**Sermon Aug.7th 2022 Psalm 34**

Today we start the first of our series of four on Psalms, chosen by members of the Church Family-Psalm 34 to be found on p561 in the bibles in the pews-to make sure I’m still on the rails. When the Psalms are mentioned, do you think of the apocryphal reply of an old lady, who, when asked what her favourite book was the Bible was, replied “the Spasms.” In fact, they are the personal outpourings of the writers before the Lord in times of trouble, joy or perplexity-often given in a series of pictures, which may be so helpful & accessible.

A. Intro. 1.Psalm 34 is in acrostic form-each verse starts with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, though it is incomplete here. This sort of straitjacket may explain why the wonderful truths come out in a higgledy-piggledy order with some repetitions.

2. The superscription-the writer is clearly in deep trouble, so it may refer to when Jonathan warned David that Saul was after his blood, so he fled to Gath. The ruler (Abimelech may have been his title) called Achish welcomed David, whereupon his servants rumbled who he was. David then faked madness & fled to the cave of Adullam, where over 400 malcontents gathered round him-see 1 Sam.21: 20-22: 1. David was in double trouble-from Saul & then from Achish.

3. The Psalm deals with : -the Lord’s promises & actions to help a follower.

-the ways a follower can tap into all these benefits.

B. The promises of the Lord’s help. 1. His eyes “are on the righteous” v15a. The righteous are those who have the right relationship with God by faith-they may not be super good, though their friendship with God should, slowly, be making them more like Him. What a wonderful picture that His eyes are on us all the time! He sees our troubles, anxieties, the pressures on us, our responses, our fears & our sinful actions. This may explain His, occasionally, unexpected help even before we have articulated our need. “His ears are attentive to (the righteous’) cry” v15b. He is tuned in to our wavelength. The disciples found this, when the sudden squall in the Sea of Galilee, made them cry out to the Lord Jesus “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown” Mk. 4: 38. I recall seeing a mother with her two year old who, wanted to walk along a very low wall unaided-the mother followed behind, but seeing a gap in the wall, she anticipated that her son would need help. She was there to help him even before he cried out. This is true for us as the Lord keeps his eyes on us.

2. The Lord’s deliverance. It’s in the past tense-the Lord “delivered me from all my fears.”v4b. I think fear is one of Satan’s major weapons to trip us up. We may try to be realistic, but then the imagination can run riot with all the ‘what ifs?’, so that fear can clutch our heart. We can, however, believe the psalmist’s personal testimony & follow suit.” I sought the Lord & He answered me.” v4a. We can recall v7 “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him.” Another striking picture, which was true for one of the prophets & his servant, when they feared being trapped by their enemies-they were, later, shown the Lord’s forces encamped around them. It’s like Ps. 23:4 “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me..” Similarly, there was chorus, I think, about being threatened by evil, where the last line ran “Jesus is nearer & stronger.” The psalmist is realistic, too, that following the Lord is not going to be a bed of roses, when he says “the righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all” v19b. Moreover, the Lord promises to protect “all his bones-not one of them will be broken.” v20. This could mean the trouble will not be catastrophic. Thus, we should look away from our troubles & fears & look to the Lord Jesus. I say this as much to myself as to anyone else!

3. The Lord saves. The writer prayed when at a low point “This poor man called & the Lord heard him; He saved him from all his trouble.”v6. It’s no surprise that after this personal testimony or experience of the Lord’s help, he wants to get everyone to praise God “Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together” v 3. Again, we read ”the Lord is close to the broken hearted & saves those crushed in spirit.” v18. We all know what being crushed in spirit is like. I think of the widow of Juliet’s only first cousin, who lost her husband 20 years ago & her daughter two months ago. She told me her heart had been broken for the second time-this is a verse for her, as ‘saves’ can mean ’heals’ as well.

4. The Lord as a refuge. “Taste & see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him.” v8. A refuge is a place of protection & safety or solace. Think how getting down into a tube station each night must have felt for Londoners at the height of the blitz-think of their relief almost happiness to be there in security uncomfortable as sleeping on the platform was in many ways. Significantly, the psalmist wrote this after asserting “the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him & He delivers them.”v7. In v22b “no one will be condemned who takes refuge in the Lord”. As I read in my bible reading notes today “God’s presence is the only safe place, if life is starting to fall apart.” How true!

5. The Lord’s presence can make us radiant. “Those who look to Him are radiant.”v5-another telling image. This may refer to the moments when Moses face shone after meeting the Lord-so much so that he had to wear a veil till the radiance faded. Paul takes up the idea “And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory(or character) are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” 2 Cor. 3: 17-18. There are people, who almost seem to glow because of the Lord’s presence in spite of their difficulties. I wonder if Stephen was like this, as he was stoned. So, by looking to the Lord we can be transformed into his likeness, however slowly & erratically. What a challenge! To sum up, we hear the promises of the Lord seeing our tribulations, hearing our cries, delivering us, saving us, being our refuge & transforming us.

C. How can we tap into these benefits? 1. The righteous are mentioned in vv15, 17, 19 & 21.This is a reminder that we need to be related to God by faith in Christ, who has paid the penalty of our sins, so that we can draw near to God. If this is our position, we will fear Him-respect Him see vv7, 9, 11 & not be too casual or chummy bouncing into His presence.

2. From this position of being righteous we must seek Him, cry out to Him vv15 & 17-the arrow prayer at the moment of crisis.

3. The psalmist stresses that a right relationship with God should lead to an upright life. “Whoever of you loves life…keep your tongue from evil…”v12. In his teaching role “I will teach you the fear of the Lord.” v11 he contrasts the negative demands to “turn from evil.”v14a, to avoid gossip v13a & lies v13b with the positive “& do good; seek peace & pursue it.” v14. This does echo Jesus statement in the Gospel reading. In Jn. 12: 46 He says He has “come into the world as a light so that no one who believes in Me should stay in darkness”-the immoral behaviour just mentioned in Ps. 34: 13a, 14a 16. He, also, says that “the Father’s command leads to eternal life.” v50. It must be obeyed, which is like the ways the Psalmist shows if we are to tap into the Lord’s benefits.

D. How does this apply to us? 1.The crucial thing is to claim these promises that the Lord sees & hears our troubles. He will deliver, save & be our refuge from our fears & tribulations & transform us, if we seek Him & cry to Him in faith. These are like a cheque-it may be all signed etc, but no use to us or our bank account, until we present it to the Bank in faith that it will be honoured.

2. We could follow the Psalmist’s exhortation to his friends “Taste & see that the Lord is good.” v8-like the Psalmist we may have to give some personal testimony to the Lord’s goodness. v4