

A Life Well Lived, Fred Bevenssee
Psalm 34
11/15/18

I've had the privilege of getting to know Fred over the past 22 years. As a matter of fact, he's partially responsible for my being here at ABC. Back in 1996 Fred was on the board of elders when they interviewed me & eventually called me to be pastor. Over these years as I've gotten to spend time with Fred, I've grown to admire, respect, & love him. He will be missed. My Thursday afternoons will be less enjoyable now that he is no longer here with us. Those of you who take a printed manuscript of the sermon each week have Fred to thank for that. As his hearing went & it was harder for him to follow along on Sundays, he asked if my sermons were in manuscript form & if so, could he have one before the service each week. Now we've been doing that for several years. If you knew Fred at all, you knew he had a relationship with his Creator through Jesus Christ. In other words, Fred was a citizen of God's kingdom & he consciously lived in that kingdom while he was here on this earth. He often told me that many Christians had it wrong. All they thought about was heaven & the afterlife. Not Fred. God saves us to live for Him now as His child, a citizen of His kingdom. & Fred did that. He's still a citizen of God's kingdom, but in a way that you & I can't even comprehend.

Over the last couple of years, Fred asked me on numerous occasions to read Psalm 34 to him. We would then talk about various parts of it. Sometimes in depth; sometimes simply thanking God for who He is & what He's done. This morning we'll look at it briefly because it describes how to have a well-lived life. It describes, in many ways, Fred & the life he lived to the glory of God. There's one question in the middle of this psalm & the rest of the psalm answers that question. It's in vs 12 where David asks, **Who is the man who desires life & loves length of days that he may see good?** That is to say, do you want God's blessing in your life? Sounds like a no-brainer, doesn't it? We all want God's blessing in our lives! But answering *yes* to this question commits us to an often difficult way of life. God doesn't bless those who ignore Him, His Word, & live solely to please themselves. He blesses those He redeems, those who fear Him, & those who walk in His ways. So let me ask again, do you want God's blessing in your life? Fred did & he experienced it

with great contentment. As Jeanie has said, *He increasingly lived in heaven's realm & made the world a better place for it.* That is so true. He desired life, true life, abundant life, & found it in a relationship with the true God through His only Son, Jesus Christ. King David, the author of Ps 34, wanted God's blessing &, in spite of his many failures & sins, he kept coming back to the Lord, repenting of his sins, & seeking God as his chief joy & treasure. David wasn't using God as a genie in the bottle the way so many of us do. You know what that is, right? As soon as life gets rough we pull out the genie bottle, rub it, & ask God to come do His thing to fix our mess. Then we put Him back on the shelf until we need Him again. Rather, David saw God Himself as the supreme blessing. He would agree with Asaph when he wrote, **Whom have I in heaven but You? & besides You, I desire nothing on earth** (Ps 73:25). In Psalm 34, David tells us how to enjoy God & His blessings & in doing so, describes Fred as well. We'll look at a few characteristics of those whom God blesses & I encourage you to study this psalm in its context & setting on your own. Let's read it, pray, & see what it teaches us. **Ps 34** Pray

Once again, the question the psalmist is answering is the one found in the middle of the psalm, vs 12. **Who is the man who desires life & loves length of days that he may see good?** The 1st characteristics of this type of person is that he is ...

1. Humbly Praising God Vs 1-3

David begins this psalm with a vow, or a promise: **I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.** Here David promises to persistently praise His God. His praise is ongoing. David isn't promising a marathon session of praise. No, he's committing himself to the praise of God at every opportunity & in the midst of various states of mind, spirit, & body, through good circumstances & bad situations. Just as we are to **pray without ceasing** (1 Thes 5:17), to pray consistently & in all circumstances, David promises to praise without ceasing. While vs 1 stresses the frequency of David's praise, the 2nd vs reveals the focus of that praise. His soul will **make its boast in the Lord** (2a). David doesn't dwell on his experience, nor even on his deliverance, but on his Deliverer. The Lord is both the subject & the object of David's praise. David is boasting, but not in himself. He's boasting in the Lord, which means he recognizes that

he's the object of God's undeserved favor (1 Cor 1:26-31). As a result, the humble (those who recognize they are recipients of grace) will rejoice with him as he tells of God's deliverance. If you knew Fred at all, you knew he was a humble man. He would boast of Leila & what a great wife, mother, & nurse she was. He would boast of his girls. But I never once heard him boast of himself. & he always boasted of God & His fabulous, wonderful, & amazing grace that would reach out even to someone like him. Like David, Fred knew the truth of vs **18**.

Who are those who are **brokenhearted & crushed in spirit**?

John Bunyan, most famous for writing *Pilgrim's Progress*, also wrote a book titled, *The Acceptable Sacrifice: The Excellency of a Broken Heart* (1689).¹ In it Bunyan goes into great detail to spell out what a broken heart & a contrite spirit consist of to help us evaluate our own hearts before God. Here's how he summarizes & explains the terms, *broken & contrite* or **crushed in spirit**. To have your heart broken means *to have it lamed, disabled, & taken off by sense of God's wrath due to sin, from that course of life it formerly was conversant in*. As for a contrite spirit, it is *a penitent one; one sorely grieved, & deeply sorrowful, for the sins it has committed against God, & to the damage of the soul*. Further, the brokenhearted man sees himself to be a poor man, as David here acknowledges himself to be (34:6). Jesus picked up on this theme when He said (Mt 5:3-4), **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted**. Bunyan's treatise is based on David's cry after his sin with Bathsheba when he says, **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken & a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise** (Ps 51:17). Isaiah also writes about a broken & contrite heart: **For thus says the high & exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, 'I dwell on a high & holy place, & also with the contrite & lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly & to revive the heart of the contrite'** (57:15). If you need reviving, it begins with a broken & contrite heart! (cf Is 61:1; 66:2). Until you realize you're broken beyond your own ability to fix, you won't cry out to God for salvation from your sin. You heard Fred's testimony earlier. He came that point & it changed his life forever.

¹ Ebook available for free at www.monergism.com/acceptable-sacrifice-or-excellency-broken-heart-ebook

As long as you think your own goodness or morality will get your life put back together, you won't see yourself as a poor sinner, crying out to God to save you (Ps 34:6). As long as you believe mankind is good & getting better through science & knowledge, you'll never admit you're a sinner & cry out to God through Jesus to save you. As God opens your eyes to the seriousness of your sin, let it drive you to the cross of Christ for God's salvation. Have you come to the place of feeling broken & crushed by your sin, so that you've cried out to God to save you through Jesus & His shed blood? Fred did as he saw the savagery of humanity & was drawn to the gospel & put his faith in Jesus.

In vs 4-10 the idea is, *God rescued me; He can rescue you, too!* The more David minimized himself & proclaimed God & His goodness & grace, the more others could identify with him & join in his praise. While Fred often felt inadequate to articulate his faith, he was good at praising His God &, I believe, drew others to do the same. Those who truly are blessed by God & experience true life are those who humbly come to God & praise Him continuously. 2ndly, they ...

2. Humbly Fear God David uses a wide range of words that speak to his response, his approach to this God whose praise he is singing. In vs 1 he says, **I will bless the Lord at all times.** Vs 2, **I will boast in the Lord.** Vs 3, he'll **magnify the Lord.** Vss 4 & 5, he **seeks the Lord.** Vss 13 & 14, he **obeys the Lord.** Vs 22, he trusts in & takes refuge in Him. How does all this relate to a proper fear of the Lord? What is the fear of the Lord? Basically, it's shifting our focus from the preoccupation with the things that terrify us to a preoccupation with the only One who can rescue us. That's exactly what David did. To fear the Lord is to take him seriously, more seriously than you take anything or anyone else. The fear of the Lord can be described by the use of 2 3-letter words. The words *W-O-E* & *W-O-W*. The tension between those 2 words defines what the fear of the Lord really is. It's the **Woe is me!** that Isaiah speaks of in Isaiah 6 when he realizes, **I am undone. I am a man of unclean lips & I dwell among a people of unclean lips.** In other words, Isaiah says, *I make my living with my lips. I'm a prophet, yet I'm undone. Even my lips, the best I have to offer, are unclean. Woe is me!* & then once having been forgiven his next response is, *Wow! You would actually use me? Here I am! Would you send me?* The tension between the *Woe is me. I'm a*

sinner, deserving God's wrath. & the, Wow! He really loves me. He's really forgiven me & is actually willing to use me to accomplish His purposes, gets to the heart of what it is to fear the Lord. We must live with that tension saying, Above & beyond anything else I fear You, I long to delight You, I want to take Your Word seriously & root my life in it & upon it.

David feared Saul & he feared the Philistines. But he testifies in **vs 4**...

He goes on to state **vs 7**...

& then **vs 9**...

Finally in **vs 11**...

Fearing God is intricately bound up with experiencing His salvation. Even Christians need to be exhorted to fear God (Ps 34:9)! If you don't fear Him, you won't take refuge in Him. The fear of the Lord is not an ill-defined, illusive concept, but one which can be taught & known. It isn't merely academic, but is worked out in very practical terms. So David has already praised God for being good to him (1-7) & he urges us to taste & see that God is good (8). The fear of the Lord is now presented as the prerequisite to seeing the goodness of the Lord. God's goodness isn't for everyone. David has experienced it & he urges us to taste of it as well. However, God's goodness is directed only toward those who fear Him. David is teaching us as one who has learned this truth the hard way. He's telling us that when he feared men more than God he was more concerned with pleasing others than he was with obeying God. Fearing God involves acting consistently with God's character & commands.

In vss 13-14 the fear of the Lord is spelled out in general terms. Not only must we guard our mouth, speaking the truth rather than deceit, but we must also depart from evil & practice what is right. The fear of the Lord is inconsistent with evil. The fear of the Lord involves acting consistently with God's character & commands. It means we must forsake deception, & we must speak truthfully. It means that we must cease pursuing evil & must pursue peace instead. Where is it found? Only through the Prince of Peace, the OT's promised Messiah, the NT's anointed One, Jesus Christ. The fear of the Lord not only involves knowing God's truth, it implements it. What we believe changes how we act. Fred was brilliant, a deep thinker. He thought at length about

what the Bible teaches & what it means. But it wasn't just an academic exercise for him. It was so it would change his life, his actions, & his attitudes. Fred lived in the fear of the Lord as a citizen of God's kingdom, which means he, by God's grace, obeyed God & desired to please Him in all he did. Which leads us to a 3rd characteristic of those who live abundantly & are blessed by God. They ...

3. Humbly Obey God Throughout this psalm, there's an emphasis on being righteous, which means, to obey the Lord. David addresses his readers as **saints** (or *holy ones*, vs 9), which is somewhat unusual in the OT. He exhorts us to **depart from evil & do good** (14). He assures us that **the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous & His ears are open to their cry** (15). He also mentions the righteous in vss 17, 19, & 21. In contrast, David states, **The face of the Lord is against evildoers, to cut off the memory of them from the earth** (16). Further, in vs 21, **Evil shall slay the wicked, & those who hate the righteous will be condemned**. So either God's eyes are towards us favorably because we fear, believe, & obey Him (15) or His face is against us because we disobey Him (16, 21). At the root of obeying the Lord is fearing Him. As Prov 8:13 states, **The fear of the Lord is to hate evil**. Fearing Him leads to obeying Him, which leads to enjoying God & experiencing His blessings. Thus, the invitation in vs 8, **O taste & see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!** He's saying, *Don't just look on, wishing that my blessings were yours. Taste the Lord's goodness yourself! Prove in your own experience that the Lord saves all that take refuge in Him*. The one who **takes refuge** in God is one who finds his strength in the Lord & not in himself. Those who have been delivered from their fear of man are those who have come to fear the Lord. The emphasis of vss 8-10 is to invite others to experience the same kind of blessings for which David is praising God. Why? Because praise is best when it's shared. Have you ever stood at the rim of Crater Lake, admiring the spectacular view, when a stranger walks up? It's hard not to say, *Isn't this amazing!* Why? Because praise is meant to be shared. In vs 5, David says that those that looked to the Lord were **radiant**. The Hebrew word is used of a mother's face lighting up with joy when her children, given up for lost, return home (Is 60:5). She can't hide her delight. When you've experienced God's salvation, your face should be

radiant when you think about your Savior! Think about Fred's demeanor; picture his face. What do you see? A gentle, quiet, content man with a little smile & twinkle in his eye. It didn't matter what the circumstances or how he felt. That was Fred. In other words, **radiant**.

But the ultimate experience of God's blessing & salvation isn't found in this life, but in the life to come. The final vss (19-22) of this psalm find their ultimate fulfillment beyond death, when God will glorify His servants. These vss make obvious what the Bible clearly teaches throughout. What is it? That there's a great divide between those whom God redeems & those whom God condemns. The Hebrew word for **condemned** (21-22) means to bear one's guilt. It's the opposite of being justified, of being declared righteous. **Those who hate the righteous will be condemned** (21b), they will be held guilty. Whereas, **none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned** (22b) or held guilty. The word **condemned** assumes guilt in both instances. David intends for us to understand that both the wicked & the righteous are guilty. We are all sinners deserving God's punishment. & so, on one hand, the guilty are held guilty & are punished for their sins. On the other, the guilty are redeemed & aren't punished. The reason some are forgiven & others are not is that some **take refuge in Him** (22), those who are **brokenhearted & crushed in spirit**, while others stubbornly resist God & **hate the righteous** (21). But what it all comes down to is characteristic #4, *redeemed*. We can praise, fear, & obey God only because we've been ...

4. Redeemed by God 22

The word **redeems** is important because it suggests that the forgiveness of those who take refuge in God isn't without cost. *Redeemed* means to buy back. From the NT we know that we're redeemed, bought back from the slavery of sin, not by the shedding of the blood of animals under the OT law, but by the shed blood, the death of Jesus Christ (Heb 9:11-14; 1 Pt 1:19). Some are saved, not because they're righteous or have done enough good deeds, but because they've been redeemed, bought back, forgiven, & thus are no longer held accountable for their sins. Their sins have been paid for by Another, by Jesus Himself. If you've taken refuge in Jesus Christ, **there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus** (Rom 8:1). We can humbly praise God, fear God, & obey God because we have been redeemed by God.

What do I want to leave you with? The same thing that Fred would want you to know. Taste & see that the Lord is good because He sent Jesus. See that the Lord is good because He gave us the gospel. Our sins are forgiven. Jesus has drunk the cup of God's wrath. Not a drop is left. Jesus has died our death. He has bore the punishment for us. Taste & see the mangled Savior of Isaiah 52. Taste & see the Savior who bears our sins, who is crushed in Isaiah 53. Taste & see the triumphant victory over death through the resurrection in the gospels. Taste & see that Jesus Christ is now our Advocate. He intercedes for us. Do you have a taste for God? Do you savor the sweetness of God's Word? Do you experience the goodness & greatness of Jesus for who He is? Or are you satisfied with the bitter taste of sin? Go to the Word of God which reveals the God of the Word & enjoy the buffet that God has given us. Let me again ask, do you want God's blessing in your life? Then learn from David that these things come from God to those who have been redeemed by Him & humbly praise, fear, & obey Him. Therefore, repent of your sins. Ask God for a broken & contrite heart & cry out to Jesus for salvation. Then, & only then, live by fearing Him & walking in His ways. You'll be blessed! & you'll end your life it having been well-lived. I pray that you will **seek refuge** in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Redeemer of mankind through His sacrificial death on the cross of Calvary. Who will come & taste, drink deeply, & find that the Lord is good? David answers that as well. In vs 2 it says, **Let the humble hear & be glad.** Vs 11, **Come O children & listen to me.** You see, it's only those who come in humility & who come as children that can taste & see that God is good. It's only those who are redeemed, made saints, & declared righteous by the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ who can taste & see that God is truly good. Who will come? Those declared righteous by faith in Christ, who humble themselves, & come in faith as children. Jesus said, **I have come that they may have life, & have it to the full** (Jn 10:10). Jesus came that we may enjoy life, that we may have it in abundance, to the full, until it overflows. His blessing comes to those who hear Him saying in Mt 11, **Come to me, all you who are weary & burdened & I will give you rest** (28). The invitation that Fred accepted still stands. *Come. Come with your questions, come with your doubts, but come humbly to Me,* the Lord Jesus says. That's the only place you're going to be filled & satisfied.

When we experience God's blessings, He expects us to share it with others & to invite them to experience God's blessings, too. The entire psalm repeats the theme, *I've received God's blessings; you can, too!* & I believe that was the cry of Fred's heart. He frequently told me it was a struggle for him to articulate & communicate the gospel with others, especially as his hearing went. But he continued to pray for this & by his countenance & demeanor he showed the love of God to many, including me. If you haven't tasted & seen that God is good, I urge you to do that today. If Fred were here, I'm convinced he'd be nodding his consent. Talk to me or someone here about the redemption & blessing we have in Christ Jesus.