

The LORD redeems His servants

Ps. 34: 1, 3

Ps. 65: 2

Ps. 34: 6 – 9

Ps. 69: 10 – 12

Ps. 40: 1, 7

Scripture reading: 1 Sam. 18: 5 – 9; 21: 10 – 22: 2; Psalm 34

Text: Psalm 34: 15 – 22

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

“Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” (1 Sam. 18: 7)

These were the words that the women sang when Israel was celebrating victory over the Philistines. It was the words of this song that triggered Saul’s jealousy. From that day onward Saul was looking for an opportunity to kill David (1 Sam. 18: 9, 11).

Finally Saul became so determined to kill David, that David concludes that it will be safer for him among the Philistines than among his own people. And he flees to Gath, a Philistine city. The Philistines, however, recognise David, seize him, and bring him to their king, Achish. This Philistine king, like the rest of these kings, was called with the official title Abimelech, which means: “my father, the king”, but his personal name was Achish, as we read in 1 Samuel 21.

Now, David is brought before Abimelech and he fears; for hear what the men are saying:

“Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying: ‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.’”?

Humanly speaking David has no chance of escape. The Philistines counted him as their biggest enemy. They suffered great losses at his hand. It would not enter anyone’s mind that the Philistine king might save David’s life. Not even David’s trick, to play the role of a mad man before Abimelech, would help him anything.

No, David’s escape was clearly the doing of the LORD alone.

And David acknowledges this. With great thankfulness He praises the Lord for His mercy and faithfulness towards those who fear Him.

At the same time David makes use of this incident as an example of the Lord’s faithfulness and mercy to strengthen all those who fear the LORD and who call on Him to deliver them from their misery and afflictions.

And so, from these verses, I proclaim God’s Word to you with the theme:

Happy are those who fear the LORD

We will note:

1. That the Lord is near the righteous and against the evildoers
2. That the righteous man suffers many afflictions
3. That the Lord redeems the soul of His servants

In the first place we note that...

The Lord is near the righteous and against the evildoer

Dear congregation, when we are experiencing affliction and sorrow we tend to think that the Lord has forgotten us. Why else would the Lord let all this happen to me? If the Lord cares for me, why do I have to suffer all this? Has He not forgotten me? Why doesn’t He answer my prayers?

Does He still hear my groaning and my cry for help?

It can be a very hard test for our faith when it seems as if everything is going wrong and as if the Lord has withdrawn His protection from us.

Think of David. He writes this psalm after the LORD delivered him, but, **before** his deliverance there was a whole series of events that made him a refugee fleeing for his life. He became so desperate to escape from the unreasonable wrath of Saul that he sought safety in Philistia among the Philistines! And then he fell into the hands of king Achish. That was as good as a death sentence.

There could be no hope of escape anymore.

Has the LORD forgotten him? Could the LORD not have prevented this? Why do the LORD hand him over into the hand of his enemy?

Brothers and sisters, we have not experienced the same trials as David, but we know by experience how doubts can arise in our heart when it **seems** to us as if the Lord has withdrawn His protection and care from us, when everything seems to be against us, and everything seems to go wrong, until we have no hope of recovery anymore.

It is in such a situation that the comfort of this psalm becomes very precious to us:

“The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry” –
verse 15

These words cause us to persevere patiently. The Lord has **not** forgotten us; even when our case seems to be hopeless. His eyes are fixed on us and his ears open to our cry. He watches over us every moment, and very closely.

In this psalm David also contrasts this comfort and blessedness of the righteous with the hopeless state of evildoers.

“The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth” – verse 16.

Now, these words are also quoted in the New Testament. The apostle Peter wrote to believers who suffered many tribulations and said to them:

“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous, not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For ‘He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil’ – 1 Peter 3: 10 – 12.

The apostle Peter quotes Psalm 34: 12 – 16. The apostle Peter is saying that if we have compassion for one another and love one another as brothers, if we are tenderhearted and courteous, not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary bless those who persecute us, then we will inherit the blessing of which Psalm 34 speaks.

For the Lord will protect the righteous and deliver him, but the wicked He will destroy.

If we do not retaliate or repay evil with evil, but flee to God for help, then **He** will be our avenger and destroy our adversaries.

Yes, the apostle Peter understood Psalm 34 correctly and applied it in a situation where believers were persecuted and suffered unjustly. If they do not repay evil with evil, but entrust themselves to the Lord, they will inherit the blessing of which David spoke in this Psalm. For the Lord **does** hear the cry of the righteous; and He will destroy our enemies.

While the Lord watches over the righteous and delivers him, He at the same time acts against the evildoers to wipe them from the earth, and even wipes away their remembrance from the earth – verse 16.

Now, David, when he wrote this psalm, was still a young man, and yet he can testify that the Lord delivers the righteous as often as we cry to Him. It does not happen once only, or twice, but as often as we cry to Him.

Note how he says it in verse 17:

“The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles.”

It is a simple statement. When the righteous cry out, the LORD hears and delivers.

It does not apply only to this one instance where David escaped from king Achish, but it is given as a doctrine that applies to all times. God is not deaf when we cry out to Him.

Dear congregation, this instruction is meant to encourage us to trust in the Lord and to persevere in prayer, for the Lord will hear the cries of His children.

“The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit” – verse 18.

Yes, the righteous man, the man who fears the LORD, is also characterised by this that he is broken hearted and contrite of spirit. His broken heart and contrite spirit is not a natural attribute, but something that develops as he suffers many and severe trials.

It is a severe trial when the grace of God seems to be delayed, when we experience no deliverance for a long time until our spirit begins to fail, when humanly speaking there is no hope of recovery or escape.

But, brothers and sisters, it is in such circumstances that the power of the LORD shines forth more clearly, when He raises us from the grave, so to speak.

Such trials are even necessary. We need to be afflicted and to be cast down utterly in order that we, when our breath returns, may breathe in God alone.

Brothers and sisters, you who are broken hearted – you who have a contrite spirit, you who are suffering various trials, you who have been humiliated and prostrated in the dust by many and severe afflictions – know for sure that the Lord is near you.

“The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit” – verse 18.

Your afflictions and miseries are not something strange, but come from the hand of your faithful Father who trains you in true godliness. Because He loves you, therefore your afflictions are many in this life.

We note that in the second place, that...

The righteous man suffers many afflictions

The Holy Spirit makes a clear distinction in this Psalm between the righteous man and the evildoer. But what is the difference? Does the Lord work in such a way that the righteous man experience no calamity or sorrow, while the evildoer meets only misery? No, not at all! On the contrary, in this life the righteous man suffers often more than the wicked!

We share not only in the common sorrow and misery of living on an earth that has been cursed by God because of sin, but we also suffer the hatred and persecution of the world. Moreover, the LORD chastises those whom He loves so that we often experience the rod of His discipline which serves our sanctification.

Yes, in this life our tears are often more than the sorrows of the ungodly.

How can this be? If God cares for the righteous, why then does the righteous suffer so many calamities and trials? Such questions can easily shake our faith if we fail to understand that the LORD uses various trials and temptations to sanctify us and to cause us to mature in the faith, in order that we may learn more and more to live by His grace alone.

The LORD does hear our cries, and protect us, but not in such a way that we are not exposed to many miseries. In fact, we need many trials to exercise us in the faith.

Every time when we experience a new trial, we tend to think: this time there is no answer; this time there is no way in which things can turn out well again; and every time the LORD puts to shame our small faith. After each deliverance we have to acknowledge once more: Yes, also this time the LORD heard. And so, through many trials we learn to trust the Lord more and more, as we experience each time His deliverance and His care for us again and again.

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all”
– verse 19.

Dear congregation, if we were exempted of every kind of trial our faith would not be exercised and would become idle. Then we would cease to call upon God and we would not come to know Him as we should.

And if we were afflicted very seldom, then it would also be seldom that we experience the Lord’s deliverance. But the more we are afflicted, the more we experience – time and again – the deliverance of the LORD.

If we were delivered from great affliction only once or twice, then we could easily think that it was “good luck”, but when it happens over and over again that we are in deep waters and the waves are over our head, then the faithfulness of the LORD becomes all the more clear to us when we see that He does indeed never leave or forsake us, but carries us through and delivers us time and again.

Yes, David was still a young man, but when he spoke these words through the Spirit, he already experienced it since his youth. He experienced it with the lion and the bear, with Goliath and with Saul, and he would continue on this training course of the LORD until the end of his life.

His whole life portrays the truth of these words:

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him **out of them all**”

When we turn through the pages of Scripture we see that David was no exception in this regard. All the saints of God went through the same training school as they were taught to put their trust in God always and in Him alone.

When David proceeds to say that the LORD guards all his bones and that not one of them is broken, the meaning is the same as where Christ said:

“...the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore...”
(Luke 12: 7)

We also know that the apostle John, in his description of Christ’s crucifixion, said that the soldiers broke the legs of the two men who were crucified with Christ, but that they did not break the legs of Christ, and that these things happened in this way in order that:

“...the Scripture should be fulfilled, ‘Not one of His bones shall be broken’” –
John 19: 36

That text refers of course to the Passover lamb. Not one of the bones of the Passover lamb may be broken. And since Christ was **the** Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5: 7), the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1: 29) not one of His bones would be broken.

But this word is also fulfilled in Christ, when it says of the righteous man that the LORD guards all his bones, and that not one of His bones will be broken. For Christ is **the** Righteous One – with a capital letter. He is the Righteous One in the absolute sense of the word, the Holy One of God. Only those who are in Him are counted righteous before God.

Scripture calls those righteous who live righteous lives, but we have to remember that there is no obedience to God except in and through Christ. It is in Him that we are called righteous, and it is through His sanctifying work in us that also our lives become righteous.

He is then also the guarantee that not one of our bones will be broken – at least if we are found in Him. In **Him** we are safe.

God will protect all those who trust in **Him**.

When he says that the Lord guards the bones of the righteous and that not one of them will be broken, it has the same meaning as when Christ said: the very hairs of your head are all numbered, therefore, do not fear. Even if we have to die for the sake of Christ, then still not one hair will fall from our head without the will of our Father. Even in our worst affliction, yes, even in death, we remain safe.

We note that in the last place, that...

The LORD redeems the soul of his servants

The contrast between the righteous and the wicked continues.

“Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous shall be condemned. The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned” – verses 21 and 22.

The wickedness of the wicked will come down on their own heads. Their own wickedness will destroy them. When they fall, they perish. In the day of visitation the wicked will not be delivered. Their destruction is sure, because they stand guilty before God. The LORD Himself condemns them, therefore they will not escape.

But the righteous man is blessed. When David goes free, when he escapes from the hand of king Achish, he sees this as a proof of God’s favour. He may go free, because the LORD does not condemn him. He has found favour with God, therefore the LORD delivers him from his enemies (Psalm 41: 11).

The LORD’s favour towards him is confirmed every time again when he sees and tastes the LORD’s deliverance.

We already noted how these words, which the LORD spoke through David, have its ultimate fulfilment in Christ. Christ was not condemned by God. His resurrection is a proof of His innocence and righteousness and that He found favour with God. Therefore God did not leave His soul in Sheol, but received His soul in Paradise.

Yes, it is only in and through Christ that our soul is saved.

We have a foretaste of this deliverance and salvation of the LORD now already, and experience many tokens of God's favour in the way that He preserves us in this life, yet it is at the same time true that we are still waiting for His final deliverance on the day of Christ's coming. Then these words will find their final and complete fulfilment:

“The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.”

On that day we will go free, while our enemies will be condemned.

We experience the Lord's deliverance now already, time and again, but ultimately our eyes are fixed on that one great day of deliverance when Christ will appear on the clouds of heaven.

Brothers and sisters, let us then, in the midst of many trials and afflictions in this life – by which the LORD tests and exercises our faith – put our trust in Him who promised to hear our cries.

Are you afflicted? Are you humiliated and despised? Are you suffering under the jealousy or hatred of false brethren? Is your spirit failing under a trial that seems to have no end? Hear what the LORD proclaims to you:

“The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.”

The history of David's life is set before us as a clear picture. How often did he come close to the grave; how often was he driven to despair! But he cried to the Lord, and out of every affliction the Lord delivered him.

Do you experience this that the righteous man suffers *many* afflictions?

Let us then, trusting in the Lord and in His promises, humble ourselves before Him and pray for His help.

And for the sake of Christ, our Lord and Saviour, He will hear and deliver us.

Amen.