

The Lord brings justice when friends turn into enemies

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Sermon on Psalm 55

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How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!

That comes from Psalm 133, and there is nothing better when families, when friends, when churches are in sync, when they're working together for the same goal. When the talk is friendly and encouraging. When conflicts arise, that they're handled with respect and openness and a genuine desire to resolve the issue. When you love your brother and sister, and they love you back, and you know it. Life is peaceful. This is shalom. It's the way things are supposed to be.

But when all of that comes crashing down, life is rotten. When one person is working for goal, and another is working in a different direction. When the talk is tense, cautious, even suspicious. When you just don't know where you stand with the person. When conflicts arise, and they're not handled with respect. There is accusation and assumption. There is judgment before the facts. There is gossip. The conflict is handled with fear, with anger and resentment. Or it may not even be handled at all. The conflict is ignored, shoved under the rug. When brothers and sister live in fear and anger, life is not peaceful. This is not shalom. Life hurts.

Psalm 55 teaches us what to do when brothers and sisters, whether biological or spiritual, turn on us, attack us and hurt us. Psalm 55 is the second imprecatory psalm that we're looking at, the

psalms that call down God's judgment on enemies. We saw Psalm 35, and we saw God coming to the defense of someone who is defenseless. The attacker is stronger than the attacked, and there's little he can do to stop the hurt. But he calls on the Lord, in his hurt, in her anger, and the Lord comes to the rescue.

And now Psalm 55 brings us to another hurtful place, when friends turn into enemies. Psalm 55, and the other psalms like it, are not so much about learning theology, teaching us how to think. What these psalms do is to teach us what to do with the theology, what to do with the hurt. See, we can separate our real lives from the real God. We can think of God as majestic and loving and holy and wise. But what does He have to do with my friend who is suddenly acting nasty, who is telling untrue things about me, who's making my life absolutely miserable. We're angry, but that anger doesn't seem to have a place before the Lord.

So Psalm 55, and the other psalms like it, act like a bridge between our real hurt and our real God. They bring God into the pain as the healer, even as the avenger. And they bring our pain to God. Verse 1:

Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea;

If we were objective and thinking clearly, we would know that of course God does not ignore our pleas. He hears every prayer. He will answer our call. But we're not thinking clearly and we're far from being objective, and we're not sure about anything. We've been hurt, and we're not sure if we could take it if God didn't answer.

So we beg, Lord, verse 2:

**hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught
at the voice of the enemy, at the stares of the wicked; for they bring
down suffering upon me and revile me in their anger.**

You hear their voice, and it sends a shiver down your back. You hear the words, and the tears come to your eyes. “Did you hear what she did? Did you hear what he’s done? Doesn’t she just drive you nuts? Isn’t he annoying?” You hear the words that you were never supposed to hear. Or maybe you were supposed to hear them. Maybe they were said in order to cause you the pain.

Or maybe it’s the silence that hurts. Maybe it’s not the voice of the enemy, maybe it’s the stares. The looks. At first, you wonder if they’re your imagination, it just looks like they don’t like you, like they’re angry. But this is happening way too often for it to be a coincidence. Obviously, this person has something against you, but for the life of you, you can’t figure out what it is. You wrack your brain. What did you do? What did you say? What’s the problem? How do you fix it?

It’s unsettling. You don’t want to go where you’ll run into the person. Verse 5:

Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me.

In fact, it would just be good to be gone. Verse 6:

**I said, “Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at
rest— I would flee far away and stay in the desert;**

And we reach a Selah in the text. Selah, remember, tells us to stop and think about what we just read, but we don’t need to be told that, because the thought of just running away sounds great.

To escape the hurt, to get away from the looks, it would just feel so good.

But we can't get away. We can't move. We can't change our lives like this. So what do we have?

We have the Lord. Verse 9:

Confuse the wicked, O Lord, confound their speech, for I see violence and strife in the city.

The enemy seems so together, like they have all the power, they are in control. Lord, turn them around. Confuse them. Make their slick talk that hurts so much, make them stumble over their words. Make them stop, because they're tearing things apart. Verse 11:

Destructive forces are at work in the city; threats and lies never leave its streets.

The enemy is at work. The enemy is destroying, cutting apart friendships, communities, even families. But look at who the enemy is. Verse 12 turns from talking to God to talking to the enemy. And the enemy, it turns out, was a friend:

If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God.

The attacker is a friend, and not just any friend. This is someone who went to church with us, where we enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng in the house of God, where we sat together over coffee after the morning service, where we worked together on committees and potlucks, where we worshiped together.

And remembering those great memories, the sweet fellowship, the close friendship, that just makes things worse. It makes the pain 10 times more hurtful, the anger 10 times fiercer. Fine, if they're going to tear apart my life, the community, the church, whatever, verse 15:

Let death take my enemies by surprise; let them go down alive to the grave for evil finds lodging among them.

This is real anger. Let them be buried alive for what they're doing. Let...them...die.

If we take our anger to God, if we pray Psalm 55 when we've been hurt, when we've been attacked, things will change. First, it might be us that changes. When we've been hurt, when we're seething with anger, and we pray this psalm, we might actually find that we're not as angry as all that. I mean, we're angry, but we're not so angry that we want them to die. We've been hurt, but wanting them to be buried alive? Well, our anger doesn't go that far. And as we realize this, there's a cap placed on our erupting anger. The anger comes under control again. We've reached a limit to the rage, and that makes us able to forgive. When we realize that we don't really want them to die, there's a little bit of compassion there, isn't there? I mean, we may be so angry, but we still care enough about the person, the friend to not want them to die. And that little seed of compassion, can we call it love? That little seed is what frees us from the grip of rage and revenge, and finally come to say the words "I can forgive. I forgive you."

But the change hopefully doesn't just come with you. The change, hopefully, comes in the person who is doing the damage. And maybe, just maybe, God will answer your prayer to bury them. Maybe He will bring them down to the grave. Just not in the way it sounds. Romans 6:2 says:

We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Perhaps, our enemy, the person who used to be our friend, will be buried, but not in their own death, in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. God takes people and He begins to kill the sin in their life. There's a killing, a burying of our old sinful selves, and we see that enacted in baptism. There's a drowning of our destructive selves, and we see that with the water being poured over us. Our enemy, our friend may go down alive to the grave, for evil lives in them.

But if they go down to the grave, to Jesus' grave, if they are buried with Christ, then they'll also be raised to new life with Jesus. Let me tell you, if Jesus could die after hanging on a cross for 6 hours, if He could stay dead for three days, and then open His eyes and walk out of that grave, then even the nastiest person can be changed. Even the most broken relationship can be healed. The person who is buried with Christ and comes alive with Him is repentant. They are asking for forgiveness. They want healing in the relationship. They want to restore what they have destroyed. I know that when the hurt is happening, when the attacks are coming, that this just seems impossible. But when someone is buried alive with Christ, and they come back to life in His resurrection, anything can happen.

But sometimes this takes time. And the hurt continues. And so, still, we're going to talk to God.

Verse 16:

But I call to God, and the LORD saves me.

The answer to attack is not to attack back. It's not to fight fire with fire. It's not even to pretend that it doesn't hurt, to put a good face on things, to look on the bright side. The answer is to talk to God, using Psalm 55, or our own words that sound like the Psalm. Verse 17:

Evening, morning and noon

This crying out is not polite. It's not always done using Bible language, clean, neat, ordered words. This crying out sounds more like this:

God, this hurts. Make it stop. Make her stop. Make him stop.

And, verse 17:

I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.

Our job, when under attack, is to cry out, and to watch. It's to pray, and to expect. We are to call out to God, and then watch for what He will do. Verse 19:

God, who is enthroned forever, will hear them and afflict them

And then there's the selah again, because we have to be careful here. Let's take a moment to make sure our motives are holy, our attitudes are pure. We want God to protect us, we want Him to provide justice. We just can't be glad that our enemies are in pain. We can't rejoice when our supposed friends are suffering. We can be joyful to see God work. These people are not acting Godly. Verse 19:

[these are] men who never change their ways and have no fear of God.

My companion attacks his friends; he violates his covenant. His

speech is smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart; his words are more

soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords.

They sound right, but they are so wrong. They sound holy, but they are actually acting evil. It would be wrong to not want this dealt with. We would be wrong if we didn't want ungodly words and actions stopped.

And yet, we can be sad that He had to work on them in the first place. There can be, there should be tears that our friend, with whom we had sweet fellowship, that they took a wrong turn, and now they and God have some unfinished business to take care of.

So, with that desire for justice, with the sadness for a friend, verse 22:

Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.

And that's what we're doing when we pray. Cast your cares on the Lord. Don't try to carry them yourself, cast your cares on the Lord. Don't return evil for evil, cast your cares on the Lord.

When you hear the words, when you see the stares, when the silence hits you like a rock, you'll hear the Holy Spirit say these words:

Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you

When the friend that was so close, that knew your heart, that you laughed with, and cried with, and worked with, and worshiped with, when your companion turns into an enemy, you'll feel the Spirit pull you to Psalm 55 so that you'll:

Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you

They may act nasty. They may spread rumors. They may act evil. But not you. As for you, you'll pray. As for you, you'll cry to God. As for you, verse 23: **But as for me, [Lord] I trust in you.**