

LEARNING TO FEAR THE LORD

Psalm 34:11-22

Intro: We come tonight to the second part of Psalm 34, which is a Psalm of David. In the first part, verses 1-10, we saw how David's heart was overflowing with praise to the Lord because of the way that Lord had heard and answered his prayer. And especially in the latter part of that first section David seemed intent on encouraging others to trust the Lord as he had so that they might experience the blessing that he had experienced. So this joyful servant of the Lord, in the second part of the Psalm, appeals for others to learn what it means to fear the Lord.

I hope you remember that I mentioned something that David made very obvious in the first part of the Psalm. I say it is obvious because there are just three things that he called upon his readers to do. And the translators of the KJV have clearly marked them out with the word "O." This means that those three verses were not only commands, but they were urgent appeals on the part of David. By now you know that I am talking about verses 3 and 8 and 9. In all of the other verses David was either telling us what he did, or what the Lord did, concluding with a firm promise in verse 10. (Read all of these verses.)

Verse 11 starts the second part of the Psalm with an invitation, an urgent invitation, for "children" to come to him to learn how to fear the Lord. Let us call it,

I. DAVID'S URGENT APPEAL (Psa. 34:11).

We have already seen that David appealed to his readers to trust the Lord in verse 8, and then to fear the Lord in verse 9. As the second part of the Psalm begins, he expressed his desire to teach "children" not only what it means to fear the Lord, but some of the blessings which follow fearing the Lord.

There is probably no reason to make "children" mean anything but those who were young in age. I want to show you something in the book of Proverbs which may have escaped your notice. Please turn with me to Proverbs 4.

We know that the book of Proverbs was written by Solomon, and that Solomon was David's son. It is clear from the first chapter that Solomon was writing this book for his own son, so it is a book written for young people.

However, here in Proverbs 4 we see the connection between David's teaching, and Solomon's teaching. (Read verses 1-4.) From the latter part of verse 4 down through verse 9 we have a summation of what Solomon learned from his father, David. Then beginning with verse 10, we see that Solomon was passing on to his son what he had learned from his father.

Now this is exactly what the fathers of Israel were instructed to do in the Law of Moses. Let me read a few verses to you from Deut. 6, words with which most of you are familiar. I am reading from verse 1 down through verse 9:

- 1 Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it:
- 2 That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.
- 3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.
- 4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:
- 5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.
- 6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:
- 7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.
- 8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.
- 9 And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deut. 6:1-9).

So you can see that there was a very special emphasis in OT times on the importance of teaching children, not only the Word of God, but teaching children how to fear the Lord.

To fear the Lord combines trusting the Lord and pleasing the Lord. But it seems that the word "fear" is used in the Scriptures to indicate not only the desire to please the Lord, but *an intense desire to please the Lord*. The

greater our desire to please the Lord, the greater will be our blessing in walking with the Lord. It certainly does not mean that we can avoid all difficulties and trials, but fearing the Lord assures us of the Lord's blessing. Jerry Bridges has given his book the right title in dealing with the subject of fearing God. He has called it, *The Joy of Fearing God*. It is so important that all of us learn to fear the Lord, and then to instruct our children truth the Lord and to fear the Lord every day of their lives and in everything that they do. This is preeminently a job for parents, but priests and Levites and prophets all had a hand in this as well. In fact, this Psalm takes on somewhat the form of the book of Proverbs, and it is important to realize that David spent time teaching his children, and that Solomon did the same with his children. How different things would have been in Israel if this practice had been carried on as the Lord intended that it should have been. But we can all be thankful for the help that we have in the Scriptures as found in the Psalms of David, and the Proverbs of Solomon. Let us make sure that our children are acquainted with both of these books of the Bible.

But let us go on.

II. A QUESTION FOR ADULTS (Psa. 34:12).

As we move from verse 11 to verse 12, we move from childhood to adulthood. Here David was asking men (and women) a question. But men are mentioned (in the singular so that every man would feel obligated to answer the question) so that they would feel their responsibility to teach their children.

In our childhood and youth we are inclined to do a lot of foolish things which we regret as we get older. That is when we begin to learn how quickly life passes, and how easily time can be wasted, we ponder thoughts that are suggested by the question in verse 12.

What is the answer to that question? It is that everyone does. Everybody desires that kind of a life. The problem is that because we are sinners we are blinded to what really is good, and we can spend our whole lives going in the wrong direction if someone does not teach us about the Lord, about loving Him, trusting Him, and, instead of spending our time pleasing ourselves, we must learn the supreme importance of living to please the Lord. And how grateful we can be if we have had parents who have taught us by their lives and by their words of instruction how important it is to know the Lord and to live for the Lord.

So we teach our children, not only that they might have a happy childhood, but also that they may have a happy adult life.

And so David went on to give the children

III. THE FIRST LESSON IN FEARING GOD (Psa. 34:13-14).

We must assume that the children David was concerned about were children who knew the Lord. Salvation is the prerequisite to such a life.

It should be of interest to us that David began by referring to the way we use our tongues. How easy it is for us to displease the Lord by talking in a sinful way, and by using our tongues to deceive others. No one has to teach us how to speak in the wrong way; that is our nature.

But a life of fearing God, seeking to please God, is not just negative. It is also very positive. We are to stay away from sin in any and every form, and to do what is pleasing to the Lord. This we also learn from the Word of God. And we are to be called *peacemakers*, because even the world recognizes that a true peacemaker is one way you can identify a child of God. Cf. Matt. 5:9. And we not only seek it, but we pursue it. We seek to be at peace with others even though they may not seek to be at peace with us.

I don't have the time right now to go into these two verses the way I would like to, but this is David's description, although brief, of what it means to be righteous in the way we live. And so at this point David went on to point out some of the blessings that come to us when we please God as compared with the difficulties that come to us when we do what is evil in His sight. There are only two ways to go. Every person lives in just one of two ways: we either please God, or we displease Him. To please Him is to be righteous; to displease Him is to be wicked.

IV. THE BLESSINGS IN A LIFE LIVED TO PLEASE GOD (Psa. 34:15-22).

Notice how David spoke of the Lord's eyes, then His ears, His presence, and the Lord's works. And all of this is set in contrast with what happens to the wicked. And we need to remember that a wicked person is not always a person who commits crimes so that he becomes a threat to society and needs to be put away. That surely is a wicked person. But a wicked person is one who lives without any concern for God, or what is pleasing

to Him. What David was seeking to instill in the hearts of children, was that true happiness is not attained by being able to do whatever we want to do, but it is the result of doing that which is pleasing to the Lord.

Now we have to remember that what David said here about the Lord is true twenty-four hours of the day. Cf. Psalm 121.

In verse 15 we are told that the Lord's eyes are upon us. Actually His eyes are upon every single person in the world. There isn't a thing that escapes the Lord's notice. But this means that He knows when we want to please Him. And He blesses us when we please Him. And He is ready to undertake for us when we run into difficulties because we please Him.

This same verse tells us that the Lord's ears are always open to our cries for help. And it does not make any difference how many of us cry to Him at one time, He hears all of us, and never gets our needs mixed up with the needs of others.

By way of contrast, verse 16 tells us that no one ever gets away with sin. It may seem at times like the wicked prosper, but they never do. There is always a price attached to sin, and either now or hereafter, or both, the Lord is just as aware of people's sinning as He is of the ways in which His people seek to please Him. There is no use to try to hide anything from the Lord because it can't be done.

Verse 17 tells us, in advance of verse 15, that the righteous who know their need of the Lord, not only cry, but the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. Sometimes it is out of, and sometimes it is through, their troubles. And verse 18 tells us that the Lord is near us when we have broken hearts, and that He delivers us when we have repentant spirits. The thought behind this is that, in spite of ourselves, there are times when we displease the Lord, when we fail, when we sin, and the Lord does not forsake us in such times.

Adam Smith said that "a broken heart and a contrite spirit are two essential characteristics of true repentance."

Verse 19 reminds us that we live in a sinful world, and that the troubles which all people experience come our way as well. But what a difference it is to have a God Who delivers us. In fact, He causes our afflictions to be our blessing because they cause us to draw even closer to the Lord. And we are reminded in verse 20 of our Lord. Cf. John 19:36. There is

always a limit which God establishes beyond which no wicked person can go in afflicting us, and that was marvelously illustrated in the case of the afflictions, the terrible afflictions, which our Lord experienced in His death on the Cross.

It is only in the Bible that we learn what is told us in this chapter, not only for the people who fear God, the blessings that come to them, but as far as evildoers are concerned. God always hold the wicked guilty and accountable for every sin (v. 21), but He redeems His servants, and none who trust in Him will ever be condemned according to verse 22. These final words of Psalm 34 remind us of the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ as recorded for us in the writings of the Apostle John.

So this final verse proves that those who are described as righteous in the Psalm are those who have been redeemed by the Lord, and as a result are living of life in which they trust in the Lord, fearing God.

Concl: This is a lesson for all to learn, but the earlier we learn what David here desired to teach children, the better off we will be.

Have you never heard an adult say something like this, after reading a Psalm like Psalm 34: "I wish I had known these things when I was young"? This is why we need to teach our children, but we must also remember that it is never too late to learn what we need to know about living a life in which we show that we fear God. And remember that this means to have an intense desire to please Him. We truly fear sin and its consequences, but we know that pleasing God is the greatest safeguard against doing those things that displease Him.

To be "desolate" in verses 21 and 22 means *to be held guilty*. The consequences of sin most certainly await all who choose to ignore God and to live wicked lives. But those who have been redeemed, and so choose by God's grace to live to please God, will never be condemned.

It is no wonder that the Apostle Paul was led to write, "What shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). The Lord will always stand in support of His people.