

Oak Lawn United Reformed Church

Preparatory Devotional

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Psalm 34: Comfort During Trying Times

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Introduction

This is the seventh Lord's supper preparatory devotional I have been blessed to write for our help and edification. I am so thankful for the opportunity to write these, and for your willingness to use them.

We are using these devotionals as a way that God the Holy Spirit is feeding and nurturing us. That feeding and nurture comes in the way of self-examination. The purpose is to know better who we are and, especially, Who Jesus Christ is, our Savior and Lord. Please make diligent use of this little devotional. If you have family with you, read it together. Pray together. Encourage one another. Ask your own heart the hard, searching questions. We each need to be strengthened in the faith and perhaps a little "help" like this preparatory devotional is just what we need.

The structure of these daily devotionals is simple. Read, reflect, and pray. Joy awaits us as we come to know our God and ourselves better in preparing to come to His table!

In this installment of the preparatory devotional, we consider several verses from Psalm 34 to learn how much comfort our God gives to us in trying times. Note this...

"...we are confident that the Savior accepts us at His table when we come in humble faith, with sorrow for our sins, and with a will to follow Him as he commands."

~ Preparatory Form, paragraph 6

All, then, who are truly sorry for their sins, who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and who earnestly desire to lead a godly life, ought to accept the invitation now given and come with gladness to the table of their Lord."

~ Preparatory Form, paragraph 8

Monday

“Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left...I sought the LORD, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears”

~~ **Psalm 34 superscription and verse 4**

David was in a bad way (1 Samuel 21.10 – 22.1 [Achish was the king’s proper name. Abimelech is more like a title meaning ‘father of a king’]). He was on the run from wicked king Saul. Harried and hurried, he made his way into the Philistine city of Gath – and he is carrying Goliath’s sword! (1 Samuel 21.8, 9). Out of the frying pan, into the fire. King Achish hears his advisors say that David is a mighty warrior king. David hears those words too, and knows he is in deep trouble. So, he pretends to be insane and makes good his escape.

Probably very soon after his “ingenious” escape as David sprains his arm from patting himself on the back (I’m kidding) he begins to reflect on the experience and makes a major discovery – it was not David who brought about David’s escape, it was the LORD! This Psalm seeks to accomplish two major goals – it is David humbling himself and it is a glorious testimony to the sovereign providential goodness of God in His rescue of His people. So, in both ways the Psalm is “Christo-centric”; it shows off the humility and triumph of Jesus Christ.

All of this is nicely captured in verse 4 (see above). The humility of David is well expressed here – *I sought the LORD*. That’s what Jesus Christ did His entire earthly ministry, often saying that His Father’s will is to be accomplished. Think of His time in the Garden of Gethsemane just before the cross – and then His Words on the cross, *My God, My God...* David, too, sought the LORD. God answered and delivered him (verse 4). We will see this again tomorrow, but humility is the voice God hears.

Reflect: David’s actions give us a lot to think about, but as He is a type and preview of Jesus Christ, we can see David more clearly. Humility and deliverance always go together in the bible.

Pray: Ask the Lord to help you *“Humble yourself under God’s mighty hand that He may lift you up”* (1 Peter 5.6).

Tuesday

“This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; He saved him out of all his troubles.”

~~ **Psalm 34.6**

In preparatory we seek to know ourselves and God. I bet we are easily convinced that it is better to know God than ourselves. David learned who he (David) was through the experience of time spent in Gath under Achish. He learned that he was NOT as powerful as everyone else said he was (check 1 Samuel 21.11). He learned that he was, verse 6, a ...*poor man*. This is something we each must also learn about ourselves.

The preparatory form says we must “...come in humble faith...” Do you know what that means? Mostly it means to come in **true** faith because the faith that is real is always humble. True (humble) faith knows what David came to know – I am really poor. Poor here means of low standing, of little power, not of great position and resource. David called himself a poor man. Keep in mind that David was already anointed as King and Saul had already been rejected by God. David was the most-powerful-man-in-the-world-in-waiting. He would become a military commander-in-chief like Israel had never known before. What he has learned now is that he is weak and powerless. This must be our understanding when we come to the Lord’s supper. We must know that God alone saves.

God saved David out of all his troubles. The Lord Jesus Christ also made appeal to His Father in heaven – “*Into Your hands I commit My Spirit.*” We must know our low position so that we can have true knowledge of God’s work of deliverance. This is what preparatory is all about. “We are confident that the Savior accepts us at His table when we come in humble faith...” If that is your attitude, you must come this Sunday.

Reflect: David learned how poor he was and that his safety is fully in God’s hands. He also learned that God is rich in His mercy to His people.

Pray: Ask the Lord to help you learn more and more about your own weakness – how desperate our condition is and then how great and mighty is His power to save us. Pray because we must know!

Wednesday

"Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. Fear the Lord, you His saints, for those who fear Him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing."

~~**Psalm 34.8-10**

It's hard to eat on the run. Today the popularity of drive-thru restaurants is flying high. The first drive-thru in America was at Red's Giant Hamburger on Route 66 in Springfield, Missouri and opened in 1947. Since then, millions of men have put others in danger by driving with their knees while eating on the run (I doubt many women are foolish enough to drive with their knees – but I could be wrong). David found out it was a blessing to eat on the run when the LORD provides the meal!

This verse, 8, is probably the most well known of the Psalm and is also very well known in relationship to partaking of the Lord's supper. I often hear this verse ringing in my ears as I put the bread and cup of the elements to my mouth. Yet I don't often remember that David, inspired by God the Holy Spirit to write these words, was remembering what it was like to be "on the run." How do we focus on what it is to be a pilgrim walking the journey of the Christian life? One help is to read this Psalm and this verse in its proper historical setting and context. David knows the goodness of the Lord (taste and see) for those who "...take refuge in Him." Fearing the LORD and seeking the LORD ensures that we lack from the LORD "...no good thing." At His supper we get only 'good things.'

David knew what we must know, what the Lord Jesus Christ showed and lived all His days – God is entirely good. We can come "...with gladness to the table of our Lord." And we must. Seek Him this week and then come in gladness to "*Taste and see that the LORD is good.*"

Reflect: The goodness of God was not lost on David while he was on the run, showing the reality of the Christian life. God is good to us all the time, and He reveals His goodness in particular events like communion.

Pray: Ask God to help you learn, believe, and live in the reality of His goodness to His people through Christ.

Thursday

"The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth."

~~Psalm 34.15, 16

There is a very interesting TV show which portrays the implications of being watched. "Person of Interest" deals with what it would be like to live in a world where every piece of video surveillance, doorbell camera, baby monitor, traffic camera, etc. could be "tasked" to track each and every movement of a 'person of interest.' Scary. What is not scary to the believer is that God already does that. His eyes and ears watch and listen to all the details of our lives. That is meant to be comforting to us, for we then know that He can rescue us out of our distress at any given moment. This is what He did for David, bringing him out of the prison David put himself into. However, for our sake the Father did not rescue His Son from suffering on the cross. But He sees and hears every cry for help we make.

This means God will know when we "come in humble faith, with sorrow for our sins..." We should be praying this week out of humble sorrow, asking God to have mercy on us and forgive us all our sins. Verse 15 (see above) says that "...*the righteous*" get a response from the LORD. The righteous confess sins and ask the LORD to forgive them (Luke 18.9-14). The LORD sees and hears all who are praying and confessing sins, and they should come to the table of the LORD this Sunday.

Of course, the other group mentioned in these verses are defined by "doing evil." The LORD sees and hears them, too. But far from doing them good the LORD is against them and will throw them into hell. As hard as this might be to hear we can't cover over the truth. Our comfort as believers is knowing that Jesus suffered hell for us on the cross, granting us the joy and freedom of eternal life.

Reflect: God knows everything, including all we say and do and think and feel. He knows our confessions, too. The righteous run to Him.

Pray: Ask the Lord to help you run to Him for mercy, trusting Him to forgive you all your sins because of the work of Jesus Christ.

Friday

"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

~~ **Psalm 34.18**

We can probably envision David sitting in the prison in Gath under the rule of Achish feeling exactly as described in this verse –

“brokenhearted and crushed in spirit.” Have you ever felt that way?

Actually, there is a negative way of understanding this and a “positive” way. So, back to the question: Have you ever been brokenhearted...crushed in spirit? If you have, the Lord has been particularly close to you.

Maybe that brokenhearted feeling was due to some situation and event in your life experience that you brought on yourself. This was David’s experience, too. Yet the LORD is close, and He saves. This truth is what enables honest confession and real repentance. To say it again, this is the positive way to understand being brokenhearted. This week of preparation should bring about some sense in you of being brokenhearted because of your sin. We should have a clear understanding of the fact that we need to have mercy from God through the work of Jesus Christ.

If you don’t practice real and true confession and repentance, then you will only experience the negative side of being crushed. To be crushed in spirit forever and ever comes to those who refuse to repent of their sins now. Such persons ought to **refrain** from coming to the Lord’s supper until they confess their treachery and trust in Jesus Christ alone.

To the rest, look to this verse and remember that the LORD is near to you and will bring you joy in the morning!

Reflect: The LORD stays near to us as we confess our sins and repent of our evil deeds, reminding us that we are forgiven by Jesus Christ.

Pray: Ask the Lord to give you peace in your heart about the sins you committed, confessed, and repented of so that your whole trust and hope is in Jesus Christ alone.

Saturday

"The LORD redeems His servants; no one will be condemned who takes his refuge in Him."

~~**Psalm 34.22**

The calling and expectation of a week of preparatory is to confront our sinfulness. That can hurt. This Psalm has been of great comfort and relief to us in this painful endeavor, and we are not disappointed in this last verse of the Psalm. Guilt is a huge enemy both really and psychologically. We feel ashamed and low because of our sinfulness; God tells us that we are not condemned. Why not? Because we take refuge in Him.

I trust you have done that – taken refuge in God through Jesus Christ? If we are honest in a week of soul-searching, we will say that we didn't like everything we saw "in us." How much more does God see than we see? But the LORD redeems His servants – those who take refuge in the salvation He has Authored in Jesus Christ. That means we can look forward to coming to corporate worship tomorrow – with the Lord's supper – in great joy, not fake joy. Fake joy is a pretend comfort and peace worn like a mask on the faces of those who have not taken refuge in Jesus Christ. The mask they put on only covers guilt and shame on the outside – no one can normally see it – but that guilt about sin and shame about their behavior rages on the inside. Trust Christ alone and be done with guilt and shame and throw away your mask!

The greatest joy we possess is knowing that we will never be condemned. Paul restates this in Romans 8.1 – *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus..."* No condemnation tomorrow when we take of the bread and the cup; no condemnation on that last tomorrow when we breath our last breath and come into God's presence. Beloved, there is, therefore, only joy for the Christian.

Reflect: All fear of being condemned by God for our many sins is removed when we have God as our refuge. There is now great joy for us in Christ and a far great joy to come.

Pray: Ask the Lord to grant you much joy in Jesus Christ our only refuge and great confidence as we approach the table tomorrow!