

Psalm Thirty- Five

Contend, O LORD,
with those who contend with me;
fight against those who fight against me!
Take hold of shield and buckler,
and rise up to help me!
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 confounded
who devise evil against me.
Let them be like chaff before the wind,
with the angel of the LORD driving them on.
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 ruin come on them unawares.
And let the net that they hid ensnare them;
let them fall in it—to their ruin.

Then my soul shall rejoice in the LORD,
exulting in his deliverance.
All my bones shall say,
“O LORD, who is like you?
You deliver the weak
from those too strong for them,
the weak and needy
from those who despoil them.”

Malicious witnesses rise up;
they ask me about things I do not know.
They repay me evil for good;
my soul is forlorn.
But as for me, when they were sick,
I wore sackcloth;
I afflicted myself with fasting.
I prayed with head bowed on my bosom,
as though I grieved for a friend or a brother;
I went about as one who laments for a mother,
bowed down and in mourning.

But at my stumbling they gathered in glee,
they gathered together against me;
ruffians whom I did not know
tore at me without ceasing;
they impiously mocked more and more,
gnashing at me with their teeth.

How long, O LORD, will you look on?
Rescue me from their ravages,
my life from the lions!
Then I will thank you in the great congregation;
in the mighty throng I will praise you.

Do not let my treacherous enemies
rejoice over me,
or those who hate me
without cause wink the eye.
For they do not speak peace,
but they conceive deceitful words
against those who are quiet in the land.
They open wide their mouths against me;
they say, “Aha, Aha,
our eyes have seen it.”

You have seen, O LORD; do not be silent!
O Lord, do not be far from me!
Wake up! Bestir yourself for my defense,
for my cause, my God and my Lord!
Vindicate me, O LORD, my God,
according to your righteousness,
and do not let them rejoice over me.
Do not let them say to themselves,
“Aha, we have our heart’s desire.”
Do not let them say,
“We have swallowed you up.”

Let all those who rejoice at my calamity
be put to shame and confusion;
let those who exalt themselves against me
be clothed with shame and dishonor.

Let those who desire my vindication
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 day long.

There are those who are dedicated to following the lives of the British royals. I am not one of them. But it has been hard, even for me, to avoid the headlines, these past months. Between Harry and Meghan's interview with Oprah and Prince Philip's death and funeral, the family has captivated the world's attention.

As has often been the case, the media itself has often garnered as much attention as what is actually being covered. It is hard to know what to make of it all. It is difficult, on one hand, to feel sympathy for people who hold the scale of wealth, fame and influence that they do. Many of the outlets in question maintain that they are doing a public service in holding those in power to account. Yet, the impact that media treatment has had on them has been undeniable. Especially when it comes to coverage that would fall under the category of "gossip."

Again, this is all foreign to me, but a quick online search will render what is apparently common fare, in terms of speculative reporting (if it can be called that):

Have the royals forgiven him, but not Meghan Markle? Is Prince Harry begging the Queen for forgiveness so he can return home? Will other Royal Family members speak out? Was Prince William secretly coronated as King as Queen Elizabeth plans to step down?

It is likewise hard to know what to make of Psalm 35. It is difficult and abrasive to read, as so many of the psalms of lament are. It is a prayer of painful petition, in which God is begged to take to task those busybodies who manufacture rumors and bite with their words.

Chief among the writer's complaints are actions of those who gossip - "malicious witnesses who rise up and ask about things [he] not know" (v.11). They are people who "do not speak peace, but conceive deceitful words against those who are quiet in the land" (v.20). They "open their mouths wide" against him (v.21a).

We are told that this is a psalm of David. So part of us might struggle, again, as we read it. Here is another royal (and one whose office came with substantial power, not just ribbon-cutting and rubber-stamping) griping about gossip. How sorry can we really feel for him? Still, we are invited to enter into the humanity of his experience with careful attention and with compassion.

We are also invited to connect his experience with our own. In his commentary, James Waltner writes, "*Can we find ourselves in this psalm? Where might it touch us? Nothing cuts so deeply as false accusations and malicious gossip. We care what people think and say about us.*" If that is our experience, he writes, "*this psalm gives testimony to the reality that in desperate situations, others have found God a refuge and saving presence.*"

Ancient and present-day royals aside, we can acknowledge our tendency, as people, to gossip. In particular, when it comes to needlessly inquiring and bending the truth about those whom we dislike. Given that universal tendency, we can also acknowledge, with the psalmist, the times when we have been on the receiving end of such talk. And with him, we can call out to God for help. NS

