

Psalm 35 “A Song for the Hated King”
Psalm 35
John 15

July 16, 2023

Psalm 35 ends with praise that the LORD delights in the welfare of his servant.
Who is the servant of the LORD?
Well, in Psalm 36, the title will be “Of David, the servant of the LORD.”

We’re approaching the end of Book One of the Psalms.
Right in the middle of the book –
Psalms 18 and 19 were the songs that introduced this theme.
The introduction to Psalm 18 referred to David as “the servant of the LORD” –
and then Psalm 19 spoke twice of ‘your servant.’

We have heard many times how David is spoken of as the LORD’s anointed – the *Messiah*.
He is the anointed King – the Son of God – whom God set on his throne,
as the one who would begin to establish the kingdom of God.
The kings of the earth should “kiss the Son” (Psalm 2) –
but as Psalm 2 pointed out –
instead the rulers of this age have conspired against him.

And so Psalm 35 is a song for the hated King – the despised servant of the LORD.
I title it this because Jesus himself says that Psalm 35 is about *him*.

In John 15:25, Jesus quotes verse 19 (“they hated me without cause”) –
as he tells his disciples that the world will hate *you* as well.
So Jesus clearly calls *you* to sing this song with him.

So Jesus teaches us to sing Psalm 35 with him.
And that is a good thing – because Psalm 35 sounds rather strange to us!

In this song, we ask God to bring destruction on those who seek to destroy us.
But notice how: “let the net that he hid ensnare him;
let him fall into it – to his destruction.”
We simply ask God to let the wicked destroy themselves!

We are not trying to destroy them.
We are not seeking to accomplish vengeance!
No, we are like David – praying and fasting for their deliverance!

Or better – we are like Jesus, who said,
“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”
Or like his servant, Stephen, who echoed his master:
“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” (Acts 7:60)

We long for our enemies to become our friends!

But if they will not repent – if they insist on pursuing wickedness –
then we ask God to let them fall into their own traps.

Sing Psalm 35

Read John 15

I want you to notice something about Jesus' comment here:

In John 15, you might think that Jesus is focused on the Jewish leadership as
“those who hated me without cause.”

But in Psalm 35, it is clear that David is focused on foreign rulers.

What Jesus is saying is that the Jewish leadership of his day
have become “foreign rulers”!

When he says *they hated me without cause* –

the “they” winds up being *anyone* who opposes the kingdom of Jesus.

After all – as we see in the first line of Psalm 35,

David asks the LORD to contend with “those who contend with me.”

The first person singular is David – and thus Jesus.

You and I need to be careful – because we can only take these words on *our lips*,
if we are actually seeking first the kingdom of Jesus!

Of David.

So how do we pray:

1. Opening Prayer (v1-10)

a. My Problem: Enemies Contend with Me and I Need You (v1-3)

35 Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me;

fight against those who fight against me!

² *Take hold of shield and buckler*

and rise for my help!

³ *Draw the spear and javelin^[a]*

against my pursuers!

Say to my soul,

“I am your salvation!”

This language is so foreign to us.

So let me quote how the Message puts it:

“Harass these hecklers, God, punch these bullies in the nose.

Grab a weapon, anything at hand; stand up for me!

Get ready to throw the spear, aim the javelin, at the people who are out to get me.

Reassure me; let me hear you say, ‘I’ll save you.’”

Honestly, when I read Psalm 35:1-3,
it sounds like the way Monte McGill used to describe his gang banging days.
When the opposing gang shoots one of your guys,
you gather the gang, grab your guns, and go looking for one of theirs...

I have titled Psalm 35, “A Song for the Hated King,”
but you could also call it “a song for gang-bangers” –
“a song for those who want revenge.”

After all, the *impetus* behind this song is *exactly* what motivates the gang-banger:
they just killed my friend – and so they deserve what’s coming!
They just disrespected us – so they need to learn a lesson!

Gang banging looks a little different in middle-class culture.
But it’s still fundamentally the same thing.
Someone does something that we don’t like,
so we get *our people* to shun, ignore, or talk against *them*.
We don’t use guns – we use words
(and as we’ll see, Psalm 35 deals with that as well).

But Psalm 35 does *not* say “*So we’re going to make them pay!*”
Psalm 35 asks *God* to take care of it.

Now remember – who is the voice of this song?
Who is the singer of this Psalm?

No, tell me!! [David]

And who is David? [the king]

Right!
Who is tasked with bringing righteousness and justice to Israel?
The king!
David.

And yet, even *King David* recognizes that *he is not* the sovereign of the universe.
He does not take matters into his own hands.
He seeks vindication *from God* – he understands that *only God* can save –
only God can make things *right*.

Athanasius rightly told us how to sing this song:
“If enemies persist, and, with hands red with blood,
try to drag you down and kill you,

remember that God is the proper judge
(for he alone is righteous while that which is human is limited)
and so say the words of Psalm 35.” (269)

We must long to hear *God* say, “I am your salvation!”
We are often tempted to try to “fix” things.
Don’t worry God, I can take care of this!!

It’s like the young desert monk who came to his superior fuming about some slight –
and the older monk said, “yes, I understand! Let us pray:
O God, we do not need you – we can take care of this ourselves. Amen.”

Immediately the younger monk realized his error!
Vengeance presupposes a world without God.

And we need to remember that as we sing the opening petition of verses 4-6 –
what do I want *God* to do?

**b. My Petition: Let them Be Put to Shame with the Angel of the LORD
Pursuing Them (v4-6)**

⁴ *Let them be put to shame and dishonor
who seek after my life!*

*Let them be turned back and disappointed
who devise evil against me!*

⁵ *Let them be like chaff before the wind,
with the angel of the LORD driving them away!*

⁶ *Let their way be dark and slippery,
with the angel of the LORD pursuing them!*

Verse 4 identifies *who* are the targets of this prayer.

Those who seek after my life – those who devise evil against me.

Verses 5-6 identify the *agent* of judgment as the *angel of the LORD* –

the angel of the LORD will drive them away like chaff –

those who pursued me – who sought to destroy me –

will now be pursued by the angel of the LORD.

There are only two Psalms that refer to the “angel of the LORD” –
Psalm 34 and Psalm 35.

Psalm 34:7 said that the “angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,
and delivers them.”

Here the angel of the LORD delivers them by driving their foes away.

Here the angel of the LORD does what Psalm 1 had said about the wicked –

“the wicked are like the chaff that the wind drives away”

(and yes, the word “wind” is *ruach* – which can also mean “spirit”).

Even as the wind blows the chaff,
so also the angel of the LORD drives away those who devise evil against me.

We've been talking about how to see with new eyes –
how to connect nature and history and scripture.

We recently saw the haze from the Canadian wildfires –
when you see the smoke from a thousand miles away –
you should remember that this is the fate of those who hate the Lord Jesus.

The chaff is like smoke – transient – and soon to disappear!

In the fall we will see another picture in those big piles of leaves.
They will be sucked up by the trash trucks – to decompose and rot.
Or those mountains of ice that you will see all winter!
They will melt in the spring thaw – never to be seen again!

And verse 7 explains *why* they are worthless:

c. My Defense: They Dig a Pit for Me without Cause (v7)

⁷ *For without cause they hid their net for me;
without cause they dug a pit for my life.^[b]*

Without cause.

They had no reason for hating me.
They had no reason to pursue me – to dig a pit or lay a snare.
They simply hated me without cause.

Jesus' words in John 15 help us to understand this.

The world hates Jesus because Jesus revealed the pride and folly of the world.
Psalm 2 said that the princes of the earth joined together
conspiring against the LORD and his Anointed.
When God reveals his righteousness from heaven –
when God shows what true justice and holiness look like –
the nations hate and despise that.

Jesus did not say that they would hate you because of your political or social views.
Jesus said that they would hate you – even that they would kill you –
“because they have not known the Father nor me.”

They hated me without cause!

Now, let's be clear.

This does not mean that they had *no reason* to hate Jesus.

They did have reasons.

But their reasons all had to do with their own wickedness.

There was nothing in Jesus that should have provoked their hatred.

And so David – and Jesus – pray in verse 8:

d. My Petition: Let Them Fall in It (v8)

⁸ *Let destruction come upon him when he does not know it!
And let the net that he hid ensnare him;
let him fall into it—to his destruction!*

This is an important principle for understanding God’s judgment.

With the measure that you use in judging others, you will be judged.

(That’s what Jesus says in Matthew 7:2).

That’s why so many people quote Jesus’ famous statement,

“Judge not, lest you be judged”! (Matthew 7:1)

They think that by refusing to judge, they can escape judgment themselves!

But if you refuse to judge *righteously* in a just cause –

if you refuse to support the poor and innocent when they appeal for judgment –

then you will be judged in the same way!

And God will refuse to support *you* when you appeal for justice!

After all, the same Jesus who said “Judge not, lest you be judged”

also said, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.” (John 7:24)

Why is it so important to judge with right judgment?

Because God will judge you with the same judgment with which you judge others.

If you lay traps and snare for others –

then God will see to it that you fall into traps and snares yourself.

How do you want God to treat you?

That is the way that you should treat others!

(We’ll see more of this in just a moment!)

Indeed, in verses 9-10, the Psalmist shows how *God himself* is the pattern of just judgment.

e. My Praise: Then I Will Rejoice in the LORD Who Delivers the Poor (v9-10)

⁹ *Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD,*

exulting in his salvation.

¹⁰ *All my bones shall say,*

“O LORD, who is like you,

delivering the poor

from him who is too strong for him,

the poor and needy from him who robs him?”

How should you judge others?

You should deliver the poor – from him who is too strong for him,
You should rescue the poor and needy from the one who would rob him.
Because that is what *God* is like.

The poor and needy keep showing up!

Thirteen Psalms speak of the “poor and needy” –
including three in this final section of Book One (35, 37, and 40).

The regular pattern in the scriptures is pretty simple.

The rich and powerful have a tendency to use their wealth and power
to protect their wealth and power.

And since people are very rarely *content* with their wealth and power
they regularly seek to extend their wealth and power –
with the result that the little guy gets stepped on.

The Davidic King is supposed to be the protector of the little guy –
the one who makes sure that the little guy does not get stepped on.

And so in Psalm 35, the Davidic King identifies with the poor and needy.

Why is the King supposed to be like this?
Because *God* is like this!

“Who is like you, delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him?”

We don’t have kings anymore.

But the apostle Peter says that emperors and governors are sent
“to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.” (1 Peter 2:14)
All government policy will punish certain behavior and reward other behavior.

And, since “we, the people” are the ‘sovereign’ in this nation,
we, the people, are responsible for the way our nation treats the poor.

Our text does not give us detailed prescriptions for social programs.

That will require *wisdom* and thoughtful discussion within our communities.

I will simply point out that our text says that *David* – the King –
identifies with the poor in his suffering,
and *looks to the LORD* as his example and pattern in how he deals with the poor.

And that’s where we turn in the central section of the Psalm (verses 11-16).

2. But I Can’t Stop Thinking About My Problem (v11-16)

a. The King as Faithful “Brother” to His Neighbors (v11-14)

¹¹ *Malicious*^[c] witnesses rise up;
they ask me of things that I do not know.

¹² *They repay me evil for good;
my soul is bereft.^[d]*
¹³ *But I, when they were sick—
I wore sackcloth;
I afflicted myself with fasting;
I prayed with head bowed^[e] on my chest.*
¹⁴ *I went about as though I grieved for my friend or my brother;
as one who laments his mother,
I bowed down in mourning.*

In verses 11-14 David describes the particular situation that he faces.

There are malicious witnesses that are challenging him.
 It's a courtroom setting –
 but the challenger is not a fellow-Israelite.
 This is the language of international diplomacy.

I know – it sounds a little strange to our ears,
 but essentially, David is saying that he has fulfilled his treaty obligations –
 he has treated his “fellow kings” as brothers.
 When his fellow kings were in trouble – when they were sick –
 David afflicted himself with fasting and grieved over the troubles of his “friends.”

But that's not how they are treating him!
 When *David* stumbled, they seized the opportunity to make trouble for him!

To put it simply, David is saying that he has demonstrated *hesed* – covenant loyalty –
 to his brother kings,
 but they have not!
 David has sympathized with them when they were weak.
 He did not take advantage of their troubles – but instead he treated them as *brothers*.

But they...

b. But They Have Dealt Falsely with Me (v15-16)

¹⁵ *But at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered;
they gathered together against me;
wretches whom I did not know
tore at me without ceasing;*
¹⁶ *like profane mockers at a feast,^[f]
they gnash at me with their teeth.*

Have you ever been in a situation that you couldn't stop thinking about?
 It just kept eating at you.
 I was good to them – I did everything that I was supposed to do –
 and this is how they treat me?

That's where David was.

You can see why our Lord Jesus sang this song on the night he was betrayed (John 15).

He who was the Creator became one of his creatures.

He who gave the Law became as one under the Law.

The eternal Son of God took our flesh in the womb of the virgin Mary.

“Thou who wast rich beyond all measure, all for our sakes, becamest poor.”

And this was how we treated him!

And so after describing his situation in greater detail,

the Psalmist returns to prayer in verse 17.

3. Closing Prayer (v17-28)

a. My Problem: How Long, O Lord? (v17-18)

¹⁷ *How long, O Lord, will you look on?*

Rescue me from their destruction,

my precious life from the lions!

¹⁸ *I will thank you in the great congregation;*

in the mighty throng I will praise you.

“How long?”

Previous Psalms have plead with God to *speak*.

This one asks, “How long, O Lord, will you look on?” –

how long will you simply watch my misery!

And yet, even in pleading with God – there is still confidence!

“I will thank you in the great congregation; in the mighty throng I will praise you.”

One commentator puts it this way:

“Whereas the petitioner was always careful to sympathize with the distress of his neighbor,

to heal and to bind up by means of intercessions (and example of *tsdq*),

there appear in the hour of his own need people and powers

who want to ruin the psalmist and separate him from God (vv. 13ff.)...

In this plight the petitioner of Psalm 35 takes refuge with [the LORD as] witness (v. 22),

judge (vv. 1ff.), and "war hero"...

It is worth noting with what bold certainty the lamenting and praying psalmist

looks forward to the salvation event.

Again and again - while still engulfed by dangers –

he goes over to expressions of a song of thanksgiving (vv. 9-10, 18, 27-28).”

(Kraus, p. 395).

Remember our Lord Jesus! –

who *for the joy set before him* endured the cross, scorning its shame.

We are not called simply to “endure” suffering and misery for the sake of being miserable!

There is a joy set before *us* no less than before Jesus.

Indeed, it is the *same* joy – even as our cross is the *same cross* –

because our lives (our stories) are joined to life and death of Jesus.

The cross and resurrection of Jesus become ours as we are *baptized* into his death
so that we might also share his resurrection life!

And so we finally come in verse 19 to the passage that Jesus quoted:

**b. My Petitions: Let Them Not Rejoice over Me – For They Do Not Speak Peace
(v19-21)**

¹⁹ *Let not those rejoice over me
who are wrongfully my foes,
and let not those wink the eye
who hate me without cause.*

²⁰ *For they do not speak peace,
but against those who are quiet in the land
they devise words of deceit.*

²¹ *They open wide their mouths against me;
they say, “Aha, Aha!
Our eyes have seen it!”*

Yes, *I* will rejoice in the midst of the great congregation –

but those who hate me without cause – *let them not rejoice over me.*

For they do not speak peace – they do *not* speak “shalom.”

(We’ll hear in a minute of the importance of *peace* – the importance of *shalom* to God!)

But the enemies of the cross take pleasure in despoiling the poor.

Notice that verses 19-21 opens and closes with the image of the “eye”

but in the middle, the focus is on words, speaking, mouths.

Because seeing leads to speaking.

And David sure hopes that the same is true for God!

c. My Defense: Vindicate Me, O LORD! You Know the Truth (v22-25)

²² *You have seen, O LORD; be not silent!
O Lord, be not far from me!*

²³ *Awake and rouse yourself for my vindication,
for my cause, my God and my Lord!*

²⁴ *Vindicate me, O LORD, my God,
according to your righteousness,
and let them not rejoice over me!*

²⁵ *Let them not say in their hearts,
“Aha, our heart's desire!”*

Let them not say, "We have swallowed him up."

If God is silent, then I am dead.

We saw that in Psalm 28.

But here the focus turns to the plea for vindication.

I need God to make things right!

I want you to think about David's way of trusting in the *LORD* in times of trouble.

What do you ask for in times of trouble?

What do you want – when everything seems to be collapsing around you?

Maybe you are angry – and you just want revenge!

Maybe you are "frustrated" and you just want the situation to go away.

Maybe you are depressed and you don't think anything will ever change.

You need to hear what David is saying here!

What are you asking for?

What are you asking God to do?

Are you focusing on *things? People? Relationships? Situations?*

Augustine said it well,

"Nothing more precious will you find, though,
nothing better, than him who made them all.

Ask for him who made them; in him and from him you will have everything he has made.

They are all precious because they are all beautiful,
but what is more beautiful than he?

They are strong,
but what is stronger than he?

And what he wants most of all to give you is himself.

If you have discovered anything better, ask for it.

But if you do ask for anything else,
you will be insulting him and inflicting loss on yourself,
because you will be esteeming something he has made
more highly than its Maker,
even though the Maker wants to give you himself." (p274)

This is why verse 22 says

"You have seen, O LORD; be not silent! O Lord, be not far from me."

What is it that I want?

What is it that I need?

I need my God to be near me!

I need to be near to my God!

*This is why the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!
Because we *didn't* want him!
We *didn't* think that we needed him.*

Verses 26-27 then speak of the two results of David's prayer for all humanity.
After all, David *is* the Lord's Anointed.
And David's greater Son, our Lord Jesus, is the one who took these words into his mouth.

d. My Petitions: Let Them Be Put to Shame – But Let Those Who Delight in My Righteousness Shout for Joy (v26-27)

There are two options for all of humanity.
All of humanity is heading for one or the other of these results:

First, verse 26 speaks of those who “hate me without cause”:

*²⁶ Let them be put to shame and disappointed altogether
who rejoice at my calamity!
Let them be clothed with shame and dishonor
who magnify themselves against me!*

If you rejoice in bad things happening to Jesus and his kingdom,
then you will be put to shame and disappointed altogether –
because the Kingdom of Jesus *will* prevail.
If you magnify yourselves against Jesus –
if you reject his glorious kingdom
and if you prefer your own pathetic little kingdom of one –
then Jesus will let you have your own pathetic little kingdom of one!
And you will be clothed with shame and dishonor
because you preferred isolation and misery to the righteousness of his kingdom!

But verse 27 says:

*²⁷ Let those who delight in my righteousness
shout for joy and be glad
and say evermore,
“Great is the LORD,
who delights in the welfare of his servant!”*

As you can see, these last verses start to overflow with delight, joy, praise –
and *righteousness*.

Notice how David refers to “my righteousness” in verse 27.
What does he mean by “my” righteousness?

Well, David had sympathized with the distress of his neighbors.
He sought to heal and bind up the wounds of his neighbors through prayer –
and perhaps by other means as well!
He interceded even for those who hated him!

And now they are trying to ruin him!

And so David says “let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad.”
Why?
Because “Great is the LORD – who *delights* in the welfare of his servant.”

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart! (Ps 37:4)
It’s just another way of saying,
“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you.”

But we should marvel at the end of verse 27,
because we learn that the LORD himself “delights in the welfare of his servant.”
Why are *we* supposed to sympathize with the poor and the weak and the helpless?
Because that is what our God is like!

God himself “delights in the *shalom* – in the *peace* – of his servant.”
And because he delighted in the well-being of Jesus,
therefore he delights in the peace of all those who believe in the name of his Son.

Just a note: *shalom* is used 7 times in Psalms 34-41.
It is only used three times before that!
Book One of the Psalms is heading towards a conclusion of *peace*.

And so David says in verse 28:

e. My Praise: Then My Tongue Will Tell Your Righteousness (v28)

²⁸ *Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness
and of your praise all the day long.*

What else would I rather do than tell of his righteousness and of his praise?
Because our God delights in our *peace* – in our well-being –
therefore we should delight in talking about him!

What do we talk about?

We talk about the things that matter most to us!
When the peace of God guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
we then speak of his righteousness.