

Pouring Out Our Hearts to God

Psalm 35

Studies in the Psalms #37

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I WANT to begin this morning in an unusual way. Brothers and sisters, do you believe the Bible you hold in your hands is the Word of God? Yes! Good. Now, do you believe the Old Testament speaks prophetically of the coming of the Lord? Yes! That's what Jesus said after his resurrection on the Emmaus Road in Luke 24. How does this Psalm speak of Jesus? Turn to John 15:25. This Psalm is a prayer of our Lord against forces of hell as he wrestled with them in his life before his death. Now, let me ask you another question: do you believe this Psalm speaks of you as well? Yes! As we are in Christ we can pray the Psalms. Turn with me as well to Philipians 3. We can pray Psalm 35 out of our position in Jesus Christ as we desire to have more and more fellowship in his sufferings. And so here is a prayer for those times when we are falsely accused by the world. As one writer says, Psalm 35 is "...more an outpouring of a troubled spirit than a carefully crafted poem."¹ We're not going to get to every verse this morning, but I want you to see in this Psalm how we are to be *pouring out our hearts to God*.

¹ Motyer, 89.

Pouring Out Our Hearts Against Persecutors

Psalm 35 is about *pouring out our hearts against persecutors*. It's been a while since I mentioned this, but it is legitimate to pray as Christians what are known as the imprecatory Psalms. These are Psalms that call down the judgment of God against our enemies. But doesn't Jesus say, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you?" Yes. We have a merciful God and we pray for the conversion of our enemies. But we also have a God of justice and we pray that he, in his own wise way, will sort everything out.

For example, in Acts 4 when Peter and John were released from their imprisonment, Luke takes us to a prayer meeting and we get to peek into the window and listen. What were they praying? They were praying Psalm 2 and applying it to their own context. Psalm 2 opens, "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed" (Ps. 2:1-2). The apostolic church applied this to the anti-Christ forces of Herod and Pontius Pilate (the "kings" and "rulers"), the Gentiles (the "nations"), and the Israelites (the "peoples"). So it's not against personal enemies but against public enemies of Christ and his church. And we learn from Ephesians 6 that behind these outward faces are the principalities and powers of Satan and his

demonic minions.

This is not just a theological truth! How often do you get frustrated in spiritual struggles? How often do you feel angry when you hear about the persecuted church? Are you even a little bitter? Give it to God: **Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me!** (v. 1) That word contend is lawsuit language (*riv*). It's why he says in verse 11 that **malicious witnesses rise up and ask me of things that I do not know** and then in verse 19 that they **hate me without cause**. So he cries out for vindication: **Awake and rouse yourself for my vindication, for my cause** (v. 23); **vindicate me, O LORD, my God, according to your righteousness** (v. 24).

How often have you loved your unbelieving neighbor and sought to do good only to have them do the opposite to you? Pour it out to God. Look at verse 12: **They repay me evil for good; my soul is bereft**. This refers to a mother's grief at the loss of her child by miscarriage or even an older son who dies in a battle. Notice that motherly image continues in verse 13: **But I, when they were sick—I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting; I prayed with head bowed on my chest**. (the image is a mother's bosom). He was praying for his enemies healing: **I went about as though I grieved**

for my friend or my brother; as one who laments his mother, I bowed down in mourning (v. 14). But what did they do? **But at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered; they gathered together against me; wretches whom I did not know tore at me without ceasing; like profane mockers at a feast, they gnash at me with their teeth** (vv. 15–16).

Brothers and sisters, the point is to give it all to God and let him sort it out! He's God after all.

Pouring Out Our Hearts for Protection

For those of you who played sports or whose kids played or still play sports, you know that there is offense and defense. Offense is scoring and defense is keeping the other team from scoring. You may have heard the saying that “the best offense is a good defense.” It means if you stop the other team you not only prevent them from scoring but give yourself another chance to score. Anyways, our first point was offensive as we pour out ourselves to God in prayer. But we need defense. And the best defense is the Lord himself. So notice here *pouring out our hearts for protection*.

Again notice verse 1: **Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me!** To those who say we shouldn't pray the imprecatory Psalms, notice it's not us doing the fighting;

we pray the Lord fights for us in his own time and way. And look at how later on in the Psalm he cries out for the Lord's protection in such intense and urgent ways: **Rescue me from their destruction** (v. 21), **be not silent! O LORD, be not far from me!** (v. 22), **awake and rouse yourself** (v. 23), **vindicate me** (v. 24).

Go back to verse 2 and listen to this: **take hold of shield** (*magen*, that's the small shield) **and buckler** (*tsinah*, that's the large full-body shield) **and rise for my help! Draw the spear and javelin against my pursuers! Say to my soul, "I am your salvation!"** (vv. 2-3) Does that kind of language remind you of any New Testament passage? How about the armor of God in Ephesians 6? We so often think of that as our armor, but first and foremost it is the armor *of God*, that is, it is his own armor. And we see the Lord wearing armor in another passage in Isaiah 59:14. When Israel was so sinful that there was no justice, no righteousness, no uprightness, and no truth (vv. 14-15) in the land "the LORD saw it, and it displeased him" (v. 15). And because of Israel's sin "there was no one to intercede" so the Lord's "own arm brought him salvation" (v. 16). Notice how Isaiah describes this: "He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a

cloak” (v. 17).

What does this have to do with me? My friends, the next time you are thinking of the persecuted church, or the next time you’re persecuted in subtle ways at work, when you feel spiritual assault and attack from family during the holidays coming up, I want you to pause and mediate on verses 1–3 of our Psalm. Ask the Lord to protect you by fighting for you. Ask him to make your spiritual battle his own. Ask him to shield you on all sides with his shield. Ask him to use his spear to vanquish the spiritual source of attack. Ask him to speak to your hearts those re-assuring words: **“I am your salvation!”**

Pouring Out Our Hearts in Praise

I was reading an article a while back about missionaries’ efforts to bring the gospel in what is now Pakistan.² What was interesting is how many Pakistani Christians attributed their conversion to hearing the Psalms being sung, whether lament or praise. In the midst of persecution, there is praise. We see this in Scripture, too, don’t we? I already mentioned Acts 4 but also Paul and Silas in prison for the gospel but there they sang Psalms late into the night. Like our Lord, who was persecuted and brought low in death, yet

² <http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/why-persecuted-christians-sing-psalms-in-pakistan/>

praising God, we are to be *pouring out our hearts in praise!*

Very quickly notice the structure of the Psalm, which I've kept until now: verses 1–10 pour out the heart then praise the Lord; verses 11–18 pour out the heart then praise the Lord; and verses 19–28 do the same with.³ It's in our personal spiritual struggles but also as part of the universal body of Christ that is persecuted that we praise. Notice after the first section of pouring out the heart we read, **then my soul will rejoice in the LORD, exulting in his salvation** (v. 9). At the end of the second section David says, **I will thank you in the great congregation; in the mighty throng I will praise you** (v. 18). And again at the end of the entire Psalm: **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!" Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness and of your praise all the day long** (vv. 27–28).

There's persecution, then praise; suffering first, then glorying in the Lord. That was the pattern of life for our Lord; that's our life's pattern as his followers. Do you want to be more like Jesus? Then you first need to die to yourself in this life before he raises you up in the life to come. Amen.

³ Futato, 137.