

“Persecuted but Not Destroyed”
Psalm 129
(Preached at Trinity, August 25, 2013)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we’ve seen, Psalms 120-134 are a series of 15 psalms designated by the title, “A Song of Degrees,” or “A Song of Ascent.” They were originally contained together in a separate self-contained hymnbook but later added to Book Four of the Psalter. They picture the ascent of pilgrims going up to Jerusalem for the feasts. They begin in a distant land and move closer and closer to Jerusalem.
2. It is sometimes difficult to see the progression of these psalms on the “ascent” to Jerusalem. From the two previous psalms that spoke to the families on the ascent we now come to one that seems to speak to the mature pilgrim who has suffered much at the hands of his persecutors.
3. We are given no hint as to the author or the particular circumstances to which he is referring. We are only told that it is the common lot for all of Israel.
Psalm 129:1-2 KJV - "many Israel now say: ² Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth:"
4. Israel has always had her persecutors and the same is true for the Israel of God today, the church. But the persecutors shall never prevail.
Matthew 16:18 KJV - "upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."
5. The issue of persecution is a common theme in the Bible. It must be clearly taught to God’s people; it must be continually taught. It has been God’s message to the church from the beginning.
Acts 14:21-22 – “And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, ²² Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”
6. We are persecuted but we shall never be destroyed
2 Corinthians 4:8-9 KJV - "*We are* troubled on every side, yet not distressed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;"
7. **Psalm 129** can be divided into three headings:
 - I. The persecution upon God’s people described – **Verses 1-3**
 - II. The wonderful care of God for His suffering people – **Verse 4**
 - III. The curse of God upon the persecutors – **Verses 5-8**

I. The persecution upon God's people described – **Verses 1-3**

- A. From the very beginning Israel's existence was a fight for survival
1. They were always strangers surrounded by nations seeking to destroy them. After Simeon and Levi took revenge for the rape of their sister Dinah Jacob declared:
Genesis 34:30 NAU - "Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and my men being few in number, they will gather together against me and attack me and I will be destroyed, I and my household."
 2. The fires of persecution became hotter as they became slaves in Egypt and were cruelly treated by the hands of the Egyptians.
Exodus 1:13-14 NAU - "The Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; ¹⁴ and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all *kinds* of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them."
 3. There were relentless attacks by the nations that did not know God
 4. The psalmist describes the magnitude – "many a time"
And he describes the duration of the afflictions
"from my youth"
- B. And we cannot fail to see in this psalm the sufferings of our Lord
Psalm 129:1 KJV - "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth"
Psalm 129:3 KJV - "The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows."
Isaiah 50:6 KJV - "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting."
1. From the time of His birth Satan sought to destroy Him
 2. Jesus suffered greatly at the hands of His persecutors
Matthew 27:26-31 NAU - "after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified. ²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole *Roman* cohort around Him. ²⁸ They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. ²⁹ And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰ They spat on Him, and took the reed and *began* to beat Him on the head. ³¹ After they had mocked Him, they took the *scarlet* robe off Him and put His *own* garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him."
Genesis 3:15 KJV - "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed"
 3. All who are united with Christ can also expect persecution
John 16:33 – "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."
2 Timothy 3:12 KJV - "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

4. The church of Christ has suffered from the beginning
Genesis 3:15 KJV - "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed"
 5. The church has suffered countless torments – the rack, suffering by fire, by drowning, being torn by wild beasts. Even today multitudes of Christians are suffering at the hands of sinful men.
 6. Christians today are suffering horribly. Egyptian Christians are facing the most intense persecution in 700 years.
- C. But the wicked shall not prevail
Psalms 129:2 KJV - "yet they have not prevailed against me."
1. God's people shall always endure
 2. Christ will always have a faithful remnant
- II. The wonderful care of God for His suffering people – **Verse 4**
He breaks the fetters the wicked use to bind us – "He hath cut asunder the cords . . ."
- A. The reason our persecutors shall not prevail is because of God's righteousness
1. God will always be faithful to His promise. Over and over the Bible affirms the faithfulness of God.
Hebrews 10:22-23 KJV - "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering; (for he *is* faithful that promised;)"
1 Corinthians 10:13 KJV - "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*."
Lamentations 3:22-23 KJV - "*It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. ²³ They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."*
 2. This psalm is similar to **Psalm 124**
Psalms 124:1-2 KJV - "If *it had not been* the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say; ² If *it had not been* the LORD who was on our side"
But God IS on our side and He will never allow us to be crushed.
 3. The wicked seek to bind God's people under their torments and afflictions
They are no match for God's almighty power.
God breaks their fetters and frees His people.
- B. There is peace in trusting in God's promise of deliverance.
Psalms 18:2 – "The LORD *is* my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, *and* my high tower."
2 Timothy 3:11-12 KJV - "Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of *them* all the Lord delivered me. ¹² Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."
Psalms 34:19 KJV - "Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all."

III. The curse of God upon the persecutors – **Verses 5-8**

- A. Here we have the fate of the enemies of God
1. They are described as those “that hate Zion”
Zion was another name for Jerusalem – the city of God. Ultimately it describes all that represents God in His holy mountain.
 2. To oppose the things of God is to declare yourself odious in His sight
Philippians 3:18-19 KJV - "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹ Whose end *is* destruction, whose God *is* *their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame, who mind earthly things."
 3. To attack the people of God is to wage war against God.
 4. After Paul had persecuted the church Jesus made it clear that his warfare was against Him – "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"
- B. This final section opens in the form of two petitions: “Let them” (**verses 5, 6**)
1. **Verse 5** - The word for “confounded” refers to being ashamed (NASB) or disappointed. It sometimes refers to great embarrassment
Judges 3:25 ESV - "And they waited till they were embarrassed. "
Ezra 8:22 KJV - "For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way"
 2. Here it refers to the utter disappointment and embarrassment of the failure of their designs. The wicked seek to mock and destroy God’s people. Their plans will be frustrated and turned upon them.
 3. This is a righteous prayer void of selfish desires for vindication. When our brothers suffer for their righteousness we should pray that their tormentors be put to shame.
 4. **Verse 6** – a prayer for the great failure of their life
Grass on a housetop has little depth of soil and is quickly scorched by the sun. It withers before it grows to maturity.
 - a. The young oak tree growing in the debris of the gutter. It might boast the greatness of a majestic oak but it will never prosper
 - b. Such are all who boast of great things; who seek to elevate themselves above God and who seek to destroy His righteous people.
 - c. **Verse 6** is a prayer that the foolish plans of the wicked shall not prosper – that they would be doomed to failure
- C. Then the psalmist declares God’s curse upon them
1. **Verse 7** – again they shall not prosper. The grass that might be used for feed or fuel will not be enough to fill the hand.
The mower who comes at harvest expecting a bountiful yield shall be disappointed. There will be nothing to bind in sheaves.
 2. **Verse 8** – There are no assurances of God’s blessings upon them.
This is the greatest curse that can come upon man. It is testimony that God is against them.
We must be cautious how we use the expression, “God bless you.” When they are enemies of the cross and persecutors of God’s people we dare not say “God bless you.”
God’s curses may be upon them.

3. Matthew Henry – “Religious expressions, being sacred things, must never be made use of in light and ludicrous actions. It is a dangerous thing to let the church's enemies have our good wishes in their designs against the church.”
- D. God doesn't take lightly any abuse upon His children
1. Persecution is a part of this life for the believer, but woe to the persecutor
Matthew 18:6-7 KJV - "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and *that* he were drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷ Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"
Matthew 18:10-11 KJV - "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. ¹¹ For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost."
 2. We must never forget God's care for His church, both as a comfort and as a constant reminder of how we must treat the Bride of Christ.
 We must never forget the precious love Christ has for His people.
Matthew 25:40 NAU - "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me."

Conclusion:

1. As we've seen over and over, persecution is the lot of God's people. All who live righteously in an evil world will be hated.
2. But God is our mighty King who preserves and keeps us.
 May we continue to encourage one another with these truths.