

THE JOY OF ANSWERED PRAYER

Psalm 34:1-10

Intro: There is a verse on prayer, spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ while He was here on earth, which has long been a favorite of mine. I am referring to John 16:24:

Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

It was a new thing for the disciples to pray in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but the part that has always attracted me has been the last phrase, "that your joy may be full."

Earlier in that same discourse our Lord had said relative to the purpose behind His teaching,

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full (John 15:11).

At this point in their relationship with the Lord, the disciples were not a very happy group. The Lord had spoken to them about leaving them, and He had spoken to them repeatedly about His death. They were very slow in comprehending all that was involved in the Lord's ministry on earth. Twice He had said to them, "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1, 27). So it was apparent that sadness had filled their hearts, and we can certainly be sympathetic with them.

I suppose it is generally true that, when we come to the Lord to bring our burdens and cares to Him, we are not in a particularly jubilant mood. The cares of life tend to burden us down, and that is why we come to the Lord, to get help and to have our sadness replaced with joy. And that is what our Lord promised His disciples: "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

If there is a Psalm that illustrates that *fulness of joy*, it is Psalm 34. David had gone down to Gaza to escape from Saul. But there, instead of feeling safe, he ran into another difficulty. The Philistines had heard how the women of Israel had praised David above King Saul, and this made the Philistines very suspicious of David. To escape from their hands, he pretended that he was insane, and the King of Gaza would have nothing to do with him. And so David escaped, but it evidently was a very dangerous situation for him to be in, and so Psalm 34 was written commemorating his escape, and the great joy which he experienced in answer to prayer. The king's name was Achish; his title was Abimelech (like Pharaoh was

the title of Egypt's king). However, the joy that David experienced was in proportion to the danger which he faced, and so David who became famous for the expression, "My cup runneth over" (Psa. 23:5), illustrated by Psalm 34 what it is to have your cup full and running over with joy. Probably the best word to describe David as he wrote Psalm 34, is the word *exuberant*! He was *exuberant with joy*! His heart was full and overflowing. He was superabounding with happiness.

Now the Spirit of God undoubtedly not only led David in the writing of this Psalm, but it is a very important part of the Word of God to encourage us in our praying. Prayers rarely bring such joy immediately, and perhaps it can be said that prayers rarely bring the kind of joy which David experienced on this occasion. But here is his testimony. We might question what David did in acting like he had lost his mind, but even if that were an evidence of his lack of faith (which it may, or may not be), that should only magnify the grace and mercy of God in sparing David's life in a very precarious situation. But it is here to encourage us. I have probably read this Psalm when visiting people in hospitals more than any other Psalm. It has often encouraged me, and undoubtedly most of you can say the same thing.

Tonight I want to take just the first part of the Psalm, verses 1 through 10, and then in a couple of weeks I will take the last twelve verses.

Derek Kidner says that these two parts of the Psalm can be described as:

- 1) Rejoice with me (vv. 1-10).
- 2) Learn with me (vv. 11-22).

Arthur Clarke, who was a missionary to China and captured by the Japanese, wrote a book on the Psalms. He gave the Psalm these titles as divisions:

- 1) Thanksgiving for a saved life (vv. 1-10).
- 2) Teaching for the sanctified life (vv. 11-22).

Graham Scroggie, a well-known expositor of the last generation, gives the Psalm these two divisions:

- 1) Song (vv. 1-10).
- 2) Sermon (vv. 11-22).

Spurgeon's division was very similar, and his may have been the earlier:

- 1) Hymn (vv. 1-10).
- 2) Sermon (vv. 11-22).

At any rate, the fact that we have two main divisions in this Psalm, is well

established by many commentators.

Tonight we want to look at verses 1-10. And I trust that you will see that David intended for his experience in this situation to be an encouragement to others to cast their care upon the Lord. We see this in the first part of David's thanksgiving.

I. DAVID'S VOW BEFORE THE LORD, or HIS DECLARED INTENTION REGARDING THE FUTURE (Psa. 34:1-2).

I think that most of us have been rebuked again and again as we have read the Scriptures, and especially the Psalms, to realize what a great place praise had in the lives of the old saints, and how little time we have given to praise in our prayers. And this in spite of exhortations like, "In everything give thanks," and, "Giving thanks always for all things." It is clearly the Lord's intention that joy should be our portion as His people, and that the expression of our joy should always be praise to Him. Perhaps it takes some special experience like David had to make us realize what "a debt of love we owe" to God for His blessings. And yet the very fact that He has saved us should make our hearts overflow with praise. David was determined that from that time on, his prayers were going to be full of praise. Whatever David may have thought of his own behavior in that time of need, he gave all of the glory to the Lord for His deliverance. As long as we are inclined to take any of the credit for ourselves, it is going to hinder us in praising the Lord. He is the One Who gets *all* of the glory!

The word "humble" can be translated *afflicted*. Our afflictions do humble us, and that is one of the main reasons for them. They make us realize how insufficient we are and how all-sufficient God is.

In the third verse we have:

II. DAVID'S FIRST APPEAL TO HIS PEOPLE (and HIS READERS) (Psa. 34:3).

David knew that every believer, regardless of what his situation might be, has many reasons to magnify the Lord. One of the results of answered prayer is that we not only praise the Lord ourselves, but we want to join with others and encourage others to do the same. It is wonderful when a single believer praises the Lord, but it is even more wonderful, and more glorifying to the Lord, when there is a chorus of praise ascending from the hearts of His people in gratitude for His many mercies.

When those of you who were memorizing these verses committed this verse to memory, was it an appeal to your own heart to do what David was doing when he wrote this Psalm? It should have been. Take this verse as though David had personally addressed it to you. This is the way we ought to take such statements in Scripture. This will make our Bible reading and Bible memory mean that much more to us.

In the third section of this first part of Psalm 34 we have:

III. DAVID'S TESTIMONY (Psa. 34:4-7).

He did not state in detail what his problem was, nor how the Lord answered him, but just that the Lord heard him, and delivered him first, "from all my fears." Often our fears are the worst part of our situation, and they may even be greater than the particular trouble we are facing.

The word "sought" indicates that David in prayer went looking for the Lord. Of course the Lord was with him, as He is always with us, but there is that exercise of seeking the Lord that is the expression of our faith. Sometimes the Lord gives us help through people, but it is the Lord we must seek. We must feel our need of Him. He makes no claim as having seen the Lord, but he did know that the Lord heard him because his fears were removed. And it is true that we need to be delivered from our fears because fear is one of our greatest enemies. Obviously David feared more from the Philistines than he had feared from Saul, or possibly he meant that the Lord delivered him from the fear of Saul as well as his fear of the Philistines. It surely seems like a lack of faith that caused David to go to the Philistines to get away from Saul. He jumped out of the frying pan into the fire, as we often say.

Verse 5 is something of a problem, but it seems that here David was taking the same kind of encouragement from others that he was seeking to give in this Psalm. He evidently remembered how the Lord had helped others even when they had gotten themselves into difficulty. They called upon the Lord. "Lightened" speaks of the change in their countenance as the Lord helped them, and they were not at all disappointed. The Lord in His mercy exceeded their hopes.

In verse 6 David tells how the Lord saved him, not just from his fears, but from his troubles. David described himself as "poor," which means weak and needy and afflicted, in trouble beyond anything that he could do to help himself. Often the Lord waits until we realize that the Lord is the

only One Who can help us.

Verse 7 is very interesting. We don't know a great deal about the ministry of angels to us as the people of God. There are a lot of silly, superstitious, and false ideas circulating among the people of the world in recent days about angels, but the place to learn the truth about angels is in our Bibles. Angels were quite prominent in OT times. Angels assisted the Lord when the Law was given to Moses. An angel delivered Peter from prison. And we are told this in Heb. 1:14 about angels: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" So it may be that in some ways, unknown to us, we all have been blessed through the ministry of angels. But David said very positively that "the angel of the Lord . . . "

It may be, I am not saying definitely, but it may be, that since our Lord appeared in the OT as "the angel of the Lord," that David was referring to a pre-incarnate appearance of our Lord. "Encampeth" means that He is always there. And "delivereth" means that He is doing this over and over again. There is a lot of truth for us to meditate on in this seventh verse of our Psalm.

This part of the Psalm concludes with:

IV. DAVID'S SECOND AND THIRD APPEALS (Psa. 34:8-10).

Derek Kidner in his commentary said this about this verse:

Both Hebrews 6:5 and 1 Peter 2:3 use this verse to describe the first venture into faith, and to urge that the tasting should be more than a casual sampling.

To taste means that by personal experience each believer must trust the Lord for himself. We can be encouraged by the faith of others, but it is our faith that lays hold of the Lord and His blessing. Then we realize that the Lord is good, and that blessing always follows the person who trust in the Lord.

To fear the Lord here is to trust Him alone. And this is the privilege extended to "his saints." "No want" is *no lack*. And this section concludes by reminding us that the king of the animals even in their strength, can sometimes be hungry, and unable to help themselves. "But they that seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing."

Concl: Now after reading all of this, the question is, What is it going to mean to us? We all have our burdens and our trouble, what David called our "afflictions." We continually face needs that are too great for us. Are we going to try to deliver ourselves, or are we going to begin by seeking the Lord and the blessing which only He can give to us?

David's purpose in writing this, and the Holy Spirit's purpose in directing him in what he said, were that we would profit from David's experience, and from the experience of those who helped David, so that as we face the difficulties that come to us, our first resort will be to the Lord. This Psalm means that He is just as ready to help us as He was to help David, but He wants us to seek Him, and to trust Him, and to know that, as He helped David, so He will help us too.