

Horsley Evangelical Church (www.horsleyec.org.uk)

Minister: Rev Ken McIntosh 21st June 2020

Psalm 35 Knocked down but not knocked out.

Psalm 35 is an example of an *imprecatory Psalm* – which just means that the Psalmist cries out to the Lord not only to rescue him but also to bring judgment on his enemies. Some people get offended at imprecatory Psalms because they believe that they go against the teaching of Christ that we are to love our enemies and pray for them.

But that is to misunderstand what the Psalmist is doing in such a Psalm. On a personal level, we *are* to pray for our enemies and seek love them. But David writes this Psalm as the Lord's *anointed*, as the one God has chosen to lead and shepherd his people. The attacks against David therefore are not just attacks against him personally but against the *kingdom* over which the Lord has made him head - and against God himself. David is praying therefore for the honour of the Lord, for the protection of God's people against the attacks of wicked men and against the devil himself.

It is true that we are to love our enemies on a personal level and pray for their salvation, but we are also to pray against the advance of the kingdom of darkness. We are also to pray for the Lord to *honour* himself as he brings *justice* on the earth and that he might *protect* those who belong to him and allow people to live in peace.

Psalm 35 is probably the most *passionate* Psalm we have studied so far where David expresses to the Lord strong feelings and emotions. There are various links between Psalms 34 and 35. They share some of the same language and vocabulary – for example, these are the only two Psalms which mention *the angel of the Lord*. Psalm 34 celebrates a deliverance which the Lord has already given to David, while in Psalm 35, David is still *waiting* for the deliverance of the Lord. Also, Psalm 35 illustrates some of the *truths* mentioned in Psalm 34, for example – **read Psalm 34:19**. David is the righteous man, and through no fault of his own, we read about him experiencing many troubles in Psalm 35.

But although David cries out to the Lord for deliverance throughout the Psalm, he is at the same time confident that when the time is right, the Lord will deliver him, and evil shall be judged. And this repeated confidence of David amidst the troubles divides the Psalm into three sections. The three sections of the Psalm are verses 1-10, 11-18 then 19-28. But we notice how each of the sections finishes – with the same hope and confidence that the Lord will deliver David. So, at the end of the first section - **read verses 9, 10**. Then at the end of the second section - **read verse 18**. Then the final section concludes – **read verses 27, 28**.

So what do we learn from this Psalm? Psalm 35 teaches us that righteous men and women *will* face many troubles in life. It teaches us about the nature of wickedness, how it manifests itself and what the behaviour of evil people is like - indeed what the devil is like. But it also teaches us to cry out to the Lord in our distress, to pour out our hearts to him and tell him about everything that concerns us. And the Psalm teaches us to hope and trust the Lord, that he will deliver us as we wait upon him and cry out to him in prayer.

So after that slightly longer introduction, let's look at the Psalm together. In each of the three sections, David is crying to the Lord for deliverance. But in the first section he particularly mentions **the aggression and scheming of the enemy**. **Read verses 1-10**. It is the nature of evil to be *aggressive* and to *plan and plot* against the Lord and his people. And as the Lord's anointed, David feels that aggression and scheming very keenly doesn't he.

David speaks here about those who fight against him (1), who pursue him (2). These same men seek David's life (4) and plot his ruin (4). They spread a net for David's feet (7) and dig a pit for him to fall into (7). And behind each attack there is a plan to catch David out and topple him. The New Testament also speaks about the *schemes of the devil* – that Satan is forever *against* the Christian and *plotting* the downfall of the righteous. He is never at rest, never at peace. There is no period of truce or holiday. And this is how it is in the world.

But these verses and indeed the whole Psalm point us forward to the Lord Jesus. And as we hear of David's trials, we are reminded of all the planning and scheming of the religious leaders *against* Christ and the plotting of Judas Iscariot *against* him. Our Lord endured much more of this attack than David ever did. And we too will experience similar *attacks* in the spiritual battle which is relentless.

But look at the comfort in these verses. They teach us that in the fight we can cry out to the Lord and ask for his help and protection. Indeed, David asks here that the Lord will fight *for* him and contend with those who content against him. **Read verse 1 again.** So we are in a battle - but we are not alone. The Lord is with us and will protect us. **Read verses 2 and 3a.** David is really asking the Lord to be his personal body guard! And notice how David also needs reassurance in his heart that all will be well. So he cries – **read verses 3b.**

Then in the verses which follow David asks the Lord to deal with the enemy in the same way that they intend to deal with him. **Read verse 4, 8.** David is asking that their judgment might match their evil intentions – that their punishment would fit their crime. And we know that because the Lord is just, people will one day be judged according to what they have done.

Then there is mention of *the angel of the Lord*. In Psalm 34 we read – **Psalm 34:7.** But look at the corresponding verse here – **read 35:5,6.** How wonderful if the angel of the Lord is for us, defending us and encamping around us. But how dreadful if the angel of the Lord should be against us. We praise the Lord that in Jesus Christ there is the forgiveness of sins. And we rejoice that the New Testament assures us that in Christ, God is for us and that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

So David is struggling in this Psalm. But look at the verses in this first section which express David's hope and faith in God. **Read verses 9, 10 again.** The enemy was too strong for David, just as the real enemy is too strong for us. But we know by faith that the Lord will deliver us from the various attacks we face in this world. And we also know by faith that one day the aggression and the scheming will cease, for evil shall be judged and the devil himself will be cast into the lake of fire, never to scheme against us again. And so, like David, we rest in God and trust him in the battle.

But let's move on to the second section in the Psalm. Again we find David crying out to the Lord for help and deliverance. But now another characteristic of wickedness emerges – **the treachery and betrayal of the enemy** (11-18). **Read verses 11-17.** David's soul has been left forlorn by the behaviour of those he considered friends. We can't be sure about which time of David's life these verses refer to. Some think it was to the time when David was on the run from Saul and those in the court of Saul with whom David had been friends, turned against him. Others think the verses refer to a time *after* David became king yet experienced the same betrayal and treachery from those he had treated well. We don't know for sure but whenever it happened, David had already been chosen and set apart as the Lord's anointed. And we see this second characteristic of evil - it is faithless and treacherous. These men had repaid David's kindness with evil.

And we can expect this too in the world. Kindness may well be repaid with evil. People we thought were friends, which we regarded as friends may well turn against us. Again, David's experience anticipates the way that our Saviour was treated. Jesus Christ treated all people well. He was always kind and loving towards everyone he met. But many betrayed him – not just Judas Iscariot. And this is what evil is like, so we must be under no illusion.

Yet it's important for us to notice once again how David pours out his heart to the Lord about all of this. David is not complaining about his enemies' treatment of him so much as expressing to the Lord his surprise and even astonishment. "How can people behave like this, Lord" he asks? David remembers when some of them were ill, how he fasted and prayed for them. And when they did not immediately recover, David continued in fasting and praying and weeping. He had truly loved them and cared for them.

But now, these same people appear as witnesses against David with stories that he knows nothing about. David's stumbling (15) probably refers to the time when the false accusations started to fly. Yet those he had regarded as friends did not come to David's support with prayer and fasting as David had done for them. Instead they gathered together with lies and slandered his name. They spoke of David with malice in their hearts. They gnashed their teeth at him as if they wanted to eat him alive - David describes them in verse 17 as lions!

There is of course something particularly hurtful when someone you loved or still do love, turns against you in most unexpected and vicious way. You almost can't believe it. It dumbfounds you. And you search your memory to try to discover what you might have done to them to make them act like this.

And sometimes there is no reason - or no good reason. And all you can remember are the ways that you tried to care for them. And of course it deeply hurts and disturbs you. What do you do? We do what David did. He pours out his heart to the Lord. Tell him all about it. Tell him exactly how you feel. Cry out to him for his mercy and help. But remember the last line of this second section, for it again speaks of David's hope. **Read verse 18.**

Remember the promised deliverance of the Lord - it will come. Think of the future when you will gather together with other worshippers. And even if that time does not come in this world, it certainly will come in the next. Whatever troubles we have had to endure. Whatever heartaches have come from the *treachery and betrayal* of men, we can be sure of the faithfulness of the Lord. And we know that one day we shall be with him in glory, and then betrayal and hatred shall be no more.

But let's consider the third and final section where David again cries out to the Lord for help and deliverance, but this time he pours out his heart concerning **the gloating and sneering of the enemy**. **Read verses 19-26.** Again David is very troubled over the behaviour of his enemies who have taken great delight in causing David's pain. And it's their pleasure in David's suffering that appals the Psalmist and causes him to pour out his heart to the Lord. It's bad enough bringing false charges against an innocent man, but even worse if you then rub your hands in glee at his distress.

Verse 19 describes David's enemies gloating over him. The winking of the eye to each another (19) tells us of their scheming and their delight in the way that things are going. Verse 20 describes them as mischief makers making up these false stories that sound so convincing. Verse 21 tells us of their false testimony, that with their own eyes they claim to have seen David doing wrong. The word 'Aha' has the meaning, "Hoorah - our little scheme against David is going so well."

But David asks the Lord to intervene, to vindicate his name and put these men to the same shame they intended for David. The enemy claims to have seen David doing certain things, but David's consolation is that the Lord has seen - and knows the truth (22). So David asks the Lord to act. His call on the Lord to 'awake' (23) suggesting that David feels as if the Lord is asleep - he has not yet acted. So David asks the Lord to rouse himself and declare it is the time to rescue his innocent servant.

And again we are being warned of another characteristic of wickedness - that when the plans of the wicked succeed and when the Lord's servant seems to be 'on the ropes', the reaction of evil is to *gloat and sneer*. There is no compassion or sorrow or mercy, but instead wicked rejoicing. If this happens to you, do not be too surprised. And remember how David's experience points forward to our

Lord Jesus. Remember how when our Saviour was in agony on the cross, the religious leaders who had put him there, gloated and sneered at him. How delighted they were that their clever plans had succeeded. And so they are triumphant and congratulate one another.

It's very interesting that in John 15, Jesus quotes from verse 19 of our Psalm when he says, "They hated me without reason". But in John 15 Jesus uses this verse not only to predict his own unjust sufferings, but also to warn the disciples that they too can expect to be treated in this way.

But in the midst of David's suffering and pouring out his heart to the Lord, we hear again at the end of this third section of the Psalm, the same words of confidence that this situation will not last forever. Better days would come in the Lord's time. **Read verses 27, 28.** David knew by faith that the Lord would rescue him. And that is our hope too, if not in this life then certainly in the next. And we will join with that great company of God's people who worship the Lord and give thanks to the Lord for his wonderful salvation.

This Psalm then is given that we might be realistic about the struggles we may face in this life and that we may recognize some of these characteristics of wickedness. Evil men will *attack and scheme against* the Lord's people. Evil men will *betray the friendship and kindness* of the righteous and repay evil for good. And evil men will *gloat over the sufferings* of the righteous. Why? What have the righteous done to offend them? They have not done anything. The righteous have always been hated without reason. This is the way of evil and it all reminds us of the way the Master went. Should not the servant tread it still? We are therefore not to be surprised if we should meet with such treatment ourselves. For we know where such wicked characteristics come from – the devil himself.

But we are to learn from this Psalm that although the righteous man may have many troubles in this world, he can and should pour out his heart to the Lord. For the Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. And we must never forget how each section finishes – with hope and with praise. The devil and his minions may have their little day, but their end will come, and they will be punished justly for all the harm they have done to others. But the righteous will be delivered and will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.