

They Have Afflicted Me From My Youth - Psalm 129 **Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading**

Notes from the Sermon

The human heart has a bit of a soft spot for underdog stories: tales of people downtrodden in affliction who persevere through the muck and the mire, getting back up after being knocked down. From boxing movies like Rocky and Creed to stories of hope like Just Mercy, Shawshank Redemption, and Les Miserables, people resonate with the resilience of the persecuted. Psalm 129 is such a story. Since the days of the Exodus, when God used Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, miraculously parting the Red Sea to Mount Sinai, where He established a covenant with His people, the Israelites have experienced affliction. Be it enslavement in Egypt, Babylonian captivity, or the oppression of neighboring nations, Israel has seen affliction continually since her youth. Yet, those persecutors have not prevailed. Even through the harsh imagery of plowers plowing the back of Israel, making long furrows, they have persevered.

In verse 4, we see the turning point in the Psalm that points to how they have persevered. Man is sinful (as seen in the first 3 verses), but God is righteous, and in His faithfulness, He has cut the cords of the wicked, ceasing the affliction of His people. It is not their own stamina, but rather God's faithfulness that enables His people to persevere and flourish, and that is something that drives Israel to celebrate with thanksgiving. This song is one to be proclaimed loudly on their journey to Jerusalem, reminding each other how God has sustained His people in the midst of their affliction. This is our same mind set today, whenever we gather together as God's church: we proclaim God's faithfulness to remind each other of His goodness and grace in the face of calamity and persecution.

From there, the Psalmist turns to a song of lament, and even a sort of imprecatory prayer. Imprecatory prayers are essentially a call on God to curse enemies. Some may be tempted to shy away from passages like these, choosing to focus their attention on passages that "feel" more comfortable. This practice could be due to underlying errors in how we approach scripture: for instance, it would be a disjointed view of scripture to think of certain portions of God's word as something to avoid. These passages are part of the canon of scripture, and should not be glossed over or ignored. This mind set could also be because of a distorted view of God, where people imagine God the Father in view in the Old Testament and God the Son in view in the New Testament, which ultimately denies the Trinity. No matter what, we need to be careful to not pick and choose which passages of scripture we pay attention to; we need to read and study the entirety of scripture, as it is all God's Word for us.

The psalm begins this section with a prayer for God to turn back those who hate Zion (God's people), having them know the shame of defeat. First and foremost, we should show love and concern for all people - including those against God - and pray for their salvation, that they would repent and believe in God. But then, though it may sound harsh, as they are against God, it is only right that God's people should pray that they be rendered ineffective in their efforts to malign God's glory. Those seeking to dishonor God should not receive honor themselves. Next, the psalmist asks that the oppressors be made as useless as grass on a roof, which withers in the sun, proving fruitless to reapers. Finally, the prayer is that God would not bless the oppressors in their efforts. God's presence in the lives of those who fear Him is linked to His blessing, and Israel prays that these persecutors would be left void of His presence and blessing.

For the Christian, this Psalm holds a deeper meaning. This Psalm is helpful to remind us of the dichotomy at play: each of us is either under the curse or under the blessing of God. This goes all the way back to Genesis 3, the Fall - Adam and Eve chose their sin over honoring and walking with God, driving God to put all of creation under the curse. Part of the fallout of the Fall is broken fellowship with God: Adam and Eve are driven out of Eden, and their role as priest and guardian of Eden is given to the cherubim. This extends to all descendants of Adam and Eve - there is now a chasm separating God and man because of our sin, as we are all born under the curse. The question is: if it is man's nature to sin (Rom 3:23, Ep 2:3), how can we be reconciled to God and receive His blessing?

The answer is that there is one who has lived without sin and satisfied the wrath of God by his own righteousness and holiness: Jesus Christ. In love, God sent Jesus to redeem us from the

curse of the law by becoming the curse on our behalf (Gal 3:13-14). The book of Isaiah prophesies about the Messiah, the suffering servant who would take the affliction due to us because of our sin, giving his back to be beaten so that we might be freed from eternal enslavement to sin (Is 50:6, Is 53:5-7). Through his resurrection, the righteous Christ has severed the cords of our enemies death and Satan, rendering their efforts fruitless, and providing us with the peace of reconciliation we desperately need. Christ fulfills and completes the entirety of Psalm 129 on our behalf, giving us a path out from under the curse and into the blessing of God.

Our application, then, in being reconciled to God through no work of our own, is to love our neighbors as Christ has loved us. We are called to pray for those around us to repent and trust in Jesus and not spiral into bitter revenge should we become persecuted ourselves. Indeed, we can pray as the Psalmist does that the affliction of God's people will come to an end, but we cannot expect life to be without persecution. It is a mystery of God's sovereign plan how He uses trials and affliction to bring His people closer to Him, thereby knowing Him deeper, becoming more aware of their own sin, and driving them to love their oppressors as only Christ has perfectly

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
2 Chron icles 7	2 Chron icles 8	2 Chron icles 9	2 Chron icles 10	2 Chron icles 11	2 Chron icles 12	2 Chron icles 13

Reading from this past week: Psalm 129

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Psalm 130

Family Worship

Song - *I Believe*

<https://youtu.be/xltmXSYRVbE?si=x2Y-rDg02B66Sj-H>

Gospel Project

Unit: Paul's Mission To Rome

Story: Paul Went to Rome

Big Picture Question: Why should we praise Jesus?

Answer: We should praise Jesus for what He has done to provide our salvation and because He will one day make all things right.

Scripture: Acts 27-28

New City Catechism

Question 29: How can we be saved?

Answer: Only by faith in Jesus Christ and in his substitutionary atoning death on the cross.

Verse: Ephesians 2:8-9

Scripture

Psalm 129

- Have you ever experienced affliction as part of God's people? If so, can you see in retrospect how God ultimately delivered you from that affliction?
- What do you think of the Psalmist's plea to God for the oppressors to be turned back and put to shame? Do you find this sinful?
- How are you able to see Jesus pictured in this Psalm?
- Do you believe God can use affliction to draw people closer to Him? Have you seen or experienced this, and how does it affect your faith?

Prayer

*Pray for the work on our new building, and for Bob Lancaster and Mike Singleton as they continue to lead this project for our church family.

*Pray for those who are under great affliction, and pray for yourself that when hard times come you would continue to trust the Lord.