

# The Vindication of the Righteous

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good morning, everyone. My name's Nathan, and let me just add my welcome. It's great to be here this morning with you, especially I hope you all had a great Christmas. It's great to be gathering together to listen to God's word again, and we're going to be continuing through the book of Psalms.
- And this morning, we come to Psalm 35. So read with me from Psalm 35. Psalm 35.
- Of David. 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. Let them be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the Lord driving them away.
- [ 1 : 0 9 ] 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, exulting 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. Malicious 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.
- I afflicted myself with fasting. I prayed with my 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.
- [ 2 : 1 4 ] 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 in the great congregation.
- In the 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, O Lord. 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.
- [ 3 : 1 7 ] Vindicate me, O Lord, my God, according to your righteousness. And let them not rejoice over me. Let them not say in their hearts, our hearts desire.

Let them not say we have swallowed him 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.

Well, friends, if you remember back in the first psalm, we were introduced to two very different men. The righteous man and the wicked man, which Psalm 1 goes on to clearly distinguish between.

While the righteous man delights in the law of God and stands firm like a tree, the wicked are like chaff, blown along by the wind and destined for destruction.

[ 4 : 31 ] And by the end of the psalm, their destination is also clearly distinguished. The righteous congregation are vindicated in their choice to delight in God's law. They stand justified.

But the wicked stand to face the consequences of their wickedness. Their destiny is to perish. That is how the psalms are introduced. But then as we continue reading, we focus in on one righteous man in particular.

King David. And we see him afflicted in many different ways by many different wicked enemies. He is hated by them, chased by them, mocked by them, and surrounded by them, to name but a few.

And time and time again, we see God's faithfulness in rescuing him from the hand of his enemies. As he vindicates David for his righteous actions, while also justly repaying his enemies for their wickedness.

Well, as we come to Psalm 35, what we read follows a very similar pattern. But here, what David is saved from is not the spear or the lion or the bear, but words.

[ 5 : 41 ] The threat is not so much from an external nation or enemy, but rather from false accusations from close friends. Now, it seems today that the world around us is getting more and more confused about words.

While on the one hand, it's no longer the case that a man's word is his bond, it seems that in other ways, the power of words has been more and more realized. Now, to us Christians, the weightiness of words, their power and their potential to do harm, shouldn't really come as much of a surprise.

Not only because we believe in a God who creates by his word and has revealed himself to us through his word, but also because of the care that the Bible instructs us to take with our words.

The ninth commandment commands us, commands not to bear false witness. The Israelites were not to put anyone to death on the account of just a single witness. Proverbs 6 includes a false witness who breathes out lies as one of the seven things that are an abomination to the Lord.

And in 1 Timothy chapter 5, Timothy is commanded not to entertain any charge against an elder unless there are at least two or three witnesses. Because words are powerful and when used maliciously, they can inflict a lot of harm.

[ 7 : 02 ] We saw it many years ago in the case of Azaria Chamberlain and more recently in the case of Cardinal George Pell, where a false accusation so heavily influenced the media and public opinion that it was impossible to get a fair trial.

And it wasn't until the evidence was properly interrogated and re-reviewed that innocence and guilt could justly be determined. However, often by this point, the reputation of the accused is so tattered so as to be almost irreparable.

Words are powerful and they can do a lot of damage. But the hope of David here in this psalm and the hope for all Christians is the promise of true vindication, proven to be truly innocent and free of blame.

And it's particularly pertinent for us in Australia today because it's not so much the spear or the lion or the bear that threaten us, but lies and false accusations. Accusations of bigotry for our views on sexuality or gender.

Allegations of hate speech or being too fundamentalist for teaching on hell and judgment. Or claims of not being inclusive for saying that repentance from sin and faith in Jesus is the only way for salvation.

[ 8 : 21 ] And so much more. The hope of Psalm 35 is that just as David and just as Jesus were both proven to be righteous, so too will all of God's people be vindicated for trusting in him.

So let's get into it. You'll see there in your outline that I've broken the psalm roughly into three sections to work through, each culminating with David's promise to praise God. And so, looking from verse 1, we're immediately thrown into desperate conflict, David's desperate conflict, as he is attacked from all sides.

Unlike the past few psalms, which have started much more passively and with thanksgiving or praise, this is much more a call to action. You can see that in the imperatives throughout the first few verses, can't you?

Contend, O Lord. Fight against. Take hold. Rise. Draw the spear. Say to my soul. This is desperation, isn't it? A cry of anguish from David for God to fight and to save his life.

And just a few quick points here about God as a defender. Firstly, notice how God isn't just defending here. In verse 2, David implores God to take up shield and buckler.

[ 9 : 37 ] Buckler just being another type of shield. But there's a much greater emphasis on God going on the offensive here, isn't there? As he takes up the spear and the javelin and turns the pursuers into the pursued.

Not only is God a sure refuge, and a stronghold, but a strong warrior able to turn back the enemy, to shame and to dishonor them.

Look a bit closer at verse 5. Let them be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the Lord driving them away. You remember that exact language comes straight from Psalm chapter 1.

While the righteous man stands firm, the wicked man is blown away like chaff in the wind. The image of chaff being blown away is an image of sorting and judgment.

The chaff, it's the outer useless part of the grain, and it can't be eaten, so you need to get rid of it. And to do so, you've thrown the whole grain into the air on a windy day, and the lighter chaff is carried off by the wind and blown away, while the heavier seed or kernel falls back to the ground.

[ 10 : 49 ] And so, like chaff, the wicked here are being sorted out from among the righteous, driven away from them. So here, David is picking up on that image of Psalm 1, asking God to do exactly that, to separate him, as the righteous and innocent king, from the wicked.

But it's a bit more forceful than Psalm 1, isn't it? Because it's not just the wind that is driving them away, but God himself, who here is acting through his angel.

Almost as if he is holding a giant fan, not only to initially separate out the wicked, but then chasing them down to ensure that they are blown far away and can never return.

This isn't passive, not leaving them to their own devices. Not just in this verse, but throughout the first part of this psalm, God is being called on to be actively on the offensive, driving them away, pursuing them, shaming and dishonouring them.

And why? Well, verse 7 tells us, for without cause they hid their net for me, without cause they dug a pit for my life. It's because they unfairly want David's life.

[ 12 : 09 ] There's no basis for their attack on him. Now, we don't know the exact situation that prompted this psalm, or who or when or why this is happening. I mean, there are various thoughts and theories, but ultimately we're not told, unlike Psalm 34, the last psalm.

We're not given an exact marker. And the reason for this, I think, is because we're not meant to be envisioning any one single occurrence. This could be true of so many different times throughout David's life.

And it could easily even be from an event that isn't recorded in the Old Testament. But what we do know is that there is no justification for David's attackers. He is innocent, and unjustly, they seek his life.

And so it's poetic that these unjust murderers get justice, that they become ensnared into the net that they hid and fall into their own pit.

It's just justice, true justice, not over or under punishing, but a punishment perfectly fitting the crime. An eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth, and it's a justice that David entrusts to God.

[ 13 : 22 ] From the very start, David isn't trying to enact his own justice, but trusting in God to be just, as the only one who can truly be just. Which will then give him a cause to praise God.

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 the needy from him who robs him.

David promises to praise God for his salvation and deliverance, to exalt in him. And it's a whole body experience. David's bones, even, are praising God.

God's care for the vulnerable is so tender that even his innermost parts shout out. How good is God's deliverance? That he doesn't side with the strong.

But instead, he delivers the needy out from them. Salvation is not for the powerful, but for the weak. He is the true champion of the oppressed, delivering them from out of the...

[ 14 : 29 ] Sorry, delivering them out from their oppressor and bringing them to justice. Which brings us back to the thought that we didn't quite finish earlier, that of God actively and forcefully driving away the wicked.

Which is a tough thing to wrestle with. And that's good and okay. It is something that we should wrestle with. But partly why I think it is such a struggle is because we believe in grace.

And that ultimately, if it wasn't for God bringing us to repentance, we would be one of the wicked. However, the reality of God's active hand in judgment, his wrath in driving away and judging the wicked, is a truth shown again and again throughout scripture.

He doesn't just leave the wicked to their own devices. He doesn't just allow rebels to exist happily in their own camp. God's judgment is an active outpouring of his wrath on sinful people.

And as much as we need to be teaching God's grace, we also need to be teaching how much God hates sin and rebellion and the horror of hell. And to allow the balance to fall too heavily one way or the other is actually to cheapen grace, to cheapen God's love and to cheapen Jesus' death.

[ 15 : 53 ] Because without Jesus standing in your place, God punishing sin requires God punishing sinners. But it's tricky, isn't it?

I mean, what are we meant to do with that? God hating sin means that he sends sinners to hell, but God also loves sinners, which is why he sent Jesus. So what does that mean for us and how are we meant to think about wicked people and towards wicked people?

I think in reflecting on this psalm, Charles Spurgeon helpfully writes, viewing sinners as men, we love them and seek their good, but regarding them as enemies of God, we cannot think of them with anything but detestation and a loyal desire for the confusion of their devices.

No loyal subject can wish well to rebels. Squeamish sentimentality may object to the strong language here used, but in their hearts, all good men wish confusion to mischief makers.

As fellow humans, we don't delight in the death of a sinner and must wish that all would be saved. But equally, we have been saved from sin into God's kingdom.

[ 17 : 05 ] Of course, we don't want sin to triumph and we don't want the rebels against the kingdom to prevail. We want God's kingdom and his king to triumph and evildoers to be done away with.

It's Psalm 2, isn't it? The nations arrayed against God and his anointed son. And unless they kiss the son, unless they take refuge in him, they will perish. And as the ultimate anointed son of Psalm 2, it's pretty easy to imagine these words on the lips of Jesus, isn't it?

And parts of them are. With enemies arrayed against him on the verge of being put to death, Jesus quotes from verse 19 of Psalm 35 as proof of his innocence and his enemy's guilt.

I know it's jumping forward a bit in the Psalm, but it's the exact same idea that we've seen in this first section, isn't it? Of being hated and pursued without cause. And in John 15, hours before he's about to be arrested and betrayed, Jesus promises persecution for his disciples because reading, as we read from verse 21, all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my father also.

[ 18 : 34 ] If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my father. But the word that is written in their law must be fulfilled.

They hated me without a cause. Jesus' words and works drove the Israelites to hatred, and in doing so, proved his innocence for speaking the truth, while also exposing their guilt for rejecting and killing God's king.

Without cause, they hid a net to trap Jesus. Without cause, they dug a pit for his life. Now, it feels as if Psalm 35 could basically finish here.

We've had conflict and resolution, had a proper story arc, but David is just getting started. And he adjusts his attention here in verse 11 from the murderous nature of his enemies to something apparently quite docile.

Malicious witnesses rise up. They ask me of things that I do not know. However, this is not just the case of a forgotten test answer or an awkward moment when someone asks you a question that you have no idea about.

[ 19 : 48 ] No, these are malicious witnesses, conniving and scheming against David. These are false accusations. As David is sitting in the prosecution box, he's suddenly barraged by a bunch of accusations that he has no idea about.

He doesn't know how to answer them because he was never involved in them. And all of a sudden, he has to defend himself from a fabricated situation that he had nothing to do with.

And just to stick the knife in a little deeper, these accusations come not from distant enemies, but from close friends. These accusers were once as close as friends or brothers whom David would grieve for.

When they were sick, David responded as if his own mother faced death. People on whom he had the deepest compassion and care for. And for all the care and good David had done towards them, he was repaid with evil and hatred.

It's bad enough being attacked, but to be betrayed by those who you thought were your closest friends, to have them throw unfounded accusations at you and to seek your downfall for no justifiable reason, sucks the very life from you.

[ 21 : 04 ] And as David says in verse 12, it leaves his soul bereft or empty. David is utterly abandoned. Those whom he thought he could trust have turned against him and he is left with no one to turn to except God alone.

The thing about false accusations, though, is that no matter how you defend yourself, no matter what you say, it's always going to be construed against you. It's almost impossible to prove your own innocence.

Your words can always be twisted every which way and taken to mean almost anything. Someone who is charged but maintains their innocence is just someone who is arrogant and blinded to their own guilt.

No matter what you say, it's always going to be the wrong thing. And abandoned by his allies, David is in a catch-22 with no one to plead his cause. But it doesn't stop there.

Not only do his enemies falsely accuse him, but they mock him when he is in trouble. They celebrate when he stumbles and they gather others to join in on the mockery. And it is those who are gathered that reveal how weak David is.

[ 22 : 15 ] Verse 15 describes him as wretches whom he doesn't know. And I think who he has in mind here are the cripples, the miserable and filthy, the dregs of society.

These are the ones plucking up courage to come and scorn him. David is so weak that even the cripples feel strong enough to come out and mock him. Like vultures who circle around, waiting for their prey to die before feasting, these miserable people descend on David when he's at his weakest and tear at him with their words.

They join in on the mockery of David's friends and heap up insults upon him. From every side, the innocent king is attacked and reviled.

And out of desperation, he calls on God to act and to rescue him from his situation. How long, O Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their destruction, my precious life from the lions.

I will thank you in the great congregation, in the mighty throng I will praise you. Overwhelmed by the onslaught of accusations against him, David begs God to step in from the sidelines, as it were.

[ 23 : 28 ] To not just look on, but to act. To rise up for his deliverance and to rescue him from the hand of his enemies. And it comes as a bit of a surprise to hear someone be so bold before God.

But David here has just been emotionally honest, isn't he? There are no false pretenses. He acknowledges that he has been crushed by his enemies, unable to save himself and utterly reliant on God to rescue him.

And that until God intervenes to deliver his king, he is helpless. Knowing that God has promised to deliver him and is powerful to do so, David here is asking God to do exactly that.

And again, as response to God's mighty deliverance, David promises praise. And not just praise, like we've already seen in this psalm, but public praise.

Praise in the midst of the great congregation. And I think the righteous congregation from Psalm 1 is the congregation in mind here. The gathering of God's own people. Having been rescued out from the wicked people and into the congregation of the righteous, David will publicly declare God's marvelous salvation to those around him and how he rescues from false accusations and mockery.

[ 24 : 50 ] But again, as with David, so too with Jesus. As the ultimate innocent king, we find these words fully fulfilled in him and the enemies that have arrayed themselves against him.

The innocent king falsely accused, mocked and scorned. But unlike David, at least initially, he was not rescued from it. Despite the compassion that Jesus had for Israel when he saw them harassed like sheep without a shepherd, despite the care and concern that he showed towards them, those very same crowds would be the ones mocking him on his way to the cross, calling out for his death, betrayed by one of his closest friends and a victim of false accusation.

So innocent was Jesus, as Matthew tells us, that even with the chief priests skipping right past actual accusations, going straight to false ones, nothing would stick to the point where you have a corrupt official like Pilate proclaiming Jesus to be an innocent man.

Falsely accused and put to death, mocked by the people he had created, abandoned by all his friends and forsaken by God himself. The truly innocent king sentenced to death on the basis of corruption and lies.

But if this psalm is fulfilled in Jesus and yet he dies, well, in what way is God's rescue fulfilled? Well, firstly, it is through Jesus not being rescued that he is one rescue for all of us.

[ 26 : 31 ] His death brings us life, but secondly, through his resurrection. Jesus' resurrection was his rescue from death and vindication as righteous, which we find out as we keep reading in Psalm 35.

And as we keep reading from Psalm 9, sorry, from verse 19, the wicked nature of David's enemies is seen more and more. As we've already seen, David repeats again how unwarranted this whole situation is.

They are wrongfully his foes. They hate him without cause. But as well as this, there's a few other things. They wink the eye. Bit of an odd thing. But ubiquitously, winking is a sign that you're not being entirely forthcoming, isn't it?

There's something more going on than what you're saying. And while it might not be an outright lie, the purpose is to be deceitful, which we see in verse 20.

They do not speak peace, but against those who are quiet in the land, they devise words of deceit. Not only against David have these wicked people lied and borne false witness, but they have opposed all who are righteous and trying to live quiet lives.

[ 27 : 49 ] Their goal is not peace, but subversion, and their weapons are lies. They open their mouths against David and maliciously witness to things that they haven't actually seen, which we see in verse 21.

They widely accuse David of guilt, saying that, oh yes, I definitely saw him do it. Wink, wink. However, despite their false witness and what they claim to have seen, there is someone who has seen all.

And to him, David cries, you have seen, oh Lord, be not silent. Oh Lord, be not far from me.

Awake and rouse yourself for my vindication, for my cause, my God and my Lord. Vindicate me, oh Lord, my God, according to your righteousness and let them not rejoice over me.

Vindication, being proven to be not guilty or free from blame after others have blamed you. This is what David has been hinting at and asking from God all along.

[ 28 : 57 ] To fight for him, to plead his cause and to prove his innocence. And see how just, just how impassioned his cry is.

See how many times he names the Lord or some variation of. He calls on him with his personal name, Yahweh. He pleads with him as his God and as his Lord.

God is David's key witness and defender. Only God himself can plead on his behalf and vindicate him from these false accusations. But see, however, that though it is for David's cause, he pleads for vindication according to God's righteousness, not his own righteousness.

Even though in this situation David is righteous and innocent, which we'll see later on, it's a plea for God to act righteously. For God to act in line with his character, which throughout the Psalms we've seen again and again, to be one of siding with the righteous and protecting the oppressed and to not allow the wicked to go unpunished.

David begging for vindication is him begging for God to reveal the truth and then to judge accordingly. Let them not say in their hearts, our hearts desire.

[ 30 : 14 ] Let them not say we have swallowed him up. Let them be put to shame and disappointed altogether who rejoiced at my calamity. Let them be clothed with shame and dishonor who magnify themselves against me.

For those that have worked to shame and dishonor him, David wants God to return it on their own heads. Again, to judge with poetic justice, to flip the injustice and to bring everything back into right order, to shame those who magnify themselves and to bring down those who build themselves up and to disappoint those wanting to rejoice in David's suffering and instead to bring delight to those who love righteousness.

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.

In the final verses of this psalm, David promises that his rescue will not only result in his praise but in the praise of all the righteous from those that know David's innocence.

As he stands delivered among the righteous, David's public praise is joined by the congregation around him. When evil prospers the wicked rejoice but when righteousness prospers the godly rejoice.

[ 31 : 43 ] God's righteous vindication of his innocent king is worthy of praise forevermore. In David yes but all the more so in Jesus. And we've seen how so much of this psalm is fulfilled in Jesus and being hated without a cause innocent and falsely accused scorned by the very people he was compassionate to.

Yet because of God's righteousness however Jesus didn't forever remain as the suffering servant eternally mocked and accused and hated. No, through all that Jesus' vindication is in his resurrection and ascension.

And what was his vindication about? Well, it's about him being proven to be exactly who he said he was. Him being the Son of God the Christ the King of the world.

And how do we see Jesus' vindication? Well, 1 Timothy 3 tells us that the mystery of godliness is in Christ being manifested in the flesh that's his resurrection body and being vindicated by the Spirit.

When Jesus ascended and sat down at the right hand of the Father he started pouring out the Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit in being poured out is to declare Jesus as Lord and Christ and as he works in our hearts that's exactly what happens.

[ 33 : 06 ] The Spirit turns us from rebellion to submission. We realise Jesus to be both Lord and Christ and we declare it. In our allegiance and in our words is proof of Jesus' vindication.



That's the main point of Peter's sermon in Acts 2 in response to the Spirit being poured out. Don't worry about turning there. It should come up on the screen but read with me from verse 31 referencing another psalm Psalm 16 David foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ that he was not abandoned to Hades nor did his flesh see corruption.

This Jesus God raised up and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

For David did not ascend into the heavens but he himself says the Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified.

Do you see that? We know that Jesus has been vindicated as king because we have the Spirit. the fact that we have the Spirit means that Jesus must be reigning as king otherwise he wouldn't be able to give the Spirit and it's because we share in that same Spirit that we know that we will share in Jesus' glory amongst the congregation of the righteous.

[ 34 : 43 ] It's the kind of thing that we were talking about back when we were going through 1 Peter earlier in the year. So turn to 1 Peter 4 verse 12 where he tells us of the hope that we have when Jesus' glory will be revealed.

And it should be up on the screen as well. 1 Peter 4 verse 12 Beloved do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you but rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed if you are insulted for the name of Christ you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

Do you see how Peter picks up on this argument? Like David in this psalm Christ suffered under false accusation surrounded by enemies yet through the spirit he will be glorified and vindicated and as Christ imitators if we share in his suffering we will also share in the same spirit that glorifies Christ and if we share in the same spirit of glory we will share and rejoice in Christ's glory because of Jesus's vindication through the spirit we can be confident to endure through pain and suffering knowing that at its end Christ's glory will be revealed and we will share in it we can patiently endure through accusations of bigotry hatred exclusion and whatever may come our way we can suffer through this life suffer through being insulted for the name of Christ because we know that when Christ and his glory is revealed we will be justified vindicated for putting our faith in him and we will stand singing his praises amongst the congregation of the righteous let's pray dear loving father thank you that you are a great

God who protects your people thank you that Jesus' suffering was not the end but that he was vindicated and shown to be the king he said he was thank you that through your spirit we can confidently live as your people waiting for the glory of Jesus to be revealed help us to patiently endure until that day amen doesn't drive to