

PSALM 34 – PRAISE IN THE CAVE (David Xu, 21 Oct 2018)

How would you describe your life if you have had lived in a cave? Miserable, lonely, hungry...

Today I choose Psalm 34 as my topic. King David once lived in a cave. Let's study it together and see what we can learn from him.

Background

King David wrote many Psalms. A shepherd boy who became a warrior and later a King. God said King David was the one who "after His heart".

Now let's have a look at the background when he wrote this Psalm 34.

In 1 Samuel 21 and 22 we knew Saul tried to kill David, Saul's son Jonathan told David to flee. David fled in such a hurry that he had no food, nor weapon with him. He went to a place called Nob, met priest Ahimelek there. He got food and the sword of Goliath. Then he went to Philistine seeking refuge. Now do you know who killed Goliath and took his sword? Do you know where was Goliath from? Now David tried to find protection from the people who he killed many of them.

Now picture yourself in David's position, you are living among your enemies, whose fathers, brothers were killed by you. How do you feel?

This Psalm is titled, **A Psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed.** David managed to flee free from Philistine. Following that, he went to Adullam Cave where many desperate men joined him. These desperate people were not of high class. 1st Samuel tells us in Chapter 22 **v2** people that were in trouble went as well. People that did not have money to pay their bills went. People that were unhappy went. They all went to David and he became their leader. There were about 400 of them.

What could you do if you were David? You just got out of danger, you lived in a cave, with no regular supply of food, water. You were hunted by the king all the time. You have had enough in your plate, and now there were 400 outcast people came to you for help? What could you give them? Would you tell them, leave me alone, I had enough problem already? Or hey, there is someone else better than me, like Jonathan, go to him?

David was facing a group of desperate people, no money, many were in debt, many had tough life, many were rejected by other people.

David didn't tell them to go away, he took the responsibility. As a leader, David needed to do something to unite these 400 men, to form them as a team, an army. To do this he needed to give them hope, purpose so that they could put themselves together again. David couldn't do this by himself, he knew there is no

better way to achieve this than to go to the Lord, the very source of life, power and truth.

David decided to teach them the truth of the Lord. Human being couldn't lead them to victory, but God could. So in this psalm we can't find David self-pity himself, he didn't complain, but instead, he praised the Lord, gave thanks for His protection, seek the truth of God, taught his followers to be fearful of the Lord.

The structure of this Psalm is acrostic, or nearly so. Each verse begins with another letter of the Hebrew alphabet, for example, first verse starts with A, second starts with letter B, third with letter C, and so on.

Now lets read this beautiful Psalm verse by verse

Praise Lord

1 I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.

2 I will glory in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

3 Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.

David started the psalm by giving praise to the Lord, regardless the difficult situation he was in. Imagine you were living in a cave in desert, can you give praise to the Lord as David did? See he said, "at all times, always on my lips"

4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. David told the audience his personal testimony, the Lord delivered him from Philistines.

5 Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

Then interestingly, David said those who look to him were radiant. We know Moses' face was radiant after he met the Lord, and he had to cover it. Paul also wrote (*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.* (2 Corinthians 3:18) This radiance is some evidence that one has truly **looked to Him**.

My parents-in-law came to our church in 2010. It was their first experience of church. I tell you, I never see their faces like that before, nor I can never forget. Their faces were like radiant, full of joy from deep in heart. Their eyes were fully of light. They said to me "how can people so warm, so joyful and kind in here. They are so different." Before their life was fully of burden and trouble. But in church in just short 2 hours, they had a glimpse of the light and a taste of freedom. All because people in the church truly worship and seek the Lord and the radiant of Lord can pass to my parents-in-law.

6 This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.

7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

These 2 verses seem address to his followers, as said before, many of them were in trouble, specially in finance. They lived in fear. What would happen if my debtor found me? When David looked around and he could feel his followers were filled with all sorts of worry, anxiety, depression, uncertainty. David taught them the very nature of the Lord. Poor man, people in trouble, if you search the Lord and fear the Lord, Lord will hear you prayer. When you find the Lord, he will save you from your troubles.

Jesus assured his followers ""So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Luke 11:9)

Jesus invite us to come to him if we are heavy burdened." ²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (Matt 11:28)

David had little to **boast** of, from a human perspective. He had to humiliate himself like a madman to escape the Philistines, whom he had foolishly sought refuge among – even bringing Goliath's sword with him to Gath!

It's very likely that David taught these men his own recent lessons of faith, including **the fear of the LORD**.

Taste of Heaven

8 *Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.*

Now David invited his men to have a taste of Lord's goodness. The taste here is not like taste of food, but rather a deep experience of Him.

There are some things, especially in the depths of the religious life, which can only be understood by being experienced, and which even then are incapable of being adequately embodied in words.

Well, you may hear many people tell you, God is good, and you heard thousands times, but unless you taste it, you would never know.

Even some Christians have no experience of it. Nowadays, when we talked about the goodness of God, it seems we narrowed down to a few things, like peace for instance, financial blessings. But in David's experience it was that in a desperate situation, he could still sing praise to God, he was still joyful because he knew God was with him. It was like Paul, regardless he was put in prison and sentenced to death, he was joyful, because he knew the Lord was with him.

9 Fear the LORD, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing.

10 The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

David comforted his followers, hey, don't you have money?, aren't you sick, need healing, aren't you tired and worn down? Come to the Lord, be his Holy people, if you fear the Lord, He will provide.

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? (Matthew 6: 25-27)

Knowledge of God

Then how do you approach to the Lord, what can you do to please Him? David started to teach his followers the nature of the Lord.

11 Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

12 Whoever of you loves life; and desires to see many good days,

13 keep your tongue from evil; and your lips from telling lies.

Interesting first thing, God wants us to learn is keep our tongue from evil. In, James 3, it also says "the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell...but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness."

My dear friend, gossip, rumours, false testimony can destroy people. Hence God treats it in a very serious way. Hence David had to remind his followers. Just because we were outcasts, didn't mean we can gossip behind people, spread rumours, talk down other people. Remember David wanted to build a strong team with these outcasts, he couldn't achieve the goal, if they thought, acted and behaved like outcasts.

In Russia this year's FIFA world cup, defending Champion Germany, was beaten by Mexico and Korea, and finished the humiliated tour at the bottom in the group. There were a lot of discussion, different opinions on why a world champion could end in such way. But one reason, almost all parties agreed is that, the team was no longer a united team. Players were divided.

David couldn't afford the cost.

14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

15The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry;

16 but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to blot out their name from the earth.

How to please God? Turn away from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it. I believe above words were spoken to his followers specifically. Because David knew his followers had many problems. Most of problems were due their own faults. It is vital important to teach these people, don't repeat your mistake. Because God is always looking at you, and he always hears righteous people's pray. There is no place for evil in God's heaven.

If you do evil things, God will cast you out. It was miserable to be casted out by people, it would be even more miserable if you were cast out by God.

Promise of God

17The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.

18The LORD is close to the broken hearted; and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

(This teaching from David was wonderful for the men at Adullam cave to hear. They – being in debt, distressed, and discontent – were likely those with **a broken heart** and **a contrite spirit**. They were objects of God's favor and salvation, not His scorn.

19 The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;

20 he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.

21Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned.

22The LORD will rescue his servants; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.

God doesn't promise us a worry free life, instead, he did say that righteous person will have many troubles. So if you want a worry free life, you can forget about following Jesus.

Do you know what happened to these 400 men?

Transformed into Mighty Men

Look at what the Bible has to say about David's men after David became the King of Israel. **In (2 Sam. 23:8-12)**

These people became marshals, generals of David's army. These be the names of the mighty men whom David had: Josheb-Basshebeth, The Tachmonite that sat in the seat, chief among the captains; the same was Adino the Eznite: he lifted up his spear against eight hundred whom he slew at one time.

And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David, when they defiled the Philistines that were there gathered together to battle, and the men of Israel were gone way: He arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword: and the LORD wrought a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to spoil.

What a great transformation! In a few years time, David's men transformed from being discontented, depressed, distressed and indebted to being honored mighty men. A bunch of outcasts became a strong army.

Today, in this world, when we have problem, we go to professionals to seek help; when we were let down, we find encouragement in celebrities stories; when we have a fight in home, we go to friend to talk about the issue. Seldom do we go to the Lord for help.

David was different. He knew the real comfort, real strength, the source of life comes from the Lord. If he would really want to achieve something in his life, the only hope he had is from the Lord.

Last week, Pastor David preached a wonderful message, that when we face challenge, if we are willing to change our attitude, turn our eyes upon Lord for answer, then the challenge will become a chance. God can use the situation to make a better you.

David and his 400 outcast men were in a devastated situation, lived in cave, no supply of food, hunted by their enemies, debtors. But David handed the situation to the Lord, praised the Lord from deep of his heart. And God answered his prayer, making him a great King.