

God's Preservation

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 June 2013

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Kids, have you seen those magic school bus books? You know what I'm talking about where the teacher and her students get on the magic school bus! and that bus takes them on a trip to the body or space and they learn about what's in those places.

This afternoon we're going to take a magic school bus ride to learn about the history of God's people from Psalm 129.

So we get on our magic school bus to Psalm 129 if you would like. We get on our magic school bus and our first stop is ancient, dusty Egypt.

There they are, God's people. What's life like for them? Well, they're slaves. Remember back on Mother's Day we read about what it was like for Israel under Pharaoh and under Egypt and how Pharaoh and Egypt oppressed Israel.

First comes the slave labor. Then the genocide starts. Baby boy threw it into the river.

[1:18] So moms, imagine how you would feel to find out that you're pregnant. And instead of joy, you would weep.

That your baby was born into a world, was going to be born into a world like that. Well, the Israelites groan in their slavery and they cry, deliver us, deliver us.

And God sends a savior. And through Moses, God leads Israel out with a mighty hand. So we get back on our bus and we go forward a little bit in time.

And now God's people are in the promised land and the Midianites have overwhelmed, have swarmed all over the land. And the power of Midian is oppressive.

So oppressive, Judges says, that the Israelites dug holes in the ground to hide from the Midianites.

And they cry out in their distress. They cry out, Lord, deliver us, deliver us, they cry.

[2:23] And so we walk into a village. And as we're outside of that village, we come to a wine press. That's a big hole dug under the ground that you smash grapes to make wine.

And we look down into that hole and there's a man in there. There's no grapes. There's a man in there. And instead of grapes, he's threshing wheat.

And it's a hard job. It's really hard because there's no wind to blow away the chaff and it's getting all over him. And so we say, hey, man, who are you? What are you doing down there?

So I'm Gideon. I'm hiding from the Midianites. That man down in the hole is God's savior. And God, through Gideon, puts the Midianites to rout and he sets his people free.

Then there are the Philistines. And then there are the Assyrians. And you remember, the Assyrians came up to the very neck of God's people. They surrounded Jerusalem and they were about to take it.

[3:29] And good king Hezekiah prayed, deliver us, oh God, deliver us. And God dispatched a whole troop of angels.

Is that what happened? He sent one angel. And in the night, 185,000 soldiers were killed.

So we get back on our bus and we go forward into the future. And at our next stop, we have a hard time opening the door because the whole bus stops in ruins.

Well, what's happened? Jerusalem is in ashes. It's in ashes. Jerusalem is in ashes. Babylon has sacked the city. And if you read about it, you can read about it in Lamentations.

This is what it says there. How deserted lies the city. Once so full of people. How like a widow is she. Who once was great among the nations.

[4:29] Once a queen. Now a slave. Bitterly she weeps at night. After affliction and harsh labor. Judah has gone into exile.

And yet. This I call to mind and therefore I have hope. Jim. Because as great. Because as great love we are not consumed.

For as compassion has never failed. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. So oppressed. Thrown down. And yet rescued.

They are rescued. So we must hurry on. And our next stop is Persia. And wicked Haman has decided that he is going to kill the Jews in a day. And so it is genocide.

It is Egypt all over again. And yet through a strange series of accidents and blunders and coincidences. And a woman named Esther. God rescues his people.

[5 : 28] Then came Antiochus Epiphanes in 166 BC. He is not in our Bibles. But he is in history. And he defiles the temple. He hunts down the people of God.

He makes Judaism. Being a Jew. Illegal. He overthrows the priests. He kills the faithful. And yet God's people were still rescued. And then next came Rome.

And Rome was the great oppressors. Of God's people in the early church. Ten times. Ten times. Ten times. Widespread persecution broke out.

And ten times. The Christians were forced underground. And ten times. Men were crucified. Ten times. Thrown to the lions. Ten times. Their houses and their businesses taken away. And yet ten times.

The people of God held on. And ten times. The church. Grew. Then came. The Roman Catholic Church. And they crushed all who wanted to worship God.

[6 : 24] According to the Bible. The Valdencians. Were one such people. They were a gentle people. People of shepherds. That lived in the mountains of northern Italy.

And southern France. And they wanted to worship God. According to the New Testament. And the Catholic Church hunted them down. And burned them at the stake.

In 1487. The church. Actually launched a crusade against them. Can you believe that? A crusade against Christians.

In 1655. The Duke of Savoy. Decreed. Either convert to Catholicism. Or forfeit your land. And they left their land. And it was winter.

If you remember Matthew 24. Jesus says. Pray. That your flight. Won't be in winter. And. They waded through. Icy waters.

[7 : 23] They went over. Snowy. Frozen. Mountain passes. And then when they got where they were going. They had three months of rest. And then April of that year. The Duke ordered a general massacre.

You can read about what happens. And. Go online. Go in and find a history book. And I won't tell you what happens. Because there's children here.

But it was Jerusalem 587. All over again. And. It was such a stunning. And horrific. Massacre. That people everywhere heard about it.

John Milton. The author of Paradise Lost. Wrote a sonnet. Marking the occasion. And he said this. In that sonnet. Avenge. O Lord. Thy slaughtered saints.

Whose bones. Lie scattered. On the alpine mountains cold. Even them. Who kept thy truth. So pure of old. When all our fathers. Worship stocks and stones.

[8 : 20] Forget not. In thy book. Record. Their groans. Traveling to. The last century. And who knows. How many people. Christians.

Died. In China. During the Chinese. During the Chinese. Revolution. Who knows. How many Christians. Died in. The Nazi. In Nazi Germany. Boldly standing.

Against evil. Tyranny. Of the worst sort. And who knows. How many Christians. Perished. In the gulags. And in the camps. Of Siberia. Under the old.

Soviet Union. And today. We read of. Christians. Dying in the Sudan. And Christians. In Nigeria. Being murdered. And raped.

And jobs lost. And families separated. Forced to flee their homes. Forced into hiding. Into holes in the ground. And they're crying out. Deliver us. Oh God.

[9 : 14] Deliver us. And we look into our own future. What does the future hold for. Us. Here. In our own country. Well I don't know.

But. It doesn't look good. In certain respects. And we ask. The question. Can the church survive? Can the church survive?

What it's going to face? Can we survive? What we are going to face. If that comes upon us. Do you ever ask that question? Are we going to be able to make it?

What about my children? They believe the Lord. Are they going to be able to hold. Hold on. Well Psalm 129 holds the answer. So it's there.

Open on your laps. Let's read it. Psalm 129. They have greatly oppressed me from my youth. Let Israel say.

[10:08] They have greatly oppressed me from my youth. But. They have not gained the victory over me. Plowmen have plowed my back. And made their furrows long.

But the Lord is righteous. He has cut me free from the cords of the wicked. May all who hate Zion be turned back in shame. May they be like the grass on the roof.

With which withers before it can grow. With it the reaper cannot fill his hands. Nor the one who gathers fill his arms. May those who pass by not say. The blessing of the Lord be upon you.

We bless you in the name of the Lord. Three very brief points. And the first two points are truths to ponder. The first truth to ponder is this.

God's people have been greatly oppressed. God's people have been greatly oppressed. That's verses 1 and 2. They have greatly. Or frequently.

[11:05] Greatly oppressed me. That was the point of our magic school bus ride. Through church history. God's people have frequently been terribly oppressed.

Now think about that. Ponder that. If it has happened in the past. Can it happen to us? Steal yourselves brothers.

Steal yourselves sisters. To be God's people. Does not mean. You get to escape. There's no promise of that kind of escape.

Everywhere the spirit tells us to expect imprisonment and hardship. Just as it told Paul to. If it happens to us. We can know. That we aren't the first.

We're not unique. We are surrounded by a long line of believers. A great cloud of witnesses. An army. An army who have suffered.

[12:07] In the past. And all around us now. And when we come into glory. Will we be ashamed when we come into their presence? Only if we turn out to be cowards.

Only if we prove to be cowards. Will we face those things? We might. When you were baptized. You gave yourself.

You swore yourself. You've covenanted. You agreed to bind yourself to Jesus Christ. The one who died under Roman oppression. The one who died under Jewish oppression.

The governments of men crushed him. So ponder this truth. God's people have been treated like oxen. That's what it says. Plowmen have plowed my back and made their furrows long.

And I think the picture here is. I'm this ox. And meanwhile they're whipping me. And as I'm plowing. They're plowing my back with this whip. And they've made their furrows long. So the stripes on my back.

[13:06] Are long. And deep. And that's our history. Brothers and sisters. This is our present. And this will be the church's future.

Until the Lord returns. So have you come to terms with that? I think it does. It gives us strength. Just to recognize that reality.

That that has happened. That is happening. And it very well could happen to us. That's the first truth to ponder. And the second is to ponder this. And this is better news.

It's something else we saw. In our magic school bus ride of church history. They have greatly oppressed me from my youth. But that's not where the sentence ends. Does it? But they have not gained the victory over me.

They've made their furrows deep. But the Lord is righteous. And he has cut me free from the cords of the wicked. Yes we are greatly oppressed. But God's people have always been graciously preserved.

[14:03] Greatly oppressed. Graciously preserved. So God's people cry out. Deliver us. Deliver us. And God is our savior.

And he answers. Jesus has come. And Jesus is coming. Not to die for sins. But to put our enemies under our feet. And we are oppressed.

We are persecuted. But not abandoned. Not abandoned at all. We have not lost. We haven't lost. God's people haven't lost. God's kingdom isn't losing.

We are winning. Even in death we win. Brothers and sisters. If it's a faithful death. God's kingdom. God's kingdom. So I have a homework assignment for you. This afternoon. Or sometime in this

coming week.

Very soon. Go to Revelation chapter 20. And I know there's been a lot of debate on that. And there's a lot of conversation. And a lot of theological ink has been spilt on the topic. But just for this homework assignment.

[14:59] Throw that stuff out. Just for now. The theological conversation. And the millennium. And the dispensational stuff that you've heard. And just read it simply for what it is. And you don't have to understand everything to understand the two main pictures there.

And it's this. There's two pictures. Satan in chains. And the martyrs reigning. Satan in chains. And the martyrs reigning.

Those who have been beheaded because of their faithfulness. They're alive. And they're reigning. Now, to the world. It looks like Satan wins.

When a Christian dies. When a Christian is beheaded. It seems apparent to everyone. That Satan is winning. And the Christian is losing. That martyr is losing.

After all, look. There's the Christian's head. It's in the basket. How can that be winning? Well, we have the wrong perspective of things. We don't see the full picture. Revelation 20 gives you the full picture.

[16:00] It gives you heaven's view of what's going on. Satan is losing. The martyrs are reigning. And living. Are winning. Yes, they have greatly oppressed me.

But they have not gained the victory over me. Even in death. Does not rob us of our victory. So can the church survive? Ponder this truth.

Think about it. God has always saved his people. One time it was with a little stone that went flying through the air. And it smacked a giant right in the head and killed him.

One time it was a king. He had this sleepless night. And then the whole story, the whole salvation changed on this king's sleepless night. One time, remember it was that man down in a hole who was the least in his family and the least of his old tribe.

One time it was an angel in the middle of the night. And one time, brothers and sisters, it's going to be because the king of glory is coming.

[17:01] And just when things are at their darkest, the great light will appear. Coming in pomp and show. Coming with a sword.

That are his words coming out of his mouth to strike down the nations. So ponder this. When you were baptized, you swore yourself.

Not just to the dying king. But the almighty victor. The Lord of heaven and earth. The commander of the armies of God. The Lord of hosts.

Kids, you know what that means? A Lord of hosts. That means he's the Lord of all the armies.

That's a favorite name that God likes to take for himself. And that's a name that Jesus takes upon himself. And he's coming again.

So God will always save his people. So we ask the question, can the church survive? And here's the answer. As long as Jesus is alive. As long as Jesus is alive to defend her.

[18:01] Things are going quite well even now. We are persecuted. But we are not abandoned. Those are two truths to ponder. Greatly oppressed. Graciously preserved.

Now finally, we end with something to do. A prayer to pray. God will save. God will always save his people. So does that mean that we sit back and do nothing?

That we just wait it out? That we just hold our breath and just sit back and wait for that deliverance to come? No, we learned something else from our little church. It wasn't a church bus.

Our little school bus. That God's people cried out. They cried, deliver us. And Psalm 129 ends with a prayer to pray.

So we've had three points. Greatly oppressed. Graciously preserved. And then finally, a prayer to pray. God will save his people. So God's people should pray. That's the logic that the Bible always uses.

[19:02] God makes a promise. And God commands us to pray that God would fulfill that promise. God has said he'll do something. So God's people pray that he'll do it. So here's how we can pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the earth.

They are in your family. You will be with them forever and ever. How can you pray for them? How can you pray against their enemies? This is how you can pray. It's found in verses 5 through 8.

Put them to shame. Put those enemies to shame. Embarrass them. Humble them. May all who hate Zion be turned back in shame.

That's how you can pray. Here's how we can pray against God's enemies. Make their work fruitless. Disappoint them. Make all that hard work and all that effort that they've put into fighting and attacking God's people.

Make it all to disappear in their hand. Make it all come to nothing. That's verses 6 through 8. May they be like a grass on the roof which withers before it can grow. So back in that day, we don't have mud roofs, but they had mud roofs.

[20:09] And sometimes, you know, grass and grain seeds, they got up there on that mud roof. And if it rained, then it might start to sprout. But then, the day heated up, the grass withered and died.

And so, you know, just imagine that. It's the same stuff. It's the same stuff that was growing out in the fields. But no one can harvest it. No one can reap it, gather it up, and bundle it up, and tie it up, and put it into a barn.

So you send your son up there. Fathers, you say, hey, go harvest the field on the roof. And he comes down 15 minutes later, and he doesn't have anything in his hands. Pray for that.

Pray for that. That God's enemies will just come back empty-handed. And we can pray, God, withhold your blessing. Foil their plan.

Remember when, in the story of Ruth, Ruth went out to pick some barley. And she was harvesting barley.

[21:12] And as they were harvesting barley, Boaz came out to the field, and he said, The Lord be with you! And the harvesters cried out, The Lord bless you! They called back. That's what you did back then.

You asked God's blessing on those who were harvesting the field. So here's one harvest that we can pray that God won't bless. Their harvest of evil. Their harvest of attacking God's people, of persecuting them.

We pray, send them from their fields empty-handed. Send them from their fields of persecution with nothing to show for it. Now, will God answer those prayers?

He gave them to us. I think he's affirmed that he will answer prayers like this if it's written in his word. Will he hear those prayers?

Jesus loves his church. You don't have to twist his arm to do so that he'll do her good. Maybe all he'll have to do is ask.

[22:16] And he gives our prayers all that they need for God to hear them and answer them. If there's any imperfection in them, Jesus, God's people's great high priest, will make them presentable to him.

And so we ask the question, can the church survive? Will the church survive the storm that it's in, the coming storm that it will face?

Can we survive that? Can we grow? Can we thrive in that kind of environment? Well, what has our history lesson taught us?

What has Psalm 129 taught you? Yes. Oppressed. Preserved. Praying.

God's people will survive. We will survive. And with his blessing, we'll do more than that. We will thrive. Well, let's pray.

[23:21] Our Heavenly Father, we do pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters throughout your world. You have indeed put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

And we are in the middle of that conflict. And even now, your people are under attack. I pray for my brothers and sisters. That you would protect them.

That you would give them courage to stand if you do not deliver them. I pray that you would put their enemies to shame. That in the middle of their plans to persecute and to attack your people, that you would make it come to nothing.

You know their very thoughts, Lord. You know what they are doing. I pray that you would show your mighty right hand in protecting your own children.

Lord, do it because you are full of love. Do not put them into a place of temptation that they cannot stand up underneath it. But strengthen them.

[24:37] And I pray for us. That the realization that this present suffering, persecution, even as slight and as mild as it is, it's not something new.

And I pray that we would take courage from the fact that our brothers and sisters have and are enduring much worse than us. Pray that we would not so love the things of this world and so love ourselves that we would not be faithful to our Lord Jesus, who was faithful to us when it meant even dying for us.

I pray that his love would motivate our steadfast love and faithfulness to him. Lord, do us good as we go on our way. You filled us, you filled our minds and our hearts with your word.

And I pray that that would bear fruit even this week, that we would become more like Jesus, our mighty, our beautiful, our good Savior. And it's in his name I pray.

Amen. Amen.