

Why Praise God?

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Introduction.

- A. Psalm 34:1-3 is with an exuberant shout of praise to God. It's the kind of passage that we read publicly before a song service to get ourselves into that "worship mindset." It is some of the finest writing of one of the greatest inspired poets ever to live, David. There are many hymns that incorporate the language of these three verses, and if the songleader called out the number for one of these hymns, we'd gladly join in.
- B. However, friends, when we look at this passage without considering its context, to the logical ear, it rings somewhat hollow. The emotion is there—it describes worship of God in enthusiastic terms—but the intellect isn't. This portion of the Psalm doesn't give us any REASON to praise God. It's like the schoolboy who becomes infatuated with the girl who sits next to him in chemistry class. He says he loves her, but he doesn't know anything about her other than her name and the fact that she's cute.
- C. In our own worship, it's easy to fall into the same trap. It's easy to be swept away by enthusiastic singing and beautiful music to the point where we reach a giddy emotional high, but such worship is incomplete at best and vain at worst. Don't get me wrong; God certainly wants us to be emotionally involved in our worship, but that's not all He wants. True worship engages us both emotionally and intellectually, and as we worship, we must consider both our duty to instruct one another in song and our call to recognize just why it is that we are worshipping. Of course, as an inspired Psalm, Psalm 34 falls short in neither of these respects. Let's consider the rest of its content this evening to learn about David's answer to the question "Why praise God?"

I. He Answers.

- A. David first tells us that we should praise God because He answers. This is the point of Psalm 34:4-7. David reveals that when the righteous are beset by trouble, they can call out to God, and He will hear them in their distress and answer them. This is extremely important to our relationship with God, both for what it tells us that He will provide, and for what it implies about what He won't provide.
- B. Let's look at the positive first. All of us struggle with our faith sometimes. One of the things that challenges us the most is that as children of God, we are instructed to rely on it, rather than on sight. Even though we don't see, we still have to believe, and that can be hard to do. Because we can't see God working directly in our lives, we are tempted to assume that He doesn't work, and that when we pray, we're talking to the ceiling.
- C. David's inspired vision of God is very different. He doesn't describe our Father as this cold, uncaring supercomputer in the sky. Instead, God is going to be as involved in our lives as we ask Him to be. If we want to go our own way, He'll let us do that, but if we turn to Him and ask Him for help, then that's where He'll be. God will move heaven and earth to help His children. All we have to do is seek Him first.
- D. However, friends, it's important to note here that although God promises us help in our troubles, He does not promise us that we won't have troubles. Indeed, the opposite is true. If nothing else, we are guaranteed to have problems in this life because we are disciples of Jesus. Despite this, lots of people have the idea that God ought to throw this invisible force field over us that protects us from everything bad ever, and that if something bad does happen, it's either because we've sinned or because God has let us down.
- E. Friends, we need to be careful not to hold God to a promise He didn't make. The fact of the matter is that sometimes, bad things DO happen to good people. Bad things happen sometimes because Satan is alive and well and working in the hearts of evil men, but sometimes they happen just because earth isn't heaven and it isn't meant to be heaven. Perfect happiness and perfect contentment are for there, not here. The next time bad things happen to us—and they will—we need to remember that and make the right choice. The wrong choice seems so right at the time. In our despair, it's so easy, as Job's wife put it, to curse God and die. But we need to be wiser than that. We need to keep trusting in God, and call on Him for help.

II. He Provides.

- A. Next in the Psalm, David praises God because He provides. This is what we see in David's words in Psalm 34:8-10. We normally think of David as the king of Israel, a guy who didn't really have any problems he didn't bring on himself, but Psalm 34 dates from an earlier time. At this point, David is a fugitive from Saul, the king of Israel, who wants to kill him for no good reason. Indeed, things are so desperate for David that he has fled to Achish, the king of the Philistines, and sought shelter from him. We see the story pick up here in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. This is the incident in David's life that makes him so thrilled with God. He has absolutely nothing, he has just had to feign madness to escape from a king who wants to kill him, and yet he's singing about it.
- B. This is a lesson that a lot of folks need to learn. Too much of the time, we focus on what we don't have and blame God for it instead of focusing on what we DO have and thanking Him for it. Let me tell you, friends—David here has a lot more cause to blame God than any of us do. He has done everything God wanted him to

do, yet he has lost almost everything. He's lost his job, he's lost his home, he's lost his best friend, he's lost his wife, and he's very nearly lost even his life. And yet, out of this, we get Psalm 34 because David is thankful for not being dead yet. Let me ask you, friends—is there anyone here with more problems than David had? If not, then we ought to be even more thankful than David for what God has provided for us.

- C. There's something more to David's thanksgiving, though, than just gratitude for not being dead yet. As David writes, he believes that those who wait on the Lord shall not lack for any good thing. Now, David was no dummy. In five minutes, he probably could have come up with a whole barrelful of things he lacked. His statement, though, is an expression not of cluelessness, but of faith. He might not be on top of the wheel right now, but he believes that sooner or later, things are going to get better, until he DOESN'T lack anything.
- D. That's something we need to see too. God isn't done with ANY of us yet unless I've made a wrong turn and am preaching this sermon in heaven. God always fulfills His promises, but he does it on His timetable, not ours. Things might not be happening right now the way that we want them to, but if we just wait on the Lord, things will work out. Sometimes, to see what God will provide, we just have to put our patience into practice.

III. He Discerns.

- A. It's also evident from this psalm that we should praise God because He discerns. Consider what David has to say in Psalm 34:15-18. Whereas before David has been describing just one group of people and the way that God interacts with that group, here we see things branch off a little bit. David explains that although God regards and answers the righteous, He is the enemy of those who are wicked.
- B. So . . . why should we care about this? Why does it make us happy that God deals differently with the righteous than with the wicked? Well, imagine this: Let's say that we're all in a high-school English class together, and on the first day of school, the teacher announces this huge paper that's due at the end of the quarter. This paper is so big and so important that it's worth 50% of the final grade. The teacher tells us that it is impossible to pass the class without doing the paper. You take this to heart. You come up with a topic, go home, and start researching your paper immediately. I, by contrast, just like I actually was in high school, spend my days doing everything under the sun but working on the paper. You have all your research done. I have nothing. You have an outline done; I have nothing. You have a rough draft done; I have nothing.
- C. This pattern continues all the way up until the end of the quarter, when you turn in your perfect paper, and I turn in nothing. Fast-forward two weeks until the day when report cards come out. You open yours and see the A that you expected and worked hard for. I lean over and peek at yours, then say casually, "That's good. I got an A too. The teacher told me that she just decided not to include those research papers in the grade at all, although she did say that yours was pretty good." How would this make you feel? Pleased? Happy? Or frustrated and disappointed? I think most of us would say the latter. Most of us, in fact, would feel betrayed by the teacher, because she was unreliable, unfair, and didn't keep her promises.
- D. That, friends, is the reason why we should praise God for His discernment. We should praise Him because He promised to distinguish between the evil and the good, and He does. If God doesn't do that, then we have no reason to trust Him. Only if our behavior matters to God do we have any way of building a life around Him.

IV. He Redeems.

- A. Finally, though, we should praise God because He redeems. David touches on this topic in Psalm 34:19-22. He begins by restating an idea we've looked at already, that the righteous do not go unscathed. Instead, they have to deal with many afflictions. What they have, though, is the help of a God who can redeem them, that is to say, rescue them from their troubles the way one man buys another out of slavery.
- B. What we have a fuller picture of than David did, though, is that God in His mercy has set up a way to redeem us from our troubles even when we have brought them on ourselves by not being righteous. Once again, though, this is not God being unreliable or capricious. It's still sinful and wrong to break His commandments. There's still a price that must be paid. God's mercy, though, is apparent in the fact that we don't have to pay it ourselves anymore. Instead of us dying for our own sins, Jesus Christ, though sinless, died for the sins of everyone else. When you get right down to it, the entire Bible is an offer of redemption based on the value of that sacrifice. God has told us that He is willing to purchase us out of sin not with gold or silver, but with the precious blood of Christ. Of course, this is not an unconditional offer. Christ's blood does not cleanse everyone, only those who have indicated a desire to BE cleansed. God doesn't give gifts to people who don't want them any more than we do.

Conclusion. That brings us, then, to the logical conclusion that we must draw from all of this, a conclusion that we see David drawing in Psalm 34:11-14. If a relationship with God offers all of these blessings, but the relationship is only available to those who want it, then we need to do something to show that we want it. One of this first steps in this process is described by David here. We have to show God that we want to be near Him by patterning our life on His word. However, this kind of repentance is not enough to make us right with God by itself. After all, our past sins are still on our record. Ultimately, our search for peace with God must lead to all of His plan of salvation, which concludes with being immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. Have you done this?