

Psalm 34:11

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 0 0] Psalm 34, we read that verse 11, Come ye children, hearken unto me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord. In this verse, children are identified not so much in the sense of little people who are not yet adults, so much as subjects of instruction.

Subjects of instruction, those who are requiring to be taught. And that doesn't necessarily mean to those of a particular juniolity of years in that sense.

Jesus said, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. And when he said that, he wasn't just talking about becoming small again.

There are lots of childlike qualities which he would want his disciples and his followers to adopt and to take on board. But first of all, remember that he said he must be converted.

So obviously, if we're going to be saved, we have to be converted. It's not just a case of like switching on a light and that's it, you just leave it there. The relationship with the Lord is a living relationship.

[1 : 1 1] It is an ongoing relationship. Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to seed that is planted in the ground. Or to blossoming and budding vines and branches and mustard seeds.

Things that grow. Things that have life. So he wasn't just saying you must be converted. And he wasn't just talking about being small. When he said we must become as little children, he meant that we must become as subjects of instruction.

If we are under instruction, we are subject to the discipline of that instruction. Anything that we are going to learn, we have to be disciplined about it.

We talked with the children a few minutes ago about learning to drive when they are older. Now when we do that, we have to learn our highway code. Nowadays you have to do a theory exam and so on.

You have to turn up for your lessons. You have to turn up for your exam when the time comes. There has to be discipline in learning the routine and the order of the gears and the pedals and the mirror signal maneuver and all of this.

[2 : 1 6] When you are learning to drive, when you are learning a language, you have to learn all the vocabulary and all the grammar of it. When you are learning maths, when you are learning science, there is a discipline to learn.

We have to be rigorous with ourselves. Any instruction is a discipline of instruction. And to be under such a discipline, a discipline of instruction, is literally what being a disciple means.

It is one who is under such discipline. Jesus doesn't just want a fan club. He doesn't want people to start following like groupies all over Galilee.

He wants disciples. Go here and make disciples of all nations. Those who will be under the discipline of instruction. He wants little children to be disciples of whose.

And he wants his disciples to become like little children. Come ye children, hearken unto me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

[3 : 19] Now, this Psalm 34 in its original is an alphabetical or acrostic psalm, which means that as you would go through it in the original, in the Hebrew, each verse or in some of the alphabetical psalms, of which there are several, we'll come to that in a minute, it might be every second verse or it might be a section or it might be particular stages through the psalms.

They work through the Hebrew alphabet so that the verse or the section or the passage always begins with a different letter, the Hebrew equivalent, A, B, C, D, E, F, G and so on, as they work through the verses.

Now, there are at least seven of such alphabetical psalms. Some commentators say there are nine. I can only identify seven, but of course there could be others there. And these are Psalm 25, Psalm 34 that we have here, Psalm 37, where it is every second verse, which is alphabeticalised in that sense, Psalm 111, Psalm 112, Psalm 119, where, as you're probably aware, it's in different sections, and Psalm 145.

Now, tragically, in our own translations, particularly into English, perhaps in Psalm 2 in the Gaelic, we have no indication, with the exception of Psalm 119, where you've got all these different funny-sounding words in the different sections that it's divided up into.

These are all the words for the different letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and it's working its way through the sections. If you were to look at it in the original, you'd see that every verse in each of these sections begins with that particular letter of the alphabet, and so it is with the other alphabetical psalms, each verse or every second verse.

[5 : 06] We can't get this in translation. We lose it in translation. But in the original, that's how it was constructed. It means that this important feature, though we lose it, you know, you can look at Psalm 25, though you blew the face of Psalm 111 or 112, and you won't have a clue in English or probably in Gaelic that these are actually alphabetical psalms in the original.

But they are constructed, at the very least constructed in such a way that these psalms were intended for teaching, intended for instruction.

They have been written down and constructed in this way, in their original language, so that they might be more easily taught. Just as, you know, sometimes when you were at school, the teachers wanted to teach you something, they might put it into song.

They might teach you a little song, whether about the alphabet, or about, you know, particular maths rules, or subtractions, or arithmetic, or whatever it might be. They put it into a little song, into a little rhyme that it helps you to remember.

Now, the psalms, of course, were designed to be sung, but they were also designed for instruction. And particularly these alphabetical ones are constructed in this way so that they might be more easily taught.

[6 : 27] Or more specifically, we might say that they might be more easily learned. And in terms of the learning, of course, not everybody could go around with scrolls and quills in those days, so if they were to be more easily learned, it means specifically they were to be more easily memorized.

They were alphabeticalized that they might be the more easily memorized. Not every psalm was. Only a handful of them. Only seven, or perhaps nine out of 150.

So it's not many. But they are designed to be learned, to be memorized. God's word is intended not only to be heard, not just to go in one ear and out the other, but also to be read.

But not only to be read, but to be taught. We don't, any of us, read some passages of Scripture and say, oh yeah, I know exactly what that means. Sometimes we do, if it's a comparatively simple or straightforward or understandable passage.

We have all read passages and thought, what on earth does that mean? Don't understand what that means. We are to be taught, partly by God's Spirit, partly by what other more learned people have written.

[7 : 38] And we can read their books, partly perhaps an expanding. A sermon might help it in some cases. But we are not only to read it, we are to be taught it. And we're not only to be, the word of God is not going to be taught, but it is to be remembered.

It will benefit us to the extent to which we remember it. So that when a particular situation comes in, something comes into our minds, you say, oh, remember that verse, remember what God said, somewhere in the Bible it says this, I don't know where it says it, but I remember hearing it.

If it is remembered, it will benefit us. If it is remembered, it can be used. It's not only intended to be taught, but to be remembered so that it is, in the fullness of time, part and parcel of the language that we speak.

You know, some aspects, some particular verses or phrases in the Bible, you know, have become part of our everyday language. You know, if someone doesn't suffer fools gladly, you know, that's sort of the inverse of what Paul says to the Corinthians.

For you do suffer fools. If somebody exploits you, if somebody robs you or whatever, you suffer fools. So if we say that somebody doesn't suffer fools, it's the opposite. We talk about the powers that be.

[8 : 51] That's what Paul writes to the Romans, the powers that be are ordained of God. Why do we say it that way? Because it's there in the Bible. There are so many phrases, particularly in the English language, which are taken from the Bible.

It has become part of the language we speak, but it ought to be more so. It ought to be more of the language we speak and the air that we breathe to sanctify all that we do in every aspect of our life so that it is part and parcel of the conversation that we have, of the air that we breathe, of the life that we live.

We cannot teach our children that which we do not first know ourselves. Not that we are to sort of memorize the whole Bible or invite it all, but we can teach that which we ourselves have known.

In the olden days, when education was more simple, perhaps, than it is now, when huge numbers of children were gathering in great big classrooms, they used to have what they would call monitors.

And these would be some of the more gifted children whom the teacher would then gather around his or her desk. They would teach the monitor the particular lesson. The monitors would then go out into particular groups in a huge classroom, gather the boys and girls around, and then the monitor would teach the children.

[10 : 11] He wouldn't teach them the whole rubrics of language and maths and science and so on. They would instruct to them that which the teacher had first given to them. So they take, as it were, their little mouthful of manna for that day, and then they give it to others.

They don't know all the rest, but they know the bit they've been given. They've been given this little bit, this little mouthful, this little teaching, and they teach it on to others. Now that may be the only way in which we, as parents or grandparents or part of the family of the Lord's people can help the younger generations to grow up.

Just take a little bit of ourselves and part that little bit that we know. Maybe that's all we can do for that day. As long as we get another day and feed them another day and another day.

Nobody expects you to cook, for example, a month's worth of meals in your kitchen and then feed it to your kids day after day after day. You cook the meal for that day on the day and you feed them.

Then you do up the dishes and then you put it all the way. The next day, you cook again, you feed again. Why should it be any different with the Word of God? We take in and we give out.

[11 : 20] Of course, the more we have at our disposal, the more knowledge, the more understanding, the easier it will be, theoretically, for us to feed them. But we take in so that we can give out.

We cannot teach our children that which we ourselves do not first know. So we must endeavor to know it. We ourselves must endeavor to know it, to learn, to read, to know God's Word and to have this relationship with Him so that having encountered it for ourselves, we can pass it on.

We ourselves are not called upon to be the repository of learning or wisdom. We're not the deep reservoir of all knowledge.

It's okay to be honest with your children and to have the courage to say, I don't know. I don't know the answer to that, but let's find out. Let's make that our project together.

I'll look this place, you look in that, you ask Mr. So-and-so or I'll try and find out from this person and let's, when we meet our next and we come together in the evening or whatever it is, let's see what we find out.

[12 : 23] Let's make it our job to find out together. It's okay to say, I don't know. But all too often when people say, I don't know, they leave it there and so you hit a cul-de-sac, you hit a dead end and you can't go anywhere with it.

The better people say, look, I don't actually know the answer to that, but let's find out. Let's make it our business to find out. Let's make it a project to find out together and then it becomes something interesting for the child.

Then it becomes discovery. Then it becomes almost exciting, you might say, something that they wanted a quick answer to, but hey, let's go and find the answer. We are not, as you say, the reservoir of all the deep waters of knowledge, but we may be the pipe through which some of it is channeled or some of it might flow and be dispensed to others, hopefully including our children or some of the children in the family of the Lord's people.

We may think ourselves unfitted or unsuited to teach others. Perhaps we may think ourselves unsuited to teach children. Say, well, I'm no use with children. Maybe we think, oh, because I don't have any children of my own or whatever, so that makes me not suited.

Of course, that's not the case, is it? My mother was a primary school teacher in the days when it was traditional that the primary school teachers who were women would only continue to teach as long as they were unmarried.

[13 : 49] And when they became married, they would leave the profession and they would go and set up home with their husbands. They'd probably raise families of their own and so on. But it became, it was the tradition that school teachers, if they were female, were unmarried.

This is why, to this day, you will still get children putting up their hands and saying, Miss, can I do this? Miss, can I do that? Miss, this. Even if the teacher is Mrs. So-and-so nowadays, it's still this.

Because that is the tradition that the school teacher was unmarried. She didn't have children of her own. I guess she was fully qualified to teach and to help other children.

Now, in the family of the Lord's people, we are all, you know, brothers and sisters in Christ. We are, hopefully, as we go on, mothers in Israel, fathers in God, brothers and sisters in Christ, we may have opportunity or ability to help, to encourage, to teach, those who are themselves children, even if they may not be biologically our children.

The fact that they may not be biologically our children doesn't mean we don't have a responsibility towards them. If children are brought within the family of a congregation, the whole congregation takes on part of the responsibility for their growth and development and teaching in the Lord.

[15 : 10] Now, that is something with which they will be in contact with that child. Maybe, you know, one day, probably, in most weeks. Their parents will be in contact with the child every day of the week.

So, a bigger burden falls on the parents, but it's not to be exclusively theirs. We are all to help, we are all to pray for, we are all to teach within the wider Christian family.

We may have opportunity. God is placed in our care within our Christian family, within the congregational family or influence, whether we be married or unmarried, whether we have biological children of our own or whether such children as we would call our own in that sense are only spiritual children.

Jesus had no physical children of his own and yet we know how brilliant Jesus was with children and we know that it says of him in the proper Isaiah, he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

He shall see his seed. all the children of Christ are not biological, physical children, they are his spiritual children, those who have been grafted, as it were, into this one true vine, those who have been made his by faith in Christ.

[16 : 25] Whatever our position, whether we are married or unmarried, whether we're single, whether we're family, men and women, whether we have biological children of our own or whether it is simply spiritual children, part of the spiritual wider family, we have part of this responsibility.

Come ye children, harpen unto me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Now when we look at this psalm as a whole, it's not just alphabetical of course, but there are different divisions within the psalm.

You know, some people have pointed out that you might say that the psalm divides into two sections, verses 1 to 10, if you look at it, you could say that this is a hymn of praise to God.

It's all about, you know, what the Lord does, how he has done with the poor man and how he's looked after him and so on. A hymn of praise to God. And in one sense, of course, it's even more perfectly divided because in the original, again, in the Hebrew, the title, a psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour and so on, this was actually verse 1 in the Hebrew.

So what we have as our verse 1, I will bless the Lord at all times, it would actually be verse 2 in the Hebrew soup, which would mean that you've got verses 1 to 11 would be the hymn of praise to God and then what we have as our verse 11 to verse 22, you might see, is a sermon of instruction for men and women, a sermon of instruction to mankind.

[17 : 51] So you've got that which is in praise of God, the first half, and that which is instruction for mankind. Not unlike, if you think about the Ten Commandments, the first four, our duty to God, the second six, our duty to one another, to our fellow men and women.

So you could say there are these two divisions. There are other divisions, however, within the psalm that they're not instead of, they can be as well as subdivisions within it. If we look more closely at these divisions, we can bring out something of the witnessing nature of this psalm.

There is a sense in which we could look at verses 1 to 3 and say, this is what I do. It is what I do. I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continue to be in my mouth.

My soul shall make a boast in the Lord. The humble shall hear and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me. Let us exalt his name together. It's a witness. It's what I do. And then you've got verses 4 to 6.

Why I do it? I sought the Lord and he heard me and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to him and were lightened. Their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried and the Lord heard him because God always hears.

[18 : 59] God always responds. God always helps. This is why I do it. That's what I do and that's why I do it. And then you've got verses 7 to 9 which you could say is why you should do it too.

Because the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them with fear and delivereth them. Taste and see. Put it to the test yourself that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man that trusts him.

Fear the Lord, he is saved, because there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. They'll never be short of any good thing.

That's why you should do it too. Verses 7 to 9. And then you've got verses 11 to 40. This is what to do. Come ye children, hearken unto me. I will teach you the people of the Lord.

What man has he designed his wife and love of many days that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, thy lips from speaking God. Depart from evil, do good, seek peace and pursue it. This is what to do.

[19 : 57] And then verses 15 to 22. This is what happens when you do it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous. His ears are open to their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

The righteous cry. The Lord healeth. The Lord is nigh to them that have a broken heart. And you've got all this interaction of the Lord with mankind. So you've got, as we say this, what I do, why I do it, why you should do it, this is what to do, and this is what happens when you do it.

Now, insofar as this is witnessing to a relationship with the Lord, this Psalm 34 has been called an evangelical Psalm in the sense of evangelism.

It is a Psalm that evangelizes, that seeks to spread the good news, whereby the writer's firm personal foundation becomes an instrument of outreach.

Just as, you know, in the days when we used to have the kishs, and some congregations, of course, still do, it was common in many places to sing, just before that, the verse was given out to sing usually in Galatians, Psalm 66, from verse 16 on to the end.

[21 : 08] Verse 16 is, Come and hear all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. Come and hear all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.

It's a witnessing. It's an evangelism, a statement, this is what God has done for me. It's not a case of, listen everybody, this is what you should do, because this is a good and moral and upright thing to do.

It's rather testifying, we have seen him ourselves, we have heard him ourselves, we have received Christ ourselves, come here, and I will tell what he has done for me personally.

And Peter, of course, mentions this, 1 Peter 3, verse 15, but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

Sanctify the Lord in your hearts, be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks if you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. Now Isaiah talks likewise about sanctifying the Lord and having this relationship with him.

[22 : 19] Sanctify, chapter 8, verse 13 of Isaiah, sanctify the Lord the host himself, let him be your fear, let him be your dread. That doesn't sound so comforting, does it?

If we're dreading and terrified of the Lord, then that's not so good, that's not how we sanctify. To sanctify is to make holy, to set apart in a holy sense.

Now, in the fear of God, at him be your fear, at him be your dread, this is that which brings good results. If we think of what Joseph says, you know, in our own connecations, most of you will know, we've been looking at Joseph and the famine and Jacob and his brothers and so on, and in chapter 42, when initially, Joseph, having the upper hand over his brothers, puts them all in prison for three days, and then he lets them back out, and he just keeps one of them as a prisoner, and he says, this do and live, for I fear God.

If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison. Go ye carry corn for the famine to your houses that bring your youngest brother back here. So on. This do because I fear God.

In other words, I don't dare to treat you harshly and unjustly because I know I answer to God. I fear God. The feet of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

[23 : 41] This is what we read in Proverbs. So the feet of the Lord is a good thing. Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, as Isaiah says. Let him be your fear, let him be your dread. Peter says, sanctify the Lord God and be ready always with a reason.

And then we read again here in the psalm that we have. Come ye children, hearken unto me, I will teach you the feet of the Lord.

This affects, the feet of the Lord is something which affects and invades and involves every part of life. Your work life, your home life, your personal life, your devotional life, your business, your relationships, your families.

we saw there with Joseph and his brothers. It affects your childhood, it affects your youth, your adulthood, your middle age, your old age, and how you face the prospect of death.

It affects every aspect of life. It is everything that is involved here. Come ye children, hearken unto me, I will teach you the feet of the Lord.

[24 : 50] It is all about past, present, future, reality. This is ultimate reality, the knowledge, the fear, the love of the Lord. And as all aspects, past, present, and future are involved, see how this psalm again, we will look at different means of subdivision here.

Verses 1 to 3, I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall continue again in my mouth, my soul shall make a boast, O magnify the Lord of me, let us exalt this name together.

It's future tense. Verses 1 to 3 is all future tense. Verses 4 to 6 is past tense. I sought the Lord, he heard me, and delivered me, they looked to him, and were like him, their faces were not ashamed, this poor man cried.

It's past tense. And then verses 7 to 10, we see it's present, and future tense. The angel of the Lord encampeth, present tense. He's doing it just now, round about them that fear him, and delivereth them, present tense.

Taste and see, it's to action, present tense into action. Taste and see the Lord is good. Blessed is the man that trusteth in him. Oh, fear the Lord, he has saved, present tense.

[26 : 02] There is no want to them that fear him. The lions, young, do lack. It's all present tense, but it's present into action. Present into future action.

And then we've got our key verse, come ye children, hearken unto me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord. And then verses 12 to 22, the remainder of the psalm, it's again present, and action.

Keep thy tongue from evil, thy lips from speaking doubt. What man is he that desireth like? The face of the Lord is against them, the righteous cry. The Lord is nigh to them. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.

He keepeth all his bones. It's present and action orientated. It is an active involvement because it's not man that is active in this latter part of the psalm.

It is God. God is the one who is active. Man is the subject upon which God operates. It is an involvement, an interaction between the Lord and his people.

[27 : 07] Well, not just his people, but the wicked as well. The Lord is involved in every aspect of life. The latter part of the psalm is all about the involvement and interaction of the Lord with man for good and for evil.

And we see all this, you know, this daily interaction, divine involvement. And it's in total contrast. The contrast could not be clearer between this and a sort of flat, cardboard, monochrome, one-dimensional, life-denying conceit and sort of atheism and secularism of the day.

It says, oh no, this is all there is. Everything you get, unless you touch it and feel it and sense it, then it doesn't exist. And when you die, that's it. You're on the ground. That's you dead. That's all there is. There is no afterlife.

There is no hope. There is no God. There is no knowledge beyond what we have. There is no soul. There is no color. There is no three, four, multiple dimensions. There is nothing beyond what I can feel, see, sense, touch, Christ.

This flat, cardboard, conceited, self-contained, self-obsessed, unreality is the complete opposite of what the Lord reveals in the fullness of his word.

[28 : 25] Even in this psalm alone, we have this description of the daily interaction, the divine involvement of the Lord with mankind.

The full on, full color, three, four-dimensional life in all its fullness. It is, it's not the fruit you find upon, it is the adventure.

It is the experience, the risk, the epic to which the Lord calls us and for which he has designed us in his own image.

And we should be like him. And being like him should be able to interact with him in this living relationship.

He has designed us to glorify him and to enjoy him forever. We are not ignorant.

[29 : 28] In this regard, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. But fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs chapter 1, verse 7. The fear of the Lord does not make you ignorant. It begins to give you knowledge. It is only the idiot, the fool, that will despise such wisdom and instruction.

Come ye children, hearken unto me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Not dread and terror and sweating blood, but rather this roller coaster, life experience, fullness, colour, all the dimensions of all the highs and lows and emotions and joys and knowledge and experience and experience of life in all its fullness.

Which is life that interacts with the Lord as we see in this. How he deals with mankind in his need, in his weakness, in his helplessness, but also when he cries to the Lord, the Lord hears and receives.

This, the feet of the Lord, the knowledge of his relationship, the way that he deals with us is surely what every loving parent will seek for their covenant child.

[30 : 54] To make the journey together because we are always together as we make it. You know, we overlap to the generations.

If I talk about my father's day, such and such is the case. Well, my father wasn't just one age all his life. Much of his life overlapped with mine. So some of what was my father's day was also my day when I was young.

And when he was young, some of his day was his father's day. And the generations we overlap. We're not in self-contained pigeonholes. So we're always making this journey together with the next generation, with the younger generation and the older generation.

We learn from them, we impart to others and we also learn from our children too. There are things we have to learn from them as well. There are things we learn about the Lord when we see the way that even a little child interacts and we see how way ahead of us God is with the simplicity of little children.

To make this journey together, learning and teaching and sharing the experience along the way. This is what we enter into with the covenant of grace and with covenant of families and with covenant children brought within the covenant family of the Lord's people.

[32 : 17] Building memories, building bonds of love, not just within family units but across the church family. Building up faith together.

when we know something, we are blessed by it and increased in knowledge by it. If we don't know something, we have the courage and honest to say, I don't know. Let's find out. Let's go and find out together.

Building up faith together. And we build them up. We trust and pray. And we grow in age and seniority and wisdom as they grow in maturity.

And in the fullness of time, unless the Lord comes back, we pass on. and they in their turn, who we hold in our arms as little infants, wet with the water of baptism.

In the fullness of time as they grow in grace and knowledge and love of the Lord, we pray it be only for a time that we part from them. And they in their turn will hold their own covenant children in their arms wet with the sacramental water and say to them as we say to them now, come ye children, hearken unto me and I will teach you the feet of the Lord.

[33 : 41] Let's pray.