

# Psalms of Ascent - Psalm 129

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] So glad that you're here. We are in Psalm 129, as was mentioned. And before we jump into the text, I just want to give us, kind of reorient us where we're at in this series. So we're in a series called Ascend to God Together. It's a series going through the Psalms of Ascent. And the Psalms of Ascent is a collection of songs, literal musical songs, that was written for the nation of Israel as they would travel to Jerusalem on pilgrimages to participate in the feasts. And as they would travel to Jerusalem, they would sing songs together, very similar to how we might take a road trip with our family and go to a destination and we're going to put on a soundtrack or a playlist.

This is very similar to what this would be. Except for these songs, we're all about preparing the heart for worship. That when we arrive in Jerusalem, we are ready to worship God in this temple.

So what we're doing, going through these Psalms of Ascent is as a body, we are preparing our hearts to worship God in fullness, in life and as a church. So today we get Psalm 129.

And we've worked our way through all the way 120 to this point. And as Josh mentioned, maybe when the scripture was read earlier, you were following along and you were asking questions like, what does that mean? What does that mean? That's an interesting image. I know for me that when I read this text for the first time this week and studied it, I had the same questions. But here's what I'm excited about with this psalm. I believe that this psalm is deeply meaningful to the human experience.

that each person who sits here today can hear the truth of God's word from this text and walk out encouraged. So I'm going to orient this message in a little bit different way than I have so thus far in the series for those who have been here. I'm going to give you right off the bat, here's the main idea that I want you to take away this morning. And it's this, from our seedbed of sorrows, God grows a harvest of justice. From our seedbed of sorrows, God grows a harvest of justice.

[ 2 : 2 3 ] So what we're going to do is we're going to break the psalm down. We're going to look at it in two sections, verses 1 to 4 and then 5 to 8. We're going to kind of work through the text with all of us. I want to encourage you to follow along. As we work there, we're going to go quickly. We're going to point out certain things going on in the text and then we're going to have five takeaways at the end of the message. So let's just work through verses 1 to 4 at this time. I'm going to go ahead and read the whole section here, 1 to 4. Greatly they have afflicted me from my youth. Let Israel now say, greatly they have afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me. The plowers plowed upon my back and made long their furrows. The Lord is righteous. He has cut the cords of the wicked.

Now in understanding these first four verses, I think it's really important for us to see a context. I think there's a backdrop that surrounds Psalm 129. And it's a backdrop that if we understand, we will see this text in a different light. We see words like affliction and from my youth and enemies prevailing and people plowing backs and cords that bind people. There's all these images and I want to encourage us this morning to consider, where was the time in Israel's history where they were quote-unquote young and experienced quote-unquote great affliction?

I believe this Psalm has the enslavement in Egypt indirectly in view. There seems to be a lot of poetic images and references to when Israel was in bondage in the nation of Egypt. This is a story you might be familiar with, you might not be, but essentially what happened was there was a man named Joseph that God sovereignly used to go into Egypt. He was sold into slavery. It's a dramatic, amazing story in Genesis. And what the result of this story is that Joseph ends up saving the entire land of Egypt through God-provided wisdom through dreams. That they would save up food for a famine that's coming. And Joseph does this. He ends up staying there.

He ends up bringing his whole family, Jacob, the patriarch, with his sons and on and on. And they end up settling in the land of Egypt. And they multiply there. And as they multiply in Egypt, their numbers grew to about a million plus. And as this happened, the pharaoh, the king of Egypt, did not like this. This is summarizing a lot of chapters of Genesis here. And essentially the pharaoh says, the Egyptians have become a lot. There's a lot, or excuse me, the Hebrews, the Israelites, there's a lot of them. And they keep on multiplying. And I'm starting to get nervous. We need to do something so they don't overtake us. So what does he subject them to? Slavery. Let's make them work for us and build the ancient city of Egypt in many ways, shapes, and forms. So for many, many centuries, Israel was enslaved in Egypt. And this enslavement included cords, included plowing upon their backs, brutal service at the hands of a nation and a king. But here's what I want us to see in these first four verses. Notice the images that are conveyed that relate back. Starts off with saying, greatly, they have afflicted me from my youth. And the word afflicted here, the ESV translates this as afflicted, but in the NASB, you might have that Bible with you, that says persecuted. In the NIV translation, it says oppressed. In the CSB translation, it says attacked, giving us a really good, well-rounded picture of what is happening here. Persecuted, oppressed, attacked, afflicted. And that word gives us a really important context to the understanding of this entire psalm. And it's this, that affliction, attack, oppression, persecution, is a part of being God's people. And we'll talk about that more in a second. But then I want you to notice it says from my youth. Now from my youth could be a reference to any of the previous generations, technically, back when I was younger.

But I think this is actually a poetic reference to a specific time in Israel's history where they refer to themselves in the Bible as when we were young. And that was when they were enslaved in Egypt. Here's a couple cross-references to kind of prove this. Hosea 2, the prophet says this, and there I will give her, the Lord speaking to Israel of their future, I will give her the vineyards and make the valley of a corridor of hope for them. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. I've got a few more, I'll just stick with that one. The Lord himself in prophecy says, hey, remember when you were in the days of your youth when you were in Egypt? The Lord himself uses this definition to describe when Israel was big, but they were young in their history. But then not only this, we have a picture of plowing upon my back. This is a really interesting image. Verse 3, the plowers plowed upon my back and made long their furrows. An image here is of a farmer who takes his plow and he tears up the ground in order to cultivate it. But instead of the ground being torn up, what's the image now? The back of a human being plowing upon this back of a person or of a nation. And in the Bible, the back is a symbol of burden and oppression. The whip and rod are used to strike the back. This image seems to highlight that burdens were laid on Israel. Metaphorically, Israel's back that carries burdens and then other nations are the ones that laid the burdens on them. But specifically, this image suggests abusive forced labor.

[ 8 : 35 ] As the burden. Proverbs 26.3, a whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools. The experience of an unwise fool, a rod to the back. Isaiah 56, they gave my back, I gave my back to those who strike, Isaiah says the prophet, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard. I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. Isaiah says, hey, I'm a persecuted prophet and I give my back freely to be persecuted because I know the truth. The experience of a persecuted prophet. Isaiah 51.23, just a few chapters later. And I will put into the hand of your tormentors who have said to you, bow down that we may pass over. And you have made your back like the ground in the street for them to pass over.

This is the experience of a nation disciplined by God. God says, I will allow nations to come and plow your back. And because I love you and I want to lead you to repentance. But then listen to this one.

1 Peter 2.24, he himself, Jesus, bore our sins in his body on the tree. Another picture. But this time it's Jesus. The experience of a sacrificial savior loving sinners by taking their punishment on his back.

The back is a symbol of burden and oppression. This harkens back to Egypt. When God's people were enslaved and beaten and abused on their backs by the Egyptians for many years. But then lastly, I want to see verse 4. Look at this last reference, which I think is an allusion to Egypt. It says this, the Lord is righteous and he has cut the cords of the wicked. Now cords here refers literally and figuratively to the trappings and schemes of the oppressors of Israel. Is it likely, perhaps even guarantee that Egypt used some sort of cord to bind the Hebrews as they served? Yes.

One commentator says that the cords could be referenced to the guiding animals in a field, but more likely it's suggesting instruments of punishment used by the Egyptians and others on the backs of subject people. All this to say, when we look at verses 1 to 4, here's what I want us to see. I want us to see a picture of a nation that is now established. They have their land.

[ 11 : 02 ] They have their temple. They have their king over them. And they're going back to Jerusalem in the context of this psalm to worship that king that has delivered them out of the hands of their oppressors.

And here's what they do. They write a song, Psalm 129. We have no idea who wrote this. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, but somebody, probably collectively written, they said, let's remind ourselves of back when we were slaves in Egypt and all of the horrible things that came along with that. Affliction from our youth when we were young. That an enemy tried to prevail against us. That they plowed our backs with labor and abuse. And that this, the ultimate, the keystone of this entire picture. Let's remember all of that for one reason. What is it? Verse 4, that the Lord is righteous and he cut the cords of the wicked. Yes, Israel wants to remind themselves in this song that even though the nations of the world who despise them and hate them, so much so that they were sold into slavery and turned into laborers for a godless, rebellious, idolatrous nation. Even so, they remember what?

Not just that they were plowed. Not just that they had afflictions. Not just that they were young and it's sad to see young people just thrown into slavery. No, no, no. What do they want to really remember? It's verse 4, you guys. It's that the Lord is righteous and he cut our bonds. The very bonds that they thought would hold us in slavery forever.

The Lord cut them. And what is he, what are the people referencing here? What are they alluding to? Even though it's not mentioned. I believe it's the Red Sea and the splitting of that sea.

That God finally, over 10 plagues, softens the hard heart of Pharaoh to let God's people go. And through his divine acts, a giant pillar of fire and smoke that keeps the Egyptians from massacring the traveling group of Israelites with men, women, children, animals.

[ 13 : 19 ] Keeping them from being massacred by the chariots of Egypt. He blocks the path. And not only that, he makes a path through the Red Sea. That Israel remembers collectively that the Lord is righteous and he cut those bonds and we are free. Do we remember that together, everyone? That's the idea here.

Israel had a seedbed of sorrows. And in verse 4, we see an attribute of the Lord that is incredibly important for us.

His attribute is righteousness. The righteousness of God is the foundation of all of the acts of God. The declaration here that he is righteous serves as a juxtaposition to the wicked in verse 4.

That the Lord is righteous, but the oppressors of us are wicked. Imagine that someone or something threaten the safety of your loved ones or harm them.

Think of your children, your brothers, your sisters, even your church family, people you do life with. Imagine that someone is threatening to harm them.

[ 14 : 40 ] How might you respond? What would you do? Verse 4 tells us exactly what the answer is.

We see it modeled by a loving Father. He comes to their rescue. He brings them out of bondage.

What would you do for your child if you knew that someone was coming to attack them, oppress them, afflict them? You would rescue them. You would save them. You would do everything in your power to keep them from being harmed.

But why? Love. This is what it means when we call God Father. This is why he wants us to refer to him as Father and we as his children, even Israel as his children, his holy chosen nation.

He loves his people and he will always protect them. And Israel reminds themselves that the Lord is righteous in this. I want us to notice though, back in verse 1 and 2, there's a really cool poetic device happening here.

[ 15 : 45 ] It says this, greatly they have afflicted me from my youth. And then there's a stop. And then it says, let Israel now say. In other words, this is what's happening. Israel, there's a worship leader that's probably leading them in the song.

And here's the idea. You say to yourselves, greatly we have been afflicted. And if there's any nation in the history of the world that can say this, it's Israel who has been afflicted since their inception.

Because when God chooses people for his purposes and showers them with his divine love and his divine favor, and the nations of the world look on and see that, affliction comes.

Here's what they say. They say greatly we have been afflicted from our youth. And now the worship leader stops. This is the point of this. And stops them and says, whoa, whoa, whoa, stop, stop. That's what we've been saying. That we've been afflicted.

Now I want you to say something else. And it's a finishing of the thought. Here's verse 2. Say this. Say greatly they have afflicted from my youth. Yes, but finish it with this.

[ 16 : 49 ] Yet they have not prevailed against me. That is the finishing thought. So verse 1 to 4, I want us to remind ourselves of this reality.

That suffering is a part of being God's chosen people. But that in verse 4, we see the Lord delivers his people. So now we're going to move on to verse 5 to 8 here.

It says this. This is the second section. May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backward. We've now transitioned from the focus is now Israel and their suffering and the seedbed of their suffering to now the ones who have inflicted this attack.

They are the subject. 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. If you're like me, you're like, what does that mean?

Okay, we're going to talk about it. Verse 7. This is an interesting section.

[ 18 : 00 ] It takes a little bit of investigative work to really unpack here so we're going to do it together. But I want you to notice that the focus is now shifted on the oppressors. Where God's salvation is the focus in verse 1-4, God's justice is the focus in verse 5-8.

Verse 5 is a heavy verse that we have to deal with. It's an imprecation from Israel. They say together, may all those who hate Zion, Zion being a reference to the holy people of God and the holy place of God where he dwells forever, may all who hate God and his people is another way to translate that, be put to shame and be turned backwards.

And this is where we can get a little somber. Because what does the Bible tell Christians they should do when they are suffering and persecuted? There's a lot of things it says to do.

There's a guy, you guys know, you've heard of him, his name is Jesus. When he was on earth, you know what he said about this topic? Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

But here we see in verse 5 that Israel is very happy to say the words, may all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backwards.

[ 19 : 40 ] So which is it? Did Jesus come on the record to change what was whack in the Old Testament? No. We know that's not true because what did Jesus say?

I have not come to abolish the law, I have come to fulfill it. Meaning that the entirety of the law from every single word of the Old Testament onto Christ.

He came to make it full. To do it in its full. And to convey it for all of us in a new way. So what do we do with this?

Well, verse 5, putting them to shame and turning them backwards is an image of justice. And this is where we need to be able to have two simultaneous doctrines.

And those doctrines are the mercy of God on undeserving sinners and the justice of God on the wicked. And the reason we can hold both of these in tension, hopefully as believers, is because we understand these two concepts oh so well, don't we?

[ 20 : 51 ] that as ones who were once formerly children of wrath, the Bible tells us, deserving of great punishment, the punishment that leads to death, God showed us mercy.

That through Jesus Christ and His perfect work, the sinner deserving of punishment and wrath can be fully forgiven. can be given eternal life only through the just suffering of someone who took our place.

And this is a concept of justice that I dealt with a long time as a youth pastor and God bless youth and their questions. I've always loved to answer them but this was a big misconception I got a lot. Was that when Jesus went to the cross, what He did was He did away with the wrath of God.

That we escaped the wrath and God didn't have to pour out any wrath. He elected to not pour out wrath. But that can't be true, can it? Because for God to be just, for Him to truly be righteous as the text says, He will fully judge all wickedness.

And the Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death. That the objects of wrath must receive wrath. for that is what is due to those who sin and go against God in rebellion.

[ 22 : 21 ] So what is the truth of the gospel? The truth of the gospel is not that Jesus somehow gives us a get out of jail free card that we don't have to experience wrath and He thumbs up to God. Alright, no wrath needed.

That's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches actually this, 2 Corinthians 5.21 that He made Him, Father made the Son, He made Him who knew no sin to become sin on our behalf.

In other words, to fully satisfy that wrath. The sinless one takes on the sin of all who repent and believe in Him.

And when He takes on the sin, God refocuses His wrath. This is what the Bible teaches. He refocuses His wrath no longer on the sinner but now on Jesus.

who becomes the perfect substitute for all who repent of sin and trust in Him. And that is the Gospel.

[ 23 : 23 ] And we see a picture here in verse 5-8 of those who hate Zion. Now I'm going to give us a quick definition here of the enemies of God here.

So in verse 5-8 we see again a picture of the enemies of God. And I'm going to call these the rest of the message here 5-8 as divine enemies. The subject of verses 5-8 are divine enemies.

And divine enemies are all those who set themselves against God or His people. They are divine enemies. Whether they be against us, the church, Israel, the Old Testament, they are against God because they are against His people.

Don't forget that. So here's what we see. We see verse 6 and there's this image of grass. So what's going to happen to those who set themselves against God and His people, the divine enemies? Well, we have this image of them, Israel saying, let them be like the grass on the housetops.

This is a really interesting illustration. Grass he refers to, the occasional kind of broad grass that would grow on the flat rooftops of the homes in the rainy season in Israel.

[ 24 : 28 ] So Israel made homes at this time that had flat rooftops called parapets. You could go up there, that's kind of where you would hold like your block party, really, honestly, in Israel. That was a place of entertainment.

You'd go onto the roof, that's where you would hang out. So they would often line it with like a soft dirt, but it's not deep. So imagine building your house today and you're like, we don't need any roof covering, we just want to use dirt for our roof.

We wouldn't do that today for many reasons. But in this day and age, they did it and the dirt packed was maybe a couple inches. So what would happen was, they would not plant grass up there on purpose, but birds would come, right?

And they do what they do, they drop seeds and then grass would slowly, it's like if you ever tried to take care of a garden and cultivate a garden, you know the pain of being like, I planted nothing in all of this and there's weeds everywhere, grassy weeds, that's the picture.

There's grassy weeds that are growing up on these rooftops in the rainy seasons. But here's the reality, this is the picture, on these flat rooftops, the depth of soil is this much, the rain stops eventually and it's a hot area of the world, so what would happen was, these grassy weeds would shoot up quick and then die off.

[ 25 : 47 ] They have absolutely no foundation, they have no moisture, they're going to die. So let's read 6 again. Let them be like the grass on the housetops which withers before it grows up.

And then verse 7, which the reaper does not fill his hand with a binder of sheaves his arms. Here's the image. A farmer who has his land that he plants certain crops in, I want wheat here, I want barley here, I want rye here, and they plant it all and they cultivate the entire area for crop.

But then there are the lands around the crop. Maybe they plant some hay or maybe just some natural hay appears that grows up tall, big giant areas of land that they're not using for farming, but they can still use for a utilitarian purpose.

So what they're going to do is they're going to cut all of that down, they're going to bind it and they're going to use it as hay for animals or something like that. Here's the picture. Verse 7, this type of grass on the housetops, it doesn't even grow big enough or significant enough for a farmer to even go and scrap it.

it grows up so short and dies off so quickly that it just withers down. There's absolutely nothing you can do with it. In other words, it's useless.

[ 27 : 08 ] That's the image we're given here. And this image conveys two things related to Israel. First, that the victory of Israel's enemies is short-lived. Notice, it shoots up and then it withers away.

This is a staggering statement, especially when we think of Egypt, because Egypt was one of the greatest, largest, most prestigious empire in the history of the world. And you know what the Bible just said of them? Yeah, they shot up quick, were powerful, look at all the things they left behind, you can still to this day go and see the great pyramids and the Sphinx, you can see the things they did, but you know what the picture of the Sphinx is today and the pyramids?

Withered away. It's amazing that they're standing, but guess what they're doing? They're slowly just withering away. Every year, there's less and less material on those objects.

And it's a picture here of this, that even in the might and power of all that Egypt did, in the grand scheme of things, according, when you juxtapose it, you compare it to the only true powerful kingdom, God's kingdom.

It's like a little piece of weed that like, it shoots up and then just dies off. That's the image of Egypt here. Israel says, let that kingdom and those people, those divine enemies, be like grass in the house, which we all know just dies off and withers out.

[ 28 : 28 ] In other words, let the enemies of God profit not much and endure not much. So first, it means the victory of Israel's enemies short-lived, and then second, the other part of this image is that the wish is that their fate be eternal destruction.

Notice with me on verse 6, it says, it withers before it grows up, and the reaper doesn't even fill his hand. In other words, when God comes to collect the fruit of all mankind, God will come, Egypt will be before him, we are told that Jesus is going to judge all the nations of the earth when he returns, but not just the ones that exist when he comes back, but for all history.

The image here is that when Jesus, Egypt stands before Jesus and all of his king of kings and lord of lords glory, Jesus is going to look at Egypt and find them wanting.

He's going to look at Egypt and say, you have nothing. Show me the fruit of your empire for me, and there will be nothing. Just like the farmer goes to the rooftops and hopefully scavenges some hay to feed to his cattle and looks and says, it's all dead.

There's nothing to harvest. So too the nations of the earth will one day appear before God and will show nothing. Now in my backyard, I'm trying to grow grass, I'm trying to fix the spots, I'm trying to get cultivated seeds up so we get a nice green grass all through the summer season.

[ 30 : 01 ] But there's a certain section of my lawn that continues to get brown quickly and die off, even though it receives the same amount of water, the same amount of fertilizer, and I cannot figure out why it's doing this.

And as I was thinking through this image, it just reminded me that there's that one patch of grass that's always brown no matter what I do. I can't get it to grow up. I think this is kind of how the Lord looks at these nations.

There are patches of green, vibrant crop that grows that He harvests. And there are patches that continue to just dry up. And then we have verse eight.

This verse is very tricky here. It's kind of the last sort of will and call of Israel in this section on the divine enemies of God and them. And it says this, that nor do those who pass by say the blessing of the Lord be upon you.

We bless you in the name of the Lord. To understand what's going on here, we need a picture of ancient Near East farming customs. This is an agricultural blessing and a well wish.

[ 31 : 10 ] It was customary in this day and age to wish on one another, farmers going to one another, and to wish on one another a blessing over their harvest, over their land, and for that blessing to be reciprocated.

Because what's happening in this day and age is what's called dry land farming. This was the primary method of farming during biblical times. Now yes, the Romans built something called aqueducts and they would like transport water into giant areas of land where they would farm.

They're like the first ones to really do that. Pretty amazing. But that is a technology not at this time. This is dry land farming. And essentially dry land farming is you are entirely dependent on weather and the conditions of the seasons and the grace of God ultimately to produce crops year after year.

And I don't know if you guys knew this. This type of farming is employed right here in Colfax and south of where we're meeting right now. And this is unbelievable that we have a literal farmer from Colfax here today.

Thank you for being here, Brian. This was not planned that he was going to be here on this, but the good family friend of ours, he participates in what's called dry land farming. And to this day, we also have Mr. Hill over here that also does this.

[ 32 : 21 ] To this day, dry land farming is still thousands and thousands, six, four thousand years later, we still have dry land farming in which the farmer with all this technology is still completely dependent on the rain.

This is a beautiful picture. And here's the picture. That farmers would go to each other's land and they would say, blessing of the Lord be upon your land. I pray that he sends rains galore and you have the greatest crop.

And what would the farmer say back? Brother, you as well. May the Lord bless your land. It's a picture of community, harmony, blessing, unity, reciprocity.

But here's what Israel says. No one passes by these nations of the world and says, may Egypt thrive.

May their idolatrous ways multiply. May the Lord bless richly this nation that has rebelled against God and treated themselves like gods.

[ 33 : 21 ] That's what they're saying. No one pass by and bless these divine enemies. In the book of Ruth, Boaz, a man of character, he greets the reapers in his field.

His own fields, he's got reapers and all of them. He goes by them. He says this, the Lord be with you. And they reply, his own workers, the Lord bless you. There's your example.

That that is what is customary for those who follow the Lord and rely on him alone like a farmer prays and waits for the rains in that dry season. And then sends it.

That blessing, that image of that blessing is lost on the enemies of God. And here we enter our picture. That those that set themselves against God and his people, they will not profit.



So here's our takeaways for this morning. Now that we've kind of worked through our message here, the text here. Takeaway number one, suffering is normative for God's chosen people.

- [ 34 : 32 ] This psalm is clearly portraying this. That Israel knows all the way back in Egypt and even today through the conquering of the land in Joshua and then through David, all of the enemies that hate us because the Lord is with us and he has blessed us and chosen us.

Even in this psalm they write to remember this is just our reality. And this is not just a reality that comes out of nowhere. We are told that we will be hated on account of our identity as God's people.

And that divine enemies will plow our backs because of this. Jesus said in John 15, if the world hates you, know that it is hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own, but because you are not of the world, because I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Like the antibodies in our blood that attack anything that looks foreign, so too, when the world sees something foreign, they attack.

And let us not be deceived, brothers and sisters, we are foreign to the world. Jesus has sanctified us, has set us apart by his glorious spirit and through the call of the gospel to lay all things aside that we might pursue Jesus and Jesus alone.

- [ 36 : 01 ] That will make you a foreigner in a world that preaches to do all for yourself and to demand everything that your desires might be satisfied.

That's the message of the world. Selfishness. And it's all of our story. We've all had this identity.

But praise be to God who redeemed us and washed us and freed us from this to pursue his glory and the good of others. So here's what I want to ask. Do you feel like your back has been plowed this morning?

The nation of Israel's back was plowed. And as the people of God, I want to ask us as the church, are we foreign to the world?

And in the ways in which we are foreign, I want to encourage you, expect hostility. Expect attacks. And in the ways in which we are not foreign, I also want to encourage you, pursue to be distinct.

- [ 37 : 03 ] Pursue holiness. And even invite persecution as it comes. For Jesus himself said, it is coming. They will hate you if you follow me. Second takeaway for this morning.

There can be no victory against our God. We see in verse 2 this amazing image. Greatly they have afflicted me, yet they have not prevailed against me. Why? Not because of them.

They didn't stand up and say, we're going to stop you from prevailing. They are referring to the Lord. God has kept our enemies from prevailing. But then again in verse 4, look at this. The Lord is righteous and he has cut the cords of the wicked.

Here's the image. There can be no victory against our God. One commentator says this, the enemies of God are not only choosing the way of hate, which is soul destroying, but get this, but they are setting themselves against God himself, which is suicide.

Now there's a very famous game in sports world history here and maybe some of you know what I'm talking about. It's the Cal versus Stanford, the classic marching band football game. Okay?

- [ 38 : 13 ] If you have no idea what I'm talking about, I'm going to really, really briefly explain this. You can go on YouTube, just type in like four words, it's going to pop up. Millions of views. There's a football game, big football game between two huge rivals, Cal, Bears, and the Stanford Cardinal, and it was a really big game.

Always a big game, they come together. And it's the last play of the game, the team that's winning has to kick off to the team that's losing, and so they do what's called the squid kick, which is basically to get the ball low on the ground, make it bounce, and it's going to be really easy to get to the one holding the ball and bring them down.

But, like every good football fan knows, what do you do when you've got two seconds on the clock and one chance? You do what's called the lateral. Okay? So one guy gets the ball, in football the rule is you can always throw it backwards, you can't throw it forwards, if you're lateral-ing, and you can just keep doing that until you find a way through it, and hopefully, by the grace and mercy of God, get into the end zone.

And here's what happened in this play. Cal received the ball and started lateral-ing, lateral-ing, and the defenders are swarming, and this play works almost never. And it looks like a guy goes down on the ground, he throws the ball out last second, and as soon as this happens, the marching band, which is ready to storm the field with their victory march.

They storm the field. The play is still alive. And Cal ends up sweeping around the outside with a bunch of laterals and running through the marching band into the end zone.

[ 39 : 38 ] The officials ruled it a touchdown game over. Stanford lost. Look it up, that's your homework. Go watch that clip so you can understand this illustration, hopefully better, but here's what I want to relate this to.

The picture here is of the nations of the world, and they think they have conquered. If you were to ask Israel in the midst of Egypt being, or Israel, if you were to ask Egypt in the midst of Israel being enslaved, hey, have you prevailed against Israel?

You know what they would say? What'd they say? Of course, look at them. They're in ropes and bondage. They're enslaved. We have taken them down. You could ask the Babylonians. You could ask the Assyrians that conquered the northern and southern kingdoms, even to the same thing.

Of course we prevailed against them. Look, we destroyed everything. Their people are enslaved. We prevailed. The nations of the world are like the marching band. It's over.

It's won. We've taken out God's people. So much for Jehovah. So much for Yahweh. But here's what this text is teaching us. No, no, no.

[ 40 : 43 ] They think they've prevailed. But where's the victory? God alone holds the victory. And one day, all of His people will be avenged.

And the evil will pay. Takeaway number three, plead for God's justice on divine enemies. And this is a big one. Plead for God's justice on divine enemies.

This text is definitely, clearly showing us that to plead for justice is a biblical response. Now again, we've got to hold these things in tension.

Pleading for justice, but also recognizing God's mercy even amongst enemies. But here's the thing. In our relatively calm, safe, modern American context, we can shrink back against these type of psalms.

Because they seem aggressive and even out of character from what God would want for us. But I have to be honest, most of us cannot say with truthfulness, greatly they have afflicted me like Israel could.

[ 41 : 55 ] In that hour of total desperation, where the wicked plow are on the backs of us, our loved ones, our children, and our faith community, this response becomes much more real.

And in the face of utter desperation, the Christian is obliged to cry out to God for help at any cost. So here's what we do. We do pray that God's justice would intervene in this life now.

And if not in this life now, by His sovereign mandate, then one day. Justice is simply the righting of wrongs. Justice is the enforcement of God's holy rule.

We should always be pro-justice because God is enforcing that which is right and holy. Even, even to the point where He pours out His own wrath on Jesus.

Christians, we are even pro-Jesus experiencing justice. Because by that, we are free. I want to encourage you, if you have a heart for the nations of the world that are persecuting Christians, there's two websites I want to allude you to, The Voice of the Martyrs and Open Doors.

[ 43 : 14 ] These are two websites that are going to help us understand this psalm better in the context in which we live. What these websites do is they track the persecuted church across the world.

And they will send you, I think both of them do this, they will send you, if you sign up, a free magazine every month where you can read stories of the persecuted church. You can read stories of people who when they read this psalm, they don't say, man, that seems harsh.

Man, to wish God's judgment on people. I thought we were supposed to love and pray, which we're going to get to. That's true. These stories are of people who are only excited to pray these prayers.

Who are desperate for God's justice. And someday, in Revelation, we see this picture of God's people. It says this, the martyrs who have been killed for their faith, they cried out with a loud voice, O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?

It's a picture of all the martyrs of all the ages saying, Lord, please avenge us. We want your holy justice. So it's right to pray for justice.

[ 44 : 24 ] But takeaway number four complements that. Here's what takeaway number four is. Pray for God's mercy on divine enemies too. What do we do when we're afflicted by the world?

We turn the other cheek. Jesus taught us that. Take another blow. Take another affliction. Do we pray for and love our enemies when we feel afflicted?

Jesus commands us to pray for those who persecute us and love our enemies. Because I believe that when we do that, Jesus knew this, when we do that, all of a sudden our hearts are softened to see the ones that are persecuting us as apart from God, stuck in their ways.

Jesus himself, when he's on the cross, what did he do? He's on the cross, nailed, scourged, beaten, abused. His back was literally whipped and plowed.

What does he do in the last moments of his life? He looks down and he looks on the very people that have inflicted all these things. What does Jesus say? Father, forgive them.

[ 45 : 37 ] Pray for God's mercy on divine enemies for recognize, brothers and sisters, that you were once one. God's mercy extends to even those that would go to the length that we see in this psalm to enslave a nation for 400 years.

And then finally, our last takeaway. In the person of Jesus Christ, all of the above takeaways find their fulfillment. There can be no victory, excuse me, I'm going to go back to the first one, not the second one.

The first one, suffering is normative for God's chosen people. Jesus suffered. He showed us that it's normative and that we're capable of enduring wrongdoing.

Takeaway two, there can be no victory against our God. Jesus ensures that through his life, death, and resurrection. But the sting of death is done away with because Jesus defeats death by rising from the grave, the greatest event in human history.

Takeaway three, plead for God's justice on divine enemies. Jesus himself goes forth over all of the earth and he reigns on the throne of David forevermore with his holy scepter.

[ 46 : 48 ] And we are given a picture of him on a white horse with a bloodstained robe tattooed on his thigh, Lord of Lords, King of Kings. And that Jesus, the one that has already conquered and redeemed his people through his salvific work is the same Jesus that stands on the throne for all of eternity and will look out and enact true, final justice.

Jesus will do that. Takeaway number four, plead for God's mercy on divine enemies. Through Christ, sinners are brought to God, transformed from sinner to saint.

Christ. The divine channel of God's mercy comes through and only through Jesus Christ. I'm going to finish this morning.

We're going to have to do communion. And when we do communion in the Lord's Supper, we get to recognize Jesus. We get to look to him. We get to give him all of our praise and worship, all of our heart by taking of the body, taking of the blood.

We're going to do that in a minute. Before we do that, I'm going to read in closing a final passage here. 1 Peter 4. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you, but rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

[ 48 : 19 ] If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or thief or an evildoer or as a middler.

Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God.

And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? In Christ, suffering becomes a means of joy.

In Christ, victory over death is secured. In Christ, justice goes forth over all the earth. And in Christ, mercy brings sinners to God transformed into saints. From our seed bed of sorrows, God grows a harvest of justice.

Let's pray. Lord, Lord, thank you for this text. Lord, we thank you for that beautiful relationship, Lord, between your justice and your mercy.

[ 49 : 22 ] Lord, we thank you that were it up to us, we would still be children of wrath. Thank you for the freedom that comes through the gospel.

Jesus, we recognize today, this morning, that there is no other way unto God than through you. So, Lord, I do pray for our persecuted churches around the world.

I pray for especially the nations of the Middle East, for North Korea, for China, and any of the other nations, Lord, that are experiencing widespread endemic persecution.

Lord, you hear their cries, you hear their pleas, and God, we pray in expectation this morning that you will bring justice, that you will right the wrongs, that you will wipe the tears, that you will comfort those who have been afflicted.

And in that same heart, Lord, we also pray for those that are inflicting these great persecutions. Jesus, would you reach the nations with your love?

[ 50 : 38 ] May the Christians who are in these contexts that are suffering for you, may they be joyous in their suffering. And may their persecutors come to a saving knowledge of you, Jesus.

Thank you that we get to join in this, that we are not a detached church from the persecuted church, that even though our experience is drastically different, Lord, that we still are brothers and sisters of those who are dying for their faith.

May we be enacted in power to take this text and to go forth pleading for your justice, praying for your mercy. We recognize all of this comes through the power of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Acucking Thank you.