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Sermon

February 21st. Lent 1

ITo Jesus Christ who, being found in appearance as a man, humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross, to Him be eternal glory. Amen. Our sermon text this morning is taken from the 34th Psalm, starting at verse 11.

**Come, children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the LORD. 12 Who wants to find pleasure in life? Who would love to experience many good days? 13 Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. 14 Turn from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it. 15 The eyes of the LORD watch over the righteous. His ears listen to their cry. 16 The face of the LORD is set against those who do evil, to cut off memory of them from the earth. 17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears. From all their distress he delivers them. 18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted. He saves those whose spirits have been crushed. 19 Many are the troubles of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him from them all. 20 He watches over all his bones; not one of them will be broken. 21 Evil will slay the wicked. Those who hate the righteous will be found guilty. 22 The LORD redeems the soul of his servants. Anyone who takes refuge in him will not be found guilty.**

This is the Word of The LORD!!! The congregation may be seated...

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

Something that fascinates me is personal memory tied to certain particular songs that you hear later. The nostalgic that certain tunes can invoke can be powerful. It takes you back in time. Maybe a song reminds you of when you were a little kid first hearing it on the radio. Maybe it takes you back to when you graduated high school. Maybe it takes you back to the music that might've played at your wedding. Maybe it takes you to what was playing over the speakers in the delivery room where your child was brought into the world. My mother always tells the story of how right before I was born, the song "Don't worry, be happy" was playing, and she took notable offense to those lyrics as she was in labor.

The song that we will focus on here today is a hymn, it's a psalm. Something that makes certain songs noteworthy is it's backstory or the context in which it is first recorded. The person who writes or sings it also may shade how we feel about it. Both the author and the context of this psalm are noteworthy. They give a certain sense of weight to the words. But even without that background knowledge, these words still are profound. And they are because they are not just the

words of a human author. They are also the words, nay the Word of the LORD!

Have you ever said, "Man, this is the good life!" Perhaps that would be something you said in a moment of great joy or relaxation. Vacation seems to be the natural setting for that. But the good life is not a moment, it's a life. What is it that makes up the good life? Many people may have different answers to that question. But, in the Word of the Good LORD we truly find the answer. The Good Life is only something that the Good LORD can give. He gives "the good" life. And most importantly, it took a good life to offer us salvation. And so, we pray, OH LORD, SANCTIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH. AMEN...

Our text this morning comes to us from the 34th Psalm. I mentioned that the author and context of this psalm is noteworthy. Many Psalms are written where we don't know who the author is or what was going on at the time it was composed. But that is not the case here. The inscription at the beginning of this Psalm reads, ***A Psalm of David when he pretended***

***madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed. (Psa 34:1 NKJ)***

What is this referring to? It is referring to an interesting time in David's life. And that is putting it mildly. The context of this psalm are events leading up to 1 Samuel 21. David had been anointed by Samuel as King over Israel. But King Saul still reigned. David became famous over his giant-slaying display of trust in the LORD. David became very popular and Saul became very jealous. He tried several times to have David killed, but the LORD was with him. Finally, it became obvious to all that Saul would stop at nothing to kill David. So, he ran away. The safest place for him was also a place of danger. He went to the land of the Philistines, an enemy of Israel and the nation of Goliath. When the king sees him there, he recognizes David the Philistine killer. So David acted like he was insane. It took this desperate display of madness to keep David safe, and the king quickly dismissed him.

This is the context wherein David pens these words. Put yourself in David's shoes here. His life was being actively pursued by the most powerful man in Israel. It took him going into enemy territory and feigning madness to escape the King's wrath. He could've dealt with it differently. He had the people's favor. He could've just incited a coup and overthrew Saul. But He would not kill the LORD's anointed, even as he himself was anointed. So, he ran for his life instead of raising his hand against the king.

Take all this into your consideration when you listen to David's Holy advice to us here today: **Come, children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the LORD. 12 Who wants to find pleasure in life? Who would love to experience many good days? 13 Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. 14 Turn from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it.**

Given the situation, isn't this remarkable? David says he will teach us the fear of the LORD. He asks, "Who wants to find pleasure in life", that is, who wants the good life? The answer to that question is pretty simple isn't it? After all, who among us doesn't want to live the good life? If given the choice of living the good life or living a hard life, wouldn't we all choose the

former? Anyone would right? But the steps given to do so really seem counterproductive to how many people view it.

What does he say? Basically he says, "Hey, listen, this is how you live a long and enjoyable life: Guard your tongue from evil, turn from evil and instead do good. Seek out and actively pursue peace." Is that how people today seek the good life? I don't think so. How do we measure "the good life" in our day and age? I think it is measured by success. Successful careers, successful relationships, successful investments. We believe, in large part, as a society, that the more success we attain the happier we will be. But that never really is the case. The more we have the more we want and the less we appreciate it.

David says nothing of being successful. Instead he warns of what not to do and then what to do instead. He says we need to guard ourselves from evil tongues and deceitful lips. Instead of doing evil, do good! Wealth isn't what we should be seeking, rather peace. Pursue it! This is really an afterthought in our society. People may become charitable, but really this only happens once they gained so much they don't know what to do with it. It is only after tremendous success do people largely turn to philanthropy. Basically, his advice comes down to this obvious truth. "If you want the good life, be good!" It's simple, really it's oversimplistic. But, it's true.

Is David's nugget of wisdom really the same as the song of my delivery, "Don't worry, be happy"? Well, think about the context again. David, when he wrote this, was not living the good life. He wasn't relaxing on a warm beach in some foreign paradise. He was living in enemy territory and hiding in caves. He was living in fear. Yet, he knew that the recipe for a long, prosperous life was doing good and seeking peace. He knew that this was the case because he knew that it was only the Good LORD who can give the good life. David saw past the fear and terror of being pursued by King Saul and looked forward to the good life that comes from His King, the LORD!

**15 The eyes of the LORD watch over the righteous. His ears listen to their cry. 16 The face**

**of the LORD is set against those who do evil, to cut off memory of them from the earth. 17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears. From all their distress he delivers them.**

Why is it that only a life that relies on the LORD is the good life? Because the LORD is the ultimate power. He is the one who gives everything to all. He hears the plea of the righteous, that is the ones who place their faith in Him. But to the wicked, that is the ones who don't have faith in Him, He is set against them. This also seems hard to see. "I believe in the LORD yet how come I am unemployed while that person who is so shamelessly and openly sinful has all this success?" These are the questions that confound us. We want to know why.

The answer is found in the definition of righteous here. That term is used extensively here. What makes one righteous? David says that the LORD watches over the righteous, hears them when they cry out, and delivers them from all of their distresses. What is the difference between the righteous and their counterparts described here as "those who do evil"/the wicked?

Paul answers this all important question in the third chapter of his letter to the Galatians: **So then, those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. 10 In fact, those who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law." 11 Clearly no one is declared righteous before God by the law, because "The righteous will live by faith."** (Gal 3:9-11 EHV)

What is the difference between the righteous and the wicked. The wicked are defined by what they do. The righteous are defined by what they believe, in whom they place their trust. So, what group are we in? Well, let's start with what we do... Do we do good as David instructs us here? NO! Not really. What we do is often the opposite of what God's Word tells us to do. As Paul says in another one of his letters, **For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.** (Rom 7:19 NKJ)

When it comes to wicked ways, we can't get out of our own way. We constantly disobey. We are not classified as righteous because of what we do. This was a common misconception among the Jewish people. They thought that they could be righteous depending on how they lived. But when you're as sinful as we are, this impossibility becomes crystal clear constantly. We cannot make up for the evil things that we have done. There is nothing we could ever do to do that.

But that's the beauty of being a Christian. It's not about what we do, it's about who we put our trust/faith in. Do our sins and lack of keeping the law condemn us? Most definitely. Yet, we are righteous and redeemed. How is this possible? By our glorious God. He allows us to repent of our sins and He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. That is what David is instructing us to do here. How do we **Turn from evil and do good**? Through repentance! How do we **Seek peace and pursue it**? By being reconciled to God! This is how we are counted among the righteous which God hears. We are not righteous on account of what we have done, rather we are righteous on account of what God has done for us!

In this text, your God guarantees you the good life. He does so by counting you as "good" and giving you the promise of life. Here, David says, the good (aka the believer, aka YOU!) has been given life because of the GOOD LORD!!!

And yet, even though the righteous (the good) have life, and truly through Him it is the good life, that doesn't mean that it won't be rocky. David freely admits here, **Many are the troubles of the righteous.** And boy, do we know first hand how that is indeed the case. But at the end of the day, how rocky the road is doesn't matter. Why? Because David goes on **Many are the troubles of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him from them all.**

What troubles are you going through? I think one problem that every single person has is that when something bad happens, we think nobody has it worse off than we do. We get into these self-pitying funks where we lament our own personal plight, and think

that no one else in the world could possibly understand what we are going through. It's incredibly hard to step back and understand that there is nothing new under the sun. Yes, something bad happens to you and it seems heavier because it is happening to YOU. But, there is nothing too heavy, too hard, too devastating that your all powerful God can't deliver you out of it. As David reminds us here, we are righteous because of Him. He therefore hears us when we cry out, He keeps His watchful eye on us all! He is in control, and He has the power to deliver us from any and all trials.

Look at the author here. He was in dire straits. He was a fugitive out on the lam. What did he do that placed him on the run? Nothing, he just served his king and his LORD faithfully. As a reward he was now a wandering and wanted man? David could have wallowed in self pity, but instead he didn't. He penned this psalm, and he knew that his LORD would deliver him from this, which of course he did. He would even have the opportunity to get revenge on his oppressor, king Saul. But he would not kill the LORD's anointed. Instead, he trusted in his God to avenge him, which the LORD did in His own time and fashion.

The point is that it doesn't matter what trouble we face. When we face trouble with the LORD, then we know ultimately we will be saved. We will be delivered. How can we know this? Because Jesus wasn't!!! **20 He watches over all his bones; not one of them will be broken.** Certain songs take us back. They trigger the nostalgia of where we were the first time we heard that song. Or, of a remarkable moment when we heard them. Familiar texts and tunes bring us back.

This verse is also familiar. That whole, "not one of his bones will be broken" will not take you back, rather it will take you forward. It is quoted in John's passion account. The soldiers who were running the execution broke the legs of the others on the left and right of Jesus to speed up the crucifixion process. But when they came to Jesus, they found Him dead already. John, after verifying that he did in fact see these things take place, says, **For these things were done**

**that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken." (Joh 19:36 NKJ)**

The truth of the matter is that for us to have become the good, and to have the good life, first a good life had to be sacrificed. Jesus lived more than just a good life, He lived the perfect life. He had to in order to fulfill the law for us. Then God punished Him in our place. For us to be righteous and to have any semblance of a good life, the good life of Jesus had to be terminated.

Compare and contrast David and David's greater Son, Jesus. There are many similarities. But let's look at David in the context of this Psalm and Jesus at His passion. They both put their lives in God's hands instead of taking control. David ran away from Saul. Jesus didn't run away from the cross. David pretended to be crazy to escape the Philistines' anger. Jesus was portrayed as a lunatic and a rabble rouser (falsely) so that He would be executed. David would not kill Saul, the LORD's anointed. Jesus, the LORD's anointed, the Christ, was killed by sinful hands on the account of sinful souls.

Think of the end verses from Jesus' point of view: **21 Evil will slay the wicked. Those who hate the righteous will be found guilty. 22 The LORD redeems the soul of his servants. Anyone who takes refuge in him will not be found guilty.**

Evil will slay the wicked. Jesus was slain because we were wicked. Jesus didn't hate anyone. Yet He was found guilty. We, the haters, the wicked, would now be found not to be guilty because of what He went through. Our souls were redeemed because He was crucified.

I think at the end of the day it all comes down to the end two verses here: What happens to wickedness? It is destroyed. Completely. The wicked are destroyed on the day of judgement. But what does that mean for us? Will we be found guilty? Certainly not! **There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1 NKJ)**

Yes, the wicked will be completely destroyed. But our wickedness was destroyed already. It was destroyed by Christ when He went to the cross and suffered the punishment of our sins! This is the most

glorious news ever. His verdict of “he is worthy of death” was not a fair ruling. But it meant that we will never be sentenced to the same fate.

Is this the good life? Well, it depends on how you look at it. Will there be troubles? You bet. Will everything be easy. Certainly not. But once you realize the perspective of the fact that I am saved by the blood of Christ, how could our lives be anything but good? The good life may be hard now, but it will be glorious eternally. All praise and thanks be to Jesus Christ, who lived the good life so we too might live with Him in heaven. AMEN!!!