

Psalm Sundays

Text
Psalm 129

Topic
The psalmist asks Israel to remember
when they were beaten so badly by their oppressors that it was as if
furrows
were being plowed into their backs

Title
"The Back Beat Boys"

Pam & I saw *Jaws* when it was released in June of 1975. That was an era in which you watched movies in theaters, one time.

Fifteen years later, *Jaws* was the first movie on DVD we ever bought.

Perfect - we thought - for Family Movie Night with our kids, who were around 12 & 9.

Obviously our memories about its content were a little fuzzy. I remember one of us telling them, "You'll love it. It's not that violent. Only one or two people die."

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One of them is Ben Gardner. When Hooper finds Ben Gardner's abandoned boat, and looks in the gash in its hull, he finds Ben. He finds his head, that is, floating by, in an unexpected jump scene.

For the record: It's five people who die brutal, bloody deaths. It averages one horrific death every 26 minutes. Not to mention the suspense.

(Fans argue over whether or not Pipit the dog was eaten. If so, his death is mercifully off-screen).

Our kids insist that the horrific images of shark kills are forever etched in their minds. It's become a standing joke in our family.

If you've ever heard one of us say something like, "Only one or two people die," it's sarcasm, and that's what we are referring to.

You know where else you find horrific images? **In the Bible:**

- 👤 Judges 19:29 When he entered his house he took a knife, laid hold of his concubine, and divided her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel.
- 👤 Second Kings 6:28-29 Then the king said to her, "What is troubling you?" And she answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' So we boiled my son, and ate him. And I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him'; but she has hidden her son."

One of the most horrific of all the biblical images summarizes the historic affliction of the nation of Israel by the devil:

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Rev 12:1 Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.

Rev 12:2 Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

Rev 12:3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.

Rev 12:4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.

Rev 12:5 She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.

Rev 12:6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

These "signs" are identified for us in the Bible:

- 👤 The woman is the nation of Israel.
- 👤 The dragon is Satan.
- 👤 The Child is Jesus.

It graphically depicts centuries of Satanic opposition against Israel to prevent the birth of their Savior. Despite which, Jesus was born, and is in Heaven, victorious over Satan and his "third of the stars of Heaven" army of fallen angels.

Psalm 129 invited the Jews on pilgrimage to Jerusalem to look back upon their storied history of affliction. To recall the many horrors the nation had endured.

It was a look of victory, as they joined voices and sang, "Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth; **Yet they have not prevailed against me.**"

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The worst is yet to come upon Israel in the future Great Tribulation. Once again they will sing, **"Yet they have not prevailed against me."**

Afflictions are something the Lord's church has, and will, experience until He removes us from the earth. That's our point of contact with this psalm; that's how it will apply to us. We want to sing, everyday, **"Yet they have not prevailed against us."**

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 In Your Afflictions You Can Praise**, and **#2 Against Your Afflictors You You Will Prevail**.

#1 - In Your Afflictions You Can Praise (v1-4)

An article posted by Business Insider was titled, *The coronavirus pandemic is fueling anti-Semitism around the world, and the US is no exception.*

"The global crisis has breathed new life into centuries-old rhetoric that blames Jews for the spread of disease and economic downturns.

"An example of that bubbled up in the United States as recently as Saturday. In an echo of Nazi propaganda, protesters at an Ohio rally held signs depicting a rat donning a Star of David and yarmulke that read "the real plague."

CNN posted this not-fake-news article, *Coronavirus lockdowns are fueling an 'explosion' of anti-Semitism online.*

It's Satanic. Zola Levitt wrote, "For thousands of years Satan has demonstrated an intense and insatiable drive to completely eliminate the Jewish people." He offers this explanation:

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For 4000 years the Jewish people have faced relentless persecution, opposition, and attempts to annihilate and destroy them; and in the future, the struggle against Israel continues. If it concerned any other people, this campaign would seem totally irrational and insane. However, with Israel, a rational but very Satanic strategy sustains this animosity.

For Satan, the destruction of Israel is a matter of self-preservation. Ultimately, the survival of Israel results in the eternal perdition of Satan. When Israel repents and nationally invites the Lord Jesus Christ to be its own Redeemer - Messiah, that generation of Israel will be saved, and Satan's plan to destroy the Jews will be finally defeated. Jesus Christ will return to the Earth, destroy the satanic antiChrist and his armies at Armageddon, establish His Kingdom over Israel and the world for 1000 years, and then cast the still rebellious Satan into the Lake of Fire forever and ever.

Notwithstanding all her afflictions, Psalm 129 was a call to praise, knowing they will prevail.

Psa 129:1 A Song of Ascents. "Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth," Let Israel now say,

Psa 129:2 "Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth; Yet they have not prevailed against me.

The worship leader began the song, inviting all those gathered to respond. As one instrument; as one voice; they directed their praise to the LORD.

They weren't simply putting a positive spin on their afflictions. They understood that in a fallen world, behind which rages a cosmic spiritual war, the people of God were going to be the high-value targets.

We must understand that, too. The world hated Jesus; it will hate His followers. In the world we will have tribulation, Jesus acknowledged. Not just the normal

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troubles everyone encounters in a fallen world. We will be targeted because we follow the Lord.

Behind this 10th of the 15 "Songs of Ascent" is God's providence. No matter the afflictors or the afflictions, God provided for Israel's continuation. From Genesis to the Revelation, He is behind the scenes, working.

In remarkable episodes, He injects Himself into Israel's history without violating anyone's free will.

When was Israel "young?" In Egypt, where God would deliver millions of them from slavery and establish them as His nation. Their backs were indeed viciously whipped.

Egypt... Assyria... Babylon... Persia... Greece... Rome... The Nazi's. All of these afflicted the Jews. They remain. Thus they could and can sing, "Yet they have not prevailed against me."

God will prevail against your enemies. If it doesn't seem that way now, it will in your future. We are a future-oriented people. Our look is heavenward. We are looking toward the finish line.

Every year there's a report or two about a jogger getting attacked by a cougar along their route. The animal comes out of nowhere, going for the throat.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Psa 129:3 The plowers plowed on my back; They made their furrows long."

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Psalm 129 will draw its comparisons from farming to get its point across. Here the psalmist compares their being whipped by cruel taskmasters to plowing a field. It was as if their backs were the field being plowed, deeply, painfully, horribly. It's meant to be a horrific image. It's rated **R** for gore.

People tend to look upon this kind of affliction as a reason to abandon their belief in God. To heap blame upon Him for what seems to be inaction.

The psalmist had a much different analysis:

Psa 129:4 The LORD *is* righteous; He has cut in pieces the cords of the wicked.

"The LORD is righteous" is a shout-out that, whatever you think about afflictions, yours or others, God is not to blame. He is righteous. He "cut[s] in pieces the cords of the wicked."

I know that I refer to them often, but Daniel's three friends - Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego - embody this worldview. When threatened with death-by-furnace, they answered, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver *us* from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:17-18).

That is what it means to "prevail" thanks to God's righteousness. It is seeing the world realistically as it is described by the Bible. We are going to be afflicted for our relationship with Jesus. Our afflicter, ultimately, is a twisted fallen angel who is depicted as a beast wanting to eat a newborn baby.

Our other enemies are sin and death. Jesus conquered them all on the Cross. No matter what, we can sing, "Yet they have not prevailed against me."

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If you are in Christ, you prevail against afflictions. Might as well do so with praise.

#2 - Against Your Afflictors, You Will Prevail (v5-8)

Epic fails caught on video can be awfully entertaining. It's hard to believe people can be that stupid.

We can't help but think that to "prevail" means we will be kept safe in the fiery furnace, hanging out with Jesus, released from it without even having the smell of smoke on our clothes. Or that the lions won't tear us apart. Or that we will be sprung from prison.

If a believer is burned-up, or torn apart, or left to rot in prison... Well those seem like epic fails, *not* prevails.

We tend to ignore the passage in Hebrews chapter eleven that says, "Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented... They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in* dens and caves of the earth" (v36-38).

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Of Himself the LORD said, "For I *am* the LORD, I do not change..." (Malachi 3:6).

At the same time, there are different dispensations when the LORD is dealing differently with His people. We like to quickly illustrate it by asking, "Why didn't you bring a lamb to sacrifice?" It's because we are not under the Law, but

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under grace. We are not Israel; we are the church, and we are in what can be called the Church Age.

(I want to add that, in every dispensation or age, salvation is the same: not by any works, but by faith).

When Jesus was on the earth, for the three-and-one-half years of His ministry, we are told that His miracles, healings, and exorcisms, "which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

While it is true that miracles, healings, and exorcisms most certainly occur in the Church Age, you must admit they are infrequent. It isn't because the church is failing. **It is because the Church Age is characterized by displays of God's power in our weakness.**

If you don't want to fully embrace that truth, you must at least acknowledge that the folks in Hebrews chapter eleven we referenced as being afflicted are every bit as spiritual as those earlier in the chapter who enjoyed miraculous escapades and escapes.

Now and later, we prevail over our afflictors - the devil and his angels, **and** the nonbelievers who do his will whether they know it or not.

Back to our pilgrims in Jerusalem...

Psa 129:5 Let all those who hate Zion Be put to shame and turned back.

Two things jump out at us:

👤 Israel expected to be hated.

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👤 Israel expected to be assaulted by those who would need to be turned back.

Psa 129:6 Let them be as the grass *on* the housetops, Which withers before it grows up,

If you have an older shake roof, it's not unusual for grasses and weeds to grow on it. In Israel the roofs were flat and they would get this same kind of growth. Those seeds can't root deeply, so they wither in the hot sun.

I listed earlier some of the nations that afflicted Israel. Historically, they sprung up quickly, but have not survived as world powers.

Psa 129:7 With which the reaper does not fill his hand, Nor he who binds sheaves, his arms.

Continuing with the comparison, this is a statement of confidence that Israel will take root and be brought in as a harvest to the LORD.

- 👤 In Zechariah 12:10 we read, "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.
- 👤 The apostle Paul said of Israel's future, "And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "THE DELIVERER WILL COME OUT OF ZION, AND HE WILL TURN AWAY UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB; FOR THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS" (Romans 11:26-27).

Modern Israel is nothing less than a miracle. It is the fulfillment of many prophecies. Israel must be in the Promised Land in order for Jesus to return and for them to recognize and receive Him as Messiah.

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Psa 129:8 Neither let those who pass by them say, "The blessing of the LORD be upon you; We bless you in the name of the LORD!"

Harvesting in their fields, the Jews would work alongside the fields of their neighbors.

They would exchange greetings like, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you." That greeting might be answered by, "We bless you in the Name of the LORD."

We need to have a stronger greeting-game. I'm just as guilty at asking. "How are you?" as I rush by you, not really wanting to spend that kind of time. "How are you?" is more like the first line in a counseling session.

Remembering that we are reading a song of praise, perhaps the big finish here is that one-half of the worshippers sing, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you." Then the other half sings, "We bless you in the Name of the LORD."

Maybe they went back-and-forth several times, getting louder each time. I'm dwelling on this for a moment to remind us that the psalm started with a recollection of their awful afflictions. The Jews could recall sufferings as the context for extolling God's righteousness.

In this Church Age, if you are in Christ, you have two options:

👤 Option #1 - You will die, leaving your corruptible physical body behind to await its resurrection. You - your spirit - will be conscious and alive in the presence of Jesus, in Heaven. We are assured that to be absent from this body is to be present with the Lord.

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- 👤 Option #2 - You will be alive when Jesus returns to resurrect the dead from the Church Age. You will not experience death, but instead be immediately transformed and in your incorruptible, immortal, eternal body.

I'd say that is "prevailing" over your afflictors.

Your future is the context within which you prevail today no matter your afflictors and the afflictions they heap upon you.

Their future is why you must have compassion upon them, making a difference:

Rev 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

Rev 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

Rev 20:13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

Rev 20:14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Rev 20:15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

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