

August 11, 2024

“Why Hold On?”

Psalm 34:1-8

### **Intro:**

We all like to hold on to things in our lives. I do realize this is a very broad, blanket statement, but ponder for a moment your own lives, and perhaps the lives of those people who are close around you. Even the person who claims to be the most minimalist has things that they just can't let go of. At face value, this is not all that bad of a thing. Yes, it might make our room or our house/condo/apartment slightly more cluttered (if we are only talking about material possessions), but in most cases it is not detrimental to safety or health in any way. In most cases, we find a reasonable place put the things and they are neatly stored out of the way and no one is any the wiser.

Cody is one who really likes to hold on to things. He comes from genetic stock that believes you might need something later, and so you should hold on to it now. He has put a personal value, or attached a story (perhaps a memory) to just about everything he holds on to. Not that many years ago, we would have to carve out most of a day just to clean his room. One of the biggest culprits would be piles of random paper – some that had things written on them (the start to a story, or a description of something, and the like), while others were partial drawings or the remnants of pages that he had cut things out of. He also had piles of the pictures that he had drawn and then cut out. Again, holding on to these things isn't really harmful; it just makes for a rather messy room. The poor kid had all his things spread out on the floor because his drawers were full of paper. Part of the cleaning process would be to go through each piece of paper and ask if it was really important and if it needed to be kept. 99% of the time it wasn't, but often he had to be talked around to seeing that.

Apparently I was also like that in my younger years, but I don't recall that and so will deny it, even if you get the more factual story from my Mom. Cody is much

better about this sort of thing now, and cleaning isn't quite the same traumatic experience.

We don't only hold onto physical things, although they are usually the easiest to identify and maybe do something about. We hold on to our habits, our mannerisms, our way of doing things, our speech. Think about the habitual things that you do on a daily basis. Maybe you have never thought about them, but they are there. You have a routine that you find comfort in following. You have a way of dealing with stressful situations at work. Perhaps you have a "don't talk to me until after the second cup of coffee" sign hanging somewhere. I like the consistency of the same routine in the morning. I can get ready and I don't have to think about it – if something interrupts that routine, then I get confused about whether I actually did brush my teeth or if I only think I did because that is what I usually do. I will also confess to holding onto (meaning I am stuck in) the music from the 1980's. It's not that the music of that era is superior to any other era – especially more recent music; it's just that I don't want to be bothered giving other decades of music a chance. And I justify this by holding to the opinion – which is entirely my own – that the music from the 90's and into the 2000's (up to and including today's popular music) is all garbage and not worth my time to listen to.

Silly, right? But we all have those things, and the hardest things to let go of in our lives are not the physical items taking up space, but the imbedded attitudes and actions.

### **Psalm 34 and 1 Peter 2:**

This is where our dive into Scripture leads us this morning. Why are we holding on to things?

If you take a look at the opening verses of Psalm 34, we find that David wrote it at a particularly difficult period of his kingship. He is in the land of the Philistines, trying to keep his head attached to the rest of his body. One would think that being in such a precarious position, one that caused him to pretend to be insane

in order to not appear as a threat, would be something he would not remember positively, and yet David is doing exactly that. In the midst of the persecution he is experiencing, he can't help but give praise to God. And he tells us exactly why. He can praise God because God has been good to him. David can point to the times and moments where God showed up and helped him when he desperately called out for help. Let's look again at verses 4-7:

"I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me. He freed me from all my fears. Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces. In my desperation I prayed, and the Lord listened; he saved me from all my troubles. For the angel of the Lord is a guard; he surrounds and defends all who fear him."

David knows that God is good, not just because someone, somewhere made some passing comment about it, but because he has experienced it first-hand. It is this experience of God's goodness and presence in his life that brings out his response of praise. Yes, he might be pretending to be a madman in the courts of a foreign country, but that does not get in the way of his holding onto the truth that he knows about God.

In verse 8, he issues the challenge to those reading and listening to "taste and see that the Lord is good." The word "taste" in this context means "proving by experience". David can prove that God is worthy of the praise he gives because he has experienced God's goodness.

We could perhaps read this section of Psalm 34 backwards and get a better sense of how it flows. Start with the encouragement to taste and see that the Lord is good, David says. Then to help us recognize God's goodness in our own lives, we move up the Psalm to see how this played out in David's life. As we read David's story, we can find similar themes in our own life – times when God was there when we needed Him to be there. When He gave us joy against all odds. Where we were desperate and afraid, but rather than being defeated, we were held up by God's protection. In essence, David is saying we don't have to taste, because

we have already tasted. We just might not have recognized God's intervention at the time. But now that we do recognize it, our response should be to praise God.

But there is another response that needs to happen as a result of tasting the goodness of God. It is the response of letting go.

This phrase "taste and see that the Lord is good" is repeated in the New Testament, specifically in 1 Peter 2:3 that we read earlier – "now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness..." The difference is that Peter is using it in the past tense (God's goodness is something you have already experienced), whereas David is using it as something to do moving forward.

There is an instruction here for us. Now that we have had a taste... what should we be doing? Clearly there is some change or shift that should be taking place. This phrase doesn't allow for the reader's life to remain stationary. Something is supposed to be shifting and changing.

We find the response in the verses just previous, the "Get rid of evil in your life" instructions of verse 1. Peter is asking the question: If you have tasted the goodness of God, then why are you still holding on to the evil behaviours of your past before you tasted such goodness?

Let's draw another comparison: Imagine that the only restaurant you have ever eaten at is McDonald's. It's not that McDonald's is great. It just that it is comfortable and you don't know that there are other options. Then you get to eat in a 5-star restaurant, and you experience a whole new level of goodness in eating. Compared to this new eating experience, McDonald's is like eating cardboard that has been left out in the rain. You have tasted "good". But instead of returning to that restaurant (let's assume that the price of the menu is not a factor), you go back to McDonald's, not because it is better but because it is familiar. Now you don't like it as much and while you are eating those rubbery chicken nuggets, you are fondly recalling the exotic dish you could be having in the fancy restaurant.

**Conclusion:**

This is what Peter, and David, are challenging us to look at. Why are we holding onto the bad, when we have tasted the good? Why are we holding onto deceitful ways? Why are we still allowing ourselves to be ruled by jealousy or hypocrisy? Why do we default to unkind words when speaking with or about others?

That is not an exhaustive list, just examples, but all of them speak to the thinking that we are missing out and that others are getting a better deal in life and that's not fair and if I can't have it, then they shouldn't be allowed to enjoy it either. This attitude leads to jealousy and unkind words, and all that Peter is telling us to put away.

If you have experienced the goodness of God, moments and times where you have experienced his protection, joy beyond anything you could have imagined, or renewed and refreshed life, then praise God for it. And don't go quietly into a private room to offer that praise. Do so in a way that others can see that such goodness exists. If you have experienced it, then don't hide it away just for yourself – share it with others. Desire that they would experience the joy of God filling them on their own. Help them to taste and see for themselves the same goodness of God that you have tasted.

Let's pray.