

Taste and See: God Answers Prayers

Psalms 34 (NIV)

Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelek, who drove him away, and he left. 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. ⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. ⁵ Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. 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. ⁸ Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in 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. 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. ¹⁴ Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. ¹⁵ The 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. ¹⁷ The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. ¹⁸ The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. 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. ²¹ Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned. ²² The LORD will rescue his servants; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.

Around about 1,000 B.C., a man named Saul was chosen by God to be the first king over the Israelites. He started out good but quickly stopped listening to God. So, God chose another man to be king: David. God was with David wherever he was and gave him victories over powerful and fierce animals like lions and bears as well as so many of Israel's enemies, including a giant named Goliath. With all this success from God, Saul became jealous of David and tried multiple times to hunt him down and kill him.

The setting of our Psalm today is one instance when David had fled Saul again. He made it out of the country to a Philistine city named Gath. This was the hometown of Goliath, the giant David killed in battle. Imagine the thoughts of the Philistines as David strolled into town carrying on his side the sword of Goliath, the very same one David used to chop off the giant's head! They recalled the song sang about David, that he had slain tens of thousands of their people. David had come there thinking that he could find refuge among his enemies, but he quickly realized that he had put his life and the lives of his companions in danger. Would they imprison him? Kill him on the spot? Torture him? David was in trouble.

"So [David] pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard." (1 Samuel 21:13) And the plan worked! The King of Gath wanted nothing to do with this once mighty but now insane lunatic of a man. He cast David out instead of exacting revenge. David was saved!

When you read through 1 Samuel 21 where this event happens, you might walk away with the impression that David was resourceful and concocted a plan that saved his skin by acting insane. But then you realize that this psalm is directly linked to that instance: "Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelek, who drove him away, and he left." (title) Nowhere in this psalm does David say that he was so smart, so wise to get himself out of this life-or-death situation. Instead, we hear: "I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears." (verse 4) "This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles." (verse 6) David gives all credit to God for rescuing him from the King of Gath, writing a whole song praising God for answering his prayers and delivering him. David had tasted and seen that God answers prayers.

We know that we can pray to God for anything at any time, but do we? If we were in the same situation as David, would we have thought to pray or would we have been too focused on figuring out how to get ourselves out of that situation? When a problem presents itself, when you're in trouble, when hurt after hurt is coming your way, do you pray? Do we even think to pray?

If you are always quick to pray to God about any and every situation, God be praised! That's where he wants you to go in times of trouble, the one sure place to receive all powerful help. I know for myself that there are too many times in my life when things are bad and prayer is not the first place I jump to. Why not? Part of it - maybe the biggest part of it - is because I am relying on myself, my wits, my abilities, my experience, my resources in order to get me out of a situation. Am I trusting myself more than I trust my God? Have I turned myself and my capabilities and my resourcefulness into idols, that I think I can control things better than God? When I do this, not only have I devalued the power of God to answer my prayers and deliver me, but I have also not trusted and loved him with my whole heart, mind, soul, and strength. I have sinned by neglecting God's gift of prayer.

Do you find yourself at times in life not turning to God in prayer? Maybe you neglect the gift of prayer because like me you sometimes rely on yourself instead of God. Maybe you don't turn in prayer because there are other times when you've prayed and it didn't seem like it made any difference, didn't feel like God heard or answered you. The bad thing still happened; you still had to deal with it. Do we not turn to prayer because we don't want to admit that we are weak, that we're not strong enough, smart enough, resourceful enough, to handle this situation on our own? Are we too prideful to ask God for help, embarrassed to do it, that what I'm asking for is not one of the typical, socially acceptable prayers to pray because what I need help with, my troubles, show my vulnerabilities and other people will think I'm weak if they knew that I prayed these things? Do I think that my problems are too insignificant for God, that I shouldn't bother him with what I got and that I should just take care of it myself?

God has given us a great gift in prayer that he wants us to use for our benefit. He has given us full, unrestricted access to come and bring any and every concern to him. He gave us that access through Jesus Christ. Jesus lived perfectly for us to cover us with his perfection, and he died to remove all our sins, everything that would block our access to God. He got rid of all of them! He adopted us into his family through the waters of baptism. He made us right with God. We are part of his family and get to talk directly to him like a child does to their loving parent.

We have a God to pray to who is always listening because Jesus gave us that direct access to him by what he did for us, by the faith the Holy Spirit gave us. "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry." (verse 15) God's not like that person with the noise cancelling headphones sitting next to you on the airplane. He is beside you, giving you his full attention, just waiting for you to talk to him in prayer, engaging you with his Word to let you know that he cares about you, to give you the gift of prayer, to show you that he is powerful to help you and wants to do so. "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them." (verse 7)

What's more is that Jesus and the Holy Spirit live to intercede for us. Jesus promised that if we ask anything according to his will, he will grant it. And we don't have to sit here wondering if we prayed just the right way in order to be heard by God, wondering whether or not we checked the boxes so that our prayer was according to God's will. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us in accordance with the will of God. This means that whatever and whenever we pray, the Holy Spirit steps in and makes our prayer align with God's will. This means that he will answer it in the way and timing that is best for us. Taste and see that God answers prayer.

If one of the reasons that we don't pray is because we feel like God did not answer other prayers of ours, consider trusting God again with our prayers based on all the examples in the Bible of believer's prayers which were heard and answered. We don't even have the exact prayer recorded here, but David prayed that God would rescue him from this situation with the King of Gath. He wrote this whole psalm so that we would hear this truth: "The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all." (verses 17-19) Through David, we taste and see that God answers prayers.

And for all those times we realize that we have neglected prayer, God records for us that Jesus was quick to pray for us and for himself. He often went to a solitary place to pray. He prayed for strength from God, and he received it. He prayed that God's will be done, even as he prayed that his cup of suffering of the cross would be taken from him the night before Good Friday. The Lord answered his prayer by having him make that sacrifice so that we would be saved. He did this while also keeping his promise that "he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken." (verse 20) Through Jesus, we have tasted and seen that God answers prayers. Through all this, we get to know that since Jesus prayed perfectly, we are filled with his perfect, trusting prayer life.

Because Jesus lived a perfect prayer life for us and gave us direct access to God in prayer by removing our sins and filling us with his perfection, we have this wonderful gift to be able to talk to God and have him answer us and deliver us. Let's use it frequently, being quick to pray, not relying on ourselves, not making prayer an afterthought, but talking to God regularly about what's going on in our lives, laying out our vulnerabilities to the Lord. As we do that active listening with people as we talked about last week, let's pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ with what they are struggling with. Yes, it shows our weakness, it shows where we struggle, where we are not enough in life, but it also gives us a chance to trust and rely on God and go to the one source who truly can deliver us from all our troubles and fix all our problems. As we do so, we taste and see that God answers prayers. Amen.