

It is February and I remember the first February after I had arrived in Chineham writing an article for the Chineham Chat and said, "it is official, that February is the worst month of the year. How do I know it is official? Because I have just declared it to be so. Sitting at my desk in January I'm aware that before we see the signs of spring we have February to go through. As we all know February is full of grey days. True the days are lengthening but then if you don't see the sun for days on end what does it matter if it is up there shining? Grey days that's February!"

It is often commented that in the summer the sun puts a spring in people's steps. We all feel a lot happier with the sun out. So it is not surprising that I am suggesting we all feel a lot more Eeyoreish during the winter and especially in February.

So when David says to us "Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together" (Ps 34:3) we may today think David you know what I'll give that a miss.

So now I have really cheered us up!

But let me suggest that if the day, week, month or whatever looks grey without much reason for joy and praise something that always lifts me is to hear good things that other people have been enjoying. I get a lift from the stories others have to share and especially testimonies of God at work in their lives.

Just before Christmas I had an email from one of our church members who wrote this:

Just wanted to share what happened to me today with you Ian.

I was meant to have a dentist appointment the other day, his receptionist rang to say his mum was ill and he had to take some time off to help her. The appointment was re-scheduled for today.

A few days ago I either dreamt or thought that I was going to pray for the dentist, today, when I went in I discovered that his mum had actually died, I passed on my condolences and he opened up, there in front of his dental assistant, I lay my hand on him and prayed for him, I felt the Lord's Spirit move through into my hand, how amazing hey, I have felt similar things in the past but nothing like this ...

That lifted me when I read it and it lifted me again this week when I reread it.

1. The call to praise God v1-3

As we come to Psalm 34 this morning it begins with David himself praising God and encouraging the people to praise God. He goes from "I will extol the Lord" v1 to "let us exalt his name together" v3.

It is never wrong to encourage others to praise God but there may be Eeyore days when we wonder what have I got to praise God for.

2. The reasons for David's praise v4-7

In these verse David alternates between I and you. "I sought the Lord", "you are radiant", "I called", "God delivers you". I hope you can see that although the words I'm using are not the exact ones in the text.

David was saying I want to praise God because I cried out to him and he heard my prayer and rescued me. Whoever does the same and looks to God will be radiant with joy because God will save them.

The bit of the Psalm before v1 gives us the setting for the Psalm.

Let me read 1 Sam 21:10-15 so we understand what had happened to David that caused him to extol the Lord.

"That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. [11](#)But the servants of Achish said to him, "Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances:

" 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands'?"

[12](#)David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath. [13](#)So he feigned insanity in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard. [14](#)Achish said to his servants, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? [15](#)Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?"

So David left Gath and escaped. God he saw had delivered him and he praised God for it and encouraged others to praise God as well. We can do that we can even in February praise God because of what he has done to save us.

Friends that is a large part of what we do as Christians isn't it?

We worship God. We sing him praise and while on a wet February morning we might not be feeling too upbeat and too much like praise but when we reflect on what God has done for us then we praise him. That is what we do if we are Christians we sing praise to God because "I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears."

Have you ever stopped to think why is it that church is one of the few places where people sing?

Well the Psalms were written to be sung and there is this long history and tradition of God's people singing and why, because of what God has done and especially because of our salvation. One of my all time favourite hymns is 'And can it be' because it has the words that speak of being rescued by God, "my chains fell off my heart was free I rose went forth and followed thee."

3. The encouragement to respond to God v8-14

a. taste and see v8. David's encouragement to the people was to find it out for themselves, to "taste and see that God is good" – try it and find out. V8 is used in the New Testament to describe the first steps of faith in Christ. Peter writes, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it

you may grow up into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." (1 Peter 2:2-3)

Faith in Christ is not something that is mere believing without evidence or rationality. You hear people talking as though biblical Christian faith and rational thought were polar opposites.

Proof about things comes in different guises. To demand the wrong sort of proof because it works, for example, in mathematics or logic, when a totally different sort of proof is required, is not rational but irrational. You cannot prove Peter loves Jane through mathematics or logic, that is plain stupid.

Imagine a man at Waterloo Station and he wants to know about the next train home to Basingstoke. So he asks a station official who says 7.30. The man's still a bit unsure so he goes and has a look at the electronic board yes 7.30. But not satisfied with that he then goes to the ticket office where he's told that it was indeed 7.30 but as it is now 7.35 he has missed the train!

Had he simply accepted the evidence he had received and acted upon it a. that would have been reasonable and b. it would have resulted in further evidence that proves the wisdom and rightness of the commitment. So when he got to Woking he could have been pretty sure he was on the right train.

Friends there is good rational and logical reasons for following Jesus but it is only when we step out in obedience to Jesus that we prove to ourselves the rightness of that faith in him – taste and see that the Lord is good. Jesus said, "If any man's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority". (John 7:17).

Yes David believed in God but it was his experience of God at work which endorsed and strengthened his faith and it can do the same for us.

b. fear the Lord v9-14 is the second response which David encourages in his listeners.

David encourages the people to have that right sense of recognition of who God is and humble respect for him. He was encouraging them to have a proper relationship with God yes recognising him as God but v10 recognising God's goodness and faithfulness.

Like children they needed to learn and often so do we. We need to learn to allow God to be God and to trust him for all that we need. We need v12-14 to recognise what will build our relationship with him and what will destroy that relationship. The words of Micah 6:8 help us here, "He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." This is the way to live out our lives with God.

If we wish the abundant life Jesus came to bring then it will be as we live in the fear of the Lord as we live lives of humble obedience.

4. God's abundant care v15-22

If we are walking God's way then

a. he watches over us v15

b. he hears us v15

c. he rescues us v17

d. he is with us v18

e. he redeems us v22

Again this was David's testimony from his own experience. Let's not get hung up on phrases like "he delivers them from all their troubles" and worry that God hasn't rescued us from the things that worry us.

The promise here is that God knows us. He is with us. He hears our prayer and yes he will rescue and redeem us but it will only be at the end of time that we are completely free from all our worries. It will only be at the end that he will wipe away every tear and "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Rev 21:4).

Friends it might be a grey dull February day and we may be feeling a bit Eeyorish but David encourages us to "Glorify the Lord with me" and he does that because of God's abundant care for his people. As we step into the new week we know that he will be watching over us and his presence is with us. More we know that as we speak to him about the things that concern us, the things that might rob us of joy and praise, God hears our prayer and he acts to help and save us.

In the light of that let's exalt his name together.