

Vindicate Me, O' Lord!

A Sermon on Psalm 35

by

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1. Introduction

2. A Plea for the Lord's Help (vv. 1-8).

a. *David prays that God would come to his defense (vv. 1-3).*

i. We don't know the circumstances David is facing, but we do know that he is under attack from his enemies once again.

1. It's important to know from the start that these people who are attacking him are exceedingly wicked.

a. They are plotting evil against him and scheming of a trap to catch him in.

b. They are slandering him.

c. They are repaying him evil for good.

d. They rejoice when he has bad things happen to him.

e. They lie to his face and are stirring up dissention.

2. In every single instance and accusation though, David is blameless. He's done nothing to deserve what they're doing to him.

a. David doesn't use this as an opportunity to exact his own form of vengeance.

b. The reason for this is simple: David is a man who wants God to be glorified, and that's his primary concern in how he prays.

ii. The first set of his petitions in vv. 1-3 are a cry for help—but the imagery here is one of warfare.

1. David asks that the Lord take up a buckler and shield and to draw the spear and the battle-axe and rise up to fight against those who fight against him (vv. 1-2).
 - a. The picture here is that the Lord would actually rise up, come to David's help, and kill his enemies.
 - b. Notice it is the Lord Himself that he calls upon to be the instrument of his salvation in v. 3.
 2. In all of it, he is entrusting the Lord to do that which he cannot do.
 - a. David knows that he is bound by the Law of God and that he is not to take vengeance.
 - b. Thus, he is appealing to God Himself to do what He has promised to do.
- b. *David prays that God would pour out retribution on his enemies (vv. 4-8).*
- i. First, David asks the Lord to bring them to open shame (v. 4).
 1. He's not asking this simply because he doesn't like these people. These are genuinely evil people.
 2. There is much more going on here than him asking for them to be embarrassed; he wants them to become a public spectacle of scorn and shame.
 - a. Think of how the story of David and Goliath plays out.
 - b. Or think of Nebuchadnezzar, when the Lord struck him with madness for seven years and he wandered around eating grass like the cattle.
 - ii. Second, David asks that the angel of the Lord would fight for him (vv. 5-6).
 1. The only other instance the "angel of the Lord" comes up in the Psalms is in Psalm 34, and it speaks to the pre-incarnate Christ.
 - a. This is the same One who David describes there as the One who encamps around those who fear the Lord, and He rescues them (Ps. 34:7).

- b. David is asking that the Lord Himself will go to battle for him and pursue his enemies relentlessly.
 - 2. He specifically asks that the Lord would blow them away like chaff in the wind and cause their feet to stumble.
 - a. The picture here is that of a man who is on the run, but no matter what he tries, he is constantly hindered.
 - b. He is being pushed forward by the Lord, yet he stumbles and slips in the darkness, and all the while, close on his heels, is God, relentlessly chasing him down to bring him to his inevitable ruin.
 - iii. Third, David asks that they would fall into their own trap designed for him (vv. 7-8)
 - 1. Here the cause for David's prayer has become clear; these men have devised to trap him without cause.
 - 2. "Let destruction come upon him unawares, and let the net which he hid catch himself; into that very destruction let him fall."
 - a. We might call this "poetic justice" that David desires of his enemies.
 - b. The principle is simple: may the cheaters be cheated, may the liars be deceived, may those who hasten towards bloodshed meet their demise.
- c. *David Promises to Praise the Lord of Salvation (vv. 9-10).*
 - i. "And my soul shall rejoice in the Lord; it shall exult in His salvation. 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?"
 - 1. This is the first of three promises David makes to praise God.
 - 2. We tend to read this in a very American way, as if David is hanging his promise of praise over God's head and will only give it upon seeing deliverance.

- ii. David is promising that his praise will be *exceedingly* great because God has rescued him—but it worth noting that David is not merely saying he will praise God’s salvation, but the God of his salvation
 - 1. He says this in v. 9 when he promises to rejoice in the Lord Himself, but then again in v. 10 he asks the rhetorical question, “Lord, who is like you?”
 - 2. The point is simply that David will rejoice in his salvation because it comes from God Himself, and David’s highest delight *is* God.
 - a. The promise then is that if the Lord does such a thing, it will result in the highest magnitude of praise that David can offer.
 - b. And this is hard for us to identify with in any real sense because we are so rarely ever at the end of our rope.

3. A Plea for the Lord’s Justice (vv. 11-18).

a. David prays that God would examine the evidence (vv. 11-16).

- i. “Malicious witnesses rise up; they ask me of things that I do not know” (v. 11).
 - 1. Here David is facing those who wish to bring him down another way through a false witness, or outright lie and slander against him.
 - a. There are famous court cases in our country where a man has served a life sentence, or even executed, only to be found innocent found later on.
 - b. Here it is worse: twisted and perverse people have found a way to manipulate the system.
 - 2. Remember, David lives under the best legal system to have ever been implemented in the history of mankind.
 - a. Yet the Law can be twisted and perverted by malicious figures so that the outcome is that the innocent gets punished.

b. All it takes for David to be stoned to death is the testimony of 2-3 witnesses.

ii. Yet it is still worse; these are men David counted as friends and treated as if they were his own family.

1. Verse 13 tells us that when they were sick, he put on a sackcloth and fasted for them, and was given to continual prayer on their behalf.
2. Verse 14 gives us further insight into the heart of David; he counted them as friends—even as his own family—and he mourned for them when life was hard for them.
3. Yet look at their response in vv. 15-16: “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. Like godless jesters at a feast, they gnashed at me with their teeth.”

a. And this is the most evil kind of betrayal one can face, isn't it?

b. You will see this if you're in the church for any period of time, yet we are likewise seeing it on a grand scale in the broader church currently.

b. David prays that God would not delay (v. 17)

i. “Lord, how long will You look on? Rescue my soul from their ravages, my only life from the lions.”

1. This is a very simple plea from David: do not wait, O' Lord. Rescue me from the savage lions who seek my downfall.
2. Such viciousness from those once deemed friends and brothers leads to only one course of action: prayer.

ii. It is worth noting that the Lord seems eerily silent to David in the midst of his trials.

1. In spite of this, David entrusts himself to the Lord.
2. He knows that even if all the friends he has depart from him, there will yet be One who remains, and that is God Himself.

c. *David Promises to Praise the Lord of Impartiality (v. 18).*

- i. This second promise of praise is focused on congregational worship.
 1. Notice he says in v. 18 that his thanksgiving and praise will be brought before a great congregation, a mighty throng.
 2. Here he is simply saying that God's deliverance will result not only in the praise of one man—but in the praise of many.
- ii. This is at the heart of David's pleas for help and judgment upon the wicked who scheme against him.
 1. David is not so much concerned about his predicament as he is concerned about God getting the glory He is due.
 2. In David's mind this is a rather simple thing: if he dies, not only will his own praise be cut short, but the praise of the entire assembly will be cut short.

4. A Plea for the Lord's Judgment (vv. 19-28).

a. *David prays that God would not let the wicked triumph over him (vv. 19-26).*

- i. As we come to vv. 19-21, David's plea begins with a very straightforward request: "Do not let those who are wrongfully my enemies rejoice over me; nor let those who hate me without cause wink maliciously."
 1. David's enemies are completely fixated on bringing him to ruin
 - a. In every way they can come against him, they have.

- b. Here he is, simply trying to live a quiet and faithful life in the land—yet they open their mouths wide against him and say, “Aha, aha, our eyes have seen it!”
- 2. Yet there is also something greater going on in v. 19 here, because this verse gets picked up in John 15:25 to speak of Jesus.
 - a. In John 15, Jesus is speaking to His disciples and telling them very plainly that the world will hate them because they have hated Him and no slave is greater than his Master.
 - b. When Christ speaks of this, He draws out the fact that He’s done works which no other man has done—and yet these things have taken place to fulfill the prophecy that they have hated Him without cause.
- ii. David knows that though the lies of these men are spreading far and wide, God has seen it (vv. 22-26).
 - 1. Notice in vv. 22-23 that it is in light of this very fact that God knows the truth of the matter that David calls upon Him to act.
 - a. Picture it as a court scene, if you will. David is on trial and virtually everyone is already convinced that he is guilty of these crimes.
 - b. Yet the painful reality is that for David, it appears as if God will not take the stand.
 - 2. He cries out, “O Lord, do not keep silent; O Lord, do not be far from me. Stir up Yourself, and awake to my right and to my cause, my God and my Lord! Judge me, O Lord my God, according to Your righteousness, and do not let them rejoice over me. Do not let them say in their heart, ‘Aha, our desire!’ Do not let them say, ‘We have swallowed him up!’ Let them be ashamed and humiliated for

rejoicing at my distress; let them be clothed in shame and dishonor for magnifying themselves over me!”

- a. Here is a man in utter desperation, but based on how things are playing out, it looks like God isn’t going to do anything about it at all.
 - b. And this is perhaps one of the hardest realities we can face as we go through trials in this life.
- b. David Promises to Praise the Lord of Vindication (vv. 27-28).
- i. Notice once again that David’s primary concern is the glory of God.
 - ii. David’s desire is that the people will magnify the Lord, and that he continue to live, simply so he can praise the Lord all day long.
 1. David sees this as an opportunity where God gets all the more praise and glory.
 2. This does not speak only of the fact that David would be delivered from harm.
 - a. What’s also in mind is that David knows the Lord gets praise and glory for the destruction of the wicked.
 - b. David knows, in other words, that wrath and vengeance are a beautiful thing, at least if you’re on the right side of it.

5. Conclusion

Small Group Questions

1. How has this challenged your thinking in the place of imprecatory Psalms and their place in the life of the Christian?
2. How should David’s promise of praise to God Himself shape how you should pray when you face trials?
3. We are not in open persecution (i.e. facing death) yet—but how can psalms like this shape how you pray against the evils facing the church today?
4. Is this at odds with how we are taught to be in the New Testament? Why or why not?