

Psalm 129 | “They Will Not Prevail Against Us!”
Preached on January 19, 2025 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles to Psalm 129 this morning, for we have been working through the section in the psalms called ‘the songs of ascents’. *[pauseeeee]*

Whenever we watch any sort of competition, we wonder, “Who’s going to win?” *[pause]*

We think, “Who will prevail? Who will stand as the victor?” and sometimes it’s hard to tell. *[pause]*

When two of the best teams go up against each other, we consider that it could go either way.

But when it’s one dominant team versus a very weak team, then we kind of have an idea of what the outcome will be. *[pauseeee]*

Sometimes there’s also those times in a competition that at the beginning, it looks like one side is losing, but then all of a sudden they make an amazing comeback and win it all. *[pause]*

Those stories stun us, as we marvel at the comeback that they made...

What looked like defeat turned into victory, and what we find this morning in our psalm is that very idea. *[pause]*

Sometimes what looks like defeat isn’t always defeat, but it can turn to victory.

Yet what the psalmist is talking about is not some inconsequential game or competition, but a fight for life and freedom. *[pauseeee]*

Let’s READ the psalm to begin. *[READ]*

When we think about this psalm, it’s hard to pinpoint the setting. *[pause]*

The psalm talks about the people of Israel being afflicted and enslaved by another group...

That happened throughout Israel’s history, so we don’t know for sure what context this is in. *[pause]*

But either way, it doesn’t really change too much about the psalm, whether knowing the exact context or not—Israel was being oppressed. *[pauseeeee]*

So as we contemplate this psalm, how do we apply it to our own lives today?

I mean, they lived thousands of years ago, and faced enemies that are no longer around, and here we are, Christians living years after with different kinds of enemies. *[pause]*

Well let’s work through the psalm and find out. *[pause]*

The first thing that this psalm teaches us is that...

I. Our enemies may afflict us, but they do not have the last word. (1–4)

People always want to have the last word because many times to have the last word often means winning an argument, or being the victor. *[pause]*

But someone with the last word can also mean someone who has the final say, and so they have the authority to say what the decision is. [pauseeee]

Aren't you thankful that our enemies do not have the last word?

They do not win, nor do they have the final, authoritative say. [pause]

Yes, they may afflict us, but they do not prevail against us—that's what we see here in verses 1–4. *[pauseeee]*

The psalmist explains that in the past, Israel had enemies, who afflicted them greatly.

In fact, in verse 5, these enemies are ones who “hate Zion”. *[pauseeee]*

*Sometimes we can become shocked that people hate us as Christians, yet as God's people, we must remember that we *do* have enemies.*

Not everyone just loves Christians and gets along with us, so we can't expect that idyllic world, for it's simply a make-believe world that's not connected with what's real and true. *[pauseeee]*

To think that way is an incorrect way to think, for various reasons...

First, the story of Scripture shows us that Satan has always been at war with God since the beginning of Creation. *[pause]*

In the Garden of Eden, Satan sought to disrupt God's good world by tempting Adam and Eve.

And then as a result of the Fall, God told Satan that there would be enmity between him and his offspring and Eve and her offspring.¹ *[pause]*

You work your way through the story of Scripture and you see Satan using people and nations to try to go up against God's people and the line of promise. [pauseeee]

Even now as New Testament believers, Ephesians 6 talks about how we are in a spiritual battle, seeking to withstand “the schemes of the devil.”²

And Jesus told us in John that the world will hate us, due to our connection with Him.³ [pauseeee]

¹ A reference to Genesis 3:14–15.

² A reference to Ephesians 6:10–20.

³ A reference to John 15:18–25.

So really, we are hated because people hate God.

Therefore, do not be surprised that we are hated by some people for simply being faithful Christians.

Israel experienced it, too, as we see here in this psalm. *[pauseeee]*

The psalmist also explains that they were “greatly afflicted” by these enemies. *[pauseeee]*

Sometimes when you are a child, you play around with another child, and one such thing you do is you ‘play fight’. *[pause]*

That is, you act or pretend like you are enemies, so you chase each other around, but you aren’t actually fighting. *[pause]*

Well guess what? Our enemies are not like that—they are not pretend enemies.

Our enemies do not shoot us with bubbles, or hit us with feathers—no, at times they can “greatly afflict” us. *[pause]*

They *can* and *do* afflict us at times, and it’s painful and it hurts, like any affliction does. *[pause]*

We can be distressed, harassed, and harmed by others, who are antagonistic towards us. *[pauseeee]*

We must realize that physical affliction has happened throughout history to God’s people, and it even happens today in other countries. *[pause]*

Now while *we* do not typically face physical harm in our country, we must be prepared for it, in case it does come.

You can’t be caught unprepared or unready, for what then? *[pause]*

And although physical affliction is a main way that we can experience affliction, it’s not the only way...

We can also experience verbal affliction or emotional affliction. *[pause]*

People can afflict us with harsh words, or they can afflict us in non-verbal ways by treating us with contempt as they show that they despise, detest, or deplore us. *[pauseeee]*

All of these ways are like being afflicted. *[pause]*

For Israel, it seems like it was all of the above, but especially physical affliction, for they say in verse 3, “The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows.” *[pauseeee]*

Isn’t that an interesting image!

It's this image of someone standing upon someone else's back and using a plow to plow over their back and making long furrows in their back. *[pause]*

This may be referring to being whipped by them, or it may be figurative of the great suffering that they experienced at the hands of their enemies. *[pauseeee]*

Like being plowed upon the back, so Israel was worked hard and exploited.

It kind of reminds you of how they lived under the Egyptians, who enslaved them, worked them hard, and whipped them. *[pauseeeee]*

This psalm is reminding us that when we are afflicted by others, it truly hurts!

And it's okay to express the pain that you feel, for *it is pain!* *[pause]*

We don't get to this spiritual state that makes pain no longer be suffering, like some Eastern religions teach.

No, pain is painful!

So do not be ashamed that you feel the painfulness of pain when others afflict you. *[pauseeeee]*

Have you been harassed by others, so much so that you feel like you are being plowed upon the back? *[pause]*

They may continually make fun of you for doing what's right, or for going to church, and it feels like they are plowing upon your back, time and time again. *[pause]*

The sharp words dig into your back.

They may disregard you, exclude you, and shame you, and it feels like you are being pushed down on the ground, and like they keep tilling up your back. *[pauseeee]*

Take that pain and anguish to the Lord, He cares!

Express it to Him, He hears! *[pause]*

Everytime that the Israelites would sing this psalm would be a recounting of the pain that they experienced. *[pauseeeee]*

This psalm also teaches us that the affliction that we experience can also be great.

Not great as good, but great as in a great amount and a great intensity. *[pause]*

Not only that, but sometimes the afflictions can go on for a long time. *[pause]*

For Israel, they say that they were afflicted from youth, so it went on a long time.

This is revealed in their history, as time and time again, they were afflicted by some other nation, whether it be Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, or the Philistines. *[pauseeee]*

They were afflicted for a long time, and this affliction was often in the form of enslavement. *[pause]*

“The cords of the wicked” were upon them, which can refer to ropes or chains around them. *[pause]*

They were oppressed and enslaved by others many times, and what a horrible thing to experience! *[pauseeee]*

Sometimes when we are afflicted by others, we can feel like we are their slaves, as if we were tied down by them and kept being beaten. *[pauseeee]*

I don’t know exactly what you have experienced from others, or what you are experiencing now because of following Christ. *[pause]*

You may be made fun of for being a Christian.

You may be reviled by others and excluded because you seek to do what’s right. *[pause]*

There could be countless other things that you experience, too. *[pause]*

Know that that is not abnormal, but normal for a Christian.

Because people hate God, so they hate God’s people. *[pause]*

The affliction that you may experience hurts, it may even be ‘great’ affliction, and go on for a long time. *[pauseeee]*

Now being Americans, we may not experience too much of what I’m talking about, but we must be ready for the day, if it comes in our lifetime. *[pause]*

How do you handle that affliction, when you experience it?

How *will* you handle it? *[pause]*

Take it to the Lord, expressing what you are going through and the pain you feel—He wants you to go to Him with it.

But also know this—God intervenes! *[pauseeee]*

After all of this talk of affliction, and what Israel went through—in verse 4, it says, “The Lord is righteous; he has cut the cords of the wicked.” *[pause]*

God intervened for Israel!

He cut the cords, that is, He rescued them from slavery and freed them from affliction. *[pauseeee]*

Now why is it that right before talking about the Lord cutting the cords, the psalmist says, “The Lord is righteous”? *[pause]*

There must be a reason, and there is!

He is righteous, that is, He always does what is right and just, and that means that God *must* intervene when evil is done. *[pause]*

Since God is righteous, He can’t let sin and evil slide.

He’s not going to let the wicked triumph, for He is just. *[pause]*

You see, our firm foundation in our afflictions is the righteousness of God—God intervenes because He always does what is right! *[pauseeee]*

In Genesis 18:25, Abraham says, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” *[pause]*

God must deal with evil due to His righteousness, and that’s something that should give us great confidence. *[pauseee]*

When we are facing affliction for being Christ’s people, we can rest in the assurance that He knows, He cares, and He will not ultimately let this go. *[pause]*

He is perfectly righteous, so He *can’t* let it go. *[pause]*

The Lord will not allow evil to prevail, His righteousness backed by His power will not allow it! *[pauseeee]*

What an encouraging thing to remember: God won’t allow our enemies to prevail against us...

Look at verse 3, “Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth, *yet* they have not prevailed against me.” *[pauseeee]*

That word for ‘prevailed’ means basically ‘they were not able’! *[pause]*

Our enemies are not able to prevail against us, succeed against us, or overcome us.

They may look like they are winning, but in the end, they will not. *[pauseeee]*

Our enemies may be able to do a lot of things against us, but they are not able to prevail. *[pause]*

They will not have the last word! They do not have the victory!

God always has the last word over our enemies, what a comforting truth to cling to! *[pause]*

Just read the book of Revelation and you get to see what this looks like—there’s great hardship for God’s people, but evil is vanquished in the end. *[pauseeee]*

The Lord is righteous, so He won't let evil slide, and He is powerful enough to make sure that it won't slide. *[pauseeee]*

The Lord will always do what's right, you can bank on that!

And what good news for us, His people—He *will* have the last word. *[pause]*

No matter how bad things look as we look around us, or read the news, the wicked will not be victorious in the end.

Their great afflictions towards us can't compare with the great power of our Lord. *[pauseeee]*

Here's the thing, though—God's intervention is always in His timing, and not our's. *[pause]*

Interestingly, isn't the timing of when we want God to intervene always *now*?

But God doesn't work according to our timetables, and we should be thankful, for our knowledge of things is limited. *[pause]*

Instead, the Lord works according to His good, perfect, and wise will and timing. *[pauseeee]*

Notice that that even happened for Israel...

God didn't intervene when the first strike of affliction happened, but Israel says that they were afflicted from youth, and then at some point God "cut the cords" and intervened. *[pauseeee]*

We must remember that God's timing is always good and perfect.

We may have a different timetable in mind, but who are we to say that our timing is better when He is God Almighty, who knows all things and we are not? *[pause]*

So rest in His perfect timing and will—He knows all things and is in control of all it.

Leave it in His hands, entrust it with Him! *[pauseeee]*

Yes, we will be afflicted, and it will be painful, but we can entrust our lives with the righteous Lord, who will someday have the last word. *[pause]*

That's what Jesus experienced and what He did...

Like the Israelites, whose backs were plowed, Jesus "gave [his] back to those who strike."⁴ *[pause]*

Like the afflicted Israelites, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth."⁵ *[pause]*

⁴ Isaiah 50:6.

⁵ Isaiah 53:7.

And Peter says, “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”⁶ *[pauseeee]*

Why did He do all of this for us?

To free us from our slavery to sin, death, and Satan! *[pause]*

Through the cross and then the grave, He “cut the cords” of our slavery to those things!

Now sin has no more dominion over us, Satan has been disarmed, and death does not have the final word over our lives. *[pause]*

Our enemies’ small and limited power is always *under* the great and unlimited power of the Lord! *[pauseeee]*

Because of Christ’s victorious work on the Cross for us, now we may be “afflicted in every way, but not crushed...struck down, but not destroyed.”⁷ *[pause]*

We may be “killed all the day long” and “regarded as sheep to be slaughtered,” but nothing can “separate us from the love of Christ”, and “we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”!⁸ *[pauseeee]*

The affliction that we may experience is not the last word on our lives!

And the Lord’s intervention through Christ is proof of that, and it’s a promise of that.

So look to the Lord, who has intervened through the Cross, and hope in Him—that’s what we see next in this psalm...

II. Hope in the Lord, who will deal with our enemies! (5–8)

After recounting God’s intervention in the past in verses 1–4, the psalm writer in verses 5–8 asks the Lord to deal with His present or future enemies. *[pauseeee]*

Whenever we face a difficult situation, we put our hope in *something*. *[pause]*

A student taking a test may put their hope in the long hours that they put into studying for it. *[pause]*

A boxer may put his hope in all the time of training that he did to get ready for the fight. *[pause]*

A nation may put their hope in the amount of military might that they have.

But what was Israel’s hope? The Lord! *[pause]*

⁶ 1 Peter 2:23.

⁷ Portions taken out of 2 Corinthians 4:8–9.

⁸ Portions taken out of Romans 8:35–39.

So also, our hope cannot be in our knowledge, preparation, training, experience, or anything like that—it must be in our God. *[pauseee]*

You see, what helped the psalmist to pray so confidently was that he looked back at God's past work of saving intervention, and then put His hope in that same Lord for the present and the future.

And that's what we are to do, too...

We look back to God's saving work through Christ, and it gives us utmost confidence to pray today. *[pauseeee]*

If He saved me from eternal death, how could He not help me in my lesser, smaller problems today? *[pauseeee]*

If a little boy jumped off of a 6 foot high ladder and his dad easily caught him, do you really think that he's going to be scared of jumping into his dad's arms from a small, 2-foot ladder? *[pause]*

Of course not! He remembers how easily his dad caught him from the 6 foot ladder.

Likewise, based on God's prior work, the psalmist prays confidently for the Lord to deal with his coming enemies. *[pauseee]*

Do you pray that way? *[pause]*

What about this—do you pray *confidently*? *[pause]*

I find that our prayers are not always so confident.

We pray with hesitation, with doubt, with wavering, yet James tells us that if we pray that way, we shouldn't expect to receive anything.⁹ *[pause]*

We sometimes pray with a sort of uncertain prayer, but we must remember that God doesn't want prayers without faith, but prayers filled with and lifted up in faith...

Our prayers should rise to Heaven on wings of faith! *[pauseeee]*

Do you pray confidently in faith?

Now this doesn't mean that we tell God what to do, but we can trust that He can answer, if it's according to His will, and we submit it to His will. *[pauseee]*

In prayer, we should show our confident hope in the Lord.

We draw near to Him, and lay it at His feet, knowing that He can do anything. *[pauseeee]*

⁹ A reference to James 1:5–8.

The psalmist's prayer is formed as a wish, desire, and hope. *[pause]*

This is what he desires, and so calls on God for it.

So don't be bashful about expressing your hopes, desires, and wishes to the Lord—He wants us to go to Him with them!

But we must remember that our desires should be aligned with God's, and that our desires should be submitted to His good will. *[pauseeee]*

Now what did the psalmist desire and request? *[pause]*

He asked that the enemies of Israel would be turned back in shame.

It's this image of a hostile nation coming to attack Israel, but God would turn them back in shame for doing so. *[pause]*

Israel's history is scattered with stories like this, where an enemy goes up against Israel, and God so thwarts their plan that they are utterly shamed. *[pause]*

It's really a great reversal.

The enemy nation comes boldly and arrogantly, thinking that they will defeat Israel, but God intervenes, and they have to flee in fear. *[pauseeee]*

Isn't that just like our God, though? He works great reversals! *[pause]*

What looks like defeat turns into victory.

What looks like the enemy about to shame us, turns into their own shame. *[pausee]*

That's just like the Cross—Satan was probably so joyous that Jesus was dying on the Cross, yet through the Cross and then the Grave, Jesus triumphed.

Colossians tells us that through the Cross, Jesus “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”¹⁰ *[pauseeeee]*

What great reversal is God working in your life? *[pause]*

We need to remember that the weakness we experience, the sufferings we go through, the revilings we face, will all be reversed someday. *[pause]*

They look like defeat to many people, like we are the losing ones, but God is doing something through them, and He promises that it will all be worth it someday.

¹⁰ Colossians 2:15.

Jesus says, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.”¹¹
[pauseeee]

So the psalm writer has asked that Israel’s enemies be turned back in shame, and also asks that they would be like withered grass on a rooftop. *[pause]*

Grass that’s growing on a roof isn’t capable of having deep roots, so when the sun scorches it, it withers away.

And that’s what the psalmist is asking his enemies to be like—he doesn’t want them to amount to anything. *[pause]*

It’s this image of being unproductive, not growing in strength, not lasting, and therefore no longer being a threat.

It’s really this hope that his enemies would be unsuccessful, for they are against God, and therefore, people will not pronounce a blessing upon them. *[pauseeee]*

This shows us the natural end of those against God—they are shamed, for they thought that they could go up against God and His people.

Yet all of their endeavors and plans will eventually be shown to amount to nothing. *[pause]*

They will not last into eternal glory with God, for they have not experienced the blessing of God. *[pauseeee]*

Like the psalmist, as we go through hardships, we are to hope in the Lord...

We go to Him in prayer, and hope in Him, for we know that good will triumph because God triumphs.

And because of that, we can have assurance as we go through the trials and afflictions of life. *[pause]*

So fellow believers...

Trust the Lord, who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ!

As you go through this life, there will be times when it feels like evil is winning. *[pause]*

Sometimes we look around, and we see a culture that is anti-God.

We see a world that puts us down, and lifts itself up.

¹¹ Matthew 5:11–12a.

And it sometimes feels like we are going to lose, yet we must hope in the Lord, who has the final word. *[pauseeee]*

Amidst that, though, we should also love them, and desire for them to find forgiveness and eternal life in Christ.

Yet the truth is that if they never turn to Jesus, Jesus will do what is right. *[pauseeee]*

Evil will be dealt with, and we can rest in that fact.

That's why Paul says that we should leave vengeance in God's hands, and so we are freed up from trying to overcome evil with evil, and instead, we can overcome evil with good.¹² *[pauseeee]*

Jesus could love His enemies, while at the same time, “entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”¹³

And that's what we do—as Peter puts it, “[we] entrust [our] souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”¹⁴ *[pauseeeee]*

So trust in the Lord, who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ, for Christ came, died for us, and rose again, so that we could experience forgiveness and eternal life.

And with that, he conquered sin, death, and Satan, so that we can always know that the victory has been secured, and will be fully realized someday. *[pauseeee]*

So now, today, in this period of suffering and waiting, we wait on the Lord in hope, knowing and remembering who He is and what He will do. *[pauseeeee]*

It's hard to not take matters into our own hands.

It's hard not to want to give up, when it seems like evil is triumphing all around us.

But we must have a confident hope in the Lord, and so pray confidently to Him about these things. *[pause]*

Lift them up to Him—tell Him how you are feeling, and what you are desiring.

But know that He *will* make all things right someday, and in that, we can rejoice. *[pauseeee]*

Even amidst great hardships, even amidst threatening enemies—we look to Him in faith.

For though it's hard in the middle of it, we know the ending, and it's good. *[pause]*

And what's the ending?...

¹² A reference to Romans 12:19–21.

¹³ 1 Peter 2:23.

¹⁴ 1 Peter 4:19.

Revelation tells us that Satan and those against God will be dealt with,¹⁵ and then Revelation 21:4 promises us that...

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” *[pause]*

Satan, sin, suffering, and sorrow—all gone.

And that last enemy, death—thrown into the lake of fire, put away forever.¹⁶ *[pauseeee]*

Truly, the Lord will have the last word, and what a gloriously good word it is for us, who trust in Jesus Christ, who gives us the victory.¹⁷

¹⁵ A reference to Revelation 20:7–15.

¹⁶ A reference to Revelation 20:14 & 1 Corinthians 15:26.

¹⁷ A reference to 1 Corinthians 15:57.