

How do we know if something tastes good. How do we know for instance that this banana is better than another banana or that one apple is better than another apple. The simple answer is experience. We have tasted banana's when they have been blackened and bruised and a bit squishy and we have tasted bananas that are still a bit green and much firmer. We have eaten red apples and green apples, granny smiths and golden delicious. It is because we have tasted, we have experienced what each is like, how they feel to us that we have our preferences. I know that I much prefer a green banana to a black one – because I have tasted and seen that black bananas are not good.

In Psalm 34 David is telling us to ***taste and see that the Lord is good*** (Psalm 34:8) because he has experienced the goodness of God. This Psalm was written at the time when David was hiding in Gath from King Saul (we can read the whole story in 1 Samuel 18-21).

Essentially Saul, after failing to wait on Samuel before preparing the men for battle, was told that the kingdom was going to be ripped from him. God had lost patience with him and would anoint another to be king. That other was David. Throughout the story of Saul and David, Saul became increasingly jealous and suspicious of David. David on the other hand grew in popularity among the people who credited him with victories over the Philistines much more than they credited Saul. They sang, ***Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands.*** (1 Samuel 21:11)

As well as Saul's popularity waning and David's growing there was also increasing evidence that the God's blessing had been removed from Saul and placed on David. All of this fuelled a paranoia in Saul that resulted in several murderous attempts on David's life. At first Saul was subtle, offering his daughters hand in marriage in return for a seemingly suicidal raid on the Philistines after which David was to bring back 100 of their foreskins – bizarre. Saul thought he could get rid of David by proxy... the philistines would do it for him.

Instead of David being killed, he inflicted greater defeats on the Philistines and so his popularity in Israel rocketed, fuelling Saul's murderous threats and making the attempts on his life all the more blatant and obvious.

In trying to escape David fled to Gath and the shelter of King Achish. His reputation went before him and the commanders in Gath feared that one day David would turn on them and defeat them and so to avoid problems in Gath David pretended to be mad. He scratched at doors and dribbled down his beard. So successful was he at this that the King sent him away in derision. Who is this David, he's mad, no use to anyone.

David, who once was anointed king over Israel, who once commanded the Israelite army, once powerful and adored reduced to dribbling down his beard and considered useless. An incredible fall from grace and favour.

Yet, this same David living through this very fall from grace wrote, ***taste and see that the Lord is good.*** (Psalm 34:8)

David understood that although in the eyes of the world he was a disgraced man, a shamed man, a fallen man, a defeated man, yet in God's eyes ***those who look to him are radiant; their***

faces are never covered with shame. (Psalm 34:5) Why in the face of such humiliation was David able to offer such praise to God and have such confidence in who he was in God?

Despite the fact that he was a man on the run, David could see that God had delivered him. Saul had not been able to kill him, despite massing an army against him, despite keeping watch for him at his home, despite the spies who watched his every move throughout the country. God had protected David; he was still alive. His reputation might well have been in tatters, but in the grand scheme of things; God had been good to David.

Do we see God's goodness in our lives? I know that for many of us life is not easy, it has many challenges. People are unwell, loved ones are in hospital or receiving palliative care at home. I know that for some of us our personal lives are challenging. I know we live with regrets, we are worried about jobs, the future, our children. I know we struggle with all kinds of mental health and anxiety problems. I know that.

Do we see God's goodness in our lives? We have a harvest, we have food on the table, compared to some we are incredibly blessed. We have support through some incredibly difficult times, we have people who love us, who are praying for us. We have not been abandoned. God has been good, despite the hardships. There is no question David was in a difficult place. There is no question life was anything but easy for him, but he understood the goodness of God and so he praised God.

Harvest is the opportunity for us to stop and realise just how good God is to us and to give thanks. That God is with us, that we have indeed tasted that God is good, but maybe we just need to remember how good that taste is.

There's something else for us in this Psalm. David learnt an important lesson when he fled from Saul. Let's not forget this is the same David who defeated Goliath, who defeated the Philistines on mass, who was able to go and collect 100 Philistine foreskins.

David could have fought back, he could have become like Saul and confronted him and tried to kill him. Indeed, he had opportunity to kill Saul as he relived himself in a cave where David was hiding, on another occasion David was able to sneak into Saul's camp and remove his staff while he slept. Yet he refused. Saul was God's anointed, and he refused to harm him.

David learnt that hard times are not reason to take matters into our own hands, hard times are not reason to stop trusting in God. ***Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.*** (Psalm 34: 11-14)

In 1 Peter 3: 10-12 these verses are used to teach the church to live peaceably among themselves and their community not repaying evil with evil. A difficult life or difficult circumstances are not reasons to stop trusting in God or living in obedience to him. God has been good to us, even when life is hard and so we keep on trusting. We keep the course, we don't give up, we don't deviate because it is in keeping on that we ***taste and see that the Lord is good.***

Finally, David learnt that because God had been faithful in earthly things so he would be faithful in heavenly things. Saul had not been allowed to harm him and so his anointing, the promise that he would one day be king still stood – so God could be trusted in greater things. The hurt, the pain, the loss of reputation all of that would one day be healed. ***The righteous person may***

have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all; he protects his bones, not one of them will be broken. (Psalm 34:19-20)

David was a shadow of his former self. He'd lost everything; indeed, he would eventually discover that his very wife had been given to another man. Yet, he believed that he would be delivered from all his troubles. He believed in a future restoration.

Without knowing it, David pointed to how that future restoration would come about. The reference to bones not being broken is a picture of what didn't happen to Jesus on the cross. When the soldiers wanted to speed up the death of Jesus and the two thieves on the cross, they were instructed to break their legs. When they came to Jesus, he was already dead and so there was no need to break his bones.

We ***taste and see the Lord is good*** not only when we see how he provides for us today – harvest for example, or in how we are able to keep on trusting him despite living through difficult times, but when we realise that ultimately in Christ, we are made whole because of how he sacrificed himself for us. In Christ we have a future deliverance from every trouble, every heartache and in their place, we are blessed with every ounce of goodness possible.

It is good to remember God's goodness today because it helps us to keep trusting in hard times. The fullness of the goodness of God is only ever tasted when we have grasped just how much we have been promised in Christ and so we hold onto that promise believing it to be the most precious thing on this earth and so nothing would make us let go.

Taste and see the Lord is good, he has been good, we see that all around us. It is because of his goodness we keep trusting him today, but ultimately, we will know and see a goodness beyond our imagination if we keep looking to the promised salvation in Jesus Christ because it is in him that the Lord will rescue his servants; no-one who takes refuge in him will be condemned. (Psalm 34:22)