

Taste and See - The Lord is Good

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 4th of January 2004 the preacher is Paul Barker his sermon is entitled Taste and See the Lord is Good it is based on Psalm 34 and you may like to have open the Bibles in the pews at page 441 to Psalm 34 and as I said at the beginning this is part of a series of sermons in the mornings and evenings in January on the Psalms well what parent has said to their child come on little Freddie, taste it, you'll like it sometimes when I've been with friends to something like a Chinese restaurant with Chinese friends it's a bit similar try this, you'll really like it and I'm looking at it thinking what on earth is this but usually they're right it's something that you like the proof of the pudding is in the eating the proof of the pudding is not in the ingredients the process of cooking or the packaging or anything like that the proof of the pudding is in the eating now in case you missed it it was Christmas recently and last year sometime and I bought a Christmas pudding and I looked at the vast array of Christmas puddings on the shelf at the supermarket and I thought I wonder which of these is the best

I compared the ingredients and thought well in the end I'm not sure that this really helps me so I just bought one and it was fine but I did wonder to myself had I done the right thing was it the best one in effect you can't quite tell from the ingredients or the packaging or the price I should really have bought all of them and then tasted each a little bit of each to see which is the best for whatever it was that I was buying it for so the proof of the pudding is in the eating so try it and taste it and see well so too with God this psalm says the proof of the pudding with God is in the eating so to speak not in theology theory philosophy thinking, knowledge all those sorts of things although there's nothing wrong with that sort of thing but in the end the proof of the pudding with God is in the eating taste and see that's what this psalm invites us to do that's what King David who wrote this psalm 1000 BC 3000 years ago urges his listeners and his readers to do taste and see that the Lord is good now at the time that he wrote this psalm

David was on the run from King Saul Saul was the first king of Israel a bit before 1000 BC not a good king one that disobeyed God and failed him several times and the story of Saul becoming king comes in the Old Testament in a book called 1 Samuel the second half of that book from chapters 16 to 31 are the story of David's rise to become the next king but Saul grimly hanging on to being king and the contest between the two of them it's a very gripping story some of the most engaging narrative that you'll find in the Bible indeed the story of Saul and David at one point in their contest Saul is king David to be king David is on the run from Saul Saul and his army are after him to kill him so desperate is David that he flees out of the land of Israel to the enemy to the Philistines the key enemy of the people of Israel of the day indeed David's own enemy because not long before

David had killed their great hero Goliath in battle and now David flees to the Philistines so desperate is he to get away from the murderous threats of King Saul and there he goes to one of the five key cities of the Philistines to Gath and he is brought by the murmuring men of Gath to the king in his court and the murmuring men of Gath know that David is the one who's killed their hero indeed killed thousands of Philistines they want David put to death like King Saul back in Israel wanted David put to death and so here is David brought before the enemy king away from his own people whose king is also his enemy and his life is clearly under threat if we read the story in 1 Samuel 21 we see that what David does in the court of the king of Gath is to feign madness that's always a good way out feigning madness is also good fun letting the spittle drip down into your beard scratching marks in the doors of the gate they're the things that David did to feign madness and when he was brought before the king of Gath the king of Gath said I've got enough mad men

I don't want another one take him away let him go and so David escapes into the wilderness to a cave and his life is spared now if you read that story in 1 Samuel 21 you'll get this sense that David was fairly clever and ingenious in feigning madness to in the end lead to his life being spared and so he was but Psalm 34 adds a dimension to what that story doesn't tell us because David could well have boasted to his people see how clever I was feigning madness and it spared my life but not at all because Psalm 34 written at this time after David's life was spared praises God for sparing David's life that's what the heading of the psalm is directing us to the historical context of this psalm it's a psalm of David when he feigned madness before Abimelech so that he drove him out and he went away his life was spared and David praises God he doesn't boast in his own ingenuity or cleverness but praises God see how the psalm begins

[6 : 15] I will bless the Lord at all times that is I'll praise the Lord at all times his praise shall continually be in my mouth my soul makes its boast in the Lord David's acknowledging that even in dire straits he will praise the Lord at all times not just when things go well not when things are easy comfortable but at all times like St. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians give thanks at all times to the Lord whatever our situation or circumstance even in times of trouble but David offering praise to God doesn't stop there because it bubbles over into an invitation for all his listeners and readers to join him in praising God see how it moves from the singular to the plural in the middle of verse 2 my soul makes its boast in the Lord let the humble hear and be glad oh magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together because praise of God and thanksgiving to God in the end can't be kept to yourself it's got to be shared the joy of answered prayer which is what this psalm is derived from is a joy that is increased when it is shared with the people of God like all of our joys usually our joys doubled when they're shared so here our joy in God our praise of God our blessing of God is rightfully shared with the rest of the people of God so we're to encourage each other ourselves with our joy and praise of God for answered prayers or deliverance or whatever that may be it's right that we encourage each other in that way we've seen that in the letter to the

Hebrews a few months ago in the sermons last year that we're to meet together and encourage each other and one aspect of that we'll be sharing our praise of God and our thanksgiving of God whether it's in our small groups or in some testimony or whatever as we encourage each other praising God for answers to prayer it's right and proper for the people of God to do that yes it's right that personally we pray because our faith is personal but our faith is never private Christian faith is a public faith and so it's right that we praise together and we invite each other to join in our prayers and our praise and thanksgiving to God so David goes on publicly to testify to what God has done and like so many of the psalms he doesn't give long detail about the plight and the strife that he was in rather the focus is always on God and God's answer so we only get a description of his plight in very general terms briefly but the focus and the emphasis is on

God's answer so see what he says in verse 4 I sought the Lord he answered me and delivered me from all my fears and the same thing in effect is said in verse 6 this poor soul cried was heard by the Lord and was saved from every trouble each of those two verses has three things three verbs David sought the Lord or cried the Lord heard or listened and then he saved or delivered David from all his fears from the trouble that he was facing though it's not spelled out here what that trouble is David prayed God heard and God delivered and verse 4 says it and verse 6 says it and then he goes on in verses 7 and 9 to show a little bit more about how God answered the prayer firstly in verse 7 God protected him the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them so in the middle of the court of the king of Gath with the murderous threats of Saul in the distance back in

Israel and no doubt the murderous threats of the men of Gath around him as he faced the king what David is testifying to is that the angel of the Lord protected him guarded him and delivered him from that danger not only did God protect but God provided so the end of verse 9 for those who fear God have no want even young lions suffer want and hunger but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing those are the two fundamental things that David is testifying about God that God protected and God provided and both of them were true in David's experience which is why he's giving thanks and praise to God but notice something else about the language that is used here when David fled from Saul in Israel he may well have had good reason to fear Saul now in the court of the king of

Gath he may well have had good reason to fear the king of Gath but above either of those two things David feared God that's the language that's used here notice verse 7 again the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear God the end of verse 9 those who fear God have no want see David's not just saying here that any old person can pray and have an instant answer to their prayer and deliverance David is testifying to God's goodness to those who fear God fearing God above king Saul fearing God above the king of Gath not a fear of God that is terror that makes us run from God and gives us bad nightmares or dreams at night that's not the fear of God the fear of God is an acknowledgement that God is God sovereign overall so that God is God above Saul that God is God above the king of

[12 : 15] Gath so you don't fear Saul or the king of Gath or whatever other strife or trouble you face in life because overall sovereign in power is God God and he is to be feared his sovereign power is to be feared fear not that is terror but fear that is reverence and awe and honour that God is God not Saul not the king of Gath nothing else no one else God alone is God to be feared so David didn't in the end fear predominantly Saul or the king of Gath he is saying that he feared God and that God answers the prayers of those who fear him God protects such people and provides for their every need in the Old Testament the idea of the fear of God or fearing God is actually a fairly comprehensive positive term for how the people of God relate to God it incorporates trusting God believing in him and honouring him as God sovereign in power so this prayer this psalm is not saying that all prayers are just instantly answered the way we expect that's certainly not our experience

I suspect for most of us rather David is testifying to the goodness of God that he answers the prayers of those who fear him who trust him who place their refuge in him and so David invites people to turn to God back in verse 5 look to God and be radiant shine so your faces shall never be ashamed even in the midst of the strife or difficulty that David or we might face look to God be radiant and your faces shall never be ashamed and similarly in the invitation in verse 8 taste and see that the Lord is good happy are those who take refuge in him the proof of the pudding is in the eating taste and see that's the invitation of this psalm David has tasted and he's seen that the Lord is good practically clearly through the answers to prayer and the sparing of his life from Saul and the king of Gath and he's saying to those who listen and read taste and see the Lord is good the proof of the pudding is in the eating and David has eaten and enjoyed and is thankful and he invites readers and listeners to do likewise he urges them then to fear

God verse 9 begins oh fear the Lord David's made it very clear that God answers the prayers of those who fear him so he says to his listeners and readers fear the Lord and he goes on to show what that means verse 11 come oh children listen to me I will teach you the fear of the Lord so what is it then to fear the Lord he asks firstly a rhetorical question verse 12 which of you desires life and covets many days to enjoy good oh I do oh I do we all do we all want to enjoy long life that is good and enjoy what we might call the good life so what then is the key to it well David goes on to say in verses 13 and 14 keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit depart from evil and do good seek peace and pursue it you see the fear of the Lord is a relationship with God seeing that he is good but it is also expressed in moral living upright ethical life as described in verses 13 and 14 notice that it involves speech and action so often we underrate the importance of speech and write words the Bible never does that words are important and what we say matters so we are to keep our tongue from evil and our lips from speaking deceit something that the

New Testament at length exhorts us to do as well say in the letter of James what we say matters we must be careful with what we say to each other and speak what is true and pure not deceitful and secondly our actions must be right not just neutral actions that our society seems to say oh he never harmed anyone but did he ever do any good to anyone you might well retort see what the Bible is exhorting us to do here and elsewhere is not just apart from evil but positively to do good to seek peace and pursue it not to be just a peace loving person but a peace making person is in effect what's being said here as well somebody who's not only shunning bad things but positively pursuing good things to do that's how we're to live if we fear the Lord and all of these two verses 13 and 14 we'll find several times over in the scriptures

Old and New Testament exhorting us to do likewise we're not excused from these high demands if we're to fear the Lord then this is the sort of life that such fear of the Lord reflects now this is a far cry from what our society calls the good life see the good life in our society is a comfortable life a life full of enjoyment really indulgence a life fairly peaceful and calm a life of easy pace that's the good life you see it in the BBC comedy of the same name but what comprises the good life here the good life comprises knowing God who is good taste and see that the Lord is good and doing good in response you see where the good life finds its origin and reflection from its origin is God who is good and it is response we respond by doing good in order to enjoy the good life the encouragement to do that continues in the next two verses 15 and 16 which say firstly positively and then negatively if you like the rewards of pursuing good or evil the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their cry the face of the Lord is against evildoers to cut off remembrance of them from the earth note how personal

[19 : 21] God is here his ears his eyes his face are involved in these two verses he is for those who fear him the humble the righteous as they're called in verse 15 he's hearing their prayers as David himself testifies but on the other hand for the evildoers those who do not fear the Lord who don't shun evil ways as verse 14 says then the remembrance of them will be cut off from the earth that is death will be final no more beyond well David is not being simplistic here in his analysis at first sight we might well say well doesn't this just say that for the person who fears the Lord the person who's a Christian today that instantly their prayers will be answered they'll have a good life a long life happy life and everything will be fine well that's not how we see the world there are plenty of good people Christian people faithful believers who suffer terribly in our world even death prematurely and there are plenty of wicked people who live long and seem to have rather indulgent and lovely and comfortable lives perhaps David's just too simplistic but no he knows the suffering it's out of that suffering that this psalm derives his suffering at the hands of Saul unjustly unfairly his suffering at the hands potentially of the king of

Gath his flight for his life from his own land into in the end a cave in the wilderness David has spent a long time with his life in jeopardy unjustly he's not advocating that if you're a God fearer fearing the Lord that your troubles just go away he's not advocating that if you just whistle a tune as in the musical the king of the hill one of those songs says that all your troubles go away he's rather saying that in the end God answers and vindicates those who fear him that in the end and ultimately God protects and provides for those who fear him not necessarily instantly and certainly fearing the Lord doesn't mean that we're exempt from problems from suffering from persecution or strife but that through them God protects and provides and finally delivers and saves that's David's experience and he commends it to his listeners and readers verse 17 when the righteous cry for help the Lord hears and rescues them from all their troubles not instantaneously is what

David's saying but ultimately that is true the Lord is near to the broken hearted and saves the crushed in spirit clearly that verse is saying that those who fear the Lord who are humble or righteous they may well be broken hearted or crushed in spirit they may well suffer and for a long time but God is near through all of that suffering and difficulty indeed verse 19 tells us that many are the afflictions of the righteous not few we're not exempt from them if we're God's people but ultimately finally and assuredly the Lord rescues them from them all he keeps all their bones not one of them will be broken that is even death doesn't prevent God from keeping these promises ultimately verse 21 paints the negative picture again evil brings death to the wicked not just physical death more than that is conveyed by this idea a death that cuts a person off from

God forever evil brings death to the wicked and those who hate the righteous will be condemned finally on that judgment day but positively the Lord redeems the life of his servants none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned on that final day as implied by that expression David perhaps had little inkling of the cost that God would expend to redeem the life of his servants as verse 22 puts it but a thousand years later God paid a high price for redeeming our lives through the death of his son on the cross none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned words that are echoed even more clearly through the pages of the New Testament testifying that there is no condemnation for those whose refuge is in

Christ Jesus because the ultimate answer to the prayers of God's people as David has testified here is the sureness of eternal life and final vindication on that judgment day when the son of God returns to judge us all our world looks for instant answers is dissatisfied and impatient with any apparent delay but God promises final and permanent answers nearness through strife and trouble but ultimate deliverance salvation and redemption for the lives of his servants who fear him and seek refuge in him taste and see that the Lord is good David is saying the proof of the pudding is in the eating don't just theorise about God abstractly look for clever formulas but jump in and see that the

[25 : 28] Lord is good how ridiculous it would be if we were all standing through this service with comfortable pews sitting empty in front of us that we've not quite analysed whether the wood is strong enough the nails are good enough the cloth is comfortable enough whether the seats will actually support us so we stand and we look and we admire but we keep our distance how crazy such action would be but you're all seated because you've in effect tasted and seen that these pews are good presumably well so too with God is what this invitation of the psalm is saying don't look on from a distance remotely don't take comfort abstractly from truths about God don't just look at the ingredients on the side of the packet don't just ponder the cooking process but taste and see that the Lord is good fear him is what

David is inviting us to do trust him seek refuge in him and you will not be disappointed I wonder if you're going to buy a Toyota car are you going to buy one because Greg Norman's advertising it not at all because you know he's getting paid a fortune to advertise it if you buy a Toyota car it's most likely because somebody you know testifies to you that it's a good car to buy oh what a feeling and all that sort of thing a satisfied customer is the best recommendation and that's what David is with God he is satisfied in God that's why he's praising God but not just why he's praising God it's why he's saying to everyone who will listen and read this psalm join me in praising God taste and see that the Lord is good I'm a satisfied customer here the Lord has not let me down and he will not let you down if you seek refuge in him if you fear him if you taste and see that truly it is that the Lord is good there are lessons for us here too we should pray if we fear God above all things then we should pray too often we pray too little yet expect too much

David has prayed he's told us that several times in this psalm he's prayed and prayed and God heard him and answered him well God will never answer our prayers unless we pray so in the middle of our strife and suffering whatever our difficulty pray and keep praying and pray with faith with confidence and with fear that God ultimately and finally will answer our prayers and vindicate us save us redeem us and deliver us for eternity where we will face no condemnation pray with faith and not remoteness and David models for us praise and answer prayer it is right to praise God together it is right to share our joy and praise at the answers to our prayer in our small groups with our Christian friends and in testimonies and other ways to encourage each other that God is indeed good and it's right even to say to unbelievers taste and see that the Lord is good he's answered my prayers in the Lord

Jesus Christ and he'll answer yours and I'm a satisfied customer and so can you be how significant our testimonies that the Lord is good will be for those who are not Christians we may not need to know all the theory and all the ingredients I can recommend to you a Christmas pudding because I tasted it and it was good I don't know how it was made I don't know the ingredients can't even remember the packaging now or so it is with our own testimony and witness to those who are not believers we've seen that the Lord is good we may not be able to answer every question they've got but invite them taste and see God is good and in the Lord Jesus Christ we can be sure that every prayer will be answered finally and fully and eternally for our good and for our benefit so why not come and taste see fear put your refuge in him join me and join us as we see that the Lord indeed is good we'll only ever do that if we're satisfied customers ourselves I wonder whether you are

I wonder whether you are a satisfied customer of God whether you've tasted and seen that the Lord is good or whether perhaps still you're analysing the ingredients on the side of the packet you can do that forever and just remain hungry taste and see that the Lord is good and join us in magnifying the Lord forever and exalting his name together so so I can't support thank you too thank you much for you to who you you hello to you to to you you