

*We bow our hearts in prayer:* Heavenly Father, You have ordained that with our tongues we are to praise You and bless our neighbor. Yet in our sinfulness with it we bless You, and with it we curse people who are made in the Your likeness. Forgive us in Jesus' name and clothe us in His righteousness and purity forever. Amen.

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We read at the beginning of Psalm 35 the introduction: "Of David."

As you listen to the text, you can consider some of the events that happened to him early on, how King Saul and a number of Saul's servants spoke against David and tried to kill him. David had already been anointed to be the next king after Saul, but Saul was still alive. Saul wanted Jonathan, his son, to succeed him, but even Jonathan realized the truth and stood up in David's defense; so much so that Saul would try to rebuke him and speak against him and on one occasion, even threw a spear at him to kill him.

The psalm that serves as our text falls under the category of the Imprecatory Psalms, meaning that at times it will sound a little more vengeful than we might feel comfortable with; like when the psalmist asks God, "**Awake and rouse Yourself for my vindication.**"

And "**Let them be put to shame and disappointed altogether who rejoice at my calamity!**"

Of course, this sounds like the request of our old man, our sinful nature.

But as you listen to it, consider that these words were sung repeatedly by Jesus as He walked this earth and how accurately they describe His Passion.

*We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

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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 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 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! 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 heart's 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. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen* <sup>(John 17:17)</sup>

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We are reviewing the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment today, in which the Lord would teach us about our words. He'd have us recognize that, regardless of the poem, words can hurt worse than sticks & stones. He says, **You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**

Of course, this has immediate meaning in the court of law.

To lie under oath is to call down a curse from God upon yourself in judgment.

A false witness, lawyer, or judge can hurt the reputation and life of the accused (and his family), even lead to his execution or a life-time of imprisonment.

But I would venture to guess that only a minority of us have been called on to witness in court.

Are you then off the hook if you never testify? No.

This commandment is for all people of all times. It teaches us of God's moral law for our words.

He would have us be perfect just like Him, even in what we say.

His desire is that your word be golden, so that what flows from your lips is always & only truth.

To speak otherwise is to lie, which is to follow after the devil, the **father of lies.** <sup>John 8:44</sup>

It is to be one who **devise[s] words of deceit.** Against whom this psalm cries out for vengeance.

And while you may not work daily in the court of law, it is not uncommon to hear someone say, "I swear to God." But how often is this spoken in order to make you believe a lie?

To invoke God's name for the support of falsehood, no matter how innocent it may seem, is to break also the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment and bring dishonor to God and yourself.

Instead, from Jesus' own lips we hear this wisdom from on high: **I say to you,**

**Do not take an oath at all... Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.** <sup>Matthew 5:34&37</sup>

But God is concerned with not only what is spoken, but also why it is spoken.

We have already spoken of slander, which is a lie, told in order to hurt someone's reputation, but gossip is also an offense against this commandment, for while gossip is true, it is not said in love or for the benefit of the neighbor it is spoken of.

Notice how in our psalm, he cries out to the Lord about the lack of love shown and spoken to him:

**They repay me evil for good... when they were sick — I wore sackcloth ...**

**I prayed with head bowed on my chest.**

**Let not those rejoice over me who are wrongfully my foes... who hate me without cause.**

**For they do not speak peace.** ... He is crying out against lovelessness.

To sin against the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment is then to fall under the cry of those who pray this psalm.

And when you consider this the prayer that Jesus prayed, that is a very terrifying thought.

It may be that you do not speak against Jesus Himself, or even maliciously use His name, but remember that those who have been baptized into His name, who believe His Word, who partake of His body and blood, are united with Him, are those He calls His brothers, *what you do to one of the least of these, His brethren, you do also to Him.* <sup>Matthew 25:40</sup>

When you slander or gossip against your fellow Christian, you slander or gossip against Jesus.

And certainly, this commandment would protect unbelievers from our careless, loveless words, since Christ has also come in the likeness of their flesh in order to redeem them as well.

By inspiration of the H. Spirit James wrote, **the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.**

**The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body,  
setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.** James 3:6

This sin, left unresolved, is the object of Jesus' prayer: **Vindicate me, O Lord, my God,  
according to Your righteousness.** Who can stand under God's righteous judgment?  
Your lies, your loveless truths earn you a place in hell. You cannot justify them.  
Nor can you justify yourself in the court of God's holy Law.

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But there is one who has stood in that court. Many **malicious witnesses** stood against Him,  
both in Pilates' court as well as before the Sanhedrin. But these were only the visible courts.  
These were the earthly representatives of God's divine court as Jesus was put on trial.  
He had no sin of Himself for which the Father should have punished Him, yet Jesus stood there  
and received the accusations for the sins of the world that He truly bore.  
Though He was there for their **good**, they **repaid Him evil**.  
Though He **mourned** their **afflictions** and sin, they **rejoiced** and **gathered to tear** at Him  
and **gnash their teeth** at Him.  
In their unrighteous courts, the Father's righteous judgment was declared, "Guilty!"  
And Jesus' sentence carried out on the cross. **Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.** Isaiah 53:7  
He did not defend Himself, but spoke the truth against those that dishonored God.  
And while He was spoken against, He spoke up for those who hadn't a prayer.  
"**Father, forgiven them,**" He said. And the Father listens to His Son.

His enemies thought they had Him when He bowed His head in death.  
"**Aha, our heart's desire!... We have swallowed Him up.**"  
But the Father heard the prayer of Jesus, when He prayed in this psalm,  
**Awake and rouse Yourself for My vindication, for My cause, My God and My Lord!**  
Jesus' resurrection from the dead 3 days later was His vindication.  
No sin of His own caused Jesus to die. He was righteous before the Father.  
Perfect in all His words. Perfect in truth. Perfect in love. Perfect even in praying this psalm.  
Even as He prayed for vindication against those **who rejoice at His calamity**.

But where do you stand in God's court? Has God **put you to shame and dishonor you**?  
No! This is because Jesus has prayed for you, even in this Psalm, when He prayed,  
**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!"** Hebrews 12:24  
The Lord's suffering Servant shed His **blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel**,  
whose *blood for vengeance Pleaded to the skies; But the blood of Jesus For your pardon cries.* (ELH #283:4)  
Instead of **clothing you with shame and dishonor** as He does with those  
who **magnify themselves against Him**,  
In your Baptism, He clothes you with His righteous Words of truth and love,  
in His words of pardon, as He declares publicly: "You're sins are forgiven."  
And He fills your mouth with these same truthful and loving words toward your neighbor  
*so that you do not lie about, betray or slander your neighbor,  
but excuse him, speak well of him and put the best construction on everything.*  
**Then your tongue shall tell of God's righteousness and of His praise all the day long. Amen.**  
*Soli Deo Gloria*