

Greatly Afflicted from Youth

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[0 : 01] Psalm 129, a song of ascents. Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth. Let Israel now say, greatly have they afflicted me from my youth.

Yet they have not prevailed against me. The plowers plowed upon my back. They made long their furrows. The Lord is righteous.

He has cut the cords of the wicked. May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backward. Let them be like the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up.

With which the reaper does not fill his hand, nor the binder of sheaves his arms. Nor do those who pass by say, the blessing of the Lord be upon you. We bless you in the name of the Lord.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. It says in Proverbs 24, verse 16, The righteous falls seven times and rises again.

[1 : 09] But the wicked stumble in times of calamity. And the righteous can rise again, even after many falls, because his hope is in the judgment of the righteous Lord.

And that's the main point of Psalm 129. It's that even when afflicted by the wicked, we can hope in the judgment of our righteous Lord. And so in the first four verses, we see the past affliction.

In the verses five to eight, we see the future judgment. So first, the psalmist invites God's people to remember their past affliction. And he begins in verses one to three like this.

Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth. Let Israel now say, greatly have they afflicted me from my youth. Yet they have not prevailed against me. The plowers plowed upon my back.

They made long their furrows. I mean, we know just even just from the history that's contained in the Old Testament that God's people endured much affliction from sojourning in foreign lands to slavery in Egypt, from oppression under the Philistines and other nations to exile in Assyria and Babylon.

[2 : 26] And all that is entailed therein, the wars, the deaths, the mourning, the rapes, the imprisonment, the countless suffering and toil that's contained in all of that.

And figuratively speaking, and from their youth, from of old, from really the onset of their history as God's people, they've been greatly afflicted.

And this affliction is described in vivid terms in verse three. It says, The plowers plowed upon my back. They made long their furrows. Ancient plowers used a plow to break up large lumps of soil and to remove debris and weeds from the soil, all in order to make the soil more suitable for farming.

And a plow has a triangular tip, an iron tip, called the plowshare, which is what scrapes and rips up the ground as it goes through the ground.

And so imagine people plowing upon your back. And not just for a short stretch, but making long their furrows. Furrow is a reference to the long, you know, kind of that line that is formed from plowing.

[3 : 42] And it's a graphic metaphor of torment and oppression. In English, we have a similar, much milder metaphor. We talk about people riding someone's back.

You guys have all heard it, I'm sure. When you say someone's riding on your back, that means you're saying that they're harassing you. They're upbraiding you. They're just criticizing you constantly. They're riding on your back.

And then so in response, sometimes people say, hey, get off my back. They stop criticizing me. Stop, you know, harassing me. And plowing upon someone's back is a similar expression, except it's much more severe and violent.

Like the plow upturning the ground, God's people were overthrown and oppressed time and time again. And yet, they maintain in verse 2, that their enemies have not prevailed against them.

And verse 4 tells us the reason why. The Lord is righteous. He has cut the cords of the wicked. The cords of slavery, the cords of oppression, the cords by which the wicked bound and controlled God's people, the righteous Lord has cut them.

[4 : 50] And so remembering that deliverance, God's deliverance time and time again throughout their history is what assures the psalmist and assures God's people to proclaim their trust in Him in His future judgment in verses 5 to 8.

And He says in verses 5 to 8, May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backward. Let them be like the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up, with which the reaper does not fill his hand, nor the binder of sheaves his arms, nor do those who pass by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you.

We bless you in the name of the Lord. This is not just a vindictive, you know, personal vendetta. Rather, it's a call for divine justice because the only way God's people get justice, the only way God's people get relief is when the wicked are judged, when justice comes to them.

And so here, the image of the harvest and farming is reversed. Right? Earlier in the first stanza, they were using God's people like ground, plowing up on their backs, enriching themselves through the pain and toil and oppression of God's people.

But here, they're described as these, you know, this futile harvest. And He says they will be like grass on housetops.

[6 : 16] So basically, it's referring to little kind of grass that grow on these crevices on rooftops. And they wither really quickly, especially in arid climates like Israel, because there's not enough soil to take root in.

It's the exact same scenario as in the Parable of the Sower, the seeds that fall upon the rocks and can only have shallow roots, right? And so they wither before it grows up.

And of course, the reaper is not going to fill his hand with that kind of dried up grass from the roof, nor the binder of sheaves fill his arms with those. And nor will people passing by that harvest say, the blessing of the Lord be upon you.

No, rather, it's clear that God's judgment is upon them. And that's what the psalmist is calling for, that that will be the fate of the wicked. And that's really the death and life and deliverance that this psalm speaks of is encapsulated in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.

And that's really the story of every Christian, right? Because 2 Corinthians 4, verses 8 to 11 says this, we are afflicted, the same word, right?

[7 : 25] We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested. In our mortal flesh. And Paul's writing here, I mean, Paul has himself suffered much affliction, right?

Imprisonment, you know, being shipwrecked, being stoned, and being left for dead, right? And all these things. And he's saying that through these sufferings, the gospel is still going forward. Through his affliction, God is still being glorified in his life.

And his faith is, he's first persevering in faith and obedience through them. And it is through death, that through his death, in really following after a pattern of Christ's death, that the life and the glory and the power of God is made manifest.

And that's the same story for us as Christians, even though we face affliction, torment by evildoers, people who sin against us, people who taunt us, people who persecute us.

[8 : 55] And though we experience all of this, we have hope, because we believe in the judgment of the righteous Lord.

He will come again, and he will bring justice. And because of that, we can endure through suffering, in hope, and let Christ's life be manifested, even after our death, even after our suffering, even after the affliction that we endure.

Maybe this is really relevant for some of you. Maybe this is not so relevant for some of you, but it will be. The time will come when it will be, and I pray that we'll be able to remember this message.