



Psalm 35:11–16

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Main idea: the God Who loves us to forgive us and produce His character in us will vindicate that love for us and that godly character in us by turning our mourning into joy and avenging us.

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| <p>¹¹ Fierce witnesses rise up;
They ask me things that I do not know.</p> <p>¹² They reward me evil for good,
To the sorrow of my soul.</p> <p>¹³ But as for me, when they were sick,
My clothing was sackcloth;
I humbled myself with fasting;
And my prayer would return to my own heart.</p> <p>¹⁴ I paced about as though he were my friend or brother;
I bowed down heavily, as one who mourns for his mother.</p> | <p>¹⁵ But in my adversity they rejoiced
And gathered together;
Attackers gathered against me,
And I did not know it;
They tore at me and did not cease;</p> <p>¹⁶ With ungodly mockers at feasts
They gnashed at me with their teeth.</p> |
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In vv1–10, David pleads with God to take up his case, set things straight, and receive honor and praise for doing so.

In vv11–16, David presents the data that demonstrates the contrast between the wicked and himself. In vv17–28, David asserts that the Lord has seen this data and will bring His people to rejoice over His avenging.

This week, with David having pleaded for God to step in and fight for him against the wicked, we see him pleading the evidence that God has already stepped in against his own wickedness. The God Who has loved him to produce this character in him must surely vindicate that love and that character.

A good conscience toward God, v11. Though the witnesses are fierce, they cannot come up with anything valid. David's clear conscience puts him in a similar place to Christ in His trial.

A good record toward others, v12. We are to overcome evil not just with neutrality but with good. He put his soul into doing them good, and they did him evil in return. It is as if after the man from the road to Jericho got better, he came and attacked the "Good Samaritan."

Enemy-love that comes from the heart, v13–14. Sackcloth and fasting are acts of self-denial, meant to express sincerity before God in humility and pleading. The last line of this verse reads more in a future/jussive sense, like "let my prayer return to my own heart." He's saying, before God, that he would willingly have what he has prayed for his enemies done to himself instead, done to his very heart. This enemy-love is not something new in the teaching of Jesus, but He does emphasize it, and of course most marvelously exercises it (cf. Matt 5:43–48; Rom 5:6–11).

The painfulness of the contrast with the wicked, v15–16. Let the godly not expect that his conduct will be persuasive to the wicked. While David had more than natural affection for his enemies, they had exactly the opposite for him. His calamity was cause for a feast for them. They gathered whatever worthless and wicked they could to help them celebrate (v15c, 16a). And the food was an all-you-can eat buffet of mocking him as if it were he himself that they were chewing up (v15d, 16b).

In order for the children of God to shine as light in the world, and to be blameless and pure in the midst of a twisted and corrupt generation, we may expect to be abused all the more for our godliness. But this becomes for us an increased opportunity to behave as children of our heavenly Father. To see His grace and glory magnified as we love our enemies. To be sure that He will glorify Himself by delivering us and avenging us and perfecting us and eternally blessing us.

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. Please be aware of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording referenced above)

Psalm 35 versus 11 through 16.

Fears witnesses. Rise up, they ask me things that I do not know. The reward me. Evil for good to the sorrow of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth. I humbled myself with fasting and my prayer would return to my own heart.

I paste about as though. He were my friend or brother. I bowed down heavily as one who mourns for his mother. But in my adversity, they rejoiced and gathered together attackers gathered against me and I did not know it. They tore me and did not cease with ungodly. Ungodly mockers at feasts.

They nashed at me with their teeth So far, the reading of God's inspired and inherent word. Psalm 35 verses 11 through 16. Well, the reason that these six verses hold together as a unit in the middle of the psalm is up until this point in verses 1 through 10.

He's crying out for the Lord to do something with a particular result. And then when we come back next time we're together in this Psalm versus 17 through 28, we'll find that he returns to crying out to the Lord, to do something in hopes of or aiming at with the end of a particular result.

But in these six verses, he's just giving data, he's just talking about what his situation is and what he's doing is he is presenting to the Lord, the difference between himself and his attackers. Now we know that it is the Lord himself who makes that difference. So, this is not David saying, I have earned for God to take my side.

This is David saying God who has been gracious to me to make this difference in me. I call upon you who have made the difference in my character to make the difference. In the outcome of the circumstances. We have the same kind of relationship between character and outcome. For instance, in Romans 8:28, we know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are the called according to his purpose.

It's not that because we have loved God. So well that we have earned for all things to work out together for our good. It's that the God who called us according to his purpose to produce that love in us. He is the one who is going to do it who's going to make all things work together for good.

Now, when we see that, that's kind of how verses 11 through 16 function. In Psalm 35, we see one of the many benefits of keeping, a clear conscience before, God of walking, before him being quick, to repent of our sin rejoice over, Jesus's sacrifice for us, to seek from him, the continual working of his spirit who first gave us new life and who is growing us in faith, and to his growing us and holiness that as we are maintaining this walk with the Lord, then when we come into a time of trouble, we can basically plead to God that we are the work of His hands that the evidence, the hallmarks of, of His gracious and merciful work in our lives are there.

And we can cling to him in confidence that he will, that he will not let go now. And so, that's what's going on here as David pleads. The difference between him and his enemies. And there are several things that especially make a difference between David and his enemies One is that he has a good conscience towards God, which we'll see in verse 11.

The second is that he has a good record towards others. The third is that he loves his enemies from his heart and then the fourth is how great the contrast of their unjustified hatred. Is towards him. How great is a contrast between that hatred that they have for him and the love that he has for them?

I think this is very helpful thing to notice. As we really get into that last the last two sections there, The love of David for his enemies because this is an imprecatory song. The David is praying to the Lord that what these wicked? What these wicked men are doing would come back down and then themselves.

So it's an imprecatory psalm but it's an imprecatory psalm that's being prayed by someone who's sincerely has loved and desired the good of his enemies and thus far, it has been to no avail and so he's committing the outcome into God's hands. So one of the first things that marks evidence or the that is a mark or an evidence of God's work in our lives, one of the first things that is the fruit of God's work in our lives is a good conscience towards God.

Fierce witnesses. Rise up, they ask me things that I do not know. Now, this doesn't mean that they are asking him to diagram English sentences, which of course, you wouldn't know because he he spoke Hebrew. But those of you who struggle through diagramming English sentences, you might think that that's something you don't know what it's talking about is they're making all kinds of accusations

and their interrogating him But their interrogating him about things that have nothing to do with him.

It's just a great big pile of charges. This is one of the things that the wicked will do. This is one of the things that perhaps you may find someone else doing, or you may even be tempted to do in your own heart. The idea that if you just make enough accusations, the other person will look guilty.

Because surely in all of these accusations, there would have to be some measure of truth. We remember that even in the trial of our Lord Jesus, don't we when he's challenged, do you not hear how many things of which they accuse you, but David has a good conscience towards God.

He can acknowledge before God. That yeah, the the accusers are many and the accusations are many of the accusers of fierce. But I honestly don't know what they're talking about in all these things that there are charging me with What a blessing to be able to keep a short account with God to repent quickly of your sins to rejoice over that forgiveness to walk with Him.

So that when when there is the accusation, whether by man or by demon, that's one of the things that Satan in particular does
And we know that they do Satan is the the accuser of the the devil is the adversary. If you are maintaining a good conscience before towards God, then you, you are prepared to tell the Lord fierce witnesses, rise up.

They ask me things. I do not know The second, The second great difference between David and his enemies is that he has a good record towards them. He says, they reward me. Evil for good to the sorrow of my soul. In other words, not only is David not guilty of the the things of which they are accusing him, but he's actually done positive good for them.

It's it's kind of like if you remember in the parable of the Good Samaritan, There's the guy who is beaten by robbers and he's bloodied at the side of the road and the Samaritan comes and he puts them on his donkey and he takes him to the end. And he pays for his medical care.

What David is saying is I did them good like that, but it would be like if in that parable once the once, the man was healed. He went out and he beat up the Samaritan and so he has done good to his enemies. We are to overcome evil. Not just with neutrality, but with good it is a wonderful thing to be able to cry out to God.

Look at what you have done in my heart and my life, that when my enemy was hungry, I fed him. And when he was thirsty, I gave him something to drink. I loved my enemy, and I was a child of my father who is in heaven. That's how you not just are not overcome with evil, but you overcome the evil with good.

You are able to tell the Lord, they are rewarding me evil for good to the sorrow of my soul. The, the natural way that our flesh operates is, we want to get them back. We want to be at least closed fist. And heartless when they are in trouble, when they are miserable.

When they are grieving, when they are ill. But if we wish to see God, glorified by the fruit of His work in our lives, and if we wish to be able to to plead before him, the difference that he has made in our lives, then we need to be actively seeking opportunity to do good to those who hate who hate us even knowing even knowing that they just as just as likely will replace evil for that good and that it will grieve us and hurt us.

There's a lot of being hurt by people in a fallen sinful, wicked world. And we can't allow ourselves to say, well I'm not going to do those people good, because every time I do them good, they turn around and they do me evil and it hurts. So I'm just going to not engage.

I'm just going to keep a distance from them. No, we don't have that option. The Lord tells us that it's going to hurt when they repay us evil for the good. And we are to do the good anyway and one of the one of the advantages are one of the benefits of doing them.

That good anyway, is being able to plead unto God to to say. They reward me evil for good look. Lord, the difference you have made in me that I am doing them good. Even though They do me evil, So a good conscience towards God, a good record towards others and then enemy love, that comes from the heart, It's not just in, in this case and in every case in Scripture, right?

All righteousness is to be from the heart. It's not superficial making sure to keep to to regulations. Yes, our regulations. There's commandments the precepts of God are to be followed, but the heart is the main thing. And that's what we that's what we see, David highlighting in verses 13 through.

14. Is that His love for his enemies comes from his heart. He says, as for me when they were sick,

my clothing was sackcloth. I humbled myself with, with fasting, sackcloth is very scratchy uncomfortable fabric that you would not actually use intentionally for clothing. It's something that you wear when you want to afflict yourself and humble yourself before God and say, you don't deserve to be clothed, You don't deserve or you don't want to be comfortable In this particular place case, when you're wearing sackcloth for someone else, you're saying they are miserable and so I'm going to wear something that hurts so that I can share the misery with them so that I can join my, my heart with them fasting.

As I guess, especially the boys would know very quickly as a way to make yourself, feel pain and your tummy, and it also is a refusal to have nice things humbling yourself before the Lord acknowledging that you need something. You need him more than food. It often comes with repenting from sin or urgent prayer And then, especially at the end of verse 13 here, when he says, and my prayer would return to my own heart.

Now, in the Hebrew, it's more of a future, kind of just of sense. So as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth. I humbled myself with fasting and let my prayer return upon my own heart or into my own heart. The idea there as he's saying, the way that I was the that I am praying for them.

I would have you Lord treat me according to how I I would I was praying for them. The prayers were so sincere. So it's it's kind of like how earlier in the Psalm he was saying, you know, let the net that he is hidden catch him into the very destruction that he is planned, let him fall now.

He's kind of doing the opposite of that and he's saying and the praying that I've been doing for them, let it come in and let it return into my own heart. If if you are not going to do them the good, or if you are going to do according to what I pray for someone and it's not going to be for them.

Well then let it be for me to pray for your enemy with such sincerity that it is as if you are praying for yourself and and would like for the Lord to, to save you, to heal you Every bit as much as you're praying, that they would be healed.

That they would be that they would be saved. So this is this is enemy. Love that comes from the heart from from who he is before, God, he's saying before God that he would willingly have what His prayed for his enemies done to himself. Instead done to his very heart.

Now, this is very helpful, I think, because there are a lot of people who make a mistake, when you come with to the teaching of Jesus, for instance, in Matthew chapter 5 and he's contrasting, the the love of God and the keeping of God's commandments with the wickedness of the Pharisees.

But there are many people who are opposed to God's law we call them and to no means it just means someone who's opposed to God's law, who treat something like Matthew chapter 5. As if Jesus is inventing, some new kind of morality because the Old Testament morality that was that was harsh.

Those Old Testament commandments, but the New Testament commandments those are all about love. Well, of course, that's nonsense because the two great commandments are from the Old Testament to love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. But this principle of loving your enemy is also from the Old Testament.

The character that we see and David in verses 13 through 14. We see perfectly in Christ. He is the one who, when we were still sinners, he died for us. We have sinned against Him more than anyone has sinned against us and he has born the penalty of our sin.

That is how God demonstrates what His love is like. And when we love our enemies, we when we bless those who curse us, when we do good to those who persecute us, we show the family resemblance that we're like our Father in heaven who sent Christ for us. That we are like our elder brother, the Lord Jesus, who his loved his enemies.

So this enemy love that comes from the heart, that something that has belonged to, to godliness from the, from the fall that we would, that we would reflect the heart of God and of Christ in loving our enemies, not just in actions, but even sincerely from our own heart and the way we pray for them.

Well, One of the hard things for us then is that if we are going to love our enemies from the heart, we need to know, or we should not be deceived about how they are going to hate us from their hearts. That's the transition the contrast in versus 15 and 16 to what we've just been looking at in verses 13 and 14.

But in my adversity, they rejoiced and gathered together attacker is gathered against me and I did not know it. They tore me and did not cease with ungodly mockers at feasts, they nashed at me with their teeth. The picture here is when they were in calamity, of course, David prayed for them,

sincerely from the heart.

When David is in calamity, they think it's time to have a party. We're going to enjoy that. David is in misery in trouble and not only are we going to gather and attack him we're going to bring in whomever is willing to join us in this ungodly mocking and the last half of verse 16, there isn't gnashing at me with their teeth.

The, the way we usually think, like It's actually the word pictures of them chewing, David up. That he is the, he's the snacks, or he is the food, the buffet at the Feast and they just can't get enough of eating up and enjoying the misery of David. And so if he was sincere in his love in verses 13 through 14, what verses 15 through 16 are describing is that they are very sincere in their hate.

We need to accept that one of the ways. We glorify God is by our difference from the culture of in a cultural moment. Right now when there is a lot of hate and a lot of despising, a lot of rejoicing in the trouble that others come into and the calamity that comes upon them, we need to see that one of the privileges that the child of God should have in this world is of not being like the wicked in that and that the more hateful they become the more loving.

We become Now part of what comes with. That privilege is pain. What David is? Describing in verses 15 and 16 is very painful for him. And yet it is an honor to be able by the grace of God. By the Spirit of God, working in you to be a blameless.

And pure child of God in the midst of a perverse and corrupt generation. So Yeah, they're in Philippians we're talks about that, It says, do all things without complaining and arguing so that you may be blameless and pure child of God in a perverse and corrupt generation. Well what Psalm 35:11 through 16 is describing is love your enemy sincerely from the heart so that you may be blameless and pure children of God in the midst of a corrupt and perverse generation and know that the way that you are going to be treated when that hurts that hurt is a reminder of the honor that you have of being light in this world of being a child of your heavenly Father.

And and of course, this isn't the whole story. It comes sandwiched between the section at the beginning and the section at the end. Because as we are children of our Heavenly Father, as we are light and darkness and the opposite of the wicked that we see around us, then we will be able to plead on the basis of that You Lord, you Lord who have done this work in us who have given us the privilege of being so opposite.

The world who have worked real sincere love for our enemies in our hearts. Now, take up our cause and deliver us and save us and bring us at last into everlasting blessedness and don't let them have the last word and that's what we'll be hearing about when we come to verses 17 through 28 next time.

But for this time, remember that the God who has loved us to forgive us and that the God who has loved us to start producing His character in us and imitating His character in us. He will vindicate his love for us and He will vindicate. That godly character that he has begun to form in us by turning our mourning into joy.

And by vindicating our names and avenging us.