
Reflection 1 Psalm 34 Unrecognised angels

Are you ever tempted to congratulate yourself when things go well or a crisis passes?

David could understandably have felt proud of his clever, high-risk strategy in escaping from the Philistine King— by pretending to be insane & harmless – read all about it in 1 Samuel chapter 21. But David knew that his rescue was down to God. The only boasting he would do is in God’s deliverance. & he wanted others to learn from him and rejoice with him in this experience of God. (v.2)

So what reasons do we have to praise God over recent troubled months? Emerging hesitantly from lockdown, there is still a lot of uncertainty & much to fear as we listen to the news, as we think about our families & our own lives. All through his life, David found God to be a faithful, strong & powerful friend, shepherd & rock, on whom He could depend.

In verse 7, David claimed - *The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him & He, the Lord, delivers them.* As we travel through life, His angels journey **with us** — saving **us** from dangers of which we may not even be aware. Angels, messengers from God, may not come to us in the form of a dazzling angelic host with trumpets & neon lights but in the form of friends or strangers, who have visited or phoned just at a time when you are low & need reassurance of God’s love & concern or direction. Who has been an angel for you over these past 6 months? I think of some members of our local church whose faith, commitment & prayers have been humbling and a real encouragement to me, and to others also.

& is there deep sadness and loss in our lives? Verse 18 says ***Our loving God is close to the broken hearted*** (18). v.20 reminds us that God himself knew the pain of the death of His only Son.

In spite of dark times, Psalm 34, David’s song, encourages us: “***Taste and see***”, find out for yourselves that God is good; & live godly lives, don’t speak evil, do good, seek peace (vv. 8-14). Sounds simple – but in the messiness of life, it often isn’t.

Praise God. He is on our side (v. 15): not there to do us down or rub our noses in the mud but to lift us up. May we know truth of v. 22: “*When we call to Him, He hears; when we take refuge in Him, we will not be condemned.*”

There is a time for everything, and a season, God's right time, for every activity under the heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,.. a time to tear down and a time to build...

Time: most of us have had more time on our hands over past 6 months - time without usual activities or normal routines, time without worship services or church meetings, time without other people & cut off from them. We've all had more time to think & listen but less noise & busy-ness to drown out God's voice.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. A time of increased loneliness, anxieties & depression. A time when most of those who have serious illness and their carers have had less support and when we have lost good friends. But also a time when people such as NHS workers, carers & other key workers as well as good neighbours, parents & children have shone like stars; when we have been reminded of the importance of the people in our lives; and when the local church closed its buildings but not its caring and praying, sharing and listening; and is finding new ways to be Christ's local church.

The writer of Ecclesiastes teaches that our lives and the people in it, our work and talents and material possessions are gifts and opportunities from God, to be recognised and valued not taken for granted, and to be used well in the light of God's love.

Time: The original Greek of the New Testament had two words for time: 1) *Chronos* – What is the time? – 11.25 am or whatever – you can check on a watch or a clock or a mobile phone. & 2) *Kairos* – which means an *opportunity* or a *critical time* when a choice has to be made.

Paul in Ephesians 5:16 writes literally "*Redeem the time*". He was using the word *Kairos* so the NIV translates this, "*Making the most of every opportunity.*" The journey of recovery will be slower than our journey into lockdown. Life is not going to be a quick return to the old normal but rather a new living with the virus, certainly for the rest of this year & through the first part of 2021. Lockdown & all the anxieties & uncertainties COVID-19 has entailed has been hard but also has brought new insights, opportunities & priorities to the surface. Part of being a listening church will be for all of us to reflect carefully on lessons learned & the next steps. What has been lost that we need to grieve? What has been paused that we have an opportunity to let go of? What has been paused that we need to work at to renew? What has been discovered that we will need to respond to? What is positive & emerging that we need to develop and resource? I would welcome your insights & feedback over coming weeks. May the Lord enable us to use these times and opportunities now given to us.

And is the Lord called you to be angel?