

## Praise for deliverance from trouble: Psalm 34

Reader Mark Hackney has chosen Psalm 34 for today's Thought for the Day.



*O taste and see that the Lord is gracious:  
Blessed are those who put their trust in Him.*

Just at the moment, it would be safe to say that we are not living in the easiest, most comfortable of times. Something of an understatement. As I type, I am crafting this reflection on Saturday the 6th of February 2021. It is seven-thirty in the morning, dark, raining hard, and I have just sifted through the online news for the day. Of course, Covid and its numerous implications dominate.

So, what a timely joy it is to reflect upon the wonderful Psalm 34!

It is not always an easy road we walk in life, is it? As we know all too well, there will be obstacles on the path, difficulties on the road.

Have you ever read the book or seen the film ‘The Lord of the Rings’? The hobbit Frodo Baggins decries the fact that he is tasked with the responsibility of taking the one ring to Mount Doom to be destroyed. His road ahead to the dark land of Mordor

feels too much for him to bear. He is afraid and daunted. Frodo says, 'I wish the Ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened.' The wise wizard Gandalf, given these words by the Catholic author JRR Tolkien, replies to Frodo: 'So do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.'

Well, Psalm 34, with its praise for God's deliverance from trouble, tells us exactly what to do in *our* current time: it suggests we cry out in praise of our loving God. Verse 4 tells the psalmist's story of having sought YHWH in times of fear, proclaiming that YHWH answered cries and '*delivered me from all my fears.*' This can be our experience too: God invites us all, as followers of God, to live together with the utmost assurance.

The entire psalm is an acrostic poem in which twenty-two verses each begin with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. For us, we may regard it as a representation of God's surrounding love and protection that encompasses us from A to Z. Though we face challenging times, we are reminded that, as people of faith, we are never alone or abandoned.

Whilst God might not take our troubles away, God gives us an option for how we live with our troubles. As Carolyn Waters reminds us, most clear in the words of the psalmist is the foundational belief in God:

"When we believe in our God, worship our God, sing praise to our God, bring all that is life to our God, and have a relationship with our God – then God is most real and makes the most difference in who we are and how we are in the world."

The psalmist seeks God and finds God. The psalmist cries out and is answered. The psalmist is proactive and his faith expects an answer from God. During hard days relief is given.

We are invited to confront our worries, indeed defeat the very word '*fear*' itself. We can transition from the colloquial meaning for the word, (*terror*, verse 4), and switch to a more powerful interpretation of '*fear*' (fear of God – *reverence*, verse 7). Thus, to fear, to mark, God drives out the fear of anything else.

*'7 The angel of the Lord encamps  
around those who fear him, and delivers them.'*

This reassures us when faced with the difficulties of life. It might not always be immediately apparent, but there is One behind the scenes, far more in touch than us with what is going on. God's eyes see far more of our situation than we are aware of ourselves. God's love encircles us.

In fact, I am touched especially by the psalm's appeal to our sense of taste:

*'8 O taste and see that the Lord is good;  
happy are those who take refuge in him.'*

We do not merely theorise about God's love, regard it as a future hope, we experience it *now* in the most intimate manner: we can taste it. God's sweet, wholesome love is like the sweetest honey, a ripe piece of fruit. The psalmist tempts us to try, to search-out, this love by cleverly referencing one of our most delightful senses. And as we eat in a daily, regular fashion, so too may we experience God's love.

We need both to sustain us.

Let us pray,

O Lord, to be turned from you is to fall, to turn to you is to rise,

And to stand in your presence is to live for ever.

Grant in us in all our duties your help,

In all our complexities your guidance,

in all our dangers your protection,

And in all our sorrows your peace;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Mark Hackney

10th February 2021