises to me." Perhaps these things seem too good to be true. Well, I'd have 2 thoughts for us to consider. Because these are hard promises to believe. After all, *many* are the afflictions of the righteous. *What about* the broken bones of life?

First, God is not making all of these promises on the *temporal* level. Meaning, they are not all guaranteed to be *immediate* cures. David is a perfect example of this. The man who declared, "The Lord has saved me out of all my troubles" was, *at that very moment*, living as a fugitive, marked for death by powerful people who were hunting him down. And yet, David speaks with confidence and assurance. He understood there was a greater plan that extended far beyond this life. So for anyone here who finds themselves under siege by sickness or sorrow or suffering: Deliverance is coming. The Apostle Paul was a man who knew suffering on an intense level. Here is his message to us:

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 - ¹⁷ For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸ So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

But second, for those who feel these promises are just too good to be true, consider this: Aren't *all* the promises of God too good to be true? That the perfect Creator would leave heaven and come to earth as a Baby, to die that we might live and make us co-inheritors with Him...that He would send His Holy Spirit to take up residence in our hearts, empowering us to live a life we could never accomplish for ourselves, though we have nothing to offer Him...isn't *that* too good to be true? It seems like it. Yet it is the Gospel! This is who God is! The God of *astounding* goodness. The God who makes *these kind* of promises to anyone who will believe on Him. A God worth exalting and boasting about. A God who wants to shine radiantly through our lives in 2018, whether we find ourselves in the proverbial palace or cave.

He is ready to rescue. He is ready to be found. He is ready to move. Seek the Lord. Taste and see that He is good. Trust Him. Fear God and see what He will do for you, in you and through you.