

HATED WITHOUT CAUSE

PSALM 35

Main point: God is a warrior, witness, and faithful judge for His people when they are unjustly treated.

INTRODUCTION:

Let's admit it—this psalm is a real “head-scratcher” at first glance. It feels unrelatable and irrelevant to us. And for the most part, it is. Psalm 35 is a **royal psalm** where the king expresses national lament as he faces an international crisis. A peace treaty between Israel and some other nation has been broken (v.20). We don't know what nation it was, but it does not matter. Former allies are now at odds. An agreement has been violated. Feelings are hurt, pains are deep, and friendships have changed. Both military and legal language are heard (vv.1-3, 11, 17, 20), which reveals that the tensions are high as the king faces the threat of war from a foreign power. They are on the brink of national conflict! We cannot relate to what it means to be a king with all the difficulties that come with being a head of state. However, Psalm 35 gives us a window into the mind and heart of King David to teach us about two things: 1) *how a godly believer should face personal crisis*, and 2) *how our ultimate King, the Lord Jesus, dealt with the crisis of evil He faced in His ministry*.

Verse 19 of Psalm 35 was quoted by Jesus in John 15 verse 25. It was during the night, just days before His crucifixion in Jerusalem. Jesus had gathered His disciples in a large room in a two-story house, which we know as *the Upper Room Discourse* (John 13-17). Jesus warns His disciples that when they experienced the world's hatred, they should remember the world hated Him first and that its hatred was without cause (John 15:20-25). But instead of praying for the destruction of His enemies or deliverance from them, Jesus succumbs to that hatred in His death—in order to bring us life!

David invoked curses to escape the hatred of his foes, but Jesus transformed this psalm in His life and ministry. Instead of calling out for deliverance and the destruction of His enemies, Jesus underwent the curses to eliminate the curse suspended over our lives because of sin. By His death and resurrection, Jesus becomes the Guarantor of a new (better) covenant, which makes it possible for sinners who repent and believe to become citizens in the kingdom of God (Heb.7:22; 8:1-6).

This psalm is naturally divided into three sections, which all have the same features of *complaint*, *prayer*, and *a promise or vow of praise*.

- In part 1 (vv.1-10), we discover **a threat of war**.
- In part 2 (vv.11-18), we discover **the background of the conflict**.
- In part 3 (vv.19-28), we discover **the prayer for victory**.

God is pictured in three ways to us in this psalm.

1. He is seen as **a Warrior** (vv.1-3), incomparable in His power, who fights on behalf of His people.
2. He is seen as **a Witness** (vv.17, 22), impartial in His observation, who sees the actions of men.
3. He is seen as **a Judge** (vv.23-24), unimpeachable in His judgments, who is ultimately responsible for overseeing and bringing about divine action.

What can we learn from Psalm 35 about God's nature and why we can fall back on God when facing a crisis?

Spurgeon said, "Every saint of God shall have this privilege: the accuser of the brethren shall be met by the Advocate of the saints. In judgment, they shall have a divine Advocate, in warfare, a divine protection."

The central idea which makes it so useful is this: this psalm was composed with reference to the treatment David received from those who had *professed to be his friends*. In that international setting—it is coming from a one-time ally, who has now turned against the king and the nation. In a time of peace, they were friends. In a time of prosperity, they were partners. But a reversal has come, and David turns to his one *Unchanging Friend*—the mighty and merciful God, and in doing so, he is an example of what we ought to do when we are *hated without a cause*.

EXPOSITION:

A. DAVID'S APPEAL (vv.1-10)

When the threat of conflict looms, what are we do?

1. Ask for God's aid. (vv.1-3)

Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me;
Fight against those who fight against me.

²Take hold of buckler and shield
And rise up for my help.

³Draw also the spear and the battle-axe to meet those who pursue me;
Say to my soul, "I am your salvation."

David employs poetic language as he prays for God's aid against his enemies. To "**contend**" and "**fight**" are synonymous parallelisms that suggest both a *legal* and *military* conflict. David is praying, "Lord, plead against those who plead against me; strive with my strivers; content with my contenders...if they take me to court, meet them there and beat them with their own weapons."

Then with a vivid metaphor, the Lord is pictured as coming forth, armed for battle and situating Himself between His servant and the enemies. The "**buckler...shield...spear...battle-axe**" are all *pieces of armor* and *weapons of war*. David employs this poetic imagery to show us what he believed about the existence and powerful intervention of God on behalf of His people.

This picture is not new with David. Moses sang of God being a Warrior when He defeated the Egyptians and liberated His people from slavery.

- **Exodus 15:2-3**—"The LORD is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation;
This is my God, and I will praise Him;
My father's God, and I will extol Him.
³ "The LORD is a warrior;
The LORD is His name.

In **Revelation 19:11**, John sees the Lord Jesus Christ mounted on a white horse as the Captain of the Lord's hosts, posed to do battle for His bride.

- ¹¹ And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

What this means for us is this: knowing that God is a Warrior who steps in and keeps back the enemy that rushes in on you like a flood, you can have security in the furnace of conflict. God's people have a King—He is the Captain of the Lord's host who has *no rivals* and makes no retreats.

2. Declare God's judgment. (vv.4-8)

David's wishes are introduced by a string of jussive verbs, "**let**," which sound like curses or something you would hear from someone calling down punishments upon an enemy. But there is nothing malicious here, David simply craves justice.

⁴ Let those be ashamed and dishonored who seek my life;
Let those be turned back and humiliated who devise evil against me.

⁵ Let them be like chaff before the wind,
With the angel of the LORD driving *them* on.

⁶ Let their way be dark and slippery,
With the angel of the LORD pursuing them.

⁷ For without cause they hid their net for me;
Without cause they dug a pit for my soul.

⁸ Let destruction come upon him unawares,
And let the net which he hid catch himself;
Into that very destruction let him fall.

Now, do we have the right to pray like this? The question is not, do we have the "*right*," but do we have "*cause*" to pray this way. In verse 7, David points out that he is being attacked "**without cause**." The enemies then are seen as ones who attack without reason. We are to love people and pray for our enemies, but when they attack without cause and stand against God's will and God's people, then we cannot wish them well. We don't pray that false teachers have success or that God would bless pedophiles. I know this is strong language, but remember, "*the fear of God is to hate all evil*." (Prov.8:13).

Picture the scene as David paints it. The enemy attacks the believer, but he is held at bay by the intervention of God, then the enemy is turned back and chased away by His messenger, and there is no escape.

Yet, God's brand of justice does not always appear how we think it will. Those who seek to shame God's people are disgraced and humiliated (v.4). Those who plot ruin are often overtaken in ruin. Those who hid a net to entrap are suddenly entangled themselves (v.7). Those who dug a pit will fall into it themselves. This is the way God's justice sometimes works.

Spurgeon said, "men set traps and catch their own fingers. They throw up stones, and they fall upon their own heads. How often Satan outwits himself and burns his fingers with his own coals. This will doubtless be one of the aggravations of hell, that men will torment themselves with what were once the fond devices of their rebellious minds." When the threat of conflict looms, what are we to do? Ask for God's aid. Declare God's judgment. Finally,

3. Anticipate God's victory. (vv.9-10)

We are not to complain to people, but bring our complaints to God. Once we have unburdened our soul in the secret chamber before the Judge, then we are to turn our eyes away from our foes and turn our eyes on Jehovah.

⁹ And my soul shall rejoice in the LORD;
It shall exult in His salvation.

David is not rejoicing in the anticipated destruction of his enemies, but in the salvation, the deliverance, the preservation, the endurance, the restrain, and the help that God has given to him. When we pray without praise, we rob God of glory. But when we pray and praise God, we demonstrate that we are trusting in God who does all things well.

Let me ask you, has God delivered you from sin? Has He protected you from Satan? Yes, you may have been in the fiery furnace this week, or the wilderness of drought, but look at where you are this morning! Listening to the Word of God, a Bible on your lap, praying, singing, asking the Lord for His mercy and grace. Well, go ahead and magnify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together! The credit and the victory belong to the Lord. But how shall we praise Him for His victory? David says in verse 10,

¹⁰ All my bones will say, "LORD, who is like You,
Who delivers the afflicted from him who is too strong for him,
And the afflicted and the needy from him who robs him?"

David says, let every part of my anatomy give praise to God. My weak hands, my tired legs, my sore back, etc. And then David reminds himself of **God's uniqueness** with a rhetorical question—"*Lord, who is like you...*" The answer, no one! He reminds himself of **God's power**—"*who delivers the afflicted from him who is too strong for him...*" And he reminds himself of **God's justice**—"*and the afflicted and the needy from him who robs him?*" When God condescends to show us such protection, compassion, kindness, and love, the highest praises ought to ring out to Him.

That's what happened with Paul and Silas in Acts 16. Paul's second missionary journey started with great results. First, Timothy was saved, then as they turned to Europe, Lydia was saved—and the enemy was threatened and savagely attacked God's missionaries. Both Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. But then at midnight—the dreariest hour of their imprisonment—they prayed and sang praises to God! And the prisoners in the surrounding cells and apartment were listening to them. As an answer to their prayer, God caused an earthquake as a sign of His interfering and intervening in their case, and every stock and fetter of the prisoners fell off. You would think they would have immediately fled the prison, but they did not. They had just been listening to God's servants praise Him, and now this happened, and there was no question that God had done it. The jailer thought about suicide and was prevented, and it led to an opportunity to share the Gospel of Christ.

No trial or circumstance that God has permitted you to be in presents a barrier to being a witness for Christ.

What this means for us is that *when we find ourselves under stress, we can find hope and help by reminding ourselves of God's character, His power, and His justice.* Yahweh is unique because of His

concern and action to rescue the people. Yes, life is often painful and difficult, but God keeps the score, and He acts for those in need who appeal to Him in faith.

B. DAVID'S ACCUSATION (vv.11-18)

As the background of the conflict is revealed, what are we to see?

David gives us "the inside scoop" on the *charges*, *conduct*, and *character* of his enemies so that we can understand and relate to him in our times of conflict.

1. Their charges were false. (v.11)

¹¹ Malicious witnesses rise up;
They ask me of things that I do not know.

Figurative language is used with the words, "**witnesses**" and "**ask me of**," which really means interrogate him, to suggest that his enemies had made this *a legal conflict*. They are ruthless or malicious as they twist the truth in order to gain the upper hand. The enemies' tactics have not changed. He charged Nehemiah with rebellion against the king (*Neh.6:6*). He accused Christ of conspiracy against Rome. But David was not only innocent of the charges, but he was also ignorant of the fault alleged.

It is a good thing when our hands are so clean that there is no trace of dirt even under our fingernails.

2. Their conduct was painful (v.12)

¹² They repay me evil for good,
To the bereavement of my soul.

The good that David had given them was unreciprocated. Instead of being thankful, these professed friends showed straight-up *ingratitude* by their actions—and it wounded the soul of the man of God. Can any parents relate to these feelings? Can any faithful employee relate to this sorrow? Perhaps you have made great sacrifices to do good in the name of the Lord, only to have those actions trashed and your heart broken. Listen, to be a Christian or to walk with God does not mean that everything that you do will be recompensed in this life. And this is why we have to be wise in where we place our confidence.

3. Their character is exposed. (vv.13-16)

¹³ But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth;
I humbled my soul with fasting,
And my prayer kept returning to my bosom.
¹⁴ I went about as though it were my friend or brother;
I bowed down mourning, as one who sorrows for a mother.
¹⁵ But at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered themselves together;
The smiters whom I did not know gathered together against me,
They slandered me without ceasing.
¹⁶ Like godless jesters at a feast,
They gnashed at me with their teeth.

David not only saw himself as a friend, but as a sympathetic brother. When they were in need and sickness, David said, "I showed empathy....I shared their grief." "**My clothing was sackcloth,**" that is, *I showed the deepest sympathy in their distress*. "**I humbled my soul with fasting,**" meaning that David even subjected himself to the pains of hunger that he might be better prepared to offer fervent intercessory prayer. But the prayers he offered with his face between his knees, and with his heart burdened and broken, amounted to nothing.

This was when their character came out! But when hard times come, those who really are your friends become obvious. They rejoiced when David stumbled. Instead of *loyalty* and *appreciation*, they responded by joining with David's enemies to make sport of him with *slander*, *ridicule*, and *contempt* in assassinating his character. They were never really David's friends, and when adversity came, their true colors came out!

Now in light of these revelations, how did David respond? And how should we respond when we are betrayed by someone that we thought was a friend or a partner? In verse 17, we hear David's prayer.

¹⁷ Lord, how long will You look on?
Rescue my soul from their ravages,
My only *life* from the lions.

These words are highly significant for two reasons. First, they show us that sometimes it appears to even the godliest of people that *God seems to be just looking on and doing nothing*. It seems as if God was indifferent. It is like that occasion when the disciples were caught in the storm and Jesus was sleeping on the cushion. They woke Him and said, "*Master do you not care that we are perishing?*" (*Mark 4:38*). Let us remember today that God's delays are not His denials. God's timing is always right. God's wisdom has ordained the hour that you're in, and nothing will stop Him from coming to your aid, though it feels slow to you.

Second, these words are significant in that David recognized that *the Lord was the only true Witness he had and the One ultimately responsible for how things worked out!* When you are innocent of action for which you are unjustly accused, you can fall back on God who *knows the truth* and ask Him for *vindication*. Because David enjoys the benefit of a clean conscience in this matter, he can pray with confidence that *the divine action that God will take will result in his deliverance!*

A word of application is given in the New Testament about how doing the right thing when you've been done wrong brings God's blessing and favor.

- **1 Peter 2:11-12**—Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. ¹² Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.
- **1 Peter 2:18-23**—Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. ¹⁹ For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.

Let me summarize what David wants us to see: false charges, painful actions, and bad characters all conspire to cast doubt on the Christian, so we must not be ignorant of Satan's schemes. For, if you look carefully at David's case, they are a small sketch of what our Lord endured when he was despised and rejected by men on His way to Calvary.

By the way, as you pray, don't forget to give God praise.

¹⁸ I will give You thanks in the great congregation;
I will praise You among a mighty throng.

One wise preacher once said, "Personal praise, public praise, and perpetual praise should be the daily revenue of heaven." Notice, this is the second time that David's prayer begins with complaint but ends in praise. This is a mighty example for us to follow.

C. DAVID'S ALLEGIANCE (vv.19-28)

The prayer for victory—is there a model prayer we can follow as we deal with persecution and crisis?

The problem has not gone away. It seems as if a campaign of false lies still marched throughout the land. They winked at David, which is a low-grade gesture of scorn.

¹⁹ Do not let those who are wrongfully my enemies rejoice over me;
Nor let those who hate me without cause wink maliciously.

They continue to organize slander and rally people to their side.

²⁰ For they do not speak peace,
But they devise deceitful words against those who are quiet in the land.

²¹ They opened their mouth wide against me;
They said, "Aha, aha, our eyes have seen it!"

They are glad to find some misfortune. They are quick to open their mouths to point out his faults, but they do not see their own. However, because David is confident that the Lord was his star Witness, he prays in these six ways.

1. God, be not silent. (v.22a)

²² You have seen it, O LORD, do not keep silent;

2. God, be not far. (v.22b)

O Lord, do not be far from me.

3. God, be not asleep. (v.23a)

²³ Stir up Yourself, and awake to my right

4. God, contend for me. (v.23b)

And to my cause, my God and my Lord.

5. God, vindicate me. (vv.24-25)

²⁴ Judge me, O LORD my God, according to Your righteousness,
And do not let them rejoice over me.

²⁵ Do not let them say in their heart, "Aha, our desire!"
Do not let them say, "We have swallowed him up!"

6. God, put them to shame. (v.26)

²⁶ Let those be ashamed and humiliated altogether who rejoice at my distress;
Let those be clothed with shame and dishonor who magnify themselves over me.

CONCLUSION:

What are we to take away from David's prayer and praise to apply to our lives from the 35th Psalm?

If we are unjustly treated, is it with cause? We are seldom completely innocent of wrong ourselves, although we might not see it at the time we are slandered. We must always be willing to pray with a humble and contrite heart, "Lord, does the fault lie with us..." and if so, "Lord, lead me to do the right thing."

We are not authorized by God to take matters into our own hands and do to the person what he or she may have done to us. Judgment is the prerogative of God. This is what we are plainly taught in Romans 12:19-21,

- Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. ²⁰ "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

If the cause is not with you, then know your priorities, have your eyes wide open, and remember your enemy.

- **1 Peter 5:6-10**—Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷ casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. ⁸ Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. ¹⁰ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

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