

Series: Psalms

Title: Lessons in Affliction

Text: Ps 129: 1-8

Date: Aug 15, 2024

Place: SGBC, NJ

Psalm 129: 1: «A Song of degrees.» Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say: 2: Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me. 3: The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows. 4: The LORD is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked. 5: Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion. 6: Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up: 7: Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom. 8: Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the LORD be upon you: we bless you in the name of the LORD.

Subject: Lessons in Affliction

We will go through Psalm 129, make a few comments, then we will see five things our Lord teaches us through affliction.

Proposition: The preeminent thing we learn in each of these lessons is found in v4: *The Lord is righteous.*

Anyone who describes the life of the church of our Lord Jesus as being without affliction is not being truthful. Our psalm begins with the lamentation of God's saints,

Psalm 129: 1: «A Song of degrees.» Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say: 2: Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth:...

No people in this world have ever been persecuted like Israel. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob suffered affliction many times from the enemies of the cross. The children of Israel were afflicted by the Egyptians, the Amalekites, the Assyrians, Babylonians, Rome and on it goes.

But as Paul declared in Romans 2, the true Jew are those born-again of the Lord. The affliction of Israel is the affliction of God's elect Israel, Christ's church. In these last days, even natural Israel afflicts spiritual Israel. It does not have to be major affliction from the world. Affliction means to be in straits, distressed, to be narrowed. One can be afflicted by being despised and rejected.

Why are God's saints afflicted by men of this world? Our Lord Jesus tells us.

John 15: 19: If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. 20: Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

Ye are not of the world not because of anything in us. We are not of the world because in eternity, God our Father chose his people in Christ by grace alone. Ye are not of the world because Christ called us out of this world in regeneration by grace alone.

John 17: 14: I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

The GodMan is not of the world. He came down from heaven above and took flesh and returned again victorious. The new man created within us in regeneration is not of this world. We are born from above. Therefore this is so,

Galatians 4: 28: Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. 29: But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him *that was born* after the Spirit, even so *it is* now.

But here is what is also true of Christ's church, and each member in particular.

Psalm 129: 2: Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me.

Many times enemies have afflicted the church but not one time have they prevailed. Concerning Egypt's affliction of Israel,

Exodus 1: 12: But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel.

Christ grows his child personally, spiritually, through affliction. Christ grows his church, collectively, spiritually through affliction.

The reason no enemies prevails against the church or against any individual saint is because of our oneness with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalm 129: 3: The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows. 4: The LORD is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.

Again, we see this Psalm applies preeminently to our Substitute. Israel is Christ's name. He gave his name to Jacob when our Lord made Jacob prevail. He gave his name to us when he wrestled us in regeneration and gave us faith in him.

When the Son of God took flesh his enemies afflicted him from his youth. There was no room for Joseph and Mary in the inn so our Savior was born in a cow stable. Herod tried to kill him immediately. The scribes and Pharisees, the Sadducees, afflicted him during his earthly ministry. At last they took out their cruel hatred on his back.

Psalm 129: 3: The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.

We see the enmity of every carnal heart against God in the cruelty man inflicted on our Savior. That is all we were in our unregenerate state. Yet, though sinners meant it for evil when afflicting our Savior, man only did what God our Savior determined before to be done. Christ gave himself into their cruel hands.

Isaiah 50: 6: 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.

Why did the Son of God take flesh and give himself to suffer the cross?

Psalm 129: 4: The LORD is righteous:

This is the reason for the cross--*the LORD is righteous*. By the cross, the enemies of God thought they won the victory. But Christ manifest the righteousness of God--how God is just and the Justifier of those he gives faith in Christ. Christ satisfied the justice of God for his elect and brought in everlasting righteousness for us. Christ conquered the world, sin, death and hell and arose triumphant.

On the cross, by justifying his elect, Christ defeated all our enemies.

Psalm 129: 4:...he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.

Romans 8: 33: Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth. 34: Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. 35: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36: As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 37: Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Now, when men of this world afflict us, what are some things our Lord teaches us through affliction?

RIGHTEOUS IMMUTABLE LOVE

Using affliction of enemies, our heavenly Father shows us his immutable love in chastening us. He brings us to confess our sin, while we confess God is righteous. We confess Christ is our only Righteousness.

Psalm 129: 4: The Lord is righteous.

Jeremiah speaks for the whole church and includes himself.

Lamentations 1: 18: The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity.

While unregenerate, when afflicted, we blamed second causes and we blamed others. But now, God sanctifies the affliction to our inner man and the child of God knows it is God our Father sending affliction for our good.

When our Substitute was afflicted by men who hated him, he knew it was God the Father who ordained it and did it.

Lamentation 1:12: *Is it* nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith THE LORD HATH AFFLICTED ME in the day of his fierce anger.

Whether we have sinned outwardly, deliberately as Davi, or be the sin of our inner fleshly man, we know sin is mixed with all we do. So God's child sees our own sin and we acknowledge God is just to afflict us for our good.

Psalm 51: 4: 4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest.

Nehemiah 9:33: Howbeit thou *art* just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly:

Whether we have sinned deliberately or not, whether we defend self for a season like Job, eventually God brings us to behold God is righteous and we say with Job,

Job 42:5 I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. :6 Wherefore I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes.

He makes us love righteousness. God makes us endeavor to please him in all that we do in gratitude for all his saving mercies. Christ is our only Righteousness. This is why God's love to us is righteous, immutable love.

RIGHTEOUS IMMUTABLE GRACE AND FAITHFULNESS

Through affliction, as God shows us our sins, God also shows us he is righteous to show us unchanging grace. His faithfulness toward those Christ made righteous never changes.

Psalm 129: 2: Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me....4: The LORD is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.

Psalm 34:19: Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.

Christ redeemed his elect and Christ dwells in his saints--*The Lord is righteous: he cut asunder the cords of wickedness*. So God never afflicts us in anger but in love. Christ will always help his child and never let the enemy prevail upon us.

Psalm 118:13: Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall: but the LORD helped me.

By this, the Spirit of God grows us to behold God's immutable grace in righteousness. His love never changes toward his elect. He is righteous to love us because Christ is our Righteousness. His grace and mercy is everlasting toward his elect. He is righteous to show us grace and mercy because Christ is our Righteousness. His faithfulness never fails to deliver us and he is faithful to save us because Christ is our Righteousness.

The Lord is righteous: he cut asunder the cords of wickedness. Christ justified us. Christ purchased us. Christ shall have us for eternity. Through affliction the Lord grows us to know more that God is righteous to show us immutable grace by his immutable faithfulness toward us.

RIGHTEOUS SUFFERING

Through affliction God gives us a deeper appreciation of what our Savior suffered on our behalf to redeem us, to make us righteous.

Psalm 129: 1: «A Song of degrees.» Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say: 2: Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me. 3: The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.

This is Christ speaking.

Lamentations 1:12 *Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.*

By the Spirit of God teaching us, it is something to you who know Christ. You behold his righteousness in Christ crucified in our place. In our light affliction, we behold and see that there is no sorrow like his sorrow. No matter how bad our affliction, it is light compared to his. When we are despised and rejected of men, we learn a little better how much more our Savior was despised and rejected of men.

Child of God, whatever you suffer, look to Christ and think how he suffered in our room and stead infinitely more. Every infirmity we have, he was touched with, yet without sin. It will attach your heart deeper to Christ and make you more thankful for his willingness to lay down his life for us. It will make you more willing to lay down your life for your brethren. It will make you rejoice in mercy rather than judgment

RIGHTEOUS FAITH

Psalm 129: 1: «A Song of degrees.» Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say: 2: Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me.

By affliction, God makes us more dependent upon our Savior at all times. The Lord is righteous. He will not lose one of his redeemed. The Spirit of God grows us in faith so that we believe on Christ to save us at all times.

Psalm 124: 1: «A Song of degrees of David.» *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, when men rose up against us: 3 Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us:...6: Blessed be the LORD, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. 7 Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.*

Christ learned obedience by the things which he suffered. He teaches us obedience by the things we suffer. Affliction teaches us how weak we are in ourselves. The devil, enemies of the cross, would swallow us up quick if it were up to us to save ourselves.

Psalm 124: 2: *If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us: 3: Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us:...*

We are not sufficient to think anything as of ourselves. Our sufficiency is of God. So affliction teaches us to cease from man, from trying to save ourselves and makes us trust Christ and wait on him to save us. That is true obedience to our Lord.

Psalm 31: 15: My times *are* in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. 16 Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake.

Psalm 124: 6: Blessed *be* the LORD, who hath not given us *as* a prey to their teeth. 7 Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.

RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

Psalm 129: 5: Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion. 6: Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up: 7: Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom. 8: Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the LORD *be* upon you: we bless you in the name of the LORD.

This is our great Intercessor praying to God concerning all the enemies of his people. By affliction, God teaches us to judge righteous judgment. We do that by casting all our care on Christ who judges righteously, even as Christ cast his care on the Father when afflicted.

1 Peter 2: 21: For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: 22: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: 23: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously: 24: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. 25: For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

Men who make themselves the enemies of Christ's church make themselves the enemies of Christ. They sign their own death sentence. A thousand times I have seen men rise up against God's people and declare they will do great things, but in a little while it comes to nothing. Why?

Isaiah 40: 6:...All flesh *is* grass, and all the goodness thereof *is* as the flower of the field: 7 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: BECAUSE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD BLOWETH UPON IT: surely the people *is* grass.

The Lord is righteous. So he says to his children, Vengeance is mine, I will repay. He says to us,

Isaiah 26: 20: Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.

Where are these chambers?

Psalm 31: 19: *Oh* how great *is* thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; *which* thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men! 20: Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues...23: O love the LORD, all ye his saints: *for* the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. 24: Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.

These are a few lessons learned in affliction. May God bless his word to your hearts.

Amen!