

Too Good

Part 1, Taste & See

Psalm 34 – Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelek, who drove him away, and he left.

- ¹ *I will extol the LORD at all times;
his praise will always be on my lips.*
- ² *I will glory in the LORD;
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.*
- ³ *Glorify the LORD with me;
let us exalt his name together.*
- ⁴ *I sought the LORD, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears.*
- ⁵ *Those who look to him are radiant;
their faces are never covered with shame.*
- ⁶ *This poor man called, and the LORD heard him;
he saved him out of all his troubles.*
- ⁷ *The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,
and he delivers them.*
- ⁸ *Taste and see that the LORD is good;
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.*
- ⁹ *Fear the LORD, you his holy people,
for those who fear him lack nothing.*
- ¹⁰ *The lions may grow weak and hungry,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*
- ¹¹ *Come, my children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*
- ¹² *Whoever of you loves life
and desires to see many good days,*
- ¹³ *keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from telling lies.*
- ¹⁴ *Turn from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.*
- ¹⁵ *The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
and his ears are attentive to their cry;*
- ¹⁶ *but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to blot out their name from the earth.*
- ¹⁷ *The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them;
he delivers them from all their troubles.*
- ¹⁸ *The LORD is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*
- ¹⁹ *The righteous person may have many troubles,
but the LORD delivers him from them all;*
- ²⁰ *he protects all his bones,
not one of them will be broken.*

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

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

Does anyone watch Mad Men? A show about advertising men set in the 1960s. It so funny when you see their ads, they look so primitive. And some of them make these outrageous claims like saying you should feed soft drink to your babies; smoking is a great weight lost tool (kind of true); or can cure tooth ache with cocaine toothache drops!

You can't advertise like this anymore because people would just see straight through these ridiculous claims. We are much more savvy these days when it comes to advertising.

I read an on-line article from the "advertising age" saying millennials are also perhaps the most analytical and media-savvy consumers ever. They are better at seeing through our messages. "We shoot a beam of content to the audience, and they take it apart like light through a prism. Millennials are super-deconstructive of any kind of media messaging."

People even see the hidden marketing messages and regularly call them out. Like product placement – James Bond driving the latest convertible, Masterchef going to new York, flying Qantas, shots on the runway!

Product placement doesn't work anymore because people are alert to it. When I see it in a movie or TV show I can't help but point it out – nice mac laptop, everyone is using Sony xperia smartphones etc.

And in this context we have to try to bring to the world a message about the gospel – about the good news we have in Jesus. A message saying turn from the ways of the world and come and follow Jesus. How do we cut through with the gospel message today? How do we communicate a message when the audience is particularly resistant to messages just like ours?

Well believe it or not I think Psalm 34 has something to teach us. Like all good poems, context can bring to life what's happening here.

David gives us that context before verse 1. David is on the run from Saul, he is fearing for his life. He finds himself in enemy territory, he is captured and brought before King Achish. David is really a low point here, he is hunted and chased from all quarters so he has Saul on his tail from Israel, and he flees to the land of Gath (one of the Philistine nations) where he is captured and brought before the king, to see what to do with him.

Remember that he is no friend of the Philistines – he killed Goliath, the Philistine champion, and many other incidents. Saul wants as a dowry for his daughters hand in marriage, 100 philistine scalps from David – its not scalps he asks for, but you get the idea – David brought but not 100, but 200 philistine scalps.

So David would be a wanted man in Gath. If they realise who he is, he's gone. He thinks his time is over, between the rock and a hard place. How will he get out of this? But the Lord saves him. He pretends to be insane, blubbering and foaming at the mouth and the king buys it, he says, get him out of here.

And after this miraculous event his heart is filled to point of bursting with love and gratitude towards his God (verses 1-3). It like the moment you win the Grand Final or when you realise you just won the lottery – this feeling of total elation.

David was finished, he was a dead man walking, his life was over but now thanks to God he lives again.

He goes on verses 4-7 – he was in deep trouble, he sought after the Lord and the Lord provided, helped him in his time of greatest need. He is a satisfied customer, he is blown away by God's faithfulness to him and he can't help but tell other about what he has experienced.

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

This is a challenge to all who read this psalm: David is saying taste for yourself, see that the Lord is Good.

Often kids won't try new foods – "lasagne, yuck looks gross". So you say "how do you know its yuck if you never try it?" This could be the best thing you have ever tasted. Imagine if you never tasted ice-cream, you just thought yuck – you would miss out one the best dessert ever because you never tried it.

David says, don't miss out on the Lord, better even than ice-cream because you didn't taste it.

You see what David is doing here?

Without realising it he is using one of the strongest advertising methods there is. Which is personal recommendation. David says, see how God has worked in my life, and see how amazing he has been for me – you have got to try this.

That message is powerful it has serious cut through, more cut through than a tract or a slick gospel presentation.

We were at this trendy restaurant bar thingy, in Manly a few months ago and Amy wanted a cocktail, and the waiter said, were known for our apple martini so on his recommendation we got one, Amy has a sip and says, "wow you have to try this". What do I do? I have to try this drink, waiter loves it, Amy loves it, I am compelled to try this drink, and it was amazing.

Now when you're all in-situ in Manly you will all want to try this drink. Not because of a sign, or an ad or a slogan or a jingle but because someone you know said, I tried it, and loved it, you should too.

How can we hope to cut through this generation's internal spam filters that filter out all messages with healthy scepticism? A generation who dissects all advertising into how they are being manipulated, discerning what's true or not. We use the one form of communication that still holds a lot of weight – personal recommendation.

This advertising age article says that transparency and authenticity are key in marketing to Gen Y, "they'll go online and ask their friends for recommendations. They're very careful shoppers."

What will cut through to people when we're trying to share our faith?

Honest stories about how Christianity and church are meaningful to you. Why you love being Christian. How the Lord has been real to you. How you can see answered pray in your life.

And I think honesty is the key – saying Jesus will solve all your problems isn't helpful because it's not honest and it sounds like a bad sales pitch.

Using the disciples as an example life got considerably harder for them after Jesus came along. It was straight forward and simple before – Peter could have just fished in the day, and been with his wife at night, raise a family etc. But eventually he was killed for his beliefs.

Honesty is the key in a personal recommendation. “This TV is great, but the remote is pretty average.” “I love this online shopping website but the sizes are a bit funny.” That's what makes it trustworthy – it's real, it's honest

One Easter I was having a family lunch with some extended family and one of those conversations started.... you know those awkward conversations? Being Easter, one guy started on the topic of religion (you can tell the conversation is awkward when there's only people left). He was saying the usual, how can God be real when he does all these things in OT – he kills all these people, in one book he tortures the guy, kills his family.

I could have said that Job is more of an allegory about suffering, not really meant to be read literally. But I said, yeah there is some crazy stuff in the Bible, I don't understand it all, there are parts I find really difficult. You should read about Jesus first, read Mark it's the shortest, most concise. And he was happy with that because I wasn't trying to beat him in an argument. I was being honest, there is hard stuff in Bible, but also good stuff I love – you should see for yourself... taste and see.

Because sometimes it's not about getting across all your talking point, winning an argument but is about moving in a direction, moving one step closer to God. Moving one degree closer to 180 degrees turn around all the way around, back to Jesus.

Steve challenged you to pray with your eyes open last week and this week I want to challenge you to pray and look for an opportunity to recommend Christianity to someone. Maybe it's saying on Monday morning, you say “we had a great service on Sunday” Maybe you should come along some time, see for yourself? Or recommending a life group to someone, or an event, men's breakfast, crafternoon etc.

After Easter we will be running Alpha course. Alpha is pushing an Easter invitational, there research says Easter is the best time of year to invite people to think about God. So we will be running the course over 2nd term. Who could you invite, who could you ask to have a taste to see for themselves that the Lord is good. Who is someone you could start praying for now.

If the Lord is good to you, who can you recommend him to? So they can taste and see for themselves.