

Wil Owens  
A Prayer for Justice; Psalm 35  
GPBC  
7.21.19

Introduction – The thematic connections between Psalm 33, 34, and 35 readily surface as we have studied them together. Psalm 33 called upon us to praise, fear, and trust the Lord because He is worthy of praise, fear, and trust. Since the fear of the Lord is not an easy concept to grasp, Psalm 34 flows from Psalm 33 rather seamlessly, and instructs us on the fear of the Lord. What we learned last week is that the fear of the Lord is directly connected to His goodness. God is especially good to those who fear Him, He encamps around those who fear Him. Psalm 34 also shows that God is good because God is just. He will justly punish sin and rightly condemn sinners. Fear of the Lord then is a strong, convincing deterrent to sin.

Psalm 35 flows right out of Psalm 34 because it is a prayer for the justice of God to be upheld, to be known. And that is a right and good prayer because the only means of removing sin's deceptive façade is for sin to be shown for what it is, an act against a holy God that receives the self-inflicted wound of sin's destruction and the divine judgment against it.

Sin presents itself as a viable, pleasurable, satisfying, justifiable alternative to the will of God. The justice of God is the cure for the deception and allurement of sin. It is the justice of God that reveals the lie of sin. It's been that way from the beginning, ever since Satan told Eve, "You will not die if you eat this fruit, even though God said you would." And she ate, and Adam ate, and they fell into sin, took all creation with them. They spiritually died, and the justice of God drove them from Paradise. We will not fear the Lord, or turn to the Lord, or flee to the Lord, or trust in the Lord until we know the hideous nature of sin and realize our own sin before God. It's His justice that opens our eyes to see His grace! Therefore, a prayer for the justice of God is a good prayer.

We're going to study through this psalm this evening in a different format than our usual method. First, I want us to note the structure and specificity of wording, and then, in light of the structure and specificity, I want us to make some observations on justice, prayer, and praise.

- I. The Structure of Psalm 35
  - a. Introduction – vv1-3 – David is praying for the justice of God to be upheld, for God to put a decisive and definite stop to those who are wrongfully accusing and persecuting His people. For justice to come from the Lord, not from David. This is not a prayer for revenge, but for justice. Undeniable divine justice clearly identifies evil behavior, rightly delivers punishment, clarifies sin, upholds righteousness, vindicates the innocent, distinguishes the true believer, and evidences the existence and presence of a holy, almighty God.
  - b. Section I – vv4-10
    - i. Condition and Request – vv4-8
    - ii. Response of Praise – vv9-10
  - c. Section II – vv11-18
    - i. Condition and Request – vv11-17
    - ii. Response of Praise – v18
  - d. Section III – vv19-28
    - i. Condition and Request – vv19-27
    - ii. Response of Praise – v28

- II. Observations on Justice, Prayer, and Praise from Psalm 35
  - a. Justice. When David begins this prayer by saying in v3 “Say to my soul, ‘I am your salvation!’” he sets forth the right tone and the correct context for a prayer for justice.
    - i. From the very beginning, in the very opening of the prayer, we know this is far more about asking for God’s deliverance than it is about David seeking some kind of personal retribution or revenge. The spirit of this prayer for God’s justice is a believer crying for help (v2), a believer who realizes the forces against him are too cruel, too strong, and too many for him. This prayer is a plea for deliverance through justice.
    - ii. This also tells us David acknowledges vengeance belongs to the Lord, not to David. David knows the Scripture. Deut 32:35 says, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” That’s also very NT btw, Paul over in Romans 12:19 writes, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says

the Lord.” David acquiesces to the will of God and leaves the vengeance in the hands of a just God.

- iii. This doesn’t mean that we never avail ourselves of God-given means of justice through righteous gov’t, laws, or law enforcement. (Rom 13) It doesn’t mean we don’t defend ourselves or those under our care when it’s appropriate to do so. It rather means when God-given means are not available to us for a course of action, we leave it to the Just Judge. We can trust that justice will occur because God is just. We can have confidence in the character of God.
- b. David’s prayer here for justice is not an overreaction! Notice as we read through this entire psalm how David carefully and articulately outlines the degree to which his enemies have harmed him and the various ways in which they have sought to do him harm. His condition here is dire.
  - i. When someone hurts our feelings, we don’t pray for God to wipe them out! That would be an overreaction!
  - ii. We pray for the justice of God to be upheld when evil is sweeping lives into destruction, when the helpless and innocent are being violated, when the people of God are being violently persecuted, and when the Gospel is being presented as defeated.
  - iii. We pray then for the justice of God to be upheld that right and wrong might be clearly distinguished, the people of God might be preserved, and the Gospel may advance.
- c. Prayer. Sometimes prayer requires repetition. David makes his case sufficiently clear in vv4-10, why does he repeat and expound in vv11-18, and then again in vv19-28? It’s not as though God did not hear him the first time!
  - i. Urgency of the situation sometimes calls us to repetitious prayer, not because we don’t think we got God’s attention the first time, but because prayer is our lifeline!
  - ii. Desperation of the petitioner often calls for repetitious prayer, not because we are trying to convince God that the situation is indeed a grave one, but rather because in these times the only thing we can do is pray, and so we pray, and pray, and pray, because it’s not only the only thing we can do, it’s the best thing we can do.

- iii. Sometimes repetitious prayer is required in order for us to completely lay down our burdens at the feet of Jesus and totally cast our care upon Him! Sometimes it takes a lot of prayer to get from under the weight of the burden and finally be able to hear the Lord say to our soul, "I am your salvation!"
- d. Praise. David's declaration to give God praise is not conditional praise, but rather circumstantial praise. David is not saying, "God, if you don't do this, I will never praise you!" He has already declared his continual praise to God in Psalm 34 based on the goodness of God. No, what David is saying here is that when God upholds His justice for David in this way, he is going to praise God for this particular deliverance.
  - i. Quick note. V27 David recognizes that when God moves on the behalf of one of His children, it blesses all of God's children.
- e. Does Jesus disagree with David? Read Matt 5:43-44. So when David prays Lord, fight against those who fight against me, draw out your sword, would Jesus tell David not to pray that way? I don't think so. Here's why.
  - i. Are we to love, pray for, forgive, and share the Gospel with our enemies? Absolutely YES! We are to love our enemies for the salvation of their souls just as God loved us, as His enemies, through Christ, for the salvation of our souls. NO question about it. And many an enemy of God has been won to Christ through the love of the very one he is persecuting!
  - ii. But sometimes it takes the justice of God thwarting the enemy, stopping the enemy, defeating the enemy in order to awaken the enemy from his hardened, blinded resistance to God, and Christ, and the Gospel.
  - iii. Sometimes the most loving prayer we can pray is for the justice of God to be upheld. When evil crushes the innocent and rolls over the people of God, it is loving and right to pray, "God, stop them! Deliver Your people! Display Your justice. Show sin to be sin so that they might repent and turn to You!"

Conclusion -