## Psalm 34

(Verses will be read before I come up)  
  
Main Point of Sermon:  
We are weak but he is strong - God’s power is manifest in and through our weakness.  
  
Intro:

Good morning church family! If I have not had the opportunity to meet you, my name is Doug Brown and I serve the St. John congregation as one of the elders.

If you’ve been coming over the last few weeks, you know that we are coming to the end of our summer preaching series where we - as your lay elders - are walking through individual Psalms.  
  
I think that I can speak on behalf of all of the elders when I say that it’s been an honor to have served you from the pulpit this summer. We do not take this opportunity lightly. I have uniquely felt the weight of desiring to handle God’s word faithfully over the last couple of weeks and I can tell you that it’s no small thing.  
  
That said, I just wanted to take a sec to express a deep appreciation for the men who serve as our regular preaching pastors. I have only had the opportunity to do this once, but it’s sobered me to the truth that - wrestling with God’s word and the weight of faithfully delivering it is a uniquely difficult and weighty task.

I am both so very honored to be with you this morning and also very ready to pass the baton back into those uniquely qualified hands!

## Introduction of Main Point

I’m going to attempt to teach a single-point sermon. Will I sneak in other subpoints as we go - absolutely! - but still, they will all hinge on this one broader point. I wanted to start with this, so that - if you tune me out for the remainder of the sermon, you’ll at least walk away with this, ready?  
  
**We are weak but He is strong**  
  
Sound familiar? It should - I lifted it directly from “Jesus Loves Me.” - the most memorable Sunday school song there is. Because *I* love you, I won’t attempt to sing it, but I do hope to get this song and this truth stuck in your head and in your heart today.

**We are weak but He is strong**

The idea is this:   
**God’s power, provision, and protection - are made manifest to the weak and the humble.**

Psalm 34 is an absolute treasure trove of truths to this end, but before we can pry this vault open we need the key.   
  
What is the key? It’s an acknowledgment of our own weakness and brokenness before God.   
  
So before we can appreciate the gems within Psalm 34. Let’s get this key firmly in hand.

## Setup

Since its founding in 1935, Alcoholics Anonymous has helped over 2 million men and women from over 180 nations find lasting sobriety. And that number doesn’t even include the many other recovery programs like those that meet weekly here at the Stone that also utilize AA’s 12-step recovery curriculum.  
  
No other recovery program has been nearly so successful. So what’s the secret?  
  
**Listen to the first two steps of recovery:  
  
Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over our addictions or compulsions — that our lives had become unmanageable.**

**Step 2: We believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.**  
  
Most self-help recovery programs start with the premise that - the strength you need to change can be found in yourself. That you need to come to the realization that you are stronger than you think.  
  
AA on the other hand - begins with the premise that you are weaker than you think - And until you acknowledge your weakness, no lasting change is possible.  
  
Do you see it? The prerequisite to lasting change isn’t our strength, but our weakness. In fact, no meaningful work can begin until we come to the end of ourselves.  
  
There’s a term for the moment you realize that you are completely powerless. When you’ve come to the end of your personal strength and have exhausted all of your available resources. It’s called hitting rock bottom and it’s seldom pretty. It wasn’t for me.

Personal Story  
  
I can so clearly remember the night that - just a few months into marriage - I found myself crumpled in a teary mess in the corner of a small duplex where Amanda and I lived right after we got married. I’d collapsed there after literally trying to run from myself. It didn’t work.  
  
I had come to the end of myself by way of a long road of carefully hidden sexual sin that I had kept completely in the dark for years - from everyone - including my new wife.  
  
I was convinced of two things:

First, while I knew my compulsions and addiction was powerful, I still believed that I could stop.

Second - I thought that marriage would be the thing that saved me - that it would be my refuge! That my love of Amanda would overwhelm my love of sin and I’d finally have freedom.

Turns out it doesn’t work that way. When I did confess, it rightfully devastated Amanda. And so there I was, a broken heap in a cheap two-bedroom duplex finally at the end of my rope, because - as it turns out - you can’t just turn off deep-seated addiction like a faucet.

In that state - I remember praying to God and saying. “I always knew that you would punish me for what I’ve done - but don’t let this hurt my wife. Don’t take it out on her - Don’t give her the check for my sin - let the payment fall on me!”  
  
**I have never heard the audible voice of God but in that moment - as clearly as I’ve ever heard his Spirit speak - he said - “If you could have paid the price, I wouldn’t have had to have come.”**  
  
At this point in my life - I had been following Jesus for over 20 years. And yet it was not until that moment - at the end of myself - that I came to understand the power of the gospel.

He wasn’t trying to punish me or Amanda! He was working through His power to Save us! He - as a loving father - had orchestrated every step along our path to bring us to this THAT moment so that we could see ourselves for what we really were - but AND more importantly to see Him for who he really is.  
  
We are weak - but He is strong.

It’s from this vantage point - from our weakness - that we began to see God’s power, provision, and protection show up in a way we could not have imagined.

## Transition

Something that felt immediately familiar in reading Psalm 34.

Something about David’s tone and posture toward God, felt like what was evoked in finding him through my rock-bottom experience.

This led me to dig more deeply into the context of the Psalm.

## Context of Psalm 34

David writes Psalm 34 in a rock-bottom moment. To be clear - we don’t find David actively struggling with compulsive addictions or moral failure - that will come later, but we do find him at the end of himself having exhausted every resource and refugee at his disposal.  
  
While God has promised David that he will be king, he is not king yet, and Saul - who is King - wants to do everything in his power to keep that from happening. He is actively pursuing David - and David is doing everything in his power to flee for his life.

Like us, David begins to pursue the resources at his disposal.  
  
Eventually, David finds himself in the most unlikely of places - he goes to the hometown of his former enemy Goliath - Gath, to meet with a leader and king of the Philistines. Why? He’s likely looking for the one earthly power to rival Saul.  
  
David’s reputation precedes him in all of the worst ways, And he’s recognized by the kings servants who make the fair point that the next big thing, the one who will proceed Saul, Just walked willinging into his net.

David just hit rock bottom.  
  
having exhausted his strength and every available resource does something unusual - he begins to drool into his own beard.   
  
David - who multiple times in the Psalms implores God not to bring him to shame before his enemies bring himself to shame. He feigns insanity to the extent that the king says “Do I lack madmen that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? He acts completely insane.  
  
**Step 2 of recovery: We believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**  
  
In David’s weakness, God shows up in strength. He moves in power to rescue and deliver David.

You see, it won’t be long before Saul's reign comes to an end. Do you know why? Because Saul - rather than trusting and obeying God - does it his own way and with his own resources.

What if God isn’t seeking to destroy David, but to persevere him? What if - as a loving father - he’s uprooting seeds of self-reliance that would topple Davids's effectiveness as king if unaddressed?   
  
What if God isn’t absent in David’s affliction, but closer than he could imagine? What if he has orchestrated every moment to the good of David and the service of his people?  
  
It’s in David’s weakness - Not his strength - that he’s able to experience and access God’s strength and power. He delivers David.  
  
He’s completely overwhelmed by it until it gushes out as, Psalm 34.  
  
So do you have the key in hand now? It’s our weakness! So now let’s use this key to unlock the treasure vault of Psalm 34.

## Unpacking Psalm 34

**Ps 34:1-5**  
**I will bless the LORD at all times;**

**his praise shall continually be in my mouth.**

**My soul makes its boast in the LORD;**

**let the humble hear and be glad.**

**Oh, magnify the LORD with me,**

**and let us exalt his name together!**

**I sought the LORD, and he answered me**

**and delivered me from all my fears  
.**

**Those who look to him are radiant,**

**and their faces shall never be ashamed.**

So I said that this morning would be a one-point sermon.  
  
**We are weak, but He is strong**  
  
**But Psalm 34 is so rich that we need a few themes to hang our main point on.**

**God’s power in our weakness,   
God’s provision in our weakness and   
God’s protection in our weakness.**

You may be thinking - Hey! That’s cheating. It absolutely is, but it’s still in service to the main point and takeaway.   
  
We are weak but he is strong.

## God’s Power in Our Weakness

So first, let’s look at some of these verses that celebrate the Lord's power.  
  
**Ps 34:1-2**  
**I will bless the LORD at all times;**

**his praise shall continually be in my mouth.**

**My soul makes its boast in the LORD;**

It’s like David is singularly focused on the Lord - as though He has a complete monopoly on his affections and David won’t be distracted by anything else..  
  
Listen to how David’s boasts are oriented - they are oriented to the LORD. Like he’s doing everything in his power to say - it’s not about me - it’s HIM.

Listen - I don’t want to diminish the many significant and notable accomplishments that are likely represented in this room, but I still think that I’m safe in asserting that none of us - combined - have David’s LinkedIn Profile.  
  
Show of hands - has anyone slain a bear or lion with your bare hands? Defeated any giants as a representative of an entire nation? Anyone anointed as a future king as a kid?   
  
No? And yet David - who has more right than any of us to boast - is saying No! Don’t look at ME - all of this belongs on HIS resume. Look at HIM!  
  
Storytime… Soon, David is going to be crowned king, and one of his first acts will be to return the Ark of the Covenant - which represented God’s presence among his people - to its rightful place in Jerusalem.  
  
There’s a parade, And David is in front of the Ark dancing in his underwear - making a fool of himself. This story always confused me. But I recently learned something that cleared a lot up for me. Ready? David isn’t actually wearing *his* underwear….  
  
Ok - let me try this again. What David is wearing is called an Ephod. It’s the undergarment of a priest. David is a king - not a priest.

A king's job is to lead God’s people. A priest’s job is to usher God’s people into God’s presence. You’re a King David - not a priest! Stay in your lane - and in your own underwear!  
  
Listen It’s as though David is saying - I may be your king, but today, the most important role is that of a priest - to usher you into God’s presence - because without his power, I can do nothing.   
  
Oh - and I’m not even qualified to suit up as a priest - the best I can pull off is the underwear. Don’t look at me - Look at HIM! David is making his boast in the Lord.  
  
The moral of the story?  
Only the humble have access to the fullness of God’s power and presence.

Which brings us to our next line in the verse.   
  
**let the humble hear and be glad.**  
  
He tells those who are humble - not powerful to be glad? Why? This feels so counter to how we think (All I do is win, win…) , but again - God’ power is made manifest in and through our weakness.  
  
Brother and Sister - do you feel like you are at the end of yourself this morning? Do you feel like you don’t have the strength required for the next step? Listen to this good news for you this morning! David just said that YOU, the one who is completely spent, completely depleted, completely broken, YOU (!!!) are more qualified than anyone to experience the power of the LORD.

If our weakness is the prerequisite for God’s power, then you have a head start on the rest of us. Be glad.

Before I read this next section again - it’s worth noting that David is likely addressing the humble when he says this:  
  
**Ps:34:3**  
**Oh, magnify the LORD with me,**

**and let us exalt his name together!**  
  
I love how Charles Spurgeon unpacks this (I may be new to preaching, but I do know that at least one Spurgeon quote to make a passable sermon)

**“*O magnify the Lord with me.* Is this request addressed to the humble? If so it is most fitting. Who can make God great but those who feel themselves to be little?”**  
  
You may know that you can actually use a magnifying glass to start a fire. How amazing is that, there’s this incredible power around you at all times - that will a little focus - could start a blaze.

The magnifying glass does not make the sunlight any more powerful than it already is. It just harnesses that power by bringing it into focus.|  
  
**Believer, what if your weakness was the lens by which we were able to see and manifest God’s ever-present power in your life?**  
  
We are weak but he is strong

## God’s Provision in Our Weakness

Not only is God’s power available in our humility and weakness, so is His provision. Again, look at David’s posture and view of himself before God.  
  
**In vs 6, David says:  
  
Ps:34:6  
This poor man cried and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all of his troubles.**

David describes himself as poor.

To be poor simply means that we lack the resources we need.

Soon, David is going to literally be about the richest most resourced man on the planet. But at this point, he can’t meet even his most basic physical needs.

Still - I think there’s something in David’s heart posture that goes beyond an awareness of his physical lack.   
  
**Listen to what he says in vs 9:  
  
Ps 34:9  
Oh, fear the Lord you, his saints.  
For those who fear him have no lack.**  
  
David’s heart posture is fear.  
  
Entire sermons could be taught on what it means to “fear” God - but here’s a working definition for today:  
  
**To fear God is to make Him primary in your estimation and consideration.**

Listen - I have ADHD and the attention span of an adolescent goldfish, so there is no judgment when I say this - I know I likely only have a small percentage of your consideration this morning. I get it! But let’s imagine a grizzly bear walked out on stage next to me…  
  
Guess who just became primary in your estimation and consideration?  
  
**Why? Because you’d rightly recognize the power of that animal compared to your weakness.**  
  
**Likewise - to fear God is to clearly see his strength over your weakness and to rightly place him in the center of your life.**  
  
Just as all of the planets are held in the proper place by bending to the gravity of the sun, we are held in our proper place by bending to the gravity of God. He is the center around which everything else in our lives orbits.

**Listen - we all fear something.** We’re already orienting our lives around some center. What’s the center for you?

Let fear be your guide - what’s the thing that you can hardly bring yourself to consider losing - Your job? Your money? Your friends? Your girlfriend/boyfriend? Your kids? Take a second to consider.  
  
(Pause)  
  
**Do you know what keeps me from placing God at the center? I fear lack.**  
**What might he ask of me if he’s in the center what might he take from me? What might it cost me?**

I’m far more comfortable with the idea that I know what’s best for me. I prefer to meet my perceived needs by my finite resources.  
  
But when God is rightly at the center - primary in my consideration and estimation - everything else in my life snaps back into its correct orbit.

**When we fear God, we have nothing else to fear. We don’t have to worry about whether or not he sees us and will care for us. Our Dad owns the place and he knows exactly what we need.**  
  
Also - when we put Him as the center, we begin to understand that there’s nothing that we have that didn’t come from him! What we have is not the product of our strength but his provision.  
  
Everything - every good and perfect gift - comes down through the hands of a loving father of infinite means who knows exactly what we need.  
  
**Look at vs 10:  
  
Ps:34:10  
The young lions suffer want and hunger;**

**But those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.**

**The point is, unless God provides there is no provision. None.**

**The young lions suffer want and hunger;**

It’s like David is looking for the most powerful and capable creature in all of the animal kingdom - Oh - and not just any lion - not a middle-aged lion who’s slow and soft in the middle - but a young lion in the prime of his life.

And yet in their strength alone - They suffer want and hunger - why? Because the same God who feeds the fragile birds of the air feeds them too. And he feeds and cares for you.  
  
**But those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.**  
  
believer, how might your estimation of God grow this morning if you were able to embrace your weakness by seeing God’s hand in every provision that you have?

He knows every need and desire and he is not withholding from you. He knows you better than you know yourself - you can trust him.

**We are Weak but He is Strong**

## God’s Protection in Our Weakness

So we’ve seen God’s power in our weakness, His provision in our weakness. Finally, we will look at God’s protection in our weakness.

This would be better expressed by saying the Lord is our deliverer and our refuge, but I needed one more “p” word. See what I did there? - This preaching thing isn’t so hard.., (yes it is)

**Let’s take a look starting in v 15:**

**Ps 34:15-18**

**The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous**

**and his ears toward their cry.**

**The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,**

**to cut off the memory of them from the earth.**

**When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears**

**and delivers them out of all their troubles.**

**The LORD is near to the brokenhearted**

**and saves the crushed in spirit.**

Look at this word “cry” in vs 15 and 17.

If you’ve ever been around babies, you know that they are very cute, but they are not terribly articulate. They get hungry, they cry., they get scared, they cry. They soil themselves, they cry. It’s like they can’t think of any better way to articulate their problems.  
  
Still - while they may lack words, they are incredibly effective communicators.

**Why - because every cry is an acknowledgment of their weakness**. It says I can’t fix it. But I know that mom or dad can. It simultaneously softens the heart of their parent and moves them to action.

**If you are a child of God, he hears your cries in the same way. As an acknowledgment that you can’t fix it and a call to a loving father who can.**  
  
Again - believer, do you feel like you are at your weakest? Are you just barely hanging by a thread? Look at the promise of vs 18.  
  
**The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in Spirit.**

It’s the crying child that a parent runs to. It’s the crying child who is scooped up and held close. The crying child who receives the presence and embrace of their Father.

(pause)

I want to take a moment to address a misconception that I can struggle with.  
  
**See, I want to believe that if I’m God’s kid, I’ll experience less affliction.**

That I’ll need to cry out less because he’ll remove my problems and afflictions. He’ll keep his kids from those things, right?  
  
**Look at v 19.  
  
Ps 34:19-22  
Many are the afflictions of the righteous,**

**but the LORD delivers him out of them all.**

**He keeps all his bones;**

**not one of them is broken.**

**Affliction will slay the wicked,**

**and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.**

**Here’s the thing to see:  
While both the righteous and the unrighteous experience affliction - for one (the righteous) this lead to deliverance, and for the other (the wicked) it leads to condemnation.**   
  
**Matt 5:45** tells us that God sends his rain - both on the just and the unjust. Both the rains that water and bring life, and the rains of affliction.

We will all experience the brokenness of this world.

Consider that the same drops that fell in Noah's time, fell on both on those outside of the ark and in it. **But where one group (the wicked) was covered and overwhelmed by these afflictions the other (the righteous we’re carried through it.**

**Why? Because for God’s children, he provided a way - in this case, an ark - Something to hide them from the storm and carry them through.**  
  
The waters of affliction that overwhelmed and covered the wicked, were the same waters that lifted God’s family and carried them to a mountaintop to experience the fulfillment of his protection and promises.  
  
**Did you know that if you are in Christ that you likewise have an ark to carry you through the afflictions of life’s storms?**   
  
**Listen to how Jesus is described in Col 3:3:  
  
Col 3:3  
For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**  
  
Maybe you feel like the storms of life are more than you can bear - that they are a consuming flood that will drown you. They won’t. Brother, Sister - They won’t.  
  
How can you know? Let’s look at why in vs 20:  
  
**Ps 34:20**  
**He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken.**  
  
On it’s surface, this may seem like a confusing promise.

In a sense, this is a promise to the righteous, that our afflictions, while painful, will not overwhelm us. But what David is also pointing forward to here is a more complete revelation through Jesus. This is a prophecy!

**In John chapter 19,** John notes that at Jesus' crucifixion, the soldiers refrained from the common practice of breaking His legs.   
  
Crucifixion is ultimately death by suffocation. You have to constantly push up on the nails in your hands and feet to take the pressure off of your lungs so you can take your next breath. So, when a soldier was ready to end the suffering - by breaking the legs, they were taking the life.  
  
**But no one took Jesus’ life from him. He laid it down. His legs were not broken - he willingly entered into death on your behalf.  
  
Death did not have the final say for him - Believer - it does not have the final say over you.**  
  
He experienced the full brunt of the storm of affliction and God’s wrath on your behalf so that your current afflictions - and death itself - would not have the final word over you.  
  
**2 Cor 4:8  
We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.**

Do you see it? **You will not be overwhelmed because he was not overwhelmed**. The vessel that was crushed was not broken.

He experienced the full brunt of the storm, every crashing wave of condemnation fell on him - But the result was not he was ultimately broken to sink down, but the vessel was intact to rise up - c**arried and qualified by his afflictions to sit at the right hand of his father where even now he advocates for you you even now.**

**We are weak but he is strong.**

## Application

So how do we experience God’s overwhelming power, provision, and protection?  
  
**It’s simple. We cry out.**  
  
Simple - but by no means easy. Trust me - I know. Admitting you are powerless is about the hardest thing you can do. Can he really hold me up? Really bear the weight of my greatest hopes and fears. He can. I promise he can. He will NOT let you fall.  
  
**The Unbeliever**  
Maybe you don’t know Jesus, but you're all too familiar with affliction. What if the storms in your life are meant to drive you to the loving arms of a father? If that’s you, you don’t need an articulate prayer. You don't need to subscribe to a new worldview. You just need to cry out.   
  
To cry out is to acknowledge that you are weak and broken and that you need refuge and a rescuer. If that’s you, we’d be happy to talk more with you. We’ll have men and women at the front of the stage after this service.  
  
**The Believer Trapped in Sin**

Maybe you know Jesus, but you resonate with my story. You are all too aware of your brokenness. You’ve exhausted all of your strength and every resource in an attempt to deliver yourself. What if today was the day that you laid it down? What if today was the day that you stopped running - aren’t you exhausted?  
  
The prayer I prayed in my rock-bottom moment - “Lord, let this punishment fall on me” was literally the most heretical, anit-gospel prayer that I’ve ever prayed.  
  
 Do you know what God heard? He heard his son crying and he scooped me up.

Cry out to him and tell him you’ve made a mess. He already knows! Tell others in your life so that they can help you. Acknowledge your weakness… he’ll provide the strength.  
  
The Believer in Self-Reliance  
Finally, Maybe you're more like David.  
  
Greeting team, deacons, kids volunteers, pastors - tune in for just a second.   
  
Maybe you don’t struggle with some hidden addiction of enslaving compulsion. Maybe you’re just… exhausted.  
  
If that’s you, consider this morning - maybe you don’t need to be saved out of your weakness but out of your perceived strength.

Know who has two thumbs and has struggled all weak with the idea of standing up hear and leading through my greatest moment of weakness? This guy.  
  
But you know what often happens when I share that story. The Spirit shows up in power? Sometimes other’s chains hit the ground. Isn’t that better?  
  
Are you exhausted? Are you jaded? Cry out! Ask him to save you out of your strength and self-reliance.  
  
Jesus says that he didn’t come to the healthy but to the sick. Ask him where you’re own perceived strength is masking symptoms. He’ll be faithful to show you.

## Conclusion

Church family, let this morning be an acknowledgment of your weakness before God and your need for a savior.  
  
**2 Cor 12:9-10  
But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**  
  
Yes, we are weak, but he is strong!   
  
 And yes - Jesus loves you.