

### **Psalm 34 – The LORD Hears! (part 3 of 3)**

**V. The Way to be Heard (vs. 13-16)** – When a believer like David comes under severe persecution and great turmoil of soul, he does not need to sin, for no one can make a believer sin unless he chooses to sin. Not even Satan can make a believer sin. Satan can only do his best to tempt, but if the believer does not want to sin he will not sin. This victory belongs only to believers and not to unbelievers who are in bondage of sin! Thus, David shared that the believer must keep his tongue from evil. The word "keep" is to guard in the sense of preserving it. He must stop himself from saying something sinful or evil. This is within his power with the help of the Holy Spirit who indwells him. He can bite his tongue and refrain from saying anything, because the moment the sinful, hurtful or unbiblical words come out of his mouth, the words will condemn him! It will reveal the sin in his heart. To be able to keep his mouth shut is a man who is able to control his emotions and he is a mature believer. Very often words are more deadly than the bullet or the arrow. These instruments of war kill only the body but the harmful words of man have "killed" millions of relationships. It is easier to conquer a fortified city than to mend a broken relationship between two brothers! It is sad but very true, for all of us have not only seen this in others but tragically have experienced it in our own lives.

Using synonymous parallelism, David highlighted the weakness of man and the power of the tongue over sinful man, even over the believer's witness and testimony. Believers must guard their lips so that what comes out of their mouths in times of great adversity is not a transgression.

**Verse 14** (synthetic parallelism) – Believers must depart from evil. The reference here is to the evil words that could come out of their mouths because of the trial they are going through now. The believer must turn away from it like turning his back on sin. This is the essence of the meaning of the verb "depart." Turning away from evil is not enough as he must now turn toward good. The problem with the sinful world is that they turn away from evil because of certain penalties or the law but for them to do good will be a hard task. Not for the believer though. He can refrain from sinning with his lips and at the same time he is able to do good to the person who is causing him grief! He does not wish him evil but only good. The "good" here is defined by the Word of God. The believer wants his persecutor to repent and he prays that God will show him mercy so that his eyes might be opened to the truth. Best of all is for his persecutor to become a believer. This is the goodness that the believer must do in reciprocation to the wrong that has been done to him. The reason is that this was what Christ did for him and now as an ambassador for Christ he must do the same for other sinners who are persecuting him in obedience to the Word of Christ!

This truth is reinforced by the use of synthetic parallelism. The believer is commanded by the LORD to seek after peace at all costs. All the four verbs used here are in the imperative

which is a command and not an option for the believer to choose to obey or not. He is commanded by God to obey a non-negotiable truth as he is put here on earth by his God to do His will. It is God's will for him to suffer for Christ's sake! He must seek until he finds. This means that he must persist and continue to seek peace with his enemy no matter how long it takes and how his enemy might resist. The believer must not give up but persevere on till he succeeds. The next verb "pursue" is even stronger, for it is a word that is sometimes translated as "to persecute." The believer does not seek peace with a lacklustre attitude but with a fierce desire to run after peace, like a man running after someone he wants to catch! Therefore the believer is to seek peace by doing good to those who persecute him and is to persevere in this until he succeeds for Christ's sake.

**Verse 15** (synthetic parallelism) – In order to do the above, the believer has to die to self. His pride and self must cease to exist. Thanks be to God that this is not done by the strength of man because it is impossible with man. This is done by the transforming power of the work of God's salvation in Christ in every believer's life. In other words, this "impossible" task of seeking peace at all costs is the norm for every truly born again believer and not for a few "super" believers who are non-existent. This is God's work and not man's. The phrase, "the eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous", means that the LORD allows persecution to fall upon all believers who serve Him on the earth. When persecution comes, the believer must see the hand of God in the persecution and not the hand of the persecutor. This will not only soften the blow upon him as he endures the suffering, he can do so with sincere and heartfelt joy in his soul without murmuring and complaining, i.e. committing sin with his lips! The righteous refers to believers only. They are God's children. God their heavenly Father will never hurt them or allow them to be hurt unless it is for their spiritual good! This is always God's intent. He wants His children to experience in their hearts that they will not only trust in Him and obey His Word when things are fine but more so when things on earth are not fine. This is the priceless kind of faith and trust all believers need to have in their spiritual bank! The more severe the trial, the greater will be the blessing in terms of their experiential faith, when they come out victorious in Christ.

God knows that in times of trial and great persecution His children will pray to Him for help. Therefore He promises them in this verse, using synthetic parallelism, that He will hear their prayers. His ears are always open to their cry. The word "cry" means to cry for help. The persecution has been used and allowed by the LORD to drive His children closer to Him in a manner that no other way can accomplish. It is true that believers will go to God in times of blessings and thanksgiving, like after the completion of the Temple! But the experience of running to God for help in times of pain is ten times sweeter and better and definitely more impactful to the believer's faith! That is why the believers in the book of Acts were able to say in **Acts 5:41** (KJV), "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." The LORD's

help will not be late so that the believer is crushed under the load. The LORD's help will not be early so that the believer does not see it is God's hand that has delivered and sustained him throughout the trial. The LORD's help will be just in time so that the believer cannot miss knowing the hand of God has succoured him in his time of need. This will enable the believer to praise the LORD from within his heart. His prayer life is deepened in the process. His spiritual bank is enlarged as he has just deposited into it a very sizable experience!

**Verse 16** (synthetic parallelism) – The ones who continue to do evil, who will not repent and will not accept the gift of peace offered to them by the believers whom they persecuted will face the anger of the LORD. Believers have to trust in the LORD to avenge. Their duty on earth as they witness for Christ is not to retaliate but to seek peace at all costs. In this way the light of Christ will shine the brightest! This does not mean that the evil ones who continue to do evil will get away with their evil. The LORD will deal with them in His time. They will be without excuse when they are judged and are found guilty before the LORD. The love and goodness reciprocated by the believers which the evil men repudiate and reject will also be held against them by the LORD. These evil men have no one to blame but themselves when they are sentenced by the LORD to spend eternity in hell for their many transgressions. They were so close to heaven when the gospel was shared with them as evidenced by the believers' testimony and words! Any temporal retaliation that the believers mete out, which they are not supposed to do, cannot be compared with the judgement of the LORD on the last day!

Using synthetic parallelism, the LORD says through David's writing that He will "cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." Men of pomp and power believe that they will be remembered by many because of their monuments and records of "great" deeds on earth. They are in for a rude shock. They will all be erased by the LORD. Instead, they will be quickly forgotten from the record of time together with everything on this earth. The LORD will destroy everything on this earth in His time. This earth is reserved for destruction by fire, and when the fire sweeps over the face of the earth, all things made by sinful man today that seem to possess the illusion of eternity will be turned to ashes. Nothing of sinful man will be left behind. They will all be forgotten. This is what the LORD will do to those who attack God's children and hinder God's work on earth!

**VI. The Protection of Being Heard (vs. 17-22)** – The LORD will hear all His children's cry for help. The LORD is not like the idols whose ears cannot hear! It is important that God's children learn to cry to Him for help in time of need. Of course, believers would not go out their way to look for trouble. But when trouble comes because of their faithful witness for Christ, then they must stand firm and strong and must not be moved at all. They must continue to do what is right at all times especially in the face of persecution. Their rule of faith and practice will always be the Bible. They trust in their heavenly Father with regard to

the outcome of all their experiences and circumstances in life. The LORD promises His people that He always hears them.

When He hears, He delivers. He will deliver them out of their troubles no matter what the troubles are. This is His sovereign promise! Believers need to understand what God means by His "deliverance." His deliverance always refers to His people ending up in heaven, no matter what evil men may do to them. Their salvation in Christ is secured. All of God's children will be found in heaven. God's deliverance does not mean that when His children are arrested and put in prison, angels will come and deliver them all out of prison. God can do that at times if He so chooses, but it does not mean that He must. It does not always mean that when believers are thrown into the lion's den, the lions will not devour the believers; for many were devoured by lions in Roman times. It does not mean that when they are crucified on the cross they will not die and will be delivered from crucifixion! Many thousands were crucified for their faith during Roman times, during the first three hundred years after the birth of the local church until Constantine turned Christianity into a respectable state religion in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Physical death is part of life for all man including all believers who serve the LORD on earth. If they suffer and die for Christ, they must not see death as a punishment but as going home to their heavenly Father. Can God deliver His people physically, like what He did for Daniel (cf. Daniel 6) and Daniel's three friends (Daniel 3) who were thrown into the fiery furnace and were not consumed? Of course he can. If the work of God's children on earth is not done yet, the LORD will keep them and deliver them physically until their work is completed. When their work is done for Christ, then the LORD will allow them to "die" and go home to be with Him. When they go home, they are also delivered from their troubles, for nothing on earth can hurt them anymore!

**Verse 18** (synonymous parallelism) – The LORD assures all believers in times of trouble that He is always near them even though no man is. He will never desert them. His people will never have to go through their trials alone. God's invisible and abiding presence will always be by the believer's side! A broken heart is the most painful experience in this earthy life of service. As Spurgeon said, an engineer can still build bridges and buildings with a broken heart and a doctor can still operate with a broken heart; but how can a believer serve with a broken heart or a preacher preach with a broken heart? Is not his heart his instrument of ministry when he brings the gospel to a sinner? That is why the LORD promises here that He is nigh unto them who have a broken heart! Cry to the LORD and He will comfort and care and heal the broken heart! The heart can only be touched by the LORD. It belongs to the LORD alone. That is why it is so very assuring that the one living and true God promises all His beloved children who are going through life's difficulties as they witness for Christ on earth to rest in Him. He will strengthen and heal all broken hearts!

Using synonymous parallelism, the LORD says that He will save them as they have a contrite, i.e. crushed, spirit. He is near them and therefore he will save them out of it. The LORD knows His children's emotional needs more than they know their own. When their spirits are crushed, i.e. humbled, by the trial, the LORD's purpose is accomplished. He wants His children to draw nigh unto Him. When God's children are going through smooth pathways, they become complacent and their dependence on God is lukewarm and lacks the intensity that only trials can garner. Thank God for trials in the lives of His children, designed by the LORD to draw all believers closer to Him and not farther away. There is no other way but the way of trials. This is also taught in the NT. **James 1:2-4** (KJV), "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; **3** Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. **4** But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." When the LORD saves believers who have a contrite heart, it means that He will lift up their spirits and they will continue to trust in Him by not sinning, especially their lips! They will continue to do good to their enemies as the LORD enables them.

**Verse 19** (antithetical parallelism) – The afflictions of believers are many. This is a statement of fact that all believers must accept and recognize. Before salvation all mankind will suffer afflictions in this sin cursed world. There are no exceptions to suffering on earth till death. This is a reminder of their sin and their end which is death. However, after salvation believers will suffer for a very different reason with a totally different outcome. They now suffer for Christ when they witness for Him on earth by sharing the gospel and living a holy life. They were not able to suffer for Christ before salvation because they were enemies of God. Now as God's children, they can. This kind of suffering which is permitted by the LORD will strengthen their faith and draw them closer to the LORD through prayer and praise! This will enhance their life on earth which the LORD Jesus Christ calls the abundant life on earth, after salvation. Therefore there will be many afflictions for the righteous. They will only end when it is time to go home to be with the LORD or when rapture takes place! This should be expected by all believers so that when afflictions come they will not be shocked or overwhelmed.

The scope of the LORD's deliverance is total and complete . . . He says He will deliver His children from all of their afflictions! This is guaranteed by the LORD. Using antithetical parallelism, the LORD highlights to all believers that He will deliver (the same verb as in verse 17) them out of them all. He will do this either by way of physical deliverance or by way of death which for the believer is to go home to heaven to be with Him. Either way, believers will be delivered from all afflictions on earth!

**Verse 20** (synonymous parallelism) – When David wrote this verse, he did not know that it was meant to be a type of Christ. The description here is of Christ perfectly; in the NT this verse is in John 19:36 when Christ was on the cross till death. The LORD will keep His

children safe from unnecessary hurt and harm. If they have to endure any form of suffering where they are hurt physically, it will be because the LORD wants to strengthen their faith and deepen their trust in the darkest moment of their life of witness. In the case of David, not one of his bones was broken. He was delivered from being a fugitive when King Saul died in battle. David was made king of Judah for 7½ years before he was made king of all Israel for the remaining 33 years of his 40 year reign as the best king Israel ever had.

This verse describes Christ's death on the cross. This obviously points to the LORD's deliberate sacrifice on the cross. Christ knew He would die in this manner nearly 1,000 years before it happened and He did not avoid it but fulfilled it. The death of Christ for sinners was a wilful and deliberate act by the Son of God. It was not an afterthought. Believers must be forever grateful and serve Him with their all. When it is time to suffer, count it all joy and remember what Christ has done.

**Verse 21** (synonymous parallelism) – The evil that evil men would do to God's children will boomerang back on them, like Haman who constructed gallows to hang Mordecai but was himself hanged by the Persian King. David said that "evil will slay the wicked." Unless these wicked men repent of their sins they will find that their own evil that they planned against God's children will destroy them instead. This has happened many times throughout the history of the church and yet sinful men will not learn. God's children need to know this truth - that when wicked men persecute them, they must not retaliate but continue to trust in the LORD. They need to be still in order to see the hand of God deliver them out of their many afflictions.

Using synonymous parallelism, David stated that the ones who hate the righteous will be desolate, i.e. found guilty and be punished. They will not escape the judgement of God no matter where they run to hide. If they escape the wrath of man, they will not escape the wrath of the LORD.

**Verse 22** (synthetical parallelism) – On the other hand, the LORD will surely redeem, i.e. preserve the soul of all those who serve Him. Their salvation is forever secured. This eternal destiny of every believer is guaranteed. There is nothing on earth or in heaven that can jeopardise the believer's secured place in heaven. He has nothing to be afraid of on earth with regard to what man can do to him. It will never alter his destiny to be found in heaven. This destiny is secured by the blood of Christ. In this verse, believers are called God's servants for the first time. They are placed here on earth to serve their Master, God. God will surely protect them since they are serving Him.

Not one of God's servants who serve Him faithfully will be desolate, i.e. found guilty, and be punished. The contrast between the wicked and the righteous is very clearly stated here as

the psalmist concluded his arguments on the fact that the LORD hears! He hears only the cries of the righteous but not the cries of the wicked unless it is the cry to be saved by Christ. Believers will have to endure many afflictions as they live for Christ on earth but they must never lose heart, for the LORD is always near them to help them in time of need. This is the blessing and comfort promised by the LORD to all faithful believers who serve and witness for the LORD till He returns. Amen.