

Bible Study

A Christian Response to Terrorism & Crisis

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Background. . .

In light of the events of Tuesday September 11th, 2001, we offer this Bible Study to the members of our church. On this day, we saw Evil unleashed on the United States. We saw the coordination of several aircraft hijackings, and massive destruction – first at the World Trade Center towers in New York City, and then at the Pentagon in Washington. As this is being written, the death toll from those events is unknown. Our prayers go out to all those who have been caught up in these events.

How should Christian people respond to terrorism on such an unprecedented scale? This Bible Study is offered as a point of departure. Our goal is that this study would do at least two things: First, that it would re-assure God's people of His protection and grace. And second, that it would challenge God's people to put into practice the admonitions found in His Holy Word. Our prayer is that it may be so, and that God's people will receive His grace through His word, as the two of us have, in the preparation of the study.

The Resource Which Follows. . .

This Bible Study takes us into the 34th Psalm. The format is a verse-by-verse commentary, allowing the leader to utilize the insights and questions for each verse as a lead into open discussion by participants. Since the study is in response to the happenings of this last few days, it should be expected that people will share honest insights and feelings. Leaders of the class will no doubt have numerous opportunities to utilize Law and Gospel effectively.

The amount of material is more than enough for one Bible study session. You may wish to scale it down to fit within your Sunday morning Bible study. However, since this event will likely remain in the forefront of our lives for many weeks to come, the material can also be utilized over a number of weeks. We would encourage, however, that a minimum of the first seven verses be covered the first week, and subsequent classes taking following sections as time allows.

May God use these horrific events and His word to us, to both re-assure us of his grace and to challenge us to live out our faith according to His will. To those ends we offer this document to the church for its consideration and use, as its leaders may see fit.

SOLI DEO GLORIA!

Psalm 34

verse 1: *I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.*

§__The Psalm begins with unconditional praise to God. This praise is offered by God’s people to Him – in all the circumstances of life. Our God is an unchanging God. And our trust, prompted and enabled by the Holy Spirit – working through the means of grace – is an unwavering trust.

- o__ Is this kind of trust realistic, given the realities of evil in our world?
- o How can I have a trust like this? Is it something that I have all at once, or is it something that grows over time?

verse 2: *My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.*

§__Notice the paradox or irony of the term “boast.” Notice the place of joy in the life of the believer.

- o__ How can “the joy of the Lord” be our strength, as His word says?
- o What can we appropriately boast about, as God’s people?
- o Is our joy based on external factors or internal factors in our lives?
- o What role does “hearing” have in our faith?

verse 3: *Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.*

§__There is a corporate element to our faith – we are in this together. God is with us. An old Scandinavian saying: “A shared joy is a DOUBLE joy. A shared sorrow is HALF a sorrow.”

- o__ How is the Lord with us?
- o How does this relate to the concept of the incarnation?

verse 4: *I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.*

§__An important part of life’s difficult times is prayer. In prayer, we do many things, including seeking the Lord’s will for our lives. Anxiety is a very common emotion in our modern world, and anxieties are heightened during times of crisis.

§ God reserves the right to challenge us at any time. He wants us to have a faith “for such a time as this.”

- o__ What are some of the symptoms of anxiety?
- o What’s the best way to deal with it?
- o In matters of faith, how can I have my “bags packed, and my tickets ready” so that no matter what may come, I will be ready for it?

verse 5: *Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.*

§__God’s people are different from those without faith. There is a “radiance” to our lives that others can see. There is no shame for those whose sins are forgiven at the cross.

§ The Psalm-writer does not blame himself for what has happened to him. He doesn't view it as punishment. He accepts it, and with God's help, begins to deal with it.

- What is the difference between shame and guilt?
- Give an example of the "radiance" that can be seen in the life of a believer.

verse 6: *This poor man called and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.*

§ There is a sense of poverty in the life the Psalmist that he openly admits. In the Beatitudes, Jesus spoke of those who were "poor in spirit." The Psalmist is a sinner, and knows it. He is a card-carrying member of the human race. He is familiar with trouble.

§ Notice the reference to being "saved." This is a common theme in this Psalm. Saved out of all troubles, not just some of them.

- When troubles come into the lives of God's people, what is the appropriate response?
- What is the appropriate motivation for us to have as we deal with difficult times?
- Give another word (a synonym) for the word "saved." What is at the root of this word?

verse 7: *The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.*

§ God's angels work to protect His people. Like a mother hen, His greatest desire is to take them under His wing, so that they can find protection there.

§ To use another metaphor, the one used by the Psalmist, God surrounds us with His love, His wagons encircle us.

§ Again, the idea of salvation is mentioned. In the Bible, repetition is often used to emphasize an idea.

- What does it mean to fear the LORD? Can this word be misunderstood?
- What does salvation, rightly understood, do to our anxieties?

verse 8: *Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.*

§ "Taste" is an imperative verb. It is something that we as God's people are required to do. We are to take into our being God's blessings and strength so that we can deal with whatever life sends our way. We need "fuel" for the journey. Or, to put it into another form, our spiritual "batteries" need to be charged and ready.

- How are God's Word and the Sacraments related to this idea of taking into ourselves this source of strength?

verse 9: *Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.*

§ To fear God is to reverence him. Also involved is the idea of respecting his authority and a desire to do his will. As the Scriptures say, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."

§ God's people are called "saints" here. Saints are holy ones -- those who are set aside for God's service. As His people, we lack nothing of value.

- o__ Can one fear and trust God at the same time? How?
- o__ What do you lack today? In what sense do we lack absolutely nothing?
- o__ How can we bring our feelings in line with what we intellectually know about our faith?

verse 10: *The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*

§__ “Lions” represent those with worldly, material power. Their power is temporary at best. The source of our power is not from the world, but from God. When we seek the Lord, through Word and Sacrament, in the context of his church, all we need to live an abundant life is given to us, by grace. This seeking of the Lord is another requirement for God’s people.

- o__ In what way could we equate terrorists with the “lions” that the Psalmist talks about here?
- o__ What do they not know, or forget?
- o__ Is our modern society comfortable with the Biblical idea of evil? Explain your answer.
- o__ How should God’s people respond to evil?
- o__ How would you respond to a believer who wanted you to tell them how to “seek the LORD?”

verse 11: *Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*

§__ Notice how the family of God is emphasized here. God is our Heavenly Father. We are his dear children. We are those who are privileged to call him “abba” – one of the first terms that ancient children used in reference to their human fathers. God seeks to protect his children. We allow ourselves, as we have seen already, to be protected.

- o__ How do we “listen” to God most effectively?
- o__ Where is the “teaching” we need?
- o__ How important is Christian teaching in our faith life and journey?

verse 12: *Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days,*
verse 13: *keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.*

§__ Jesus promised His people an abundant life in His Kingdom. The people who went to work at the World Trade Center or at the Pentagon on September 11th, 2001, loved life. The individuals on those hijacked airliners desired to see many good days, with family and friends. But evil intervened.

§ There is great power for evil in the tongue. Lies prompted those behind the terror to do what they did.

- o__ What did Jesus say about the devil and lies?
- o When did Satan begin his deception?
- o How can we use the power of the tongue to build up and not to tear down?

verse 14: Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

§ Another word for “turn” in the Bible is “repent.” We turn away from evil and back toward God. Another imperative.

§ With God’s enabling, we turn from evil. With God’s enabling, we do good.

§ God’s people are peacemakers. Peace is our constant goal.

- What place does revenge have in the life of believers?
- What happens if we handle revenge the way the unbelieving world so often does?
- How can individuals break out of the cycle of revenge, and still protect themselves from the power of evil?

verse 15: The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry.

§ We all want to be able to have hope for the future. We all want to experience the peace that passes all understanding. But often, our environment makes these things seem impossible to attain.

§ God watches over us. He hears our prayers, no matter how desperate they may be.

- What kind of person would be glad to have God watch over them?
- What kind of person would not want this?

verse 16: The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

§ God is against evil. We cannot blame Him for it. And yet, so many people do. They wonder why He would let the events of September 11th occur. Why would He allow so many innocent people to die?

- How do we know that God is against evil? What is the best proof of this?
- Is it true that our society tends to minimize evil? Why would that be?

verse 17: The righteous cry out and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.

§ When troubles come, God’s people pray. On September 11th, a religious leader in the U.S. asked the American people to “light a candle” and put it out for all to see. When we don’t know what to say, the Holy Spirit grants assistance. Evil powers use communication to deceive and destroy. God’s people use communication to keep in touch with the LORD and to encourage those in need.

§ Note again the theme of salvation. God’s rescue plan came to fulfillment in Christ.

- Can you suggest what a person might say to God in a prayer, after the events of September 11th have transpired?
- In John, chapter 1, verse 5, what does the Gospel-writer say about light and darkness? What is an alternate translation of this verse?
- What should a Christian parent say to their children about the events of September 11th?

verse 18: *The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

§__ God is close to His people in Christ. This is the heart of the incarnation – God becoming man, in Christ. He has not and will not forsake us. Nothing can separate us from His love.

§ Even when we are brokenhearted, He is with us and brings peace. Despair cannot keep us from the Lord, or from His love. Even when we feel “crushed” by events, God is there to bring healing, and salvation as well.

- o__ What does Isaiah 53 say about being “crushed?”
- o How does Jesus’ suffering relate to our own?
- o How is His suffering different?

verse 19: *A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all.*

§__ We all experience trouble in life. But not all people deal with it in the same way. Our LORD brings deliverance from troubles – large and small.

- o__ What is the ultimate sources of our troubles?
- o What “troubles” did Jesus experience?
- o How does Romans 8:28 relate to this discussion and to the events of September 11th, 2001?

verse 20: *He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.*

§__ God promises protection for His people. That doesn’t mean that we will escape life’s slings and arrows, but it does mean that he will never leave us or forsake us.

- o__ How can we be sure that God is protecting us?
- o Can you give an example of God’s protection?
- o How can we say that God protected the people who died or lost a loved one because of the terrorism of September 11th?

verse 21: *Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned.*

§__ Note that evil is harmful to the evil individual. They cannot escape the consequences of their actions. The one who makes the bomb is eventually destroyed by it. Or as Jesus put it, the one who lives by the sword, also dies by the sword.

§ There is no salvation here, only condemnation. No Gospel, but only Law.

- o__ What about those who say that many evil people get away with their evil acts?

verse 22: *The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.*

§__ To redeem is to purchase freedom at a price. Christ is our Redeemer. His death on the cross paid for our freedom. His last words on the cross: “It is finished!” literally mean “Paid in Full.”

§ When we trust Him, there is no longer any condemnation for us, because of our sins.

- § He is our refuge – our hiding place. When the storms rage outside, we have peace within.
- Can we still praise God despite the plots of the terrorists?
 - Can we still praise him when the doctor tells us we have cancer?
 - If so, how can that occur?

The following cross-references may be used as a start for further discussion and/or scriptural direction regarding insights and questions. Certainly, the list is not all-inclusive!

Verse 2

Neh. 8:10, Gal. 6:14, & Rom. 10:17

Verse 3

Is. 7:14 & Matt. 1:23

Verse 4

Esther 4:14 & 1 Pet. 5:7

Verse 6

Romans 5:1-5

Verse 7 - 9

Psalm 111:10

Verse 11

Romans 8:15

Verses 12-13

John 10:10 & John 8:44

Verse 14

Rom. 12:19