

Psalm 35

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[0:00] And open up in your Bibles to Psalm 35. During the month of September, really beginning the last week of August, but for a few weeks we are walking through some of the Psalms.

And we've been doing this actually for quite a while. Whenever we're in between longer sermon series, we'll take anywhere from three to five or six weeks and cover a psalm each week so that we spend some time in the Old Testament, but also so that we spend some time in these great and wonderful psalms that teach us how to pray and that all point us, in one way or another, they are all pointing us toward Christ.

And so this morning we are in Psalm 35. And if you're looking for that in the Bibles that we leave scattered, you'll find it on page 464. And it's a longer psalm, but we are going to read through the whole thing here at the very beginning.

So bear with me. It's a little bit longer than the last couple of psalms that we've covered, but it's worth our time and investment to read through the whole psalm. So if you would, stand to your feet. We'll read beginning in verse 1, where we are told that this psalm is of David.

Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me. Fight against those who fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler and rise for my help.

[1:23] Draw the spear and javelin against my pursuers. Say to my soul, I am your salvation. 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. Let them be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the Lord driving them away. Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the Lord pursuing them.

For without cause they hid their net for me. Without cause they dug a pit for my life. 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. Then my soul will rejoice in the Lord. Exulting in his salvation, 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. Malicious witnesses rise up.

[2:29] They ask of me things I do not know. They repay me evil for good. My soul is bereft. But I, when they were sick, I wore sackcloth.

I afflicted myself with fasting. I prayed with head bowed on my chest. I went about as though I grieved for my friend or my brother, as one who laments his mother. I bowed down in the morning.

But at my stumbling, they rejoiced and gathered. They gathered together against me. Wretches whom I do not know tore at me without ceasing. Like profane mockers at a feast, they gnash at me with their teeth.

How long, O Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their destruction. My precious life from the lions. I thank you in the great congregation.

In the mighty throng, I will praise you. Let not those who rejoice over me who are wrongfully my foes. And let not those wink the eye who hate me without cause.

[3:36] For they do not speak peace. But against those who are quiet in the land, they devise words of deceit. They open wide their mouths against me. They say, Aha! Aha!

Our eyes have seen it. You have seen. O Lord, be not silent. O Lord, be not far from me.

Awake and rouse yourself for my vindication, for my cause, my God and my Lord. Vindicate me, O Lord, my God, according to your righteousness.

And let them not rejoice over me. Let them not say in their hearts, Aha! Our hearts desire. Let them not say, We have swallowed him up. 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. 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.

[4:40] Then, my tongue shall tell of your righteousness and of your praise all the day long.

God, we thank you that your spirit actually inspired David in the midst of his troubles to pen this psalm so that we might be taught and instructed today.

So, help us to see in David's words the truth and help us to see with clarity how we might apply this psalm to our own lives.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. This particular psalm is what you might call a psalm of deliverance or a prayer for deliverance.

And there are many, many stories in the Bible of deliverance where God shows up, where God sends in his messenger to set things right and to rescue people who are in the midst of some sort of distress the way that David is right now.

[5:51] One of my favorite stories of God's rescue comes from the book of Acts. And you may know the story really well. In Acts chapter 5, very early on in the life of the church, in fact, the church at that point hadn't even really expanded outside the borders of the city of Jerusalem.

They're all there in Jerusalem. The apostles and all of those early followers of Jesus that they won after the day of Pentecost. And as the apostles are preaching and teaching daily in the temple courts, they upset the Jewish religious leadership.

They are upset that these disciples of Jesus are proclaiming this crucified man as the Messiah. After all, some of these religious leaders were those who had been responsible for having him crucified by the Romans.

Some of them were the ones who had convinced Pilate and Herod to persecute Jesus and eventually have him put to death. The last thing they need after they assume they have successfully put him to death is now, a few weeks later, these men going about proclaiming that this one has been raised from the dead and everybody needs to believe in him.

So, they're obviously upset with the apostles and for their ministry of preaching and teaching right there in their own home court in the temple courts. And so, they arrest a few of the disciples and they throw them into prison.

[7:14] It's not a good sign for them. And yet, the story as we read it tells us that in the middle of the night an angel came, opened the prison doors and called the apostles to walk out of the prison, just to walk away, just to leave the prison on their own.

And they do. They walk out and the next day they're back at it preaching again. And so, they are once again arrested and brought before the religious leaders. And yet, this time, one of those leaders stands up and actually defends them.

And so, they're set free again. Two times in a row, two days in a row, these apostles are rescued by God once miraculously at the hands of an angel and once through the mouthpiece of one that they thought would have been one of their enemies.

God does these sorts of things. It's an incredible story of God hearing the pleas of His people and answering them in that moment. Well, what we have in Psalm 35 is not the moment of deliverance, but the plea for help.

And as we read through this plea for help though, I think it might be helpful for us to think about the varied ways in which God may respond to these types of prayers.

[8 : 34] Because He very well might miraculously deliver us from whatever trouble we're in. It could be sickness. It could be financial difficulties.

It could be trouble at work. It could be difficulties in relationship. It could be troubles with your children, troubles with your spouse. It could be any number of problems that you face that are, at least at the moment, insurmountable.

You can't defeat those problems yourself and so you cry out to God for help. And He just might miraculously deliver you in that moment. Or He might, through what looks like ordinary means, just an ordinary guy speaking up in Acts, He might, through ordinary means, rescue you from that problem.

Or, He might do neither of those. because, two chapters after this miraculous deliverance at the hands of an angel, we find another one of Jesus' followers named Stephen.

And Stephen is doing the same thing that the apostles were doing. He's preaching the gospel and he is arrested. And if you're reading the story of the book of Acts, you've seen a few deliverances and you're expecting another deliverance to come.

[9 : 48] You're expecting somehow Stephen is going to be rescued at the last moment and he's not. He's stoned to death. A gruesome, terrible way to die.

And at the very end of the story of Stephen's death, there's a little note that Luke, as he's writing Acts, tags on to the end of that story and he says that those who stoned Stephen brought his clothes and laid them at the feet of a man named Saul.

And if you read on in the story of Acts, you know the story. You know Saul eventually becomes the apostle Paul. He writes 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament.

He takes the gospel far outside the walls of Jerusalem. He takes the gospel all over the Roman Empire. He is the apostle to the Gentiles. He does more to spread the gospel in his days than all of the other apostles combined.

And frequently in his letters, Paul refers back to his time before he was a follower of Jesus. He says that I'm the least of the apostles because I persecuted the church.

[11 : 01] He says that he was trying to destroy the church. He calls himself a murderer. He understands his role. In other words, the events that took place when God did not rescue Stephen set the stage for Paul's conversion and for his subsequent ministry and placed upon Paul for the rest of his ministry an incredible amount of humility because he knew who he had been.

then. Now, if you were Stephen or perhaps if you were Stephen's family, his wife or his children or maybe just a fellow church member and you were praying and praying because you know that God had delivered these apostles, you're praying and praying that Stephen would be delivered in some way.

Maybe someone will stand up and speak in Stephen's defense. Maybe an angel will show up during his trial. Whatever it might take. And yet, it did not happen. You may grow discouraged.

You may think those stories of God's deliverance are for somebody else but apparently not for us. And the reality is that God is always doing in the good times and the bad in our lives 10,000 more things than we can see him doing.

His hand is moving and at work in ways that we will never perceive. But what he never does is ignore our pleas for help. He hears them and he responds to them but not always in the ways that we would want.

[12:45] And I want us to keep that in mind as we walk through this psalm this morning. I want us to hear David's words, his cry for help and I want us to be willing to take upon that urgency that David has to know that we can go to the Lord and ask him for help just as David does.

But we need to not be presumptuous about how God is going to carry out his plans in our lives. And we need to not assume that we are the center of the story.

He is the center of the story. We're not the center. And so the things that he's doing are working for his greater glory. And our good is to be caught up in the pursuit of his glory.

So with all of that in mind, just to get our hearts ready to read this kind of a psalm, let's jump into the psalm. Now I said it's a long psalm and you know that now because we read through all of it.

It's not the longest obviously. There are plenty of psalms that are longer. But as you read through it you realize man there's a lot here and it's actually somewhat repetitive isn't it? He kind of says the same thing over and over in different sorts of ways and that's because it's poetry and that often happens in poetry.

[14:01] In fact though we don't really need to move beyond verse one to see the main point of the entire psalm. In other words the rest of this psalm from verse two on is just elaboration upon what David prays for in verse one.

Let me show you what I mean. There are two prayers that David utters that are parallel in verse one. The first one is contend oh Lord with those who contend with me.

And then the parallel phrase is fight against those who fight against me. Now those are parallel statements and on one level he's really asking the same thing in two ways but there is an important distinction between these two requests.

Because the first request uses courtroom type language. Contend with those who contend against me. It's almost like he's saying bear witness against or rise up and file a complaint against those who are bearing witness against me or filing a complaint against me.

It's the kind of language that you would have in the gates of the city where trials were often set and took place in David's time. This is courtroom type language. And he uses that language to express his need of help.

[15:27] But it's not the only language he uses. Because in the second half of this verse, in the second plea, he switches to wartime language. Where he says now, fight against those who fight against me.

So we have two metaphors running side by side throughout this psalm. The first is the courtroom metaphor. Because people are going to accuse you of things. Because people are going to say things about you and come against you with their words.

And you need to know how to pray when that happens. And there will be times when you feel as if you're actually being physically attacked. And you may be physically attacked. And you need to know how to call upon God to help you in those times.

Now as we read through the rest of the psalm, David actually reverses those metaphors. So what he does is he begins with the war time or the battle metaphor in verse 2.

And he takes that all the way through verse 10. Verses 9 and 10 kind of close that section off with praise. And then beginning in verse 11 and really in a sense going all the way to the end of the chapter, you have the courtroom metaphor where he's pleading for help against those who make false accusations against him.

[16:44] And you get praise at the end of that as well in verse 28. And you also get a little burst of praise to break that long section in half in verse 18.

So this psalm is really well laid out in three parts. Wartime metaphor, courtroom metaphor, praise, courtroom metaphor, praise. That's how it's kind of laid out for us.

And the reason I show you that at the beginning is because we're not going to walk through every single verse this morning. Even if I were to spend two minutes per verse, we'd be here for an hour at that point and I've already been talking for more than five minutes.

We'd be here for a while. So we're not going to walk through every individual verse but I want you to see how it all kind of hangs together and I want us to think about and consider these two metaphors that David is using as he cries out to God for help.

So he asks for God to contend with those who contend with him. He asks for God to intervene in the case that's being put against him in the court of public opinion.

[17:53] David has accusers. David has people who would claim that he is the wicked one, that he's the evil one, that he's the one who's doing all sorts of terrible things.

So in verse 11 he says malicious witnesses rise up and they ask me of things that I do not know.

In other words, they're accusing me of things that I don't even know what they're talking about. They repay me evil for good so my soul is bereft.

He's saying that I've not done the things that they accuse me of and yet they're accusing me of them and not only are they accusing me of them but they want to pay me back when I've not done anything wrong.

And then to add insult to injury he says and as for these people when they were down I prayed for them. I went about in mourning when they were sick and they were weak.

[18:51] I pled with the Lord to help them and now that I'm down and now that I'm on the outs they're attacking me. Is anything like that ever happened to you? Have you had someone and it feels like a real betrayal because you've helped them supported them encouraged them through difficult days in their lives and then when the difficult days arise for you suddenly they position themselves as your accuser and your enemy has that ever happened to you?

It happens it can happen praise God if it has never happened to you but it happens and so how are we supposed to pray? Should we pray exactly like David prays our enemies to be destroyed and God to go after them is that the prayer that we should pray?

Because we do have to read the Old Testament as New Testament people as New Covenant people happen we don't want to treat the two Testaments as being so distinct and separate that we think they preach a different message or proclaim a different God it's the same message throughout the same God throughout the same way of salvation from Genesis all the way to Revelation none of that ever changes but there are shifts and changes that take place between the Old Covenant or the Testament and the New Covenant is that things that happen under the Old Covenant that are largely external in other words David is dealing with external outward human enemies and when we come to the New Testament our primary enemy is not people it's not external it's not those who would hurl insults at us rather it's the accuser himself

Satan he is our primary enemy he is the one who brings slanderous accusations against us in God's own court in fact Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6 that our fight our battle is not against flesh and blood right but against the rulers against the authorities against these spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places we have real enemies and we have a real accuser who accuses us night and day we are told that's his vocation his vocation is to accuse us and just as David cries out to the Lord for help so we are supposed to cry out to the Lord for help in the face of these very real spiritual enemies in fact in the midst of his wartime metaphor David makes it clear who he expects to bring salvation look at verses 5 and 6 there he says let them that is his accusers his enemies be like chaff before the wind with the angel of the Lord driving them away and then again in verse 6 let their way be dark and slippery with the angel of the Lord pursuing him now the angel of the Lord occurs frequently in the story of the Old

Testament and most scholars most evangelical Bible scholars believe that many if not all but certainly many of the references to the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament are actually references to a pre-incarnate Christ that is the son of God before he becomes a human being coming to the help and the aid of God's people and the defeat of God's enemies and so David is in a very real way praying that the future Messiah would come and rescue him and yet we know that he has come to rescue us and so when we think about our great enemy when we think about the great accuser or the spiritual enemies that we face we need to think primarily in terms of what Christ has already done to subdue and defeat our enemy he may seem powerful in the moment yes he's a roaring lion seeking someone to devour but his teeth have been broken his nails have been filed there's little he can do against those who belong to

[23 : 08] Christ let me show you what I mean in Revelation chapter 12 now I know the book of Revelation can be hard to understand there's a lot of imagery here but Revelation chapter 12 describes the coming of Christ into the world in very highly symbolic language and so you have a woman and you have a dragon who's chasing that woman and of course the dragon is Satan himself we know that because John tells us in Revelation that the dragon is Satan and he's chasing down the woman in other words he's trying to prevent the redeemer from coming into the world he of course fails at that task because she's rescued and protected and delivered and her son is born he comes into the world and he comes to defeat the dragon the accuser and I want you to just listen carefully to these words Revelation chapter 12 beginning in verse 10 John says after seeing this vision dragon woman child okay after that vision

I heard a loud voice in heaven saying now the salvation the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down who accuses them day and night before our God and they have conquered him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony you see the message that John is trying to help us to understand that when Christ came into the world he defeated the one who would bring accusations against us he defeated the very one who would accuse us of being the wicked ones of being the evil ones he comes and he makes his accusations and they would land on us but one has come who defeats the accuser who strips him of his power in the psalm in psalm 35 verse 22

David cries out you have seen oh lord you've seen it all be not silent be not far from me awake and rouse yourself for my vindication that is my judgment I want to come into your judgment I want to be vindicated I want to be declared righteous vindicate me oh lord my god according to your righteousness let them not rejoice over me well he has seen and he has heard and he has awakened and he has roused and he took upon himself flesh and he came into the world and according to his righteousness he has defeated the accuser so that Paul is able to say in Romans 8 1 there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ yes we have real spiritual enemies yes the accuser would come against us and yes left on our own we would probably be unlike David convicted of wrongdoing and yet

Christ has come and he has silenced their voices and he has redeemed us that is if you belong to him there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and those who conquer in Revelation 12 conquer by the blood of the lamb you and I on our own we are guilty David may have been innocent of whatever he's being accused of in Psalm 35 but we're not really innocent not ultimately yes false accusations may be hurled at us from people at times but when Satan accuses us in God's court he accuses us of things that we've actually done and we are guilty and yet we conquer by the blood of the lamb because in his coming he silenced the accuser by taking the guilt upon himself he silenced our enemy by taking the violence the enemy that would hurl at us taking upon himself upon the cross he has redeemed us from ourselves and from our greatest enemy so that if in this life you don't see that miraculous intervention the way the apostle saw in prison or you don't see even through ordinary everyday means God turning around your circumstances the way that he did as one of the religious leaders spoke up in favor of the apostles if you don't see any of those things if you're more like Stephen and the rocks fly remember also that Stephen as he was dying looked into heaven and saw the face of Jesus in other words his ultimate vindication was secured because Christ had already paid for his sins and his destiny secured no matter what others might do to him you can be accused by people in this life and never be vindicated in the eyes of others around you and you can walk through that and not give up because you know that ultimately you will be vindicated because Christ has paid for all your sins it's good news oh Lord contend for us he has contended for us on the cross there's more than that right that's only one of the two major metaphors in this chapter the other is the wartime metaphor right the fight with those who fight against me and just as you continue to read in verse 2 where that fighting metaphor that war metaphor is taken up and carried forward you see two clear aspects of David's prayer what he's asking

God to do the first is defense verse 2 take hold of shield and buckler and rise for my help the shield would have been the large almost a full body shield at least probably four feet tall so you could crouch down behind it and you could be protected the buckler would be the small little shield that you might wear on your arm so that as you get into closer combat you have something to block with right he's asking God to take these defense weapons up on his behalf and stand between him and the enemy to defend him and that's a prayer that we need to be willing to pray God defend me I'm under attack there's nothing that I can do defend me against those who would set themselves up as my enemies Jesus says to love your enemies pray for those who persecute you it's hard to love them if you're putting on the gloves and stepping into the ring with them it's hard to love them isn't it and so rather than engage in the battle ourselves we say

[31:00] God just protect me from their onslaught protect me but more than just protection because God does go on the offensive right he says draw the spear and the javelin the javelin maybe it's hard to translate that word it may be the long thing you throw so you get them from a distance but that's almost the same as the spear it's probably more of the battle axe so you got one weapon you can throw and one weapon you can really go at it with right and he's asking God God take these weapons up now the picture gets a little bit ridiculous at this point because he's got two shields right and now he's got to have a spear and a battle axe or javelin or some sort of other weapon you know and it's you know it's if you read it more literally it's kind of ridiculous you know he doesn't you need four arms for all of that right but just defend us and fight for us so that we don't have to engage in the battle it is remarkable that David who is referred to in the

Old Testament as a man of violence he was not permitted by God to build the temple because he had lived his life as a man of war and violence it's remarkable that such a man in his hour of need that his default answer would not be to take up the sword himself but to ask God for help there were many times in David's life if he had simply taken up the sword which he's capable of if he had just done that there were many times when he could have immediately solved his own problems there's the story of David when he's hiding in the cave do you remember this story he's hiding in a cave because Saul is chasing after him with his soldiers and Saul is close and his army is sort of camped there right outside the cave and Saul's got to go to the bathroom so he goes in the cave to go to the bathroom that's a vulnerable position nobody wants to be attacked when they're going to the bathroom and David could very easily he's got a weapon in his hand it's easy to defeat his enemy and he doesn't do it he does cut off a little piece of his robe but he doesn't do it he's a man of violence he's a man of war at times but he doesn't do that and the kind of

David that we're seeing in Psalm 35 is the kind of David that we see in the cave with Saul where he's not going to try to solve his own problems with his own strength and his own weapons he's just going to pray and ask God to help him and rescue him and fight his battles for him this is what Paul teaches us in Romans chapter 12 Jesus says to love your enemies and Paul helps us to see in Romans chapter 12 how that might play out practically in real life it's a chapter where he warns us against taking vengeance within our own hands and he reminds us that vengeance belongs to the Lord and not to us so he says this verse 19 beloved never avenge yourselves but leave it to the wrath of God and then he goes on to say if your enemy is hungry feed him if he's thirsty give him something to drink for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head there's

Paul Paul knows what it is to have enemies I mean he's stoned more than once he survives it unlike Stephen he's put in prison multiple times and sometimes he's miraculously delivered like the other apostles and sometimes he sits there for years he knows both sides both stories he understands what it is to have actual human enemies who are carrying out the work of this ravenous lion he knows what it's like and yet he encourages his readers don't take vengeance for yourself leave room for God to work and while you're at it given that Jesus said to love your enemies when they're hungry feed them when they're thirsty give them something to drink we don't have to take it upon ourselves when Satan is at work through others we don't have to take it upon ourselves to set everything right or to go to battle with them we don't we wage war in Ephesians 6 there's armor that we're supposed to take up to wage war and yet that's for spiritual enemies when someone slanders you you don't have to call them out in public or slander them back or when somebody threatens your job your livelihood you don't have to threaten back you don't have to try to find a way to get even with people all the time that's that's not our job that's vengeance and God says vengeance is mine and sometimes he will mete out that vengeance here during our time on earth and people will be repaid for the bad things they do to us and other times that vengeance awaits the future and sometimes the vengeance that God owes to your enemies he puts on his son just like he did for you just like he did for Paul was Paul ever punished for the stoning of

Stephen no but Jesus was and those who you regard as your enemies you may never throughout all of eternity see them get what's coming to them because Christ takes it and that's okay because you're somebody's enemy or you were and you didn't you didn't get what's coming to you because Christ took it for you that's the good news of the gospel and when we look around us and we see and we think that we've got enemies who are advancing upon us the first thing that we need to do is to remind ourselves it's not our job to constantly defend ourselves it's not our job to take up weapons and go against them it's our job to wait on the Lord and to cry out to him for help but there's something else that follows the cry for help there's something else that follows once we're we've been encouraged and we know that

[37:55] God is at work and we know he sees and we know he hears then there's a right response that should come from us and the only right response is praise notice what David says each of these sections ends with praise verses 9 and 10 after he's prayed to God to fight his fights for him he says then my soul will rejoice in the Lord exulting in his salvation all my bones shall say oh 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 when God delivers you be it in this life or ultimately when he defeats the enemy the only right response is praise or when God silences your accusers or silences the ultimate accuser verse 28 then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness righteousness and of your praise all the day long we should be in light of the deliverance that we have received already we should be an exulting rejoicing praising people and if instead you're a bitter disgruntled person only seeing the bad around you you need to look to Christ look to him and be saved or look to him and be reminded of the saving work that he's already done on your behalf the only right response of God's people when we pray to

God for deliverance is to then praise him for his goodness and his faithfulness let's pray not