

The Lord protects those who can't protect themselves

Gary Brouwers

Sermon on Psalm 35

Hollandale (Minn.) CRC

Should we love them or should we hate them? Our enemies, the people who treat us rotten.

Should we love them or should we hate them? Should we have compassion for those who do evil to us, or should we wish bad things to happen to them?

I know what comes naturally, to us. We are hurt by someone, and we want them to pay. We might not go so far to wish bad things to happen to that person, but we want justice. We want the sin to be punished. We want them to feel bad about what they did. It only makes sense, right? We feel bad. They should feel bad, too.

Except, we don't usually talk that way, at least in church, right? Church is supposed to be the place where we love each other, where we forgive one another. In church, we speak kindly about other people, we smile, even when we're hurting inside. We pretend to be getting along, even when everything inside us is torn apart by that person, that person who said what they said and did what they did. How can we talk about hating other people, wanting bad things to happen to them? How can we talk about this in church of all places?

Because Psalm 35 is in the Bible, that's why. Psalm 35 is one of what are called the imprecatory psalms. Imprecatory means calling down curses on our enemies. It means calling on God to blast them with hellfire and brimstone, to make very bad things happen to them and our families.

The psalms are the tools God gives us to help us talk to Him. We know the Psalms for when we're happy. Bless the Lord, Oh my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. We know the Psalms when we're thankful. The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. Some of the Psalms teach us what to do when we're angry with God. Psalm 13, "How long, Oh Lord? Will You forget me forever? And some Psalms teach us what to do when we're angry at someone else. When they've done us wrong. When they've hurt us. These Psalms teach us to be angry, but they teach us to take that anger to God.

We're going to take a look at a few of these psalms, but while we do, we're going to have verses like Matthew 5:44 going through our minds:

**Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you  
may be sons of your Father in heaven**

I hope that in the five years of preaching here, you've heard me preach compassion, love for enemies. You've heard me say that forgiving is the hardest thing that God requires of us, and yet He requires this of us. So, there it is. We are to love our enemies

At the same time, here's Psalm 35. And when we bring loving our enemies together with the call for vengeance, then we are being holy. If we lose the love, if we won't forgive, then we grow

resentful, then we are sinning. But with the hatred, without Psalm 35, we ignore justice. We gloss over the hurt. And that, too, is sinful.

So, while we're loving our enemies, we pray verse 1:

**Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me.**

The writer of Psalm 35 is under attack, and there's nothing he can do about it. Well, there's something he could do about it. He could use the same tactics, the same strategy as his attacker. Fight fire with fire, do evil to evil. That would make sense. And while it would probably just make things worse, just escalate the war and bring more attack, that is one option.

But the writer of Psalm 35 knows a better way. Turn the matter over to God. Put the problem in His hands. Let Him bring the justice, let Him expose the evil, let Him pay back the wrong. Now don't get me wrong. This is not just some nice, schmaltzy, too nice for real life kind of prayer. There is real hurt, and the real hurt is being turned over to God. Verse 4 is the request being made of God, and verse 4 is not nice:

**May those who seek my life be disgraced and put to shame; may those who plot my ruin be turned back in dismay. May they be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them away;**

We want things put right. We want those who have shamed us to suffer shame themselves, to know what it feels like. And maybe, if we're honest, we want them to just be gone. Out of our lives, away from us. Because they hurt us. They hurt us.

They hurt us, so let them be hurt. Verse 7:

**Since they hid their net for me without cause and without cause dug a pit for me, may ruin overtake them by surprise— may the net they hid entangle them, may they fall into the pit, to their ruin.**

If they want to inflict pain, then let them suffer pain themselves. If they want to attack, let them be attacked, and let them be ruined. Let them be taken out. May they fall into the pit, to their ruin.

At which point, I will praise the Lord. Verse 9:

**Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD and delight in his salvation. My whole being will exclaim, “Who is like you, O LORD? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them.”**

This is ultimately about God. This is about how strong God is, and how much He cares for His people. This about God’s sense of justice, about His sense of fairness, whether evil should be punished and good protected. If evil IS punished and good IS protected, then I will praise the Lord, when I see my attackers get what’s coming to them.

Psalm 35, then, is both a comfort and a warning. It’s a comfort to those who are being attacked. It’s a relief to run to God for protection and justice, even for vengeance. AND, it’s a warning, that if anyone is going to attack, they had better be sure the attack is justified. That if they are attacking a righteous person, someone who has done no wrong, then God will step in and protect.

After all, why should someone who has done nothing wrong suffer? Verse 12:

**They repay me evil for good and leave my soul forlorn. Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered, I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother.**

You didn't bring this on yourself. In fact, you treated them kindly. You wanted the best for them. You prayed for them. You helped them when they needed help.

And what do they do? Verse 15:

**But when I stumbled, they gathered in glee; attackers gathered against me when I was unaware. They slandered me without ceasing.**

These attacks come from a lot of different places, some of them impersonal and some from very close friends. Christians have big enemies in this world, people that would love to just see us disappear. They roll their eyes at our values. They smirk when they hear us talk about holiness. Watch the news, and you won't see stories about Christians, about you, taking care of people, showing God's love, providing needs, doing what Dave talked about this morning, serving. What you'll see is when a Christian leader falls into public sin. You'll see TV shows that mock Christians. What did we do to bring this on? We just want to help people? Why do they attack us?

We look around at evil people doing evil things. We ourselves, in our church, have been affected by murder in the past few months. People are raped. People break into our cars, into our houses. Why? What did we ever do?

But those attacks don't hurt us nearly as bad as the attacks of a friend. Especially a friend who is supposed to be a Christian, and is supposed to act like a Christian. Verse 16:

**Like the ungodly they maliciously mocked**

They are not the ungodly, but they are sure acting like it. They are not acting like Jesus. They are not showing holiness. They are not loving at all. They are attacking, and you want it to stop. And you pray verse 19:

**Let not those gloat over me who are my enemies without cause;  
let not those who hate me without reason maliciously wink the  
eye.**

Sin hurts. If sin doesn't hurt us, then we've somehow become callous to it. Sin hurts, big impersonal sin, but especially sin from a friend, from a personal attack. So what do we do with the hurt? Do we just grin and bear it? Shove it way down inside and hope for the hurt to go away?

Of course not. We talk to God about it. Psalm 35, and the other psalms like it, teach us how to talk to God. This is real hurt, real pain, and we can talk about it in real terms. We want bad things to happen to people who do bad things. This is what we want. Psalm 35 recognizes this.

But Psalm 35 doesn't leave us there. Psalm 35 doesn't just tell us how to feel, what attitude to take. Psalm 35 shows us what to do when we're being attacked, when the attacker is stronger than we are, and we don't know what to do. Psalm 35 tells us to pray. If this is just the way we feel, if we are holding on to the anger, the hatred, the wishes for hurt on our enemies, if all of that is just inside, then we are sinning.

But if we talk this way to God, if we take the anger, the hatred, and we bring it to Him, wonderful things will happen. First, the anger, the hatred, the fear will start to disappear from us. After all, we brought to the Lord who hates sin more than we do, who is fiercely angry at evil people who attack righteous people for no reason. We brought this to our Father. Our Father will not tolerate anyone coming after His children. He is very protective of His children, and we just told Him the problem. We don't have to be angry any more. We have a God who is angry at the hurt.

And once we see this, once the hurt doesn't hurt as much, once the fear starts to come down, we'll see God working. And God works at this in a couple of different ways. There are times when He does punish evil doers, when those who live by the sword do die by the sword, and what they reap, that's what they'll sow. God does bring justice, God does bring consequences for people's actions. That might happen.

Or God's anger might go another place. To another Person. At another time. God's anger for that sin might have been flung down on Jesus, hanging on the cross. The hurt, the shame, the damage that we want done to that person, to our attacker...that's the hurt, that's the shame, that's the

damage that was done to Jesus with thorns in His head and the nails through His hand and the spear in His heart. God took our prayer of vengeance, and He answered it, by sending His Son to die.

And we can be thankful He did this, because that hurt and shame and damage that Jesus took, that was ours. We should have been hurt and shamed and damaged, because we too have hurt other people. Each one of us have hurt someone in some way along the way. God didn't strike us down because of that. God forgave us, through His Son.

That's the first and most important answer to the prayer of Psalm 35. But, there's a sense where that's not totally satisfying. I mean, okay, what if a Christian, a believer, does something really bad against us, really hurts us. We just schluff it off, and deal with the pain? No. Even though Jesus died for that person, that doesn't mean God won't do anything. God still works in our lives to correct and change us. And God will work in that person. And sometimes, that's a very difficult work. It's painful to be changed by God, sometimes. Zechariah 13:9 describes it like a burning:

**This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold.**

But again, we have to be careful. We don't want to be happy if our enemy goes through bad times. We just want to be happy if justice is done, if righteousness is rewarded.

It's good to be angry at sin. It's good to demand justice. Be angry. Demand justice. Expect righteousness. God does, so if we do, then we are godly. And it's right to take that anger to God.

It's wrong to hang on to that anger. We have been hurt, wrong has been done. But God knows this, and He will do something about it. We put it in His good, sure hands, and we trust that He will carry out His justice. And when we see His justice carried out, when we see wrongs righted and hurts defended, we will praise, in verse 27:

**The LORD be exalted, who delights in the well-being of his servant.”**

**My tongue will speak of your righteousness and of your praises all day long.**