

## **Psalm 34: “Taste and See”**

*5 April 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney*

### **Welcome & Call to Worship:**

Good morning and welcome to this recording of our online service. It's great to have you join with us this morning as we worship the Lord our God together. I just want to say that it has been very encouraging for me personally to see so many of you tune in each week to join these online services and I hope that, even in some small way, they've helped you to continue to feel part of the Adelaide Road community and that they have built you up in your faith. This morning, as you well know, we are still separated from each other physically, but I pray that even in the short time that we have together we can continue to draw together as a church family. If you have been tuning into the previous online services, then you will know that we have been looking at the psalms as we prepare for Easter. And this morning, on Palm Sunday, we are looking at Psalm 34. Among the many great things that this psalm says to us, in verse 18 it tells us that “the LORD is near to the brokenhearted” and to those who are crushed in spirit. And I'm sure that, today, many of you can identify with how that feels, just based on what is happening in our world today. But as Christians and as children of God, we have this amazing truth that the LORD is not far from us. In fact, He is near to us, no matter how we feel and no matter what is going on in the world today. And so this morning, I hope that we can remember that truth, that it can encourage us and that it can drive us to a spirit of worship. And so let's, let's do that, let's worship the LORD together as we sing our first praise this morning, which is “All Glory, Praise and Honour”.

**Praise:** IPH 395 All Glory, Praise and Honour

### **Prayer of Adoration and Confession:**

It hasn't been easy for us, being away from church, and in a sense we're exiled. One of the kinds of prayers we have in exile is that of lament, where we're sad and sorry, and we want to then confess to God. So, this is a prayer of adoration and confession. It's based on a prayer that was sent to me this week, so let's join together as we pray.

Heavenly Father, in this time of great need, we turn to You. Lord Jesus, we call upon Your name. Holy Spirit, we cry out for You to come. God who is merciful, capture our hearts, awaken Your church, heal our land. Lord Jesus Christ, we cry out to You for mercy. Have mercy on us, Lord. We cry out to You to protect this land from the spread of the coronavirus. Shield us from this outbreak, guard our loved ones, place Your hedge of protection around our neighbours. Lord Jesus, we turn to You in faith and hope. You are the God who is able to save and help. Heavenly Father, You are a holy and righteous God. Today, we turn from our sin, our self-worship, our self-centeredness, and our sense of entitlement. Lord, let us consider how our sin grieves You. Father, we repent and turn back to doing the things that please You - loving You and loving our neighbours. Forgive us where we have put ourselves first, relied on our own strength, wandered from Your ways and forgotten

who You really are. Heavenly Father, we take time today to listen to You speak. Enable us to reflect on Your Word. Bring the things that You speak to us about to mind, the areas of our lives that are under Your spotlight. We acknowledge that it is Your kindness that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). We bring our lives before You - honestly, humbly, and in hope of Your love and forgiveness. Have mercy on us. O Lord, have mercy. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. May Your glory shine over all the earth. We pray, in Jesus' holy name, amen.

**Reading:** Psalm 34

**Sermon:**

We in Ireland, along with the rest of the world, are in the middle of a crisis. Our national life is under severe pressure and our personal lives are hugely disrupted because of this virus, COVID-19, which is deadly, and we are vulnerable. We feel anxious, even afraid, and as Christians we have turned to God and the psalms for reassurance. We have learned, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble" and that "as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him" in Psalms 46 and 103. God is loving, strong and ever-present. What was true then is true today through Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who believe. These are great truths about God and His love for us, but now I want to encourage us to use these truths to go deeper and ask ourselves what response should we make to them. What does God want us to do? And to do that, we're going to look at another psalm - Psalm 34. If you have your Bibles, do open them at Psalm 34 and we'll look at this together.

I. David's context: real difficulty

The writer of Psalm 34 is David, and he's in a spot of real difficulty (see 1 Samuel 21). He's on the run from Saul, the king of Israel, who is jealous of him and is trying to kill him. David flees and tries to hide among Israel's enemies, thinking that he would be safe. That's the Philistines. However, he finds himself in the town of Gath, the home of Goliath, and he's most likely wearing Goliath's sword! What seemed a good idea has turned out to be really bad. What will he do? Well, he pretends to be insane, and the king of Gath, called Achish, says literally, "Do I need anymore madmen?" (1 Samuel 21:15) He must have been having a bad day, and he instructs them to let him go. How mad is that? Looking back, we sometimes see the funny side of a situation, but at the time it was anything but funny. It was difficult, dangerous, and likely to end in death. David is fearful (v. 4).

II. David's lesson: seek the LORD

A. Fear the LORD.

But he wants to teach us what he learned in that particular situation in verse 11 - "Come, my children, listen to me, and I will teach you the fear of the LORD." To fear God means to respect God and honour God by believing Him. He (David) wants us to remember his teaching, so he has written this psalm as an acrostic, every verse beginning with successive

letters of the Hebrew alphabet to aid memory. And the lesson's aim is to encourage us in all of life, and particularly in difficulty, to look to and to seek the LORD (vv. 4, 5, 6, 10, and 17).

B. Engage with God honestly in prayer.

So David encourages us to engage with God. And David says with enthusiasm engage with God in prayer. Talk honestly to God. David speaks of seeking the LORD and being answered in verse 4. He acknowledges his poverty in verse 6 - poverty in the sense of being helpless and of calling out to God, and of being heard. In verses 15 and 17, he tells us God is attentive to their cries, and that He hears us. I have been heartened by the deepening desire for prayer within the church, locally and nationally. I am often aware of my prayer poverty. Many are asking, "What is God saying in the crisis?" And Psalm 34 says that God is encouraging engagement with Him, and honestly. Talk to God in prayer. It's as if God has got our attention, and He's encouraging this engagement with Him. And a good place to start would be to say, "I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing that I've made it," to borrow a line from a Matt Redman song. Prayer is not a thing, working through a list, familiar words and phrases spoken everyday. Lists are good, but it's honest, heartfelt communication between ourselves and God. "Engage with God honestly," was David's lesson.

C. Experience God.

And secondly, David encourages us to experience God (v. 8). "Taste and see that the LORD is good." Now, I enjoy shopping in the RDS Christmas Fair. And honestly, I buy most of my presents in the food hall. What encourages me to buy? Well, it's the tasters. Balsamic vinegar, rapeseed oil, sausages with leeks or sausages with curry, jams, chutneys, handmade crisps - all these tasters encourage me to buy, because they're good. David says the same about God - buy in! "Taste and see that God is good. Blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him" (v.8). His testimony is that God does not disappoint. He answers prayer. He delivers us from all our fears (v. 4). He gives us inner peace and contentment (v. 5). He assures us of His presence (v. 7). He blesses abundantly (vv. 8-10). And He protects (v. 20). And there's a beautiful summary in verse 22, the last verse - "The LORD redeems His servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in Him." An all-encompassing refuge.

So, David engaged and experienced God in his poverty, and he became rich through God's blessing of redemption.

III. Jesus, us and Psalm 34

However, the psalm is not only speaking of David's experience. It references the Lord Jesus and the Easter story in verse 20. As the apostle John tells us, not one of Jesus' bones were broken while on the cross (John 19:36). Yes, He became poor. He took our sins, our punishment. He cried out to God, His Father, and He was delivered from death. He rose from the dead and is ascended, and in heaven!

So, how do we engage and experience God? Well, we do that through faith in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul tells us, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” ( 2 Corinthians 8:9).

And so the lesson of Psalm 34 - what does God want us to do in this particular crisis? Well, He wants us to engage with Him. He wants us to experience Him. “Taste and see that the LORD is good.” He redeems. He protects. He gives us His presence, and ultimately, He delivers us from all our fears and troubles. *All*, even death. And so I want to encourage us all to heed David’s call, to “taste and see that the LORD is good.” I want us to heed the call of Jesus - “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11: 28-30). Let each of us today, and throughout Holy Week, sit down, or even kneel down, and pray. Honestly talk with God about your life, where it’s at now - the good things, the fears - and listen to what He says. And then rise and then say, in faith, “I’m going to get on with life in the knowledge that God has heard me. He will work it out. He will bless.”

So as a church, practically today, we are praying in bouts of thirty minutes. We’ve signed up to a twelve-hour sheet , from 8 AM to 8 PM. If you’re signed up, please honour that, and if you’re not, just take thirty minutes and pray for yourself, for your family, for your neighbours and for all those involved in fighting this particular crisis. The main church leaders have encouraged us to pray sometime between 3 and 4 PM for the state of our nation and the world. I want to encourage us to do that as well. And in this special week in the Christian calendar, do read through the story of the Holy Week events. I’ve suggested that we do that in John’s Gospel, following on from our series in chapters 13 to 18. I sent a reading plan and a simple study guide in an email to you all.

In our trouble, let us engage and experience God through faith in Jesus Christ. Psalm 34 promises that will be good, because God is good. Let’s engage and experience God. Amen.

Well, we’re going to sing together - *what a friend we have in Jesus, what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.*

**Praise:** IPH 257(i) What A Friend We Have In Jesus

### **Prayers for Others:**

Let’s pray. Father, as we come to You now with our prayers for others, we confess that we hardly know how to pray. The coronavirus crisis that overwhelms us has changed our world in ways that we could not begin to comprehend even two weeks ago. The numbers of people involved are so

enormous, so frightening, so fraught with suffering that we are reduced to silence. And so we pray for the help of Your Holy Spirit as we bring our prayers to you now.

Father, for the precious gift of life that You've given to us, we give You thanks. For the enduring presence of Your love in this world, we give You thanks. For the knowledge that You are with us wherever we are today, we give You thanks. Father, we lift up to You now all those who have been infected with COVID-19. We pray for Your healing hand upon them. We pray that the medical staff treating them will have the strength and the resources to do their job effectively. Father, on this Palm Sunday we hear the gospel words that speak of hope and we hear the cry, "Hosanna!" We hear the gospel words that speak of promise and we hear the cry, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" So on this Palm Sunday, we journey in hope as we trust in Your promise. And Father, we lift up to You now the families of all those who are ill and we pray that they will know the comfort of Your presence as they deal with the worry and the stress of separation. Father, as we journey into the Holy Week to come, we are conscious that we share in the life of the world. We are conscious of the presence of those who are near to us and of those from whom we are apart. Whether near or far, embrace us all in Your love, Father. We lift up to You now the families of those who have been bereaved and we pray that they will know the comfort and the love of the One who gave up His life that we might live. Father, we're conscious, too, of so many others whose life and work is woven into the fabric of our society and upon whom we now depend. We pray for them, for delivery drivers and postmen, for refuse collectors and cleaners, for police officers and care workers - protect them and keep them safe. For nurses and doctors, for scientists and surgeons, for midwives and ambulance drivers - protect them and watch over them. For those who govern on our behalf, for those who make decisions that impact upon us all, for all who shape our common life - protect them and increase their wisdom and understanding. For those who have lost jobs and livelihoods, for those from whom the future is now uncertain, for those tempted to despair - may they find their hope in You and trust that You will make a way for them in a post-COVID-19 world. Father, in Your mercy, hear our prayer and grant us the faith to journey into the week to come, assured of the presence of the crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, amen.

**Closing Praise:** Tis So Sweet To Trust In Jesus

**Benediction:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.