Psalm 34:1-3

A Psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed.

1 I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. 2 My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; the humble shall hear of it and be glad. 3 Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together.

Excerpt from Notes on Psalms (2010 Edition), by Dr. Thomas L. Constable

• PSALM 34
  o In this combination individual thanksgiving and wisdom psalm, David glorified God for delivering His people, and he reflected on the Lord's promise to bless the godly with long life.
  o The title identifies the occasion on which David composed this psalm (cf. 1 Sam. 21:10-15). It is another acrostic with all but the last verse beginning with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet and with the omission of a verse beginning with the letter waw.

• GOD'S GOODNESS TO HIS PEOPLE (34:1-10)
  o 34:1-3, “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; the humble shall hear of it and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together.”
    ▪ David exulted in the Lord and called on his people to praise God with him.
    ▪ “The purpose of praise is not to make God's people feel good but to acknowledge in a communal way the greatness of our God (v. 3; cf. 30:1; 69:30; 99:5, 9; 107:32; 145:1).”

Excerpt from The Fear of the Lord: Psalm 34 (Easy English Translation), by Gordon Churchyard

Jesus said, "This is what I say to my friends. Do not be afraid of them that kill the body. They can do nothing else. I will tell you of whom you should be afraid. Be afraid of him that kills you and has the power to send you to hell. Yes, I tell you, be afraid of him”. (Luke 12:4-5)

Word list

fear ~ what we feel inside when we are afraid
humble ~ people who do not think that they are important
camp ~ a place that soldiers live in

The Story of Psalm 34

Saul was King of Israel. He wanted to kill David. David ran away. Saul followed him. David went to Gath, which was a Philistine city. The king of Gath was Abimelech. He was not a friend to David. David became afraid. He should have trusted in the LORD. He did not, but made a plan of his own. He made Abimelech think that he, David, was crazy. For this reason, Abimelech did not kill David. In those days they thought that it was wrong to kill crazy people. Abimelech sent David away. He went to a cave in Adullam, which was a few miles away. 400 people went to the camp that David made in Adullum. They were running away from a difficult life in Judah. Today we would say that they were refugees.
The story is in a part of the Bible that we call I Samuel, chapters 21 and 22 (see below). In Psalm 34 David thanked God that he was safe.

Psalm 34 is an alphabet psalm. There are 22 verses in it. Each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew Alphabet. Verse 1 begins with aleph, verse 2 with beth, and so on. We have put verse 16 before verse 15, because this makes it easier to understand. Because it is an alphabet psalm there are a lot of different ideas in it. Other alphabet psalms are 9, 10, 25, 37, 111, 112, 119 and 145.

What Psalm 34 means

Verses 1 – 3: The Hebrew word for "say good things about" is "baruch". We often translate it "bless". The word "boast" usually means "tell people how great you are." Here, though, it means "tell everyone how great God is". Some people translate verse 3 as "Let us magnify the LORD". "Magnify" means "make bigger". We cannot make God bigger but we can bring him near to people. We do this by always obeying him. In this way we magnify him.

Excerpt from Commentary on Psalms – Volume 1, BY JOHNSON CALVIN

• PSALM 34 BACKGROUND

  o David gives thanks to God for a signal deliverance, and takes occasion from it to celebrate his perpetual grace towards all the saints, and to exhort them both to trust in him, and to the study of godliness; affirming, that the only way to pass through life happily, is to walk holily and harmlessly in the world, in the service and fear of God.

  o It is obvious from the title what particular instance of God’s favor he here celebrates. When he was driven to King Achish, as recorded in 1 Samuel 21:11, 12, whom, with the exception of Saul, he accounted the deadliest of all his enemies, it was not probable that he would ever be able to make his escape from him. The only means, therefore, he had of saving his life was to feign himself mad by frothing at the mouth, looking fiercely, and disfiguring his countenance. Nor is this to be wondered at; for Achish, being disappointed of the confident hope of victory which he had, and attributing to David alone both the loss which he had sustained and the dishonor which he had received, burned with implacable hatred against him. In allowing him to escape, therefore, contrary to his own expectation, and the expectation of all other men, David acknowledges that there had been exhibited a memorable instance of God’s favor towards him, which may be serviceable for the general instruction of the whole Church.

    ▪ Achish may have been his particular name, while Abimelech was the common title of the Kings of Gath. The word Abimelech signifies Father — King. We know that many ages before David was born, the kings who reigned in Gerar in the time of Abraham were called Abimelech. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at, that this name should be handed down from age to age among their posterity, and become the common name of all the kings of Palestine.

  o Although David escaped by this subtle device, he doubts not that he was delivered by the hand of God; nor does he ascribe the praise of his safety to the pretense of madness, but rather acknowledges that the cruelty of his enemy had been softened by the secret influence of God, so that he who formerly burned with rage against him had been pacified by an artifice.

• I WILL BLESS JEHOVAH AT ALL TIMES

1 I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

  o “That is, in all circumstances; in every posture of my affairs.” — Horsley.

  o David here extols the greatness of God, promising to keep in remembrance during his whole life the goodness which he had bestowed upon him. God assists his people daily, that they may continually employ themselves in
praising him; yet it is certain that the blessing which is said to be worthy of everlasting remembrance is distinguished by this mark from other benefits which are ordinary and common. This, therefore, is a rule which should be observed by the saints — they should often call into remembrance whatever good has been bestowed upon them by God; but if at any time he should display his power more illustriously in preserving them from some danger, so much the more does it become them earnestly to testify their gratitude. Now if by one benefit alone God lays us under obligation to himself all our life, so that we may never lawfully cease from setting forth his praises, how much more when he heaps upon us innumerable benefits?

- In order to distinguish the praise which he had before said would be continually in his mouth from the empty sound of the tongue, in which many hypocrites boast, he adds, in the beginning of the second verse, that it would proceed from the heart.

• MY SOUL SHALL MAKE HER BOAST IN JEHOVAH.

2 My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; the humble shall hear of it and be glad.

- The term soul in this place signifies not the vital spirit, but the seat of the affections; as if David had said, I shall always have ground of boasting with my whole heart in God alone, so that I shall never suffer myself to fall into forgetfulness of so great a deliverance. In the second clause he specifies this as the fruit of his thanksgiving, that the afflicted and miserable shall derive from it ground of hope.

- The Hebrew word ענויים, anavim, which we have rendered humble and afflicted, signifies not all the afflicted in general, but those who, being humbled and subdued by afflictions, instead of breathing the spirit of pride, are cast down, and ready to abase themselves to the very dust. These, he says, shall be partakers of his joy; but not, as some have coldly explained it, simply from a feeling of sympathy, but because, being persuaded that in the example of David, God had given them a general testimony of his grace, their hearts would recover from sorrow, and would be lifted up on high. Accordingly, he says that this joy shall spring from hope, because, having received a pledge of their deliverance, they shall cheerfully have recourse to God.

• MAGNIFY JEHOVAH WITH ME.

3 Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together.

- The Psalmist shows still another fruit which would be the result of his giving thanks to God, namely, that he shall induce others by his example to the same exercise of devotion; nay more, he calls upon all the godly to unite with him in this exercise, inviting and exhorting them heartily and with one consent to extol the Lord. Let us therefore learn, from the many instances in which God may have given helps to any of his people, to abound in hope; and when each recites the personal benefits which he has received, let all be animated unitedly and in a public manner to give praise to God. We give thanks publicly to God, not only that men may be witnesses of our gratitude, but also that they may follow our example.