

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to Psalm 34

We'd like to look at a Psalm that was written by David in his 20s. It is one of the first lessons he would learn as God had called him to be the king, but Saul was certainly not vacating the throne easily or quickly. It is one of the 14 Psalms in the book of Psalms that has very concrete explanation as to when and why it was written, and so we would like to at least take a look at that.

Notice that it says "A Psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed." The context is almost as important as the lesson, because when we know the context, then we can apply it properly to the situation. So we're going to spend more of our time in the context than the verses themselves, but we'll get to the verses. And I'll be kind of tempted to have to get all the information right.

David had just killed Goliath. He was a man of Gath, one of the Philistine cities, five in all, that was very powerful in his day. He had been told as a young man that the Lord was going to use him to be the king. David didn't know what to do with that. He was a faithful young man. Eventually Saul invited him to come and begin to worship and lead worship at the place that Saul lived, there in the castle. And now this. David takes Goliath on, everyone is frightened, David is trusting God. And it brings deliverance to the people, but more importantly, it turns the heart of the people away from Saul. And they begin to sing "Saul may have killed his thousands, but David will kill his ten thousands. And the worship of David, if you will, in terms of political approval and acceptance from the people was palpable. In fact, it really bothered Saul. He wanted the power. He was losing it. His popularity was slipping. And so if you go to I Samuel, you don't have to turn there this morning, chapter 21 and 22, you have the background story for this Psalm.

Because David had showed up to begin to lead worship for Saul, Saul was angry with David, threw a javelin at him a couple times. I would think that would convince you you're in trouble, but David kept going back. But that day would be the last day of David's time in the courts of Saul. He had a best friend, Jonathan, he was Saul's son, who came

to him one night and said, man, dad at dinner was talking about taking you out. If I were you, I'd just -- you got to get out of town. You got to get out of Dodge. Things are not looking very good for you. And David went home that night to his wife Michal, who happened to be Saul's daughter. And she said, yeah, I was at dinner last night. Dad is sending his henchmen over here tonight to take you from the house. And so this young man that had left his father's flocks, had come to serve the king, had been faithful, had risked his life to stand between Goliath, if you will, and God's people, now finds himself in the cross hairs of a very wicked king.

David would be the king for 40 years, but the first seven and a half years of that kingship he would be on the run. Saul would do one thing: Kill David. That was his only goal on his to-do list, kill David. And David found himself under tremendous pressure. Well, this is the start of that time of running, if you will. And though he had been chosen to be the king, there was this lengthy trial of waiting, these rough steps towards the throne, and David now finds himself early on with a decision to make. How is God going to deliver me from the likes of Saul? He stood against the entire government, which, you know, was very powerful and very antagonistic against him.

David didn't have a lot of followers then. He had a few guys that liked hanging out with him, a few loyal guys. But in the process of running away from this situation, David would begin to learn what it meant to trust the Lord versus what it meant to go out on your own or on your own power. So you find a man under tremendous kind of pressure. He even said to Jonathan on his way out, I feel like there's just one step between me and death. It's a tough way to live as a 20-something kid, whom God has called. It wasn't exaggerated, it was absolutely true. And until Saul died, that would be David's plot, his plot in life -- his lot, I should say, in life. You can go to I Samuel 21 and join David on the first day of his fleeing from Saul. A man under tremendous pressure, a young man in a hurry, a young man who'd rather than turning to faith, which he had certainly entertained over the years, he turns to his own wits. He just figure, his mantra right now is there's no time to have faith. I got to figure this out. I got to run for myself. My life is in danger. Now God takes him through this. He takes us through them as well. There are times when your faith in God seems very strong. It's usually when there's not much pressure. And then the key is to have that same faith when there is tremendous pressure.

So David runs out of town. He runs to a place called Nob. It was place where the priests lived. It was a place where the tabernacle stood. It is only a mile outside of Jerusalem. If you've ever been to Israel, it is where Mount Scopus University stands today. We have

taken some trips where our group has stayed in a hotel near there. But it isn't very far out of town, but David is in a hurry. And he stops by and there's a fellow named Ahimelech, not with a "B" as you see in this superscription here, but A-h, I should say, Ahimelech. And he is the head of the priests there. And David tells him lots of lies. He's scared.

"Where you going David?"

"Well, you know, we -- we're doing work for the king."

"Well, how come you don't have the guards with you, you know, and the kingly kind of body guards?"

He goes, "Well, we don't have time and I can't explain it to you. We need to have some food, however. Do you have any food here?"

And Ahimelech said, "We have five loaves left of the shew bread."

The shew bread were those 12 loaves that were put in the holy place every month before the Lord to represent the 12 tribes, and because they were used for that purpose, only the priests were allowed to eat them. They were holy or sanctified. And yet Jesus would later say, hey, if it comes to human life, even the rites of those things have to be set aside. People are more important than process. So Ahimelech felt the same way.

He said, "That's all I have is five loaves."

And David said, "Well, give them to me. We need them to survive. We're starving and on the run." He then said to Ahimelech, "Do you have any weapons here?"

"You know, it's the church. We're not allowed. But we do have the sword that you took from Goliath. It's wrapped up. It's laying behind the ephod here. You can have that."

And David said, "Oh, there's no sword like that. I'd like to have that." And so he got the sword.

And he then took the bread, took the sword, and he runs 30 miles southwest to Gath. Gath is one of the Philistine cities. It is where the Gaza Strip is today. It is also Goliath's hometown. So David on the run from Saul wants to find asylum in a foreign land, a country outside of Israel, but he shows up in Goliath's hometown, with Goliath's sword in his hand, and a reputation that he killed him. This is not a smart move, but it is a man who's afraid, and he's not sure what to do with himself. He runs right into the Philistine stronghold.

The king there is named Achish. Now, I know that you read here the words "Abimelech." Abimelech is a title. You could say governor. It would be like, you know, the Pharaoh in Egypt. It didn't really specify a person as much as a position. But his name was Achish,

and no sooner had David got to town than at least some of the soldiers in the army there recognized him, recognized who he was and what he has done, and immediately just takes him into custody. And now David's worried. They lock him up and they say, "We're getting the king. You're a bonehead to be coming here now". And David finds himself locked up and wondering, what am I going to do? The king comes, he is going to kill me. I've killed their champion, their hero, their hometown hero. And David, rather than really seeking the Lord, begins to calculate what can I do to get out of this? And you read in 1 Samuel 21, David is tremendously afraid. I mean, this was suicide. This couldn't have gone worse. And so David tries to plot in his mind, and he comes up with what he thinks will make sense since he'd already done the dumbest thing in coming there. He begins to act like he's crazy. He runs headlong into the wall. He begins to scratch at the gate. He spits up on himself. I mean, he just looks like a lunatic. And he just keeps that up, ranting and raving, all the while the demeanor is not exactly honorable to the king of Israel or a representative of the Lord. But this is David's idea that he can use this to get away. Fear.

Well, the king shows up and he looks at this crazy guy and he says, "Why'd you bring me him for? He's nuts." The king buys the entire act. And finally says to the people, "Just get him out of here and away from me. I don't want him near me." And they take David and they put him outside and they tell him to go home. And this is kind of the sad page in the early history of David's life. He was going to be the king, but he acted like a fool, and he's tried to live by his own wits and he's terrified. So David heads home. And he hadn't trusted the Lord. He hadn't sought the Lord. He went to hide in the city of the enemy. He makes a fool out of himself to try to escape, and it worked. So David heads home.

There are the caves of Adullam. There're not very far from Jerusalem. He and his family would eventually meet up there, and eventually 400 men would join David there and he would begin to teach them. They would become his mighty men as the years would progress. But he shows up in this cave aware of the fact that he had just disappointed himself and certainly disappointed the Lord in the place that He had called him. And it killed him. Whether he writes this in the cave, he certainly wrote it after he got out of trouble. You can read about his cave experience in the next chapter, 1 Samuel 22. And it is in the southern Judah area. It's halfway between Gath and Bethlehem on the way up to Jerusalem. And David wrote a lot of Psalms there. There are several of them that are mentioned. This one as well. And so David writes about his experience. But he comes back to this place repentant and remorseful about having disappointed the Lord. I wish I'd have trusted God. I mean, he'd done it before,

but it didn't do very well now. And so this is the heart of David writing after the fact.

Notice that this Psalm has 22 verses. It is an acrostic. Every verse begins with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet, of which there are 22. The greatest example that you have in the Psalm is Psalm 119. It's that really long one. There are eight verses for every letter, so 176 verses, and every eight verses have the title of the next letter. So if you ever want to learn the Hebrew alphabet, just go learn those headings there in that Psalm. It was written that way, and there's a lot of them like that, that are designed to help you to remember them. It doesn't help you much in the English, but if you knew Hebrew, man, this would be a cinch for you. Now you just have to learn Hebrew.

Peter so enjoyed what David had to say here that in 1 Peter 3, he quotes verse 13, 14, 15 and 16 -- actually 12 through 16 in the body of his letter almost word-for-word. John quotes verse 20 about Jesus, not a bone of His was broken, in prophecy in terms of His death. But David had learned much early on now about trusting God. He would have to learn that over the next seven and a half years or he'd die running. He'd literally find himself having to learn every day, getting up, God's got to get me through the day or I'm not going to make it through at all.

This battle to let God handle things in your life rather than seeking to do it yourself though is constant. It's constant for David, it's constant for you and I. We want to say we trust the Lord, but let's face it, if we don't like how Lord's dealing with it, we can always mess it around. It's not a smart move, but it's one that we opt for time and again.

So David has passed through the trial by the time we get here. He's out of Philistine territory. He's learning lessons along the rough road of repentance. He's hidden back in the caves of the Lord and back in the land, and he spends 10 verses thanking the Lord for his deliverance and confessing his foolishness. And then he spends the next verses, from verse 11 to the end of chapter, teaching those who had gathered to him the lesson that he had just learned. He really turns around what he had gone through and said look, learn this lesson. Children, gather to me, beginning there in verse 11.

Verse 1 -- see I told you we'd get there -- "I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; and the humble will hear it and be glad. So magnify the Lord with me, let us exalt His name together." You get this picture of a young man who is now resolved

to do the right thing. He's very ashamed of himself. He sits and he realizes he's delivered. He realizes God brought him out, even though he tried to help God out. He is aware of the situation, but he wants to make a commitment that from now on, whatever happens, I'm going to trust the Lord.

I mean, think about young David's life. He had said in passing when he was standing on the battle that would take place between him and Goliath, he said to the men who said, "Maybe this is a bad idea." He said, "No, no, no. God has always been with me. In fact, one time I took on a bear to protect my dad's sheep, and the Lord delivered the bear into my hands." You try fighting a bear. If a bear is around, I'm leaving. Poor sheep, but I'm gone. And David stood fast. He believed God. He took on Goliath with some stones and a slingshot, while every tough marine hid behind the rocks.

David knew what it was like to trust the Lord, but here as he begins to ascend to the throne, he balks, and he falls back down to this idea of trusting himself. God had delivered him this far, and David was going to learn that he'd grown plenty, but he had a long way to go. And this was lesson one in a bunch of them that would take the better part of a decade.

So I'm just going to praise the Lord. I'm going to bless the Lord, at all times, at every place, at everywhere. I'm going to rely upon Him and I'm going to boast in Him and I'm going to rest in Him and I'm going to magnify Him and I'm going to exalt Him. He's going to be the one I'm going to turn to, no longer to myself. He says in verse 4, "I sought the Lord, He heard me, He's delivered me from all of my fears. I looked to Him, I was radiant, my face was as one who is not ashamed. The poor man can cry out and the Lord will hear him. He'll deliver him from all of his troubles. And the angel of the Lord will encamp around those that fear Him and deliver them."

There's this constant "all." You'll find it in four or five of these verses. God will deliver you from all of your troubles, from all of your fears. It appears that David, while acting insane, realized that even -- I'm sure he was doing his best and praying, God help me. But he was there trying to help out, right? Oh, God, bless what I'm about to do. And that's where he found himself. His life was on the line. He'd made the dumbest turn at the road, right? He'd gone left, he should have went right. He should have come home, but he hadn't. He wants to help the Lord out. But he acknowledges God's deliverance. He realizes it wasn't his own. That God would deliver those who look to Him, that the angel of the Lord was with him. Not on my own here. I'm not standing alone. Boy, what a good lesson for this would-be king. And it would serve him well in the years

that would follow.

He said in verse 8, "Just taste and see. The Lord's good; blessed the man who trusts in Him. Fear the Lord, you His saints. There's no want, no lack, for those who fear Him. Though the young lion may suffer lack and hunger; those who would seek the Lord would not lack for any good thing." No one on their own is going to survive. That's his point. I love the poetic, nature of the Psalms. He takes a young lion, who just by description, a young lion, no one can stop him. It's not an old lion where I'm just sleepy and lazy. It's a young lion who has his strength and his prowess and his ability, and he says of this young lion who is perfectly suited for his environment, there are days that he's not going to get his food. Even with all of his attributes, there are days he's going to go without. There's days he's going to suffer. The best man has will leave him short. But those who trust the Lord, those who look to Him, they'll never lack. You'll never want. You'll never want. You'll never want for anything. Those who fear Him will be fine. And David's point was, I trusted in myself. I tried this on my own. I got out, but I was just blessed by God. This wasn't my doing. This was His goodness. And he invites us to come and taste and see.

I always thought that was so interesting about food. You can explain food to anyone, but until they taste it, they're never going to know what it tastes like. My dad used to have a lot of fun with me as a kid. He'd go, "Taste this." And yuck. And then he'd laugh, "ha, ha, ha. You're an idiot." He had fun with me, a lot. You probably do that with your kids. Brussels sprouts, they're great. Just go ahead, eat those. They came in after the fall. I'm pretty sure of that. But you have to come and taste and see. Literally the implication is, I can explain to you and tell you what good it is to walk with God, but until you do it yourself, you'll never get there. You've got to taste and see. You've got to get yourself involved. There's really no way to know how God is good until you experience it for yourself personally, so come and taste and see.

Well, then he gathered these men together. We're told in 1 Samuel 22, there are 400 men that come. They will be his counsel, his guys that will give their lives for David. They're faithful guys. They learn to trust God. They learn it from David. These are scoundrels and malcontents and runners, with their abuses and sins and disobedience and rebellion, and yet David will teach them about the fear of the Lord. So these men gather together. David says in verse 11, "Come, children, and listen to me. I'm going to teach you the fear of the Lord." He had just learned it himself. "What man would desire life and love good deeds that he may see good, or love many days that he may see good?" So he calls the men together. He says

to them, you want to live a good long life, you want to be blessed in this life, here's what you should do. Verse 13, begin with this: "Keep your mouth from evil, or your tongue, and your lips from speaking deceit. And depart from evil. Do good, seek peace, and pursue it." David gives them a wonderful little outline of advice about how they should live their life so that God might bless their life. Their life might be fruitful. Like I said, these are the verses that Peter picked up on 1,000 years later and just transferred them word-for-word into his letter.

He starts with this: Watch what you say. What had David done? He had lied to the priests. Now, I'll tell you how bad that lie was. When David left, there was a man there that kept the flocks of Saul named -- well, his name is Doeg, but we just call him the dog because he is a dog. He goes to Saul and he said, "I saw David and some guys and they got food and they run off with the sword and they headed south." And Saul is furious, so he takes his army to Nob and he says to them, "Kill every priest." 85 of them. And they refuse, and so he said to Doeg, "You do it." And he did. Killed all 85 priests there where they were serving the Lord. He then sent his army into the city, and they slaughtered everything that moved; children, women, oxen. The whole town was obliterated because David went there and lied.

He says, you want to live a good life, watch what you say. He had lied to the priests. He had put on a show for the king of Achish. He disgraced himself, he disgraced the Lord, and he became a fool. His sinfulness cost the lives of many. He said in verse 14 you should run from evil and run to good. The word "depart" literally means to make haste. You want to live a good life that God can use, then run away from evil. And be aware and available to go -- to be a peacemaker. Pursue those things that make for peace.

For the next seven and a half years as David ran, he would be given lots of opportunities to kill Saul. He'll find him asleep in a cave, he'll find him asleep outside without many guards. And he had some opportunities. In fact, his 400 men said to David, "Ha, ha. The Lord is with us. That's what you've been teaching us, right? There he is asleep. Let's kill him. Bless the Lord." And David said, "No. The Lord wouldn't allow us to lay our hands upon His anointed. If God wants to remove him, let God remove him, but we're not killing him." And they said, "Well, if you won't do it, we'll do it. I volunteer." And time and again David put the brakes on. He let God be God. He learned that lesson here.

He says in verse 15, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, His ears are open to the cries. While the face of the Lord is against

those that would do evil, to cut them off and the remembrance of them from the earth." God is with you, He'll fight your battles. Never forget who is watching over you. David had forgotten. Here's what I wrote in my margin on verses 15 and 16, I wrote this: "God chooses sides." God picks sides. He chooses to stand with His people. And if somebody's bothering you, He'll deal with them. His face is against the wicked, His eyes are open, His ears open to your cry. God chooses sides. Don't forget who fights for you so you don't have to do it yourself.

"The righteous will cry out and the Lord will hear, He'll deliver them from all of their troubles. He's near to those with a broken heart, saves those of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord will deliver them out of them all. He'll guard all of His bones; and not one of them will be broken." God will deliver you from everything.

Look, life is not without trials, but God is also not without power. He has power. Even in the midst of the difficulty, He'll be there. In the context, certainly verse 20 would not speak to crucifixion, but yet it's properly applied by John to Jesus. He protected His own.

So David ends with these words: "Evil shall slay the wicked, those who hate the righteous will be condemned. But the Lord will redeem the soles of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him will be condemned." Literally, I'm going to go practice what I preach. For the next seven and a half years of running before he would ultimately become the lord, if you will, the king over the land that God could use, David camped, hid, narrowly escaped. It is the subject of whole books in the historical sections of your Bible. This poor kid that grows old, I think, quickly. He dies at 70, which isn't so old in the Old Testament sense. I think the life he lived was pretty tough. But God was with him and He used him and he learned the lesson here. He would survive to rule the nation to God's glory. But here's a lesson from his early years. I did the wrong thing. He was right to run. There's nothing smart about sitting around and letting your enemy find you. But where he ran and what he depended upon was absolutely in the wrong direction.

And maybe we do that as well, don't we? We trust the Lord until we don't like something He's doing and then we help Him out. May I just say this to you: God doesn't need your help. In fact, there is no good idea you have that He doesn't have a better one. I hope you learned the lesson of the chapter. It's only 22 verses. And by the way, if you know Hebrew, you'll know it really quickly.