

Psalms 33 and 34 – John Karmelich

1. Of all the lessons I have written recently, this one wins the award for being the most positive. After many lessons focusing on how God can and does rescue us through our problems and our issues, this lesson focuses on praising God for our victories. To put it in modern American terms, this lesson is "party time". ☺ It is designed for those moments when God has rescued us through our issues and we can give Him the credit for seeing us through our problems.
2. Let me describe this lesson another way: God does not want us to go through our lives saying in effect, "Woe is me, look at what I have to deal with". Nobody wants to be around that type of person. The appropriate response is in effect, "God is great and He will get me through what I am dealing with right now." The other way to through life is complaining about how bad it is.
 - a) I understand that in tough times, it is difficult to not focus on one's problems. Even though we are counting on God to see us through trouble, we don't know how He will.
 - b) For most of us, there does come moments where we realize that God does see us through our difficult times. When we realize God has gotten us through such times, we need to praise Him and recognize Him for that. These two psalms do just that. They praise God for getting us through difficult times.
3. Does this mean we should only praise God when no bad things are happening? Of course not.
 - a) It also does not mean we wait until our lives are perfect before we praise Him.
 - b) It just means that God wants us to have a positive attitude going through life knowing that He does and will see us through whatever we are dealing with.
 - c) Let's face it; nobody likes to hear people complaining all the time. When we are going through tough times, we should still praise God during those times and trust that He will see us through them. If our problems are still right in front of us, instead of complaining about them, we praise God for the fact He can and does rescue us out of our problems and He will see us through those times. Yes we can praise Him through those times just as we praise Him when such bad times come to an end.
 - d) With that said, put a smile on your face, jump up and down with joy, and enjoy these two psalms as they focus on how and when we should praise God and "why" we should.
 - i) So go ahead and whoop it up. I'll wait here until you are done. ☺
4. Psalm 33 - Title: (none)
 - a) This psalm has no title. It means we don't know who wrote it or why.
 - b) Well, given the lack of a title, why is this psalm placed here? As I said in the introduction, it is a psalm of praise to God. Think of it this way, we have just completed a large group of psalms that all deal with the issue of asking God to rescue us from our bad situation and separate us as believers from nonbelievers.
 - i) Now, here is Psalm 33, praising God. It is as if whatever bad things happened in the last group of psalms have come to an end, and its time to praise Him.
 - c) Well, what if I am still dealing with the same issues I had in the last group of psalms? Then praise God for the victory that you will have when the problem comes to an end.
5. Verse 1: Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him.
 - a) The first line of the psalm has two requests of us: The first is to sing "joyfully". What does that mean? It means to sing out to God as if you mean it. What if I don't have a great singing voice? Sing out to Him anyway! If God gave us a voice, then we should use it.
 - b) Let me share one of my favorite little secrets of the bible: The privilege of singing to God is reserved only for people and not angels. If you study the bible carefully, angels never sing. They do praise him, but there are no references to angels singing. Well, can't anyone sing to God, saved or not? True. But the true joy of knowing the peace of God does require one to be a believer.

- c) I said there was a second request in this line too. It says that it is "fitting" for the upright to praise him. Essentially it means it is appropriate for believers to praise God for the good He has done in our lives, and the fact that we trust in Him for the good things.
 - i) In short, it is appropriate to praise God, if we have a good voice or not.
 - ii) The point of this verse is not the method, but the effort and doing it joyfully.
- 6. Verse 2: Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.
 - a) This is the first reference to a musical instrument in the psalms. The specific instrument is a 10-stringed harp (also called a lyre) that was used in David's time.
 - i) I don't think God cares what types of musical instruments are used to praise Him. What counts is the fact we are actually praising Him. Whoever wrote this psalm probably played this instrument and that is why it is referenced.
- 7. Verse 3: Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.
 - a) Let me talk about the term "new song": Every time we praise God, it is in effect, a new song. It is new in terms of our feelings as we perform it and express it to God.
 - b) The text says to play (the song) skillfully. That doesn't mean we have to be an accomplished musician to praise Him, but at the same time, it does not mean we shouldn't practice.
 - i) If God has given us the talent to play a musical instrument, then we should practice it and play it skillfully.
 - ii) A retired pastor and a good friend used to play in church services (not at the same time) a bagpipe and a (wood cutting) saw with a bow. My point is, I don't think God cares so much about what musical instrument is used, but the fact that one does do it skillfully and practice before one performs.
 - c) Finally the verse says to shout for joy. Singing to God should come from the heart. OK, suppose I don't have a great singing ability or can't play any instrument. But, are you grateful for what God has done in your life? If you are, then we can and should sing praises to Him. The point is not so much our natural talents, as much as our desire to praise Him for saving us and for the good He has done in our lives.
- 8. Verse 4: For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.
 - a) Do you need a reason to praise God? Do you not feel like singing at this moment? Well, look at Verse 4 and that alone should give us a reason to praise Him.
 - i) The text says His word (i.e., the bible text) is "right and true". If we are having a bad day and we don't feel like praising Him due to the troubles we are dealing with, we can and should still praise Him for His word.
 - ii) Think of it this way: Has His word every been not true, in any aspect of our lives and at any time of our lives? Has God ever been not faithful to keep His word?
 - b) But John, the text doesn't say to praise Him for His word, just that it is "right and true"?
 - i) Yes, but one has to read this verse in context of the whole psalm. The topic of this psalm is about praising God, and it would fit in that context.
- 9. Verse 5: The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.
 - a) Verse 5 reminds us that God loves what is right and remembering that He loves us and cares for us. OK, so why bring that up here and now?
 - i) Remember that this is a psalm about gratitude. God does not change because we sing this psalm, nor does He get any "perks" out of us singing it. The point of reading or singing this psalm is so that we remember what God is like.
 - ii) Let me answer this question a different way. When do we enjoy giving God the praise the most? It is usually after we have finished dealing with some sort of problem. We realize how God has worked things out. Therefore we love God's righteousness (making it right) and His justice. The idea of justice is about giving people what they deserve.
 - b) In summary, we praise God here, because we are reminding ourselves that these attributes about God are true as we see them come to pass first hand.

10. Verse 6: By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses.
- a) To say that God created the world in a poetic way is to say it is by the "word of God".
 - b) Without getting into a classical debate about how the world was actually made, let us focus on the topic of "How was the world made by the word of God"?
 - i) This is not saying that the world came out of a book or out of scrolls of the bible.
 - ii) A better way to understand it is to accept the idea that God is bigger than the universe we live in and He decided to create it.
 - c) Let me stop and ask the classical question here: Why did God bother? If God is perfect and He doesn't need anything (by definition), then why create the world in the first place?
 - i) The best answer I can think of is that because God is a "God of Love", He wants to show His love upon something or someone. It would be like an artist who didn't need money, but just painted because that artist just loves to paint. God needed someone to show His love upon and created people for that purpose.
 - d) This leads us back to the verses. It says that the heavens (i.e., the stars in the sky, the atmosphere as we know it) was all created by God. He didn't do it because it "looked pretty". He did it for our pleasure in the sense that God wanted to show His love to us and therefore, He wanted us to appreciate the heavens as we can comprehend them.
 - i) Which reminds me, sometimes I get the question: Is there life elsewhere in the universe? My answer is, "If there is, then the salvation of those creatures depends upon their grasp of Jesus dying for their sins. With that said, I don't know."
 - e) OK, John, Verse 7 that says God gathers the waters into jars. So is God storing big jars of water somewhere? ☺ I don't believe that is the point of that verse.
 - i) The idea here ties back to the flood. Most cultures around the world have a flood story similar to Noah. Most of the world understands the flood story. Part of that story is that water is "stored up" in the deep parts of the world (inside the earth as we know it.) When the flood happened, it wasn't just rain coming down, it was the waters of the deep rising up from the earth. (See Genesis 7:11.)
 - ii) Verse 7 is reminding us is that God controls the oceans and the height to which waters can rise. The reason there has not been a "great flood" since Noah's day is strictly because God controls it that way. That is the essential point of this verse.
 - f) So, if this psalm is about praising God, what do these verses have to do with that point?
 - i) If we can't think of any other reason to thank God, we can thank Him that He created the world and has established the land boundaries for our pleasure.
 - ii) These verses acknowledge that God exists, He is bigger than the universe and He provides for us (all humans) a place to live. He controls the waters of this planet so that they don't rise up and wipe the planet clean like it did in Noah's day.
 - a) OK John, that does not make me feel all warm inside. ☺ The idea is for us to remember that God exists and since He cares about us, He controls the waters of the world so that we can have life here on earth.
11. Verse 8: Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him.
- a) Just when I think I am straying far away from the text, the next verse reminds me that I am right where I should be. I was talking about the world respecting the fact that God is the creator and He is responsible for our existence. Verse 8 is reminding us that we should acknowledge the fact that God exists and He is greater than the world, and for that reason alone we should revere Him (treat Him with respect).
 - b) A common question people like to ask is, "Well, who created God?" The short answer is if someone created god, there must be a "greater god" who created God. Eventually one has to get to a point of acknowledging the fact that there is a single entity who always existed and is greater than all created things. That is the God we worship. That is one reason why God describes Himself as "I am", which is what "Jehovah" means.

12. Verse 9: For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.
- a) This verse continues the idea of giving God the credit for the world's existence.
 - b) Why is the unnamed author of this psalm spending time reminding us that God created the world? The short answer is this psalm is all about praising God. If one wants a reason to praise God, one can start with the fact that He created the world.
 - i) The underlying point is that God didn't create the world so He could then "stand back and see what happens". God gets involved in our affairs as multitudes of people can attest to with their lives.
 - ii) So John, are you saying God knows every little thing that I do? I believe a God that is perfect cannot learn anything. I also believe that same God loves us and wants us to live a life of obedience. He knows who will turn to Him with their lives and ultimately uses all of that knowledge for His glory.
 - a) (For supporting biblical text of this idea, see Isaiah 46:10.)
 - iii) While you are digesting that thought, ☺ I'll move on to Verse 10.
13. Verse 10: The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. ¹¹ But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.
- a) The idea of my speech from the last verse continues well in these next two verses. The God who controls the world and gets involved in its affairs works to thwart (bring down) any and all plans that are against His will.
 - b) OK John, all of this big picture stuff is interesting. How does it affect me?
 - i) If we believe that God involves Himself in the "big picture" of life that must mean that He gets involved in the little things as well. If God intervenes in our lives and is working it out for His glory, then why worry about our problems? If we trust that God knows the outcome of our situations, why worry about them?
 - ii) If we know we are saved, what can we possibly worry about in comparison to that fact? If we fear the wrath of God, we should not have to fear anything else in this life, as nothing is significant in comparison to our relationship with God.
14. Verse 12: Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance.
- a) At first glance, one can read this verse and say, well it is just talking about the Nation of Israel as that nation was supposed to look to God for their salvation and protection.
 - b) I also see this as applying to individuals as well as specific nations. Those who realize God is in charge of their lives have more joy than those who see life as "luck" or just based on applying one's skills. Those who put their trust in Jesus form a single nation of believers. Jesus taught this principal when He talked about the "kingdom of God".
 - c) Think of it this way: Those who don't trust in God believe it is up to them to make the world a better place. The believer says in effect, "It is up to God and not up to me. My joy is not dependant upon my circumstances, but upon God's will being done".
 - i) I was thinking about the apostle's Paul statement of "I have learned to be content in all things". He wrote that while suffering in a jail cell. My point is Paul did not say, "I can be content if I just get out of this cell or if people bring me my desires".
 - a) (See Philippians 4:12 in reference to Paul's statement here.) Paul learned the secret of being content is realizing the purpose of life is to do His will.
 - b) Did Paul still plan and make decisions? Of course. At the same time, He trusted that God is in charge of his life and the outcome is God's problem.
 - d) All of this does lead back to this verse. The point here is that we can enjoy our lives no matter our circumstances, because joy does not come from God rescuing us out of bad circumstances. Joy comes from trusting that God is in charge of our lives and ultimately is using our lives and our situations out for His glory.
 - e) So then why pray for things that we desire? The point is God may know what is His will for our lives, but we don't. The purpose of prayer is not to get our will done, but His. Sometimes God gives us insight as to His will and that is a purpose of prayer.

15. Verse 13: From heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind; ¹⁴ from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth-- ¹⁵ he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.
- a) I admit at times, when I try to think about how big God is, I feel overwhelmed. When one considers how many billions of people there are in this world, and here in these verses it states that God forms all of our hearts and considers all that we do. I can't physically comprehend that. I accept it as true, but the idea of all-powerful God who is capable and does watch all of mankind is more than I can grasp my mind around.
 - i) Here's the point: Just because God is too big for us to grasp, does not mean that the facts as stated in these three verses are not true. We may not be able to comprehend how God can do "all of this", but just because we can't comprehend it does not mean it is not true. This is something we have to accept by faith.
 - b) I would rather believe in a God that is so big (vastness) that I cannot comprehend than to believe that life as we know it is a random accident. There is too much evidence for the existence of such a God to believe that He does not exist.
 - i) So what is that evidence? Let me ask that question this way: If you were God and wanted to prove your existence, how would you do it? The answer is to write out key facts about human history in advance. That is why roughly one third of the bible is predictions. It gives us the proof through history that God exists.
 - c) OK, let's say for the moment we accept that God exists and He makes all people and somehow has the ability to watch all people all at the same time. Setting aside the question of whether or not this is true, why include these lines here in the psalm?
 - i) The main point of this psalm is about praising God. One reason why we should praise Him is for the fact that He has created all people and He does watch over our lives. What if we say, "My life isn't going so well at the moment. Why should I praise Him despite all of the problems I am going through?"
 - ii) The answer is in effect, "What choice do we have"? Would we rather face life without a God that knows the outcome of our situations, or would you just trust in random luck, or worse, just our own ability to get out of the situation?
 - a) Trusting in the God who can rescue us out of our problems. That is a source of comfort and a reason to praise Him. That's the point here.
16. Verse 16: No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. ¹⁷ A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save.
- a) Those of us who have had the privilege of studying military world history can recite a good number of stories of small armies that have successfully beaten much larger armies.
 - b) The point is, if it God's will for one side to win a particular battle or war, it does not matter what weaponry one side has or how big is one's army. The issue is not even who is saved among one or both sides of the army. The issue is that God does get involved in the affairs of the world and God does allow at times, smaller or less equipped sides to win battles, if for no other reason, than to prove His existence.
 - c) The reason Verse 17 mentions horses, is that before the era of modern warfare, it was often thought that the side with the most horses wins the battle. In effect, Verse 17 is saying the army that is best equipped does not always win the battle.
 - d) OK John, given this fact about the size of armies and that God gets involved in battles ultimately, somehow for His glory, why should we praise Him for this fact?
 - i) If we believe in the true God of the universe, we don't have to worry about the size of our army. We still have to plan and prepare, as we don't always know the results of the battle.
 - e) The idea here is about praising God because He is more powerful than whatever forces we are facing against at the present moment. The idea is to remember that "God and us" make a majority and we don't have to fear the outcome of whatever we are facing.

17. Verse 18: But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,¹⁹ to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.
- a) A few verses ago, this psalm talked about how God created all people and somehow He has the ability to watch over every person. Then this psalm went on to say in effect that God already knows the outcome of any battle. He can lead anyone to victory, as long as that person or group is trusting in Him and it is His will to win that battle.
 - b) This leads us to Verses 18-19. The point here is that God somehow cares more for those people who do fear Him (that is, fear His wrath for disobedience). The idea is that God somehow cares more for those who trust in His love and His protection.
 - i) First of all, I don't know how God cares more for those who do trust in Him more than those who do not. I know it is true by living life and observing the world.
 - ii) If we can't comprehend how God does this (separates believers from nonbelievers) than we should just focus on our part and not try to figure out "His part". If God wanted us to know how He does that, He would let us know.
 - c) The important thing here in these verses is to remember that those who trust in God are protected. He loves us too much to allow us to suffer eternally.
 - d) Here's something else to remember: Those who trust in Jesus still suffer from horrible and fatal things. So how could these verses be true about deliverance all the time?
 - i) Remember that the Christian does not have to fear death. Death for the Christian is a victory party into a wonderful eternal life. Death for the nonbeliever is not only death in this lifetime, but also eternal death.
 - ii) I believe the underlying point of these verses is just that, those who trust in Jesus as payment for their sins have no reason to fear death, or famine or any other terrible thing. The worse thing that could happen to us is we die and get to be in the presence of God. What is that in comparison to suffering in this lifetime?
 - e) This leads us back to praising God. He is more than capable than rescuing us out of any and all situations we are facing. He can see us through that time, rescue us at any time and lead us to everlasting joy in heaven whenever He chooses (not when we choose).
 - f) You may find it interesting that if you die with a smile, that smile stays on your physical body after you are dead. A mortician cannot force your mouth in the "smile position" after you die. Christians started the practice of open casket funeral because so many of the early believers did die with smiles on their faces as they knew their ultimate fate.
 - i) The point for you and me is, if such Christians can have a smile on their faces despite the peril they faced, why do we worry about what we are dealing with?
 - ii) That too, is a reason for praising God and a point of these verses.
18. Verse 20: We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield.²¹ In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.²² May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you.
- a) The final three lines of the psalm say in effect, "We trust in God, because He loves us and He does help and protect us." We consider God to be special (which in effect is what holy means) and we don't take that relationship lightly. We understand God desires obedience and we do so fearing that His wrath can come down on us as well as unbelievers.
 - b) Let me sum up the psalm this way: We trust in a God who watches over all people and somehow separates those who do love Him from those who don't. We trust that He is watching over our lives and He can and does protect us from danger. We go through life not usually knowing what is going to happen, but we do know that the results are in "His hands" and therefore, since "we are His", we don't have to worry about the results.
 - c) In summary, we can praise Him because He is God, He does care for our lives, He does want to protect us, and He loves those who trust in His love and His forgiveness.
 - d) On that happy note, we are going to move on to Psalm 34.

19. Psalm 34 Introduction: Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left.
- a) As opposed to Psalm 33 that had no title, Psalm 34 was written by David and it gives the specific time in David's life when he wrote the psalm.
 - b) Let me give you a brief history lesson as to what was going on in David's life at this time.
 - i) David was not yet the King of Israel. He along with some followers, were on the run from King Saul, who was the King of Israel. King Saul wanted David dead as he feared that David would overthrow him. At one point when David was on the run he hid amongst the Philistines (an enemy of the Israelites). David did not want to go to war against the Israelites despite the fact that Saul wanted him dead. Therefore David pretended here to be a mad man, so the Philistine leaders would not include David amongst the men who would fight against Saul.
 - a) (This event is described in First Samuel 21, 13-15.)
 - ii) I have to admit I find it interesting that David considered it a reason to praise God when he pretended to be something he was not (insane). The question becomes, can we praise God when we are lying about who we are to someone? Yes, it got David off the hook for the moment, but does God condone lying in order to get out of situation? I will answer that question later in the psalm, so keep it in mind.
20. Verse 1: I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.
- a) Verse 1 says in effect that David will always be praising God. So if David just pretended to be insane, why would he start off by praising God? As best I can figure, it was because David was giving God the credit for not having to fight fellow Israelites.
 - b) The point is not the specifics of how God got David out of his mess, as much as it is to remind us that God does get us through our problems and issues. It is important for us to stop and praise God for being there and getting us through our "predicaments".
 - c) So why do we need to regularly praise God? Does He need to hear it? This isn't about God, but about us. By pausing to praise God for getting us through tough situations, it reminds us that He is there, He cares for us and it gets our focus upon Him.
 - i) Did David still have problems at this point? Of course. Saul is still trying to kill him. Think of it this way: Do you want to go through life praising God for what He has done, or constantly complain about what God hasn't done with problems that still exist? Having a positive attitude about what God has done at the least, gets us in a better mood to face what we still have to face.
21. Verse 2: My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.
- a) Let me ask what is our soul? How does our soul praise God differ from us praising God? Our soul is our inner being that will live forever. When we die, our soul is transferred into a new body that will live forever. The idea as it ties to this verse is that our bodies can only praise Him for a lifetime. Our souls can praise Him forever.
 - b) The second part of this verse leads back to my "be positive" speech of verse 1. One reason God wants us to be grateful for the good things and His victories in life are contagious. We've all heard the expression "misery loves company". Well, joy likes to be spread as well. If we are praising God for the good that is done, people around us would want to join in that happiness. People like to be around other positive people.
22. Verse 3: Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.
- a) Again, by showing joy to God, that is contagious and spreads to those around us. Verse 3 is encouraging us to join together in groups to praise God.
 - b) OK, why does God want that? Why does He in effect encourage group praise? Again, it is not for His benefit but for ours. It is about encouraging others to have a grateful attitude and a positive attitude that God will see us through our problems. David felt that sense of gratitude at this moment in his life and wanted that positive feeling to spread to others.

23. Verse 4: I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.
- a) This verse says that God delivered David from his fears. What were his fears at this moment? Possibly that the Philistines would kill David or make him fight against Saul.
 - i) More importantly, what are our fears right now? What is it we fear and if David can trust in God to deliver him from his fears, why do we doubt God can?
 - b) Notice this verse says David was delivered from all (note the word "all") of his fears.
 - i) What was David afraid of? Going back to the Psalm title, it probably has to do with living amongst the Philistines. David knew that God had rescued him from all (not some, but all) of his fears. If David can see God that way, so should we.
24. Verse 5: Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.
- a) How are those of us who trust in God "radiant"? It starts with the idea that God sees us in our future perfect state of existence. In effect we reflect the radiance that glows from Him. Getting our focus upon Him means in effect we are "shining" from being in His presence.
 - b) OK John, while you are explaining words, how are we not "covered with shame"? Again, the idea comes back to God seeing us in our future, perfected state. That is, God does not see us as people "covered in sin" that needs to be forgiven, God sees us as those who are forgiven because we trust in Him and are praising God for who He is.
 - i) When God sees believers praising Him, God sees a desire in our hearts to let Him be in charge. When Adam and Eve sinned, they choose for the first time to do their own will and not God's will. When we willfully choose God's will, we are in a sense, returning to do His desire for our lives. That is in effect, what makes us "radiant" in God's eyes toward us.
25. Verse 6: This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.
- a) Notice the word "this". It does not say "the" poor man called, but "this" man. David is talking about himself here. I don't think David was talking about his financial status, as much as he realized he was "poor" in the eyes of God. OK then, what does poor mean?
 - i) I believe the idea is we can't approach God with anything we can offer Him. We can't say to God, help me, and here is five dollars for your trouble. ☺
 - ii) Coming to God "poor" is to say in effect, we are coming to Him with nothing. We are asking God to help us not because we have something to offer Him, but just because He wants to. This is about remembering that God is a god of love, and He wants to help us just because He wants to and not because of anything we have to offer God in return. Even our desire to please Him does come from Him.
 - b) The point is to come to God "empty handed". That in effect is what David meant by poor. It is asking God to help us because He wants to, not because of what we have to give Him.
26. Verse 7: The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.
- a) OK, who or what is the "Angel of the LORD" (notice it is singular) and why should I care?
 - i) There are bible scholars who believe that specific term (the Angel of the Lord) refers to an Old Testament appearance of Jesus. Jesus didn't just begin existing under Joseph and Mary. If Jesus always existed, where was He in the Old Testament? The answer may be, that every now and then, the Old Testament mentions, "The (not "a", but "the") Angel of the Lord."
 - ii) The idea as it is used here is that Jesus protects those who fear God the Father. This reminds me of the Gospel of John, Chapter 10. In that chapter, there are references to Christians being both in "Jesus' hands and in God the Father's hands". I can't think of two safer places to be.
 - iii) Here in this verse, whoever this angel is, He is surrounding those who fear God and He delivers them. OK, John, how do you know that this verse is not describing say, the Holy Spirit, protecting and delivering believers? If this is "the" angel, isn't it possible that this is a term for the Holy Spirit? It is possible, but I like to stick to Jesus because it is our belief in Him that delivers us to heaven.

- b) So how would an Old Testament believer see this "Angel of the Lord"? Some of my religious Jewish friends believe it is just a term for God's presence protecting us. I can't buy off on that theory only because then the text would just say that the LORD himself (i.e., Jehovah) protecting and guiding us.
 - i) Because it is this special angel, I lean toward the view that is describing an Old Testament appearance of Jesus Himself. I could be wrong, but that is how I see it.
 - ii) If it is Jesus, why is He only an angel here? The idea is about doing God's will. It is not about being lower in status, just about His desire to do God the Father's will.
 - c) That phrase, "The Angel of the Lord" does appear a number of times in the New Testament, but never while Jesus was alive on the earth, only before and after that event.
27. Verse 8: Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.
- a) First of all, when David says to "taste and see", he is not being literal. It is somewhat like the idea of the expression, "devouring a book". We are not literally eating a book, but just studying it carefully. To study the bible carefully is in effect, "devouring it".
 - i) The other part of the idea here is about praying regularly. The whole idea of this verse is David is reminding us to seek God regularly.
 - ii) Remember that David is grateful to God at this moment because he was able to get away from the Philistines by pretending to be a mad man. Setting aside the issue of lying at the moment, David did depend on God to rescue Him. David believed that those who regularly sought God are blessed by Him and that is the point here.
28. Verse 9: Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.
- a) I have to admit, Verse 9 troubles me. It says that those who fear God "lack nothing". Yet, I know many Christians that lack all sorts of things.
 - i) So what does Verse 9 mean? It means that those who trust in God are eternally blessed whether they realize it or not. We may not know how God will get us out of every and all situations, but if it is His will for us to get through whatever we are going through, then we have to have faith it will get done.
 - b) Did David lack anything when he was living amongst the Philistines? Probably. David did realize it was not God's desire for him to be there at that time. God did provide a way for David to escape. David is showing his gratitude to God for getting him out of the mess David got himself into.
 - c) There are times when God has rescued us out of our trials, where we need to stop and thank Him for doing so. It is because we fear God (i.e., fear punishment for disobedience) that He blesses us. We need to trust in that when we are going through tough times and thank Him for His love after we have finished going through our trial of the moment.
29. Verse 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.
- a) Let me ask a strange question that does tie to Verse 10: How do lions die? How do they grow weak and hungry? I suspect that when lions get old, they are too old to hunt or if they are very weak, too old to join in the caught prey of other lions.
 - b) OK John, what does that have to do with us? The point of Verse 10 isn't about lions, but about us. The point is those who regularly seek God do not lack any good thing.
 - i) Think of it this way, if you feel you have nothing good to thank God for at the moment, thank Him that He thinks of us as people who lacking nothing. But you may say, I lack a lot of things I desire at the moment. The text does not say we lack what we desire. The text says we don't lack what is not a good thing.
 - ii) OK, so what is this "good thing"? It is our ability to understand who God is, what is His plans for our eternal life (i.e., our salvation) and understanding that He does watch over our lives and intervenes in our lives for His glory. If you get that concept, but still are suffering due to the circumstances of one's life, then we still can praise Him and that is the point of this verse.

- c) Now I can move on to Verse 11. The reason this verse is here is not about passing on the ideas about God The Father to our children, as important as that is. It is that God considers each of us believers as His children. The idea is if we are willing to stick close to God, He will teach us what we need to learn. If we do commit ourselves to regular study of His word, He does promise to teach us what we need to learn about life.
30. Verse 12: Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, ¹³ keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. ¹⁴ Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.
- a) First of all, Verse 12 does not promise that if one seeks God, one is guaranteed to live to an old age. That is not what these verses are saying.
- b) The verse is saying in effect that if one wants to live a good life (whatever length that is), then we should avoid what is evil and not seek lies. Turn our lives to God and pursue Him. That will give us the peace we desire in our lives, not our circumstances.
- c) Let me now ask the tough question about David. He wrote this psalm after faking being insane in order to escape from the Philistines. In Verse 13 David says "don't lie" (at the end of the verse). Didn't David lie (in effect) by pretending to be insane?
- i) For starters, if David didn't move into Philistine territory in the first place, he would not have been in that mess, so David has no one to blame but himself.
- ii) There are times in our lives where one can lie "for a greater good". For example, if in a time of war, we were assigned to live amongst the enemy, we may have to lie about ourselves in order to accomplish a mission. It is "lying for the greater good".
- iii) In my job, I occasionally have to lie about my purpose as an appraiser. A property owner may tell me to not tell the tenants about the purpose of being there (e.g., don't tell them the property is being sold). In such cases, I avoid the question if asked, but sometimes I have to lie to a tenant as per the request of my client.
- iv) Does that make lying OK? No it does not. However, there are times where God tolerates a lie for a greater good. I believe that is the case with David and the Philistines and at times it is acceptable our lives if such a lie is for a greater good.
- d) This does lead me back to these three verses. The last paragraph described times of exceptions, not the rules. We should not let our exceptions rule over other aspects of our lives. The verses teach in effect, that God desires us to be truth tellers, to seek His peace and do what is good. If we want people to believe what we say about God, then it is essential in life to be "truth tellers".
31. Verse 15: The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; ¹⁶ the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.
- a) In these two verses, we have an "either or" statement. Often in biblical poetry (remember the psalms are poetry), it contrasts two ideas. Those who seek God get His attention and His mercy while those who don't (the "either or" situation) get "cut off from Him".
- b) Let's start with the negative concept first and get that out of the way: Verse 16 says the face of God (The LORD) is against those who do evil and cut off the memory of them.
- i) Most of us know that there are times when those who do evil, get away with it. Why does God allow that to happen? The answer is that God somehow uses that evil for His glory. The key point is that God does not such evil to exist forever. Such people are judged and get to spend eternity away from the presence of God. Since that is what they sought in this lifetime, that is what they get for eternity.
- ii) Here's a difficult example: Why did God allow Hitler and the Germans to kill millions of Jewish people? The good that came out of it was that it got the Jewish people back to their homeland. That does not make up for all of those who lost their lives, but it does show that some good does come out of situations that were intent for evil. So why does God allow mass murders to happen? I can't explain such evil. I just know that such evil does exist in the world and I trust that God has reasons for allowing such evil to exist in this world.

- c) OK, enough suffering. ☺ Let's get back to the positive aspects of these verses. Verse 15 says in effect that God is constantly watching over those who do trust in Him and He does respond to our cries for help.
 - i) These verses do not say that those who trust in God won't go through trials or difficult times. It just says that God is aware of our situations and He does pull us through them if we trust that He is doing so.
 - d) The point of these two verses is not that those who trust in God avoid suffering. The point is those who trust in God can count on Him to rescue us through such times. That rescue may come at death or it may come in this lifetime. The point is we can count on God to rescue us and for that reason we should show gratitude to Him.
32. Verse 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 A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;
- a) Verse 17 says in effect that those who trust in God (called the "righteous" here) are delivered from all of their troubles. In my bible, I underlined the word "all". No matter how bad the situation is we face, we can trust that God will rescue us. The rescue usually comes in this lifetime but there are also cases where it does come from our death.
 - b) We may not know how God will get us through our situation of the moment. We still have to do all we can to get through it on our own. We don't know how God is going to work. We still have to plan and go forward, trusting the results are in His hands. In short, we do what we can and trust God for the results.
 - c) With that positive thought in mind, let us look at Verse 18. It says that God is close to those who are "brokenhearted" and those who are "crushed in spirit".
 - i) What that tells me is that Christians are not immune from problems. God still allows us to go through tough situations. God is there with us through those trials whether we feel His presence or not. As I have taught in the past couple of lessons, we can thank God that He will get us through our problems. We can count on that fact and show gratitude to Him to lead us through our problems.
 - d) Verse 19 summarizes the main thought of this section. It says in effect that we may not know how God will rescue us, but He will. That is a promise we can count on.
33. Verse 20: he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.
- a) Verse 20 finishes the thought of this section. This verse says that God protects all of his (our) bones. The text says that not one of them will be broken. This line is commonly tied to Jesus and I'll explain why that is in a moment.
 - b) First, let's talk about this verse and us. Is this verse saying that none of our bones will ever be broken? Hardly. The idea here is that we can count on eternal life with God in an always-healthy eternal state, no matter what physical damage we deal with in this life.
 - c) Now more importantly, let's talk about how this verse ties to Jesus:
 - i) As best we can tell, Jesus never suffered any broken bones.
 - ii) When Jesus was hanging on the cross along with other criminals, Pilate ordered Jesus' legs to be broken on the cross in order to speed up their death. The soldier ordered to break Jesus' legs ignored that order as Jesus was already dead. (See John 19:33). The point is the soldier could have still carried out that order, but didn't. I don't believe the soldier did it to fulfill prophecy about Jesus' bones.
 - iii) Why is it important that none of Jesus' bones are broken? To understand, one has to understand the sacrificial lambs in the annual Jewish celebration of Exodus. Moses commanded that when lambs are slaughtered to remember that event none of the bones are to be broken. (See Exodus 12:46 or Numbers 9:12.) Yes it signifies how Jesus died, but it also reminds us how God preserves us even through our death. That is the symbolic idea being portrayed here.

34. Verse 21: Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned.
- a) The idea of the first half of this verse is that the evil done by those who don't care about pleasing God will be their downfall. What is the purpose of this verse? The idea is that those who don't care about God will be condemned. We can count on that fact as much as we can count on our own salvation.
 - i) The idea of condemnation is about being sent to hell. The idea is that those who don't care about God in this lifetime get to continue that desire forever.
 - b) Let me pick a tough issue here: What about those who have done evil all their life and then they truly commit their lives to Jesus on their deathbed? I do believe they are saved, because God loves us so much He is willing to forgive all of our sins if we desire to spend eternity in His presence. Such people may not have many rewards in heaven, but I believe they are saved. What about punishment in this lifetime? I believe they should still suffer in this lifetime, but forgiveness is up to the person or the society they have hurt. Since they are asking God for forgiveness, that is His business and not ours.
35. Verse 22: The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.
- a) Sometimes I wonder why God has me write paragraphs like the last one. Then I read the next verse and see how it fits in perfectly. The point is no one is turned away from God who is truly willing to seek Him and have all of one's sins paid for through Jesus.
 - b) Let me end this with another tough question: If God forgives us of all of our evil deeds (if we seek Him at anytime), why don't we wait until the last moment to turn to Jesus?
 - i) The short answer is we may die in a way that we don't get a chance to do that.
 - ii) The other answer is that life is much more enjoyable if we turn to Him now as opposed to the last possible moment. Living for God now, gives us a purpose for living that is far greater than everything one can think of in this lifetime. Caring about God includes the desire to please Him as much as possible all the time.
36. In summary, this whole lesson has been about praising God. There are a few mentions about those who turn from Him, but most of the text focuses on why we should praise God. That is, what reason is there for us to praise Him?
- a) If I had to state the key point to remember here, it is that no matter how bad our situations get or how good our situation gets, we have to remember that God is in charge of our lives. He wants to guide us if we are willing to let Him and He wants our lives to turn out for His (not our) glory, no matter the length of our life or no matter what we think we did or should have accomplished. That right there, is a great reason to praise Him!
 - b) Let me end this lesson another way: I can't think of a reason for living greater than making a difference for God through our lives. I can't find a purpose for living (believe me I have tried) that compares with that goal. Obviously, there are millions of ways we can live to make a difference for Him. The point is to plan and consider our lives with that thought in mind. The point is we should pray and should study God's word with the thoughts of how we can be pleasing to Him. If we can do that, and be willing to turn our lives over to Him, I promise that God will work through our lives to fulfill that goal.
37. Let's pray: Father, may we never fail to give you the praise. May we never be so "down" that we fail to see the good that You are doing in our lives. May our praise of You always and regularly be a part of our lives. May we see Your hand at work in both the good and bad times of our lives. May we give You all the glory as You work through us to make a difference for You in the world around us. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.