**Vindicate me O Lord**  4/24 dkm

Read: Psalm 35,

Text: Psalm 35

Psalms:

David’s life as a shepherd looking after his father’s sheep changed dramatically when, in the name of the Lord, he Goliath the Philistine. He was praised throughout Israel, much to chagrin of King Saul. Driven by jealousy, Saul pursued David in a desperate attempt to capture and kill him. Later in his life when David was king his own son rebelled against him. In these times of being attacked without cause by people close to him, David cried to the Lord. Psalm 55:13 is a case in point: ‘My companion and my acquaintance’.

Here is Psalm 35 David is being mocked and attacked by a group with whom he had made a treaty or covenant of some kind. They are people whom he once helped, people now rewarding him evil for good (35:12). Who are the people that you find attacking or undermining you and your life? Often it is people with whom you had a close relationship is it not? Our courts are kept busy settling disputes between partners in marriage, partners in business and sometimes partners in the church.

This psalm falls into three sections which follow a similar pattern, namely, a petition or cry to the Lord to deal with people who have turned against him, details of their unwarranted and offensive behaviour, and a promise to praise the Lord for delivering him. Our subheadings are: ‘Divine warrior’, ‘False witnesses’, and, ‘Wrongful enemies’.

**1. Divine warrior**

The psalm has no title telling us the circumstances in which it was written. It has no introduction either. David immediately brings his case before the Lord, asking the Lord to contend for him, or plead his case, against those contending against him. The picture is that of a court, with the Lord pleading and indeed judging in favour of David. But the picture then changes to a battlefield with David urging the Lord to fight against those who have risen up against him. David was a warrior himself, but here he pictures the Lord taking up a shield and a buckler, and drawing the sword in his defence; the buckler was a large of two shields (contrary to the NKJV margin).

Although David was a warrior, an excellent one at that, he depended on the Lord’s help in all his battles, and in personal battles he refused to take up his own spear or sword. He entrusted himself and his life into the hands of the Lord. This was one such occasion. He pleaded for the Lord to reassure his soul saying, ‘I am your salvation’, even as he saw and heard treaty-breakers threatening him. David trusted in the Lord’s power to stop and even destroy his enemies, and he believed the Lord would help him because they were attacking him without a valid reason. In disputes there are usually faults on both sides, but not always. David pleaded innocence, but the Lord knows our hearts and judges accordingly. Failure to trust in the Lord is an indicator of wrongdoing.

After calling upon the Lord to defend him, David goes into detail with regard to the things his opponents had done to him, and what he wants the Lord to do to them. We read of eight imprecations, each introduced by the words, ‘Let them’ or similar. David may or may not have been in a portion to defend himself physically, but he entrusted himself into the hands of the Lord knowing that the Lord is just in all his judgments. Even so, David proceeds to declare judgment himself as he lists the wicked deeds of these one-time friends but now opponents. They were trying to hurt or kill David, sins for which David called for them to be shamed and brought to confusion (35:4). Breaking the terms of a covenant brought covenant curses. As a warrior God, the Lord has supernatural ways of dealing with enemies, including dreams and confusion (2Kings 7:6, 7). With so many conspiracy theories circulating on the internet these days we do not need dreams to spread confusion among enemies of the truth and of God.

The imprecations continue in verse 5 and 6, with David calling for the wicked to be like chaff in the wind, and the angel of the Lord to chase them away. In Psalm 1 the ungodly are likened to chaff that the wind blows away. The angel of the Lord is a messenger of the Lord who acts in defence of God’s people (Ps 34:7, Numb 20:16). The angel is called upon in the next verse after David calls for his opponents to be put on a dark and slippery path. Opponents cannot attack in the dark, and the slippery path sees them sliding away, ultimately to destruction.

In poetic language, David speaks of them hiding a net for him in a pit (35:7). Metaphors of a net to catch birds and a pit to catch animals are combined. They were pursuing him to catch him and kill him, and that without any cause. So he calls for them to be destroyed, to be caught in the net they set for him, and the pit they dug for him. Such an end for them would be poetic justice. David believed in just retribution as a form of divine justice. We see this in the case of Haman being hung on the gallows he built for Mordecai (Esther 7:10).

David asked for the Lord to be his salvation, and now he declares he will rejoice in his salvation (35:3, 9). Such was David’s faith and confidence that the Lord would defend and deliver him. He knew the Lord to be the defender and deliverer of the poor and needy, so when he humbled himself and declared himself innocent before the Lord he believed the Lord would deliver him. The cry, ‘Who is like you’ (35:10), takes us back to deliverance of God’s people from the hands of Pharaoh and his army at the Red Sea (Exod 15:11). David was not imagining what God is like; he was recalling truths about God as recorded in Scripture. Too many people, including some Christians, imagine what God is like without bothering to search the Scriptures.

**2. False witnesses**

In a second round of pleading his cause against those attacking him, David call them fiercen witnesses, fierce and false witnesses. We think of the trial to which our Lord Jesus Christ was subjected. The council of the Jews arrested Jesus and was desperate to find evidence by which they condemn him to death. Many false witnesses were brought forward, but they did not agree (Mark 14:56). They questioned Jesus himself, asking him under oath if he was the Christ (Mat 26:63). Jesus could answer the question of course, and he did, but it was illegal to ask a self-incriminating question. David’s opponents asked him impossible questions (35:11).

David was grieved that his opponents were people whom he had actually helped as if they were a friend or brother (35:13, 14). When they were sick he put on clothes of mourning, and fasted and prayed for them. He showed great sympathy for them, but for this good towards them they rewarded him with evil: ‘They reward me evil for good’ (35:12). Their evil came in the form of rejoicing over David when he faced problems of his own. They gathered around, not to help or grieve but to gloat. They mocked him and gnashed their teeth at him. When Jesus was condemned by the Jews they gathered around to mock and ridicule him. They did this all the way to the cross, and until he died. The Jewish leaders were jealous of Jesus from the start, but the amazing thing prophesied in this psalm is how the people shouting, ‘Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’ on Palm Sunday, turned upon Jesus shouting, ‘Crucify him’ by Friday. The most blatant case of returning well for evil was that of Judas of course.

Having further detailed the wicked ways of his opponents, David again turns to the Lord, asking how long he will ‘look on’ and not deal with them (35:17). He pleads with the Lord to rescue him from their mocking and their threats to tear him to pieces. He pictures them as lions prowling around him. We see this picture in Psalm 22, an obviously messianic psalm. The last verse of this second section, is like that at the end of the first section in verse 9, namely a promise to thank and praise the Lord in the assembly when the Lord, with divine justice, delivers him.

**3. Wrongful enemies**

‘Let them not rejoice over me who are wrongfully my enemies’ (35:19). In this verse we have the theme of this psalm. Rightful enemies were foreign nations like the Philistines. So who were David’s wrongful enemies? Who were the allies that had turned against him, breaking the treaty they had? Allan Harman refers to the peace treaty Joshua made with the Gibeonites (Josh 9:15), and then writes, ‘Clearly the psalmist’s enemies were breaking the terms of the treaty and making false claims against those living in quietness in the land’. In the book of Obadiah the prophet condemns Edom for gloating over the destruction of Jerusalem because Esau was a brother to Jacob or Israel. ‘Winking the eye’ in verse 19 is a malicious look akin to gnashing their teeth in verse 16.

The words, ‘Hate me without a cause’ in verse 19 were quoted by Jesus while speaking to his disciples (John 15:25) - the same words are found in Psalm 69:4. So clearly, this psalm is prophetic of the suffering of Jesus of Nazareth. David continues to protest his innocence but only Jesus is truly innocent in the sense of having no sin of his own. We referred to the difficulty the Jewish council and then the Roman Governor had in finding any evidence to convict Jesus; there was of course no such evidence to be found! If David pleaded, ‘they hate me without a cause’, how much more our Lord Jesus Christ.

The wicked however are not interested in truth or justice. They do not seek peace (35:20). All they seek is power and self-glory. Slander and deception are foremost in their attacks upon the innocent or ‘the quiet in the land’. Yes, you can living a quiet life and harming no one, but these malicious men will come after you. They claimed to have seen David breaking the terms of their treaty but David makes the counter claim that the Lord has seen everything and will deliver justice (35:21, 22). He answers their ‘Aha, aha!’ by calling upon the Lord not to remain silent and far from him. Jesus felt the Lord was far from him as he cried out from the cross, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me’ (Ps 22:1).

David called upon the Lord to vindicate him ‘according to your righteousness’ (35:24). He did not want the wicked rejoicing over his demise. As the anointed king, David’s demise or defeat would have brought shame to the Lord. ‘Let those who gloat over my distress be put to shame and confusion’ (35:26 NIV) is David’s final plea to the Lord regarding his mockers and malicious opponents returning him evil for good. Jesus did not cry out for God to judge those mocking and ridiculing him and then putting him on the cross, even though they would be held to account by God. His death was a great injustice and yet it was God being just and justifying sinners like you and me. Vindication came on the third day when God raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. His mockers were confused and shamed and silenced. It is us who believe in Jesus who are rejoicing today.

In the closing verse of the psalm, David draws in supporters who have not been mentioned so far. He has spoken of thanking and praising God in the assembly (35:18), but now speaks of some who ‘favour my righteous cause’; Jesus of course, had none until after his resurrection. David had those who would shout for joy when he was vindicated by the Lord (35:27). Jesus has those who shout for joy because God has vindicated him. Are you among those shouting and praising God for the salvation you have in the blood of Jesus Christ? Can you, like David, say, ‘My tongue shall speak of your righteousness and of your praise all the day long’ (35:28)?