

“Boasting in the Lord”  
 Pastor Sam Richards  
 Sermon for 14 May 2023  
 Texts: Psalms 34 & 18

**I will bless the Lord at all times  
 His praise shall continually be in my mouth  
 My soul shall make its boast in the Lord;  
 The humble shall hear and be glad.**

What a concept! *David has chosen to bless the Lord . . .* at all times, continually **praising God**. That’s rare. And in Psalm 18 verse 1 we are informed of his motivation: love. **I will love You, O Lord, my strength**. Both sentences are declarative; both sentences announce personal, deliberate, voluntary acts of will. It is as if David’s saying, “Regardless of what happened to me, or around me, or through me . . . and regardless of what’s happening with you . . . and regardless of the justification of evil in the world, or regardless of whatever narrative is out there demanding compulsory compliance, or conformity of thought, feeling, or action, I have chosen to bless God, to praise God and to love God.” But did he? I mean, at all times, continually did David, **the man after God’s own heart, love God . . . like, with all his heart, mind, soul and strength**, which we are told by Jesus is the first, pre-eminent and **greatest commandment**? And, it is sobering to remember, that the One who told us this, is the only One who ever did so . . . the only One to keep covenant to always, and at all times, praise and love the Lord God so entirely, with such abandon!

So what do we do with David’s faith? For surely it is his faith that is speaking here. These are declarations of love, either implicitly or explicitly. Do we file them under “new year’s resolutions?” Under proper aspirations which, in affirming, we are also admitting to the impossibility of them? Who can do such things? Make such profound choices? Oh, right, David did just that and someone else, Jesus, actually accomplished them. And quickly, before you can temporize, and rationalize (saying, well I’m not Jesus), I would gently remind you that Christ living in us is the same Jesus who blessed God, praised God and loved God with all **His heart, soul, mind and might**—for He is alive, and active and powerful in us through the operation of the indwelling Spirit. He chose to do the Father’s will and so can we! What can we do with David’s faith? We can imitate it, we can actively seek a portion, and an increasing portion of it (as life goes on), and rest assured that these efforts are good and wholesome.

I am preaching on Psalms 34 and 18 this morning. But we can pose my approach as a problem. It is fine for David to express his decision to do all this out of his love for God—his faith seems clear, firm and assured and he is able therefore **to bless the Lord at all times**. But what if, and this is a real possibility, I lack the level of trust and assurance to do likewise. What if my relationship with God is more ambiguous, and my feelings about God are more complicated (as they say) or ambivalent? How am I supposed to attract people to God if, for whatever in my heart of hearts, I don’t find God attractive? There are so many doors into this room! The Bible says that the arm of the Lord is not short—meaning He is able to keep His covenants and promises to the utmost degree. The Bible says, God is constantly good, just, true and merciful. But I have dry seasons, I have moments when the cry of my heart is far from “Thank you, Lord, for your present strength.” To be transparent, there are moments when “Where are you, Lord?” overshadows the exultant, “O Lord, I see you there!” You say you love me, Lord, but I can’t get past my sense of unworthiness, my guilt and shame of not living up to **I will bless the Lord at all times, or His praise will be continually on my lips**. I am so fickle, so

inconstant, so unfaithful, that to hear you love me, have chosen me, absolutely levels, even destroys me. And “How can you [One such as You?] love such a one as I?” competes with **I will love You, O Lord, my strength.**

If I could find my way to my knees, or, fall to my knees in praise; I could then pray. I am convinced that only awe at His love for us, can evoke love in my heart for Him! It is not my feelings, it is not my emotional state; no, it is being thunderstruck the fact that I am the object of divine love!

It is written that **God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whomsoever should believe on Him would not perish but have everlasting life.** (John 3:16) We must grasp the meaning of **gave His Son**—as a ransom, as a payment for our sin guilt (a debt incurred by our froward rebelliousness, rejection, spiritual treachery) **gave Him unto death on a cross** that His atoning blood might be shed and being shed bring forgiveness and purification of sin’s resilient and stubborn stains. He makes us whiter, much whiter than snow! *Here then are several reasons that we might have cause to love God and, on the basis of that one, praise Him continually.*

An ancient Easter cry of the church went like this: “Christ has died, Christ is risen! In Christ shall all be made alive.”

When the dazed women stumbled back to the place where the dispirited disciples were staying, **doors barred for fear of the Jews(!)**, they declared, “**Christ has risen! We have seen the Lord.**” (John 20:18) The men did not fall down in thanksgiving, or praise:

**5 And as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men** (for “angels”) **said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? 6 He is not here, but He has [a]risen.**

**Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, 7 saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” 8 And they remembered His words, 9 and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.** (In their grief over His horrific death, they had suppressed so much--couldn’t deal with the pain of it all. His appearing reversed all that—and their memory was retired as their insight was enhanced.

**10 Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles.**

**11 But these words appeared [b]to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them.**

**12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he \*saw the linen wrappings [c]only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.<sup>1</sup>**

Jesus loved us enough to come for us (redeemer), and to live for us (savior). . . then He died for us (sacrifice in weakness), and He rose again (victor over death and the grave in strength, conquering sin and removing its bondage and consequences)—*all for the love of us!* All these things commend to us both love and goodness. Everyone seems to lift up the love bit, to the unfortunate neglect of the goodness bit (the *hosed (HEB)*, or steadfast loving kindness of God a promise made and kept.)

In a manner of summary, the love of God was expressed in the birth of Christ, in the life of Christ (his visitation), in the death of Christ (the atonement) and in the resurrection of Christ but all of that is not apparent in saying, “Christ has died, Christ is Risen, In Christ shall all be made alive.” But the essence of the Christian message is what I have just preached—it lies behind our Easter acclamations!

Again: It is fine for David to express his decision to do all this out of his love for God—his faith seems clear, firm and assured and he is able therefore to bless the Lord at all times. But what if, and this is a real possibility, I lack the level of trust and assurance to do likewise. What if my relationship with God is more ambiguous, and my feelings about God are more complicated (as they say) or ambivalent? How am I supposed to attract people to God if, for, whatever in my heart of hearts, I don't find God attractive?

You should study God's Word until whatever in your heart is dislodged. Doubt is like chicken bone in the throat. It must be dislodged, or it can take you out. David writes, **I sought the Lord, and He heard me** (34:4) So far, so good. We start with being heard because we sought. No particular deliverance named here. No circumstances are named. But God **delivered me from all my fears**. And do we know how that occurred? Well, here is what is in the text: **They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces were not ashamed.** (v.3) They came into God's presence by prayer and by **looking to him**. They were transformed, were **made radiant**. Something like what happened to Moses, when he went up into the mountain and conversed with God, a like transformation occurred to David; he had a shining encounter with God, who is the Light of the World. Darkness could not prevail then and Moses' face was a beaming radiance, a blindingly bright radiance. He veiled his face to shield others from that radiance. Moses became an LED in his flesh! David got up from prayer, shining bright—radiating truth, life, goodness because *all the effects of God were transferred upon him*. The face of Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration comes to mind. The face of Stephen as he looked to heaven while being stoned also.

About the clause, **their faces were not ashamed**, Barnes writes: “That is, they were not ashamed of having put their trust in God, or they were not disappointed. They had

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<sup>1</sup> Footnotes

- a. **Luke 24:6 Or *been raised***
- b. **Luke 24:11 Lit *in their sight***
- c. **Luke 24:12 Or *by themselves***

not occasion to confess that it was a vain reliance, or that they had been foolish in thus trusting him.”

**This poor man** (King David!) **cried out** (he did not lose track of being spiritually needy; it kept him humble), **and the Lord heard. . . and saved him out of all his troubles.** Note the universal effect of prayer: all fears and all troubles escaped. This is said to encourage us, to build up our trust in the Trustworthy One. Surely that is an attractive thing! Besides, if we cry out of our poverty and dependency as David did, perhaps we will experience, as David confesses, **the angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him . . . And delivers them.** It strikes me that our usual understanding of deliverance ministry is that it relates to casting out, and driving out demons. This sheds different light: here the one oppressed is rescued, delivered from the traps set and snares laid! Such a spiritual operation would make one susceptible to **tasting and seeing that the Lord is good!** Hearing, feeling and smelling are also engaged in the deliverance process, *and it is a process rather than just an event!* What happens in an apparent moment has frequently been incubating over time, like a festering thorn which is lanced; it took time to reach that final stage.

David starts a new theme with verse 8: **Blessed is the man trusting in Him! O fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him.** Here is an opening for false teaching, for a quasi-prosperity gospel. I think it best to take verses 9 & 10 as a study in contrast: David is pointing out how the wants of the saints differ qualitatively from wants of the natural order—say, the wants of young lions *on a literal level*. David, the shepherd was acquainted with the behavior of young lions who would maraud the flock, seeking out the weak and vulnerable as easy kill. He would drive them off with his sling. The saints are not of the same order as young lions **who lack and suffer hunger**—who are motivated by food and the need for nourishment. And the reason for this explanation lies with what the saints shall not lack: it’s **any good thing—any good, spiritual thing!** If we take young lions metaphorically, as strong rulers and oppressors, of course, a different interpretation would follow! But that seems a deviation to me.

David moves next to **the fear of the Lord which yields life, and longevity of life that he may see good** (which is definitely not a young lion’s concern for a fresh kill!). Those who fear the Lord will **keep their tongues from evil . . . from speaking deceit. (They) Depart from evil and do good, Seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord** (for protection and provision) are **upon these righteous. And His ear is open to their cry.** David affirms that how we live makes a difference in this matter of gaining a hearing, or audience with God! And that this is true whether we come at it from a positive, or negative perspective. Psalm 18:20-27 declares:

**20 The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness** (we all have a “righteousness” of varying degrees of our faithful obedience);

**According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me.**

**21 For I have kept the ways of the Lord** (naturally, not in an absolute way—David remained a sinner; however relatively, he kept to God’s will, and moral standards. See the verse following.)

**And have not wickedly departed from my God.**

**22 For all His ordinances were before me** (He studied the word, meditated on it—it was part of his learning, memory, experience. He read it over repeatedly and memorized significant portions of it much as a Christian might memorize 1 For. 15:1-11.;

**15 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received** (it comes to us like a UPS package), **in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast [a]the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.**

**3 For I delivered to you [b]as of first importance what I also received** (Paul doesn't get to make it up—just deliver it!), **that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to [c]James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as [d]to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, [e]and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.<sup>2</sup>**

**And I did not put away His statutes from me.**

**23 I was also [a]blameless** (again this is not meant absolutely) **with Him, And I kept myself from my iniquity** (daily he endeavored to choose not to sin! To resist temptation and refrain from speaking evil, doing evil).

**24 Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness** (As in real time, as in the actual life he led—dealt with exactly and fairly! For God truly knows us—there's no manipulation going on.), **According to the cleanness of my hands in His eyes.**

**25 With the kind You show Yourself kind;**

**With the [b]blameless You show Yourself blameless;**

**26 With the pure You show Yourself pure, (This is wonderful!)**

**And with the crooked You show Yourself** (Crooked here means devious, dishonest and rebellious.) **deceitful or [c]astute** (With wisdom, discernment.).

**27 For You save an afflicted people, But haughty eyes You abase.**

**28 For You light my lamp** (This is light from heaven, heavenly truth which is given to us from God, revealed to us by God—not some odd, moral night-light

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<sup>2</sup>Footnotes

a. 1 Corinthians 15:2 Lit *to what word I*

b. 1 Corinthians 15:3 Lit *among the first*

c. 1 Corinthians 15:7 Or *Jacob*

d. 1 Corinthians 15:8 Lit *to an untimely birth*

e. 1 Corinthians 15:9 Lit *who am*

that we can flick on at will—an inner light! );

**The Lord my God illumines my darkness.** (That is what God does. His light never fails, never ceases to shine. We can pretend it's not there, by hiding under the blankets; but when you peep out . . . guess what? It's still there, still on,)<sup>3</sup>

This should minister some comfort and guidance to our souls. **Amen.**

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<sup>3</sup>Footnotes

- a. Psalm 18:23 Lit *complete*; or *having integrity*, or *perfect*
- b. Psalm 18:25 V 23, note 1
- c. Psalm 18:26 Lit *twisted*