

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In order to appreciate the words of David in Psalm 34—which is our emergency sermon text this morning!—I'd like you to think about a time when you've been afraid. Maybe it's been a while since you've feared something, but for some of you that's not going to be very hard because you're afraid of something or someone right now.

You're afraid of what it's going to be like to be without your spouse.

You're afraid of that other student.

You're afraid of what the doctor is going to say.

You're afraid of failing.

You're afraid your parents are going to find out.

You're afraid this is going to become a legal matter.

You're afraid the job isn't going to last.

You're afraid he doesn't love you anymore.

You're afraid because of your financial mess.

You're afraid life is just never going to be what you want it to be.

Every person has fears.

Sometimes we read about people in the Bible and to us they seem like nothing more than characters in a story. It's like watching a movie—it's not really real. We need to be reminded that's not true. Those were real people, with real lives, with real issues and...with real fears. David—successful, strong, confident, blessed David—was afraid. And in his fear, he showed a weakness of faith. He lost confidence in God's protection and care, and he did something that showed a lack of trust in God.

You may remember the story of David and Goliath. The young shepherd David had no fear before the giant warrior of the Philistines because he trusted in the LORD to care for him and give him the victory. And God did make him victorious over Goliath, guiding the stone from David's sling into the head of the giant, killing him and leading the Israelites to victory over the Philistines. God's people went wild for David, singing songs that praised him. This caused King Saul to be jealous of David to the point of threatening David's life. So he fled from the king he had faithfully served.

This all happened some time after his famous confrontation with Goliath, but the giant's sword had been kept and stored away. As David fled, he grabbed that sword, the only weapon available to him, and took it with him as he ran into Philistine territory to escape Saul. He ran to the king of Gath where things got very uncomfortable. The king knew that David was all but king in Israel already; he was so loved by the people. The king's servants were extremely suspicious of David being there. And David was very afraid because they were afraid! Tension was high, so reacting in fear, David did something very strange. Listen to this: **David...was very much afraid of Achish king**

of Gath. So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard (1 Samuel 21:11-13). The king was angry that a madman had been brought before him, so David got out of Gath, escaping to a cave.

It was as he remembered these events and his own behavior that David wrote Psalm 34, just as it says in the heading of the Psalm: **Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left.** (Abimelech and King Achish were the same person). And this is what he wrote:

- ¹ I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.
- ² My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.
- ³ Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.
- ⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.
- ⁵ Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.
- ⁶ This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.
- ⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.
- ⁸ Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.
- ⁹ Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.
- ¹⁰ The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.
- ¹¹ Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
- ¹² Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days,
- ¹³ keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.
- ¹⁴ Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.
- ¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry;
- ¹⁶ the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.
- ¹⁷ The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.
- ¹⁸ The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.
- ¹⁹ A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;
- ²⁰ he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.
- ²¹ Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned.
- ²² The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.

Do you ever feel like David? You look back on your life—and especially this morning we think of times we have been afraid—and you shake your head at how foolish you were. Maybe you've done what David did; you've shown your lack of trust in God, given in to your fears, and done things you shouldn't have done. Because he was afraid, David was reduced to acting crazy—scratching at the doorposts and spitting all over himself! Fear will make you do funny things, won't it? If we've created a financial mess for ourselves and we're afraid, what is often one of the first things we do? We cut back on our gifts to God. Crazy. We're afraid that certain someone doesn't love us anymore, so what do we do? Just don't talk about it. Crazy. We're afraid of what the doctor will say, but we wring our hands and fret without ever asking the Lord for calm and healing. Crazy. You're afraid your parents will find out, but what don't you do? You don't stop doing the thing that God says is wrong and would rightfully upset them! Crazy. Oh my goodness, we think David was crazy when he acted like it—look at us! We are equally ridiculous when it comes to our fears and our faith!

There is a better approach. Take a lesson from David, someone who's been there and done that and realizes how unnecessary and even how sinful our actions can be when we are gripped with fear. David says...

TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD

David wants you to TASTE AND SEE; he wants you to experience the goodness of God. The goodness of God really is something that a person must experience before it is truly appreciated. And as he talks to many of you, he's talking to people who have experienced the goodness of God already. You know his love. You know his forgiveness. You know his care. Why would you ever—even in fear—shy away from God's protective care to take things on yourself? Because we are sinners, we do that, so even we who know the goodness of God need to be reminded to not give in to fear, but instead trust in God.

Just look at all the things God did for David. Run your eyes over the words of Psalm 34 and you'll see them. God **“answered”** David and **“delivered (him) from all (his) fears.”** God **“heard”** when he called and God **“saved him out of all his troubles.”** The LORD encamped around David and delivered him. Farther down, in verse 15, we find that David understood that **The eyes of the LORD (were) on the (him) and his ears (were) attentive to (his) cry.** David knew that he could cry out and the LORD would hear him and deliver him from his troubles. Why? Because God was right there for him! He was close to him.

No, David didn't remember all this as he panicked in fear, and as he reflected on it, you know there was repentance. You see it as he calls himself **“This poor man”** and as he talks about the **“brokenhearted”** and the **“crushed in spirit.”** Though a man of great faith, David was also a sinner. He knew when he offended God and he repented.

That's what we are to do also. For all the times we have reacted out of fear and done things that were not pleasing to God, we ask for forgiveness. With broken hearts and crushed spirits, we come before the LORD and ask him to take away our sins and keep us as his children. We trust that because Jesus paid for our sins, including our fearful, lack-of-faith words and actions, our sins really are forgiven. In thanks for the love of God in Jesus Christ, his Son, we then want to change our sinful lives. We want to stop the sins that broke our hearts before our Savior and crushed our spirits. That's what David did—that's why he wrote a psalm of praise like this. But it is also a psalm of instruction for us.

He invites us: **Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.** He says: **Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.** David wants us to learn from what *he* went through. And we, like David, can learn from what *we've* been through. We too can look back, see where we've done wrong, and be thankful that the Lord was with us anyway, purely out of his perfect and undeserved love for us.

This of course, leads us to praise God, like David did as he looked back on events in his life. Again, as we scan his psalm, we see the way he felt about the LORD. “**Extol,**” “**praise,**” “**boast in the LORD,**” “**Glorify**” are the words he uses. And we do the same. We sing hymns of praise in worship. We sing songs with the word “alleluia” in it (“alleluia” means “praise to God”). Not only do we praise him when we gather for worship, but we glorify him through daily prayer and with the way we live our lives according to his Word, the Bible.

God has been there for us, his people, every step of our lives. Through every trial, every difficulty, every trauma, and even when we were not paying attention to him as we were gripped with fear, and when we came up with solutions on our own that did not include him and even offended him, God was faithful and loving to us! How can we not fall on our knees and give him thanks and praise?

And not only was he there during those times, he has been there for the aftermath—later on when we, like David, took time to reflect on the goodness of God despite our unworthiness. And at those times he has forgiven us. He has assured us of his love. He has assured us of the complete work of Jesus on our behalf. He was the One who never yielded to fear, never concocted a plan outside of God’s will, but was faithful to his Father and trusted absolutely in him. Jesus’ perfection and sacrifice are what remove these sins of ours. In Jesus, we have TASTED AND SEEN THAT THE LORD IS GOOD, haven’t we?

But there is one more thing to experience, one more thing to taste, one more thing that brings about the realization that “good” is a gross understatement and that the LORD is beyond great! David moves us to consider it as he writes: **The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.**

Not only has God been there for us through tough times, not only has he taken away our sins, but he has redeemed us. That means that God has bought us back. Through Christ’s life and blood and resurrection, the price was paid for our sin and we are God’s holy people now.

Consider the promise which closes the psalm: **no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.** David was saying the same thing that Paul later wrote in Romans 8:1: **Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** You and I, in times of fear and at all times, take refuge in God. We crowd around under the cross of Christ and we gather at the empty tomb and we receive the promise that we are not condemned, but we are forgiven and we are saved. We *will* taste and see the joys of heaven one day. We can thank David when we get there for reminding us to not give in to fear, but to trust and praise our LORD. But most importantly we will thank and praise our Savior for removing fear and doubt during our earthly lives and for graciously allowing us to TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD for all eternity. Amen.

**Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**