

Contend, O LORD

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we are glad this evening to know that we are on your side. The Almighty God, the Lord, the Sovereign Lord, the Heavenly Father loves us.

Though we were once your enemies, Lord, you have reconciled us to yourself through your Son. And now we are here as members of your family, your sons and daughters, your grateful servants. So we pray that you would meet with us now. Speak to us. Listen to us. Lead us and be glorified by our time together.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. We're in Psalm 35. I guess eventually we'll finish the Psalms. Slowly making our way. In 120 weeks or something. Well, Psalm 119 will take us a bit. We'll probably have to break that one up a little bit.

[1 : 31] In like three years. It goes by quickly. It happens. Genesis is flying by.

That's like three chapters. Psalm 35 verses 1 to 28. This is the Psalm of David. Read it out loud for us.

Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me. Fight against those who fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler and rise for my help. Draw the spear and javelin against my pursuers. Say to my soul, I am your salvation.

Let them be put to shame and dishonor who seek after my life. Let them be turned back and disappointed who devise evil against me.

[2 : 27] Let them be like shaft before the wind. With the angel of the Lord driving them away. Let their way be dark and slippery.

With the angel of the Lord pursuing them. For without cause they hid their net for me. Without cause they dug a pit for my life. Let destruction come upon him when he does not know it. And let the net that he hid ensnare him. Let him fall into it to his destruction. Then my soul will rejoice in the Lord.

Exalting in his salvation. All my bones shall say, O Lord, who is like you? Delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him. The poor and needy from him who robs him.

Belicious witnesses rise up. They ask me of things that I do not know. They repay me evil for good. My soul is bereft. But I, when they were sick, I wore sackcloth.

[3 : 26] I afflicted myself with fasting. I prayed with head bowed on my chest. I went about as though I grieved for my friend or my brother. As one who laments his mother. I bowed down in mourning.

But at my stumbling, they rejoiced and gathered. They gathered together against me wretches whom I did not know tore at me without ceasing. Like profane mockers at a feast, they gnash at me with their teeth.

How long, O Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their destruction. My precious life from the lions. I will thank you and the great congregation. In a mighty throng, I will praise you.

Let not those rejoice over me who are wrongfully my foes. And let not those wink the eye who hate me without cause. For they do not speak peace.

But against those who are quiet in the land, they devise words of deceit. They open wide their mouths against me. They say, Aha! Aha! Our eyes have seen it. You have seen it, O Lord.

[4 : 31] Be not silent. O Lord, be not far from me. Awake and rouse yourself for my vindication. For my cause, my God and my Lord. Vindicate me, O Lord, my God, according to your righteousness.

And let them not rejoice over me. Let them not say in their hearts, Aha! Our hearts desire. Let them not say we have swallowed them up. Let them be put to shame and disappointed altogether who rejoice at my calamity.

Let them be clothed with shame and dishonor who magnify themselves against me. Let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad and say evermore, Great is the Lord who delights in the welfare of his servant.

Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness and of your praise all the day long. During the American Civil War, a man asked President Abraham Lincoln, Which side do you think God is fighting on?

The Union side or the Confederate side? And he gave the famous reply, Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side. My greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right. [5 : 48] And that's, he makes a good point, right? Because it's often people try to co-opt God for their purposes, their plans and agendas, Instead of trying to submit to his will and follow what he does.

And that's kind of the background here. Because David's enemies here are claiming that they've caught David in the act of basically violating the covenant that he made with them before the Lord. And with that false accusation, they're attacking him. That's the basis. So you broke the covenant, so now we're going to enforce the covenant by attacking you.

So that's basically what it is. So there's both a legal struggle here and a military struggle. And you see that in verse 1, where David cries out to God for help. Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me.

Fight against those who fight against me. So the word contend has legal overtones. And the word fight has military overtones. But here, David is confident that God's on his side.

[6 : 50] Or rather, he knows that he's right with God, that he's on God's side. Because he can confidently cry out to God, knowing that he will act on his behalf and not on behalf of his enemies. And it's really cool how he imagines God in verses 1 to 10.

He imagines that he's like this mighty warrior. He has the shield and buckler, the spear and javelin. And coming to his rescue. So he describes God and then calls out to him in verses 1 to 10.

And then in verses 11 to 16, he recounts the malicious deeds of his enemies, what they have done. And he talks about how it's all the more painful because it's his allies, right? It's the people that he treated as his own friend and brother, as it says in verse 14.

And they're the ones who are repaying evil for good. And verse 16 is so graphic. He describes them as profane mockers at a feast.

So it's kind of like, you know, ungrateful guests who slander their host. And when it's at, I mean, it's at the expense and goodwill of the host that they're enjoying the feast.

[7 : 54] But they're at the feast, you know, just basically chewing out the host. And they're gnashing their teeth in anger. So that's basically how David described it. So there's a lot of subversion in what they're doing.

And it says in verse 19, they wink the eye. That's reference to their treachery. Really, they're kind of scheming against David. And they are the ones that have broken covenant. So it says, David says in verse 20, they do not speak peace, which is the traditional way referring to a covenant relationship.

So they do not speak peace. But against those who are quiet in the land, they devise word of deceit. And then verse 21, it says, they open wide their mouths against me.

They say, aha, aha, our eyes have seen. So that's an example of their false accusation. They're saying, no, we've seen you. We've caught you doing what you're not supposed to do. And you violated this.

But David, he draws a very, it's a beautiful contrast between verse 21 and verse 22. Because in verse 21, they say, our eyes have seen it.

[8 : 55] And in verse 22, David says, Lord, you have seen. Right? You have seen, O Lord, be not silent. They are speaking, you know, they're bluffing. They're making stuff up, false occasion. And they haven't seen anything, yet they are speaking.

So he goes to God and says, Lord, you actually have seen everything. So I need you to speak on my behalf. Right? And then, so that's David's prayer. Let them be put to shame and disappointed. That's verse 26. It's kind of a bold prayer, right?

I mean, if we heard someone pray like this on a Friday night prayer service, we'd probably be like, whoa. That's, and it's a little, I think we're reluctant to pray that way in some ways.

But to pray for, it's really kind of a natural thing to pray for. Because on the one hand, David prays for his protection and vindication. Right? And their frustration and judgment is just the flip side of that.

[9 : 53] Right? I mean, you can't protect the weak unless you stop the oppressor. Right? You can't, I mean, you can't vindicate David unless you judge the people who are falsely accusing him.

Right? So it's really just the flip side of the same coin. So not really surprising that he asks for this. And David, as he cries out to God, he's confident that God's going to act on his behalf.

So in verses 27 and 28, he concludes with confidence that he'll end up praising God and those others will follow him in that praise. Let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad and say evermore, Great is the Lord who delights in the welfare of his servant.

Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness and of your praise all the day long. So what's the significance of this psalm for us as Christians? And in John 15, 25, when Jesus is predicting his death on the cross, and he's warning his disciples that they will be persecuted as he was persecuted, he quotes Psalm 35, verse 19.

And he says this, But the word that is written in their law must be fulfilled. They hated me without a cost. That's how David describes his enemies. They hated him without a cost.

[11 : 02] So this psalm is prophetic in the sense that David's suffering served as a type and a prefigurement of Christ's ultimate suffering at the hands of sinners. And though we'd like to imagine ourselves being on David's side, we are actually the profane mockers at the feast.

We are the ones who are falsely accusing. We falsely accuse Jesus with our sin and with our rebellion. And in Romans 5, 10, it says that while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son.

So we were his enemies. We were the ones who hated him without a cost. Yet Jesus is a better David, an ultimate David, in the sense that David here cries out for his vindication.

But Jesus doesn't cry out for his vindication. But he dies for our justification. So he bears the suffering, the pain that these false accusers deserved, that we deserved as his enemies.

And that results in our righteousness, our vindication, so that we can reconcile to him and be on his side instead of being against him, opposed to him. And that's really, that's the gospel, right?

[12 : 11] That's the wonderful grace that we get to experience. And if we make that the controlling center of our lives, then it will shape everything we do, think, and feel, and say.

And as people who have been saved and have experienced that grace, then now we are actually on David's side now, right? And so because we're following in Jesus' footsteps, we too will be persecuted.

And we will also become innocent sufferers at the hands of evildoers and false accusers like David is in this. And when we are experiencing that, then we could also have hope because David is confident because he's on the Lord's side that God will advocate for him and fight for him, contend for him.

And we can have the same faith. And even though in this life we'll experience unfairness and injustice, we know that God sees rightly and he judges infallibly and that he will have the final say on our behalf.

So with that confidence, let's maybe sing and we could turn to prayer.