

Come to My Defense

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We come to Psalm 35 as we continue Psalm by Psalm through the Psalter of the Old Testament and what a joy it is to be able to do that together. You're no doubt like me if you're anywhere into your adult life, you go through times where you find yourself dealing with people who for some reason seem to be set against you, that are opposed to you and somehow seek your harm or argue with you and you're saying, "What is this all about? I don't understand why we're having this conflict. I haven't done anything to bring about your opposition to me." Well, if you've gone through that or if you're going through that, perhaps the spirit of Psalm 35 will be a help and a blessing to you, although we'll save the application of this Psalm to the very end.

In Psalm 35, David is suffering under the weight of accusations and plots from his enemies, and in very broad terms, he is simply praying that God would come to guard and God would act to protect him and in the process he promises to thank God for the deliverance that he expects God to give to him. So there is a very different spirit to this Psalm than what we saw, for example, in Psalm 32 where he was confessing sin, or in Psalm 34 where he was doing other things and calling us to bless the Lord at all times. Here this Psalm opens up not with a call to worship but with a prayer for help and there is an edge to what David says in this Psalm. And just by way of a little bit of overview just to give you a sense of where we're going since we do all of this in one evening, Psalm 35 kind of breaks down into three natural sections and you'll find elements of protest and prayer and praise in all three of those sections. So verses 1 through 10 constitute the first section, verses 11 through 18, and then 19 through 28 are the three sections that we have in this Psalm, and I say that just to give you a little orientation, a little sense of what's going on. The three sections are parallel in many ways because he's protesting against the unrighteous actions of his enemies. He's asking God to help and he's praying for, or promising his praise, I should say, at the end of each section. So that's what's going on. David has enemies that are after him and he asks God, "God, save me. Help me. Deliver me. Protect me. Defend me. Come to my defense."

Well, in the first section, he's praying for defense from baseless charges that are being made against him. That's our first point here this evening. He's asking for God to defend him from baseless charges that are being made against him. Look at verse 1 as he opens with this prayer for help,

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

And he uses a word here, "contend," that kind of comes from the legal realm, an idea of a legal defense or a legal contention, as well as a military metaphor, "fight against those who fight against me." What I would have you see is that the common theme, the common element in those different calls is that David is asking God to defend him from enemy attacks. We shouldn't think about this necessarily as a military attack but attacks against his person, attacks that would undermine his credibility. So he opens up with this vigorous call for defense. You know, a lot of times when we read Psalms, we're expecting a call to worship and, you know, Psalm 95, "Sing to the Lord," or something like this. This Psalm opens on a much different tone. He gets right to the point and he says, "God, you've got to defend me. You've got to help me as we go through this situation."

So he continues on in verses 2 and 3 and expands the military imagery in his prayer for protection. Look at verses 2 and 3. He says,

2 Take hold of buckler and shield

It's a picture of a small round shield, the buckler, and then the shield, the word for "shield" picturing full length body armor. He's calling God as a warrior to come and fight for him and you see that as you go on. He says, verse 2,

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

So David is calling upon God to exercise his omnipotent power, his strength, and say, "God, this enemy is too strong for me and I'm asking you in your power to act like a warrior on my behalf in order to defend me in this situation where I am too weak to help myself." Now, you've been in that situation, haven't you? In situations in family or in workplace situations or with people who were attacking your character unjustly, making accusations against you that were not true and you are not in a position to defend yourself. Man, I've been there. I remember what it was like. I'm glad I'm not in that situation now but being in a situation where people of influence were set against me and there was nothing I could do to defend myself in the midst of the process. And so you cry out to God, "God, you've got to help me here. God, you've got to act because I cannot do anything to deliver myself from this."

And part of what I would have you notice, beloved, as you enter into this Psalm 35 is notice the humble and dependent spirit with which David prays. He humbly says, "This is too much for me." He dependently says, "God, I need you to rise up and be on my behalf and act on my behalf." So there is a humility and a dependence that is woven in and wrapped around an urgency to the request that he is making. He is threatened and he is not able to defend himself in his own strength and so he calls on God in verses 4 to 6 to go to war, as it were, and to turn back their attacks that they were making against David.

Look at verses 4 through 6. He says,

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.

So he calls on the angel of the Lord which we saw in Psalm 34 last week, he calls on the pre-incarnate second person of the Trinity to act on his behalf to defend him and to drive away his enemies like chaff in the harvest. We've talked about the chaff in the harvest in times gone by. They would toss the grain mixed with dust up in the air, the heavy grain would fall back to the earth and the wind would just blow the dust away and into oblivion. That's a picture of what David is saying and asking God to do, saying, "God, turn against these enemies and blow them away so that they become insignificant and no longer a factor in my life any longer." And why is he praying this way? Well, he says, "I'm innocent. There is no reason for them to do what they are doing to me." We really don't know what the setting of this Psalm is and so we simply let the Psalm speak broadly rather than trying to tie it to a specific situation in David's life.

Look at verse 7 with me, if you would, and you see the word "for" there as we so often see. Why is David praying this way? Well, in verse 7 we get the reason that he is praying this urgently. They are attacking him in a baseless manner. Verse 7,

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

He said, "God, they have set themselves against me for absolutely no reason. There is no basis for them to oppose me in this manner like they are doing. I have done nothing wrong to them and yet here they are coming against me as an enemy, seeking my destruction, seeking to dishonor me. And God, what I'm asking you to do is to turn the tables on them and just as they are plotting dishonor against me, God, I pray that you would turn it so that they themselves would be dishonored." And he appeals to God and he says, "God, be my advocate here. As it were, step into the courtroom and defend me. Help me in a way that I cannot do on my own. Defend me in righteousness." And David says in verse 8,

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

Now, that may sound kind of harsh on our New Testament ears where we're used to hearing about love and forgiveness, especially from those that don't go into the whole counsel of God, but when you think about it, what David is saying here is, "God, let them reap what they themselves have sown. They are planning baseless destruction against me, God, let the destruction that they are sowing fall onto their own heads. I ask you to

defend me from evil attacks with a righteous victory." And in anticipation of God's answer, David promises his future praise. Look at verses 9 and 10 as we complete the first section. He says,

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

"God, I promise, God, I vow that when your deliverance comes, I will be praising you for it. I won't be like those who ask for your help and then walk away and forget when the answer comes. God, I will rejoice in you. I will exalt in you." Look at 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?"

He's saying, "God, the stage is set for you to put your glory on display. I have confessed that these enemies are too strong for me and I need to find deliverance. When you act, O God, when you display your power, I will have already disclaimed that I didn't do it of my own strength and so God, when deliverance comes, I will give you the praise because I have already said that I couldn't do it on my own." So he's asking God to defend him and he says, "God, when your deliverance comes, I'm going to pray like Micah the prophet did," although Micah the prophet came about 300-400 years later. We can look back on it and realize the echo of Micah 7:18 where it says, "Who is like You? God, who is like You? Who is strong and mighty like You to deliver and vindicate those who are too weak to defend themselves?" David says, "I want to praise you like that. You are set apart in your power. You are set apart in your faithfulness. There is no one like you, O God, and you'll find me praising you when this deliverance comes." That's the first section and you kind of get the sense of what's going on. Strong people are against him. There is no reason for the attack. David prays for help and promises to praise God when the help comes.

Now, as you go on into the second section, you could say this is a prayer for a defense from ungrateful men. A defense from ungrateful men and this section picks up on similar themes and the variation here gives you a sense of insight into David's sorrow and the basis of his plea to the Lord. It's not simply that people are strong against him and are opposing him without cause, these are people that are coming against him that he has actually poured himself and poured his heart into for their well-being. They are traitors to him. They have betrayed his love.

Look at verses 11 and 12 as he protests against the wicked nature of those who seek his harm. Verse 11,

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

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

David says, "God, I have been good to these people in the past but now they are trying to harm me. God, this is an exact reversal of what they should be doing. God, I was good to

them." And he goes on in verses 13 and 14 and says, "I sought their good in their hour of weakness." Look at verses 13 and 14 with me. He says,

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.

"I kept praying even though my prayers came back unanswered. I was praying for their well-being. I was praying for their healing, Lord. You know this." Verse 14,

14 I went about as though it were my friend or brother; I bowed down mourning, as one who sorrows for a mother.

He says, "God, you know what it was like. God, you know that in my prayers I sought their well-being when they were downcast, when they were on their sickbed. God, I sought you on their behalf. And what do they do in return, O God" Verse 15,

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.

"God, is this the way that a man should repay the kind of earnest concern that I showed to them? With slander? With jesting? With rejoicing when I go through my own difficulties? God, you see the utter injustice and the perversion that is woven into their actions toward me." So he prays again for relief. Look at verse 17, he says,

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

So, again, you see in these verses that we just looked at, verses 11 through 16, he protests against the unrighteousness of what is happening and here in verse 17 he prays for God's help. Again, "Lord, how long will you look on? How long will you stand silently by? How long will you be inactive while this injustice is being perpetrated on me?" So he prays there in verse 17, "Rescue my soul from their ravages, My only life from the lions." "Lord, come and rescue me out of the jaws of the lion as they attack me like this." And what will he do? Verse 18,

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

Do you see how each section is ending on a note of pledge to praise God? Go back to verses 9 and 10. I want you to see the pattern here, to see how the sections break down. He says in verse 9, "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?'" He says,

"God, my soul will rejoice in you and declare your praise." Verse 18, he says, "I will give thanks in the great congregation; I will praise You among a mighty throng." He's not simply talking about a private expression of praise. As king, he says, "God, I will lead your people in praise. I will lead your people in giving honor to you for this deliverance." So as he prays against these ungrateful men, as he prays against these baseless charges, he promises his praise as he goes through and so there are elements of complaint woven with request, woven with praise going through all these three sections of this Psalm.

Finally in this third section, he prays for a defense from deceitful threats. A defense from deceitful threats and he opens again with a renewed prayer for defense. Look at verse 19, he says,

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

The wink here is an indication that I've got mischievous plans in mind and we kind of see that sometimes in our own culture, a wink indicating that there's more going on than meets the eye. Well, here David says, "Don't let those who hate me carry out those devious plans that are expressed in the wink of their eye because, Lord, that would not be right." Verse 20,

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

And how are they deceitful? How are they wronging David? They speak as if they've caught him in wickedness. Verse 21, he said,

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

In other words, it's as if they are in court testifying against David saying, "We saw this wicked act that David has done and we testify to it." But David says, "They are speaking deceitfully. Lord, you know that what they're saying is not true." Look at verse 22, they say that their eyes have seen it, David appeals to the omniscience of God in verse 22. He says,

22 You have seen it, O LORD.

Our eyes have seen it, David says, "No, Lord, you have seen it."

do not keep silent; O Lord, do not be far from me.

So David appeals to the omniscience of God and says, "God, since you know the situation perfectly, you know my innocence in the midst of this situation, you know the deceitful way that they are dealing. God, I appeal to your omniscience as the basis that would motivate you to intercede and act on my behalf, to protect me, to guard me, to help

me." They are like false witnesses at a trial, testifying to something that never happened. So David asks for God's help and then he again protests his innocence and asks God to defend him. Look at verses 23 and 24. He says,

23 Stir up Yourself, and awake to my right
And to my cause, my God and
my Lord.

He says, "God, don't be inactive in this situation any longer. I know that you have the capacity to intercede and help me and to diffuse this situation, to turn their attacks against me around so that it does not harm me and works against them. I know that you have that power so rise up and act." In verse 24 he says,

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

So he continues to pray and stresses the urgency. In verses 25 and 26 he says,

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

He issues his final prayer in verse 26 and he says,

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.

He's praying for a thorough repudiation of these foes; that God would thoroughly tear them down and send them away in shame. And when God comes to his defense, they will be exposed as liars and David will voice out his praise.

Look at verse 27. Again, he has his eye on the congregation of the people of God that support him. Verse 27, he says,

27 Let them shout for joy and rejoice, who favor my vindication;
And let them say continually, "The LORD be magnified,
Who delights in the prosperity of His servant."

David says, "God, if you will just deal with me in this manner, the whole congregation will give you praise and adoration and they will ascribe glory to your name of which you are so richly deserving." And he closes and makes it personal in verse 28. He says,

28 And my tongue shall declare Your righteousness
And Your praise all day long.

David says, "God, when you come to my defense, I will praise you. I will give you the honor that you are due for this deliverance which I cannot affect on my own power."

Now, we kind of sailed through that Psalm pretty quickly but I'm not done yet. I actually have some points of application that I really wanted to spend the greater part of our time on and to kind of help you work through your own feelings of bitterness, discouragement, frustration, that sense of injustice with those who wrong you and oppose you. Like I say, I've been there so I speak from sympathy, not by way of rebuke. And when you look at Psalm 35, this would be a very easy Psalm for you to misapply in your life. A carnal mind, an ungodly mind, an unsanctified mind could easily go to Psalm 35 and justify its own vindictive spirit and seek your own sense of revenge as if you were going to call on God to be on your side in the personal disputes that you find yourself in. Well, how can we sort through this and learn from Psalm 35 and have it sanctify us? How can we avoid the pitfall of letting Psalm 35 drive us in a direction of a vindictive spirit that is not the intent of its teaching? How can we avoid that pitfall and still honor the message of David calling upon God to defend him in the midst of his enemies? I want to give you five things to think about here, all of them will be an encouragement and a help to you in thinking through things rightly.

First of all, how should we think through Psalm 35 and these forceful prayers for God to act against his enemies when Christ said that we should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us? This isn't as easy as it might seem. It's a difficult passage to apply. Let me give you some things to think about. First of all, as you're looking at Psalm 35 and thinking through this prayer of David, you need to do this, you need to remember David's role. Remember David's role, r-o-l-e. Remember his role. Don't immediately assume that you should take Psalm 35 and use it as a one-to-one correspondence for your situation because that's not a good way to think. David was the king of Israel. He was a representative for the people of God which, in a way and in a manner that was not true of you and me. Attacks on David had implications far beyond the personal situation that he found himself in. They undermined the blessing and the stability of the nation and so David as king, David as the representative of the people of God, David as the appointed king by God, was in a unique representative role. It's not the same. It's not a one-to-one correspondence as when somebody attacks you. You need to have, we, you and I here in the New Testament era, we need to have the humility to say, "Do you know what? David was in a position when he was attacked that's a little bit different than where I was at." That doesn't mean that we throw out Psalm 35 in our own personal lives, but it acts as a restraint on you to just jump in and say, "Yeah, God, just like David prayed, I want you to do to this guy who cheated me out of a couple of hundred bucks." That's a whole different animal.

So we need to remember David's role as he was praying these things. He was praying for more than just himself and his own well-being. Look back at verse 27, he had in mind the people of God who supported him. Verse 27, you really need to see this. Verse 27, "Let them shout for joy and rejoice, who favor my vindication; And let them say continually, 'The LORD be magnified, Who delights in the prosperity of His servant.'" David wasn't simply praying as a private citizen, he was praying as a public representative of the people of God whose well-being was wrapped around his well-being as king. We need to keep that in mind if we would use Psalm 35 rightly.

Secondly, this gets a lot more personal really quick. Remember David's reflection. Remember David's reflection. You know, if you're like me, first of all I pity you if you're like me. That's not too good. But if you're like me, it's easy to kind of unthinkingly rush into the presence of God and voice a complaint about something that someone has done to wrong you. You have this sense of, "This wasn't right. They shouldn't have done this. And God, help me in this situation." And you just kind of rush in with your human condition and the earthly circumstances and start venting your frustration to God. Do you know what? That's not what David did here. Let's step back and take a little broader look at what David did. Psalm 35 when you read this and this is very instructive for the way that you need to handle your own soul and the way that you need to deal with the anger, the bitterness, the frustrations you feel at the hands of others when someone has wronged you. You need to step back and before you start praying God's judgment upon their head, you need to step back and look at yourself first. David wrote Psalm 35 only after he had examined his prior dealings with these enemies. He reviewed his prayer life and only then did he pray. Remember, remember, David here is praying to God and appealing to the omniscience of God as a basis for his defense. As he's praying, he says things like this, he says in verse 7, look at verse 7 with me. We're kind of going back and seeing the Psalm from a different perspective as we seek to apply it rightly to our lives. David says in verse 7, "without cause they hid their net for me; Without cause they dug a pit for my soul." Appealing to the omniscience of God, he boldly says, "Without cause they have done this." Do you know what this means? It means that he has examined his life, he examined his dealings with them, he examined his thoughts and actions before he ever voiced complaint to God. Before you go to God to complain about a human situation that you're dealing with, somebody who is opposing you, you need to set that aside and examine your own life and your own heart and come before God searching your own heart, praying as it said elsewhere, "Examine me, O Lord. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O God." And be concerned – watch this – be concerned that there would be a holiness in your own life as your first priority rather than bringing in the human circumstances asking for God to judge that person who seems to be against you. Don't rush into that spirit of prayer, "God, do something about this yo-yo that's bothering me." No, go first and examine yourself.

As David did this, notice how he had reflected on his life. Look back at verse 13. He's praying in the present, looking back, remembering how he had prayed in the past. He says, "God, when they were sick," verse 13, "I wrapped myself in sackcloth. I humbled my soul with fasting. My prayer kept returning to my bosom. I bowed down mourning for them." Do you see what David has done? He has taken a long hard look and said, "No, I look back, Lord, and here's what I see in my life. I sought their well-being. I prayed for them. I was concerned for them. My heart was heavy when they were downcast." So as you and I think about how Psalm 35 would apply to us, we need to realize the spirit of self-examination and reflection that David shows in this Psalm before we go rushing into God's presence.

So sometimes you find, don't you, that in the midst of the conflict, especially if there's a little bit of passage of time and you can get out of the emotion of the moment, you can

look back and say, "Do you know what, Lord? Part of that was my fault. Part of it was something that I had done. There was a reason why they acted that way. I contributed to the situation." Then that spirit of examination rather than taking you into a prayer where you're asking God's judgment on someone who opposes you, brings you into a spirit of confession that says, "God, I was wrong here. Forgive me even as I would pray that you would forgive them." So self-examination is critical as we consider how to do this and we see that from the way that David himself handled himself in prayer.

Thirdly, as you examine yourself in light of this Psalm, we said that you should remember David's role, he was a king. Don't be so quick to put yourself in his shoes. Remember David's reflection. Slow down and examine your own life before you go rushing in asking for God's intervention against another man. Thirdly, remember David's restraint. Remember David's restraint. David here was appealing to God. He was not taking matters into his own hands. This is a bold prayer in Psalm 35. It is an aggressive prayer. But notice that it is a prayer, it is not David seeking vengeance on his own enemies. You know, if you remember David's life and the pattern of his life, you remember how Saul pursued him and persecuted him and David had opportunities to bring harm against Saul and he never did it. He was restrained in his personal interactions, restrained in personal vengeance even as he would pray to God and ask for God's help. Beloved, are you in like manner slow to try to vindicate yourself? Slow to react? Slow to retaliate? If you are, then that's the spirit with which David approaches Psalm 35 and it's also the spirit that the New Testament calls us to.

Look back at the book of Romans 12 and Romans 12 helps us see and apply this Psalm rightly in our own thinking and acts as a hedge against that ungodly impulse for self-vindication, vengeance and self-justification which can be true of us but was not true of David as he prayed in Psalm 35. Look at Romans 12:17 as Paul is speaking to believers. Here's another way for you to work out the will of God who saved you. He says in verse 17, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 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. 'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will keep burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Now, beloved, I'm making a very broad general point, not a detailed matter of exegesis here in what I'm saying. I'm speaking to you as seeking your own spiritual development, seeking for you to become more like Christ. What did Christ do when they unjustly struck him and slapped him and blindfolded him and spat upon his face? What did Christ do? Well, look over at 1 Peter 2 and remember the example of Christ as well as the things that we have seen from Psalm 35. 1 Peter 2. You see, I want to restrain, I want by God's word to restrain that impulse for vengeance that so easily resides deep in your dark heart, in the dark closet of your heart sometimes.

Look at 1 Peter 2:21, "you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin,

nor was any deceit found in His mouth," watch this, verse 23, "and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." Notice that when Christ was personally reviled, notice that when Christ was personally suffering he uttered no threats. He simply entrusted himself to his Father all of the way to the cross.

Now, beloved, I ask you in light of that example from Christ, in light of that clear instruction from Romans: where is it that we find the spirit that makes us justify our own retaliatory spirit against those who wrong us on a personal basis? We can't do that. We can't be like that. Now, that doesn't mean that we can't bring injustice before the Lord but let me suggest this to you, that even as you pour it out after examining yourself and after remembering where you fit into the order of the universe, you might say, go right ahead and pour it out and say, "Lord, this is unfair. Lord, you know that I did not wrong that person. I did nothing to justify that kind of response and treatment from that person," and grateful for the opportunities that the Lord gives us to feel these things, to identify a little bit with the suffering of Christ. But here's a suggestion for you as you're dealing with that particular person who is a real thorn in your side and unfair with you, however else you want to pray along the lines of Psalm 35, it is always fitting, it is always a restraint for you to say, "Lord, whatever else you do, now that I have poured out my heart to you, I just pray that your will would be done." It is always safe for you to pray, "God, deal with that person according to your will. God, deal with them according to your righteousness and according to your mercy. Whatever follows from this prayer, Lord, I'll rest in the confidence that you've heard my prayer and that you're working out your purposes in my life." So that, you see, beloved, what I want you to see is this, is that the condition of your heart in those situations where you're being unjustly accused is far more important than what happens to the person who is opposing you. It shouldn't be your first desire of your heart to see that person struck by lightning or to read about their demise in the morning paper. That wouldn't be good for you to want that, but rather to say, "Lord, I entrust myself to you even as 1 Peter 2 says. I want to be like Christ and entrust myself to you and, God, thank you for hearing my prayers against the injustice of what has happened to me. I know that you see the righteous way that I have tried to conduct myself in this situation. I thank you for all of that, Father. I don't know what's best. I don't know what you're doing and so I'm just going to ask for your will to be done and in that simple prayer, Father, I entrust myself over to you and I am content with whatever you do with this situation as with the rest of my life going forward. Just let me be in your hand and all will be well with me."

Do you see how a prayer like that is not inconsistent with the spirit of Psalm 35 but is informed with the fuller revelation that we get as Christians from the New Testament? Do you see how that acts as a restraint against that natural impulse that we all have in our hearts to want to strike back when someone strikes us first? Do you see that? And more importantly, will you move your heart in that direction? Psalm 35 points you in that way, especially as it is interpreted with the rest of the Scriptures.

And you say, "But Don, this is very painful. Do you realize that there are family members that are actively opposing me, that hate me without cause? There is no reason for them to deal with me this way. It's very painful. It's very discouraging." I know. I know. I have relatives like that myself, that some of you I have described to in the past. I remember getting a phone call from a relative out of the blue, hadn't talked to this person for years and they raised a 20 year old thing that happened and just started cursing me. Just cursing, cursing, cursing me and invoking the name of God against me. Well, I knew at that point that I was in good shape because there was no way that they were going to turn God against me. I'm reconciled fully to God through faith in Christ. God is never going to raise his hand against me with the kind of violent damnation that they were wishing upon my soul. But just hearing that come out of that vile mouth and just saying, "Lord, you know that this is all without cause. There is no righteous purpose in this. There is no reason for them to talk to me this way whatsoever."

So I just said, "This conversation is over," and hung up on him but that to say I realize that sometimes it's really close family relationships and you say, "They hate me without a reason." What do you do then when your heart is breaking? Someone that you have affection for returns it with violent hatred? How can Psalm 35 help us? Well, fourthly, we said remember David's role, remember David's reflection, remember David's restraint, fourthly, remember David's Redeemer who is also your Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look over at John 15 here for just a moment. You say, "This is unrighteous. There is no reason for this." Precisely. Once again, we find that our lovely Lord Jesus Christ has gone before us in the realm of human experience. Jesus said in chapter 15, verse 23 of the Gospel of John, "He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law," and Jesus quotes from Psalm 35 and says, "They hated Me without a cause." They hated me without a cause. Jesus knew by experience what Psalm 35 was like. Jesus becomes the fulfillment, the ultimate fulfillment of the object of this unjust hatred. David walked through it. In a greater way, the greater David himself was hated without a cause.

Well, if you're hated without a cause, go back to Christ and remember two things: first of all, Jesus knows what that's like and he sympathizes with his people in their sorrow, and then humble yourself down to this level and remember this, beloved, before you were a Christian, before God saved you, do you know what you did? You hated Christ without a cause. You refused his Lordship. You resented the authority of his word. You sinned openly against him. Why? On what righteous basis were you ever like that? There is no answer to that question, is there? You hated Christ. You refused Christ. You rejected him without a cause and what did Christ do for you? He loved you. Even in the midst of your rejection, he saved you while you were hating him without a cause. That was the spirit of your soul when he intervened and took you as his own. Well, if Christ knows what it's like to be hated without a cause in his own person and if you, yourself, were a God-hater rebelling against his authority in your condition of sin and God saved you anyway, then doesn't that do something to turn your heart and your perspective as you look on those

who hate you without a cause? You say, "Lord, you know what this is like. Lord, I was like that to you." And all of a sudden the energy of your vindictive spirit just starts to drain away.

So you entrust yourself to Christ. Beloved, never, never, never, never let your enemies distract your attention from your heavenly friend. Don't do that. Don't give in to that compulsive obsession with an earthly antagonist in your life when you have a Christ, you have a Redeemer who knows what it's like to be hated without a cause. He was on the receiving end of your own hatred without a cause and yet showed mercy to you. Let the earthly issue drive you closer to Christ if you would respond in a godly way.

Then one final point here. You remember David's Redeemer, working backwards, you remember his restraint, his reflection, his role. I like this last point, coming straight from the text of Psalm 35: beloved, remember David's resolve. Remember David's resolve. As I pointed out as we were going through our exposition of the text, each section of this Psalm ends on a pledge of praise. David never lost sight of giving honor to God.

Go back to Psalm 35. I want you to see this again because the replication, the duplication of this shows you the final closing emphasis of the direction of the Psalm. Embedded in his complaint about his situation was an overarching commitment to praise God through it and at the end of it. Look at verse 9 with me. He says, "my soul shall rejoice in the LORD; It shall exult in His salvation. All my bones will say, 'LORD, who is like You?'" Look at verse 18 at the end of the second section, "I will give You thanks in the great congregation; I will praise You among a mighty throng." And how did it end in verse 28? "My tongue shall declare Your righteousness And Your praise all day long." Do you see it, beloved? Do you see how clear and obvious this is as you go through the Scripture? As David is working through the earthly human difficulty, there is this transcendent commitment to praise, honor and glory coming out of his heart to God. Beloved, he never lost sight of giving honor to God even as he was in the midst of his circumstances.

Do you see that whatever else you're going through in difficult human relationships that that commitment to praise should be the compass that guides you in the right direction? When your heart is focused on giving praise and honor to God regardless of the human circumstances, God will sanctify that distress to the good of your soul. Isn't that what you want? Isn't that the picture that Scripture gives to you? Isn't that the desire of your redeemed heart? That, "God, I will praise you no matter what men do to me. And no matter what men do to me, it will not distract me from that central supreme focus that God," verse 28, "my tongue shall declare Your righteousness And Your praise all day long." Beloved, let that be that which gives you direction in the midst of your enemies.

Let's pray together.

Father, I pray as we gather together as the people of God, that you would indeed defend us against those who would wrongfully harm us, Father, those that oppose us without cause. We all have felt the pain of that, the discouragement that that can bring; that those that we have loved return vindictiveness toward us in return. It's one of the greatest

human griefs, Father, and to one degree or another, we've all felt it or will feel it in the days to come. Father, give grace to those that are walking through that valley, loved ones who have betrayed trust, who have returned silence and opposition for prayers and love. Father, give comfort in the midst of those discouraging situations. And as you give that comfort, Father, strengthen our resolve to keep our focus on Christ, the Redeemer who loved us when we did not love him. He loved us first. He came for us first and now we are under his care. Christ, you made us who were once your enemy, you have turned us into a friend. You overcame our opposition to you with your grace and now brought us into the family of God. That changes our whole perspective on unjust hatred. And as we remember our Christ, Father, we resolve to keep at the center of our hearts a similar pledge of praise that David made. Lord, give us grace that our tongues would always declare your righteousness, your praise all the day long, and that that commitment, Father, would redefine the way that we think and respond to the opposition of men. Give us the comfort that comes from knowing that all of our earthly circumstances will be resolved and settled and every tear will be wiped away when we find ourselves in the presence of Christ in heaven forever and ever and ever. Amen.

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