

August 18, 2013 by Steve Brandon



Remember Your Troubles

Psalm 129

1. They Persecuted Us (verses 1-3)

2. God Protected us (verses 4)

3. May God Vindicate Us (verses 5-8)

The history of God's people has always been that of persecution. Cain killed Abel. Why? "Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous" (1 John 3:12). The people of Israel were enslaved by Egypt. Why? Because Egypt was afraid of them, and so they afflicted them with hard labor (Exodus 1:8-11). The king of Judah (Zedekiah) threw Jeremiah in prison. Why? Because he was telling the truth -- Nebuchadnezzar is soon to conquer Jerusalem (Jeremiah 32:1-5). Ezra and Nehemiah faced opposition as they sought to rebuild Jerusalem. Why? Because these people hated the Jews (Nehemiah 4). Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. Why? Because his peers didn't want him to rise in power (Dan. 6:1-5). Jesus, Himself, the greatest prophet, was crucified. Why? Because, "men loved the darkness rather than the Light" (John 3:19).

The followers of Jesus have faced similar things. Peter and John were thrown into prison for their preaching (Acts 4-5). Stephen was stoned because of his preaching (Acts 7). Shortly after that, "a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1). Herod "had James the brother of John put to death with a sword" (Acts 12:2).

Paul spent numerous years in prison (Acts 24:26). The early church faced some 300 years of unrelenting persecution by the Romans. Ignatius of Antioch was fed to the wild beasts. Polycarp was burned at the stake. Blandina was tortured without mercy. The early Christians had to meet in the catacombs -- the tombs -- lest the Romans arrest them. Countless numbers of believers were martyred in the first three centuries of the church. It was only when the Edict of Toleration was declared in 311 A.D., that things began to let up a bit.

But, such a declaration has hardly ended Christian persecution any more than the end of the Civil War has ended all racial discrimination. Throughout her history, the church has always known persecution. That's why Paul told the believers in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Persecutions, tribulations, hardships -- they all go with the territory of following Christ.

The Middle Ages were times of persecution. The Reformation was a time of persecution. Persecution has continued to this day.

There are many, many books that you can read about the persecutions that Christians have endured down through the centuries. On my vacation, I finished reading one of them, a book entitled, "The Pastor's Wife," written by Sabina Wurmbbrand. It's not a book for pastor's wives. It's a book about a pastor's wife).

It's a book that tells the story of the persecutions that Sabina Wurmbbrand endured for following Christ. She and her husband, Richard, were Jews, born in Romania in the early 1900's. They were converted to Christ in 1938, just before the outbreak of World War II. Soon afterwards, the Nazis invaded Romania. The Wurmbbrands found themselves evangelizing the German soldiers. "They preached in the bomb shelters and rescued Jewish children out of the ghettos". [\[1\]](#)

And all was not easy. During the war, Richard was in and out of prison for weeks at a time. Sabina's entire family died in Nazi concentration camps.

But, things really got difficult when the war ended in 1945. The Romanian Communists seized power in Romania. And a million Russian troops poured into the country. Shortly afterwards, the Romanian Government sponsored a "Congress of Cults." Every confession and every religion was summoned to this conference. They were to be told of the "full religious freedom" that they could expect under a communist regime. But, Richard and Sabina Wurmbbrand knew what was going on.

They knew that the church would be lulled into acceptance, and then the blow would fall. [\[2\]](#) They knew that Communism was dedicated to the destruction of religion. They had seen what it did to religion in Russia.

But, to the shame of the 4,000 bishops, pastors, priests, rabbis and mullahs from all religions and all faiths, they stood and spoke of how happy they were about the political arrangement. "The State could count on the church if the Church could count on the state" was their mantra. Everyone was glad. "Their gladness was broadcast to the world over the radio". [\[3\]](#)

Sabina writes, ...

They spoke out of fear for their families, for their jobs, for their salaries. They could at least have kept silent, instead of filling the air with flattery and lies.

It was as if they spat in Christ's face. I could feel that Richard was boiling. So I told him what was already in his heart and said, "Will you not wash this shame from the face of Christ?"

Richard knew what would happen: "If I speak, you will lose a husband."

At once I replied--it was not my courage, but given to me for the moment: "I don't need a coward for a husband". [\[4\]](#)

And so, Richard put in his request to speak. The leaders were delighted to see a representative of the World Council of Churches come to make propaganda for them. When he took his stand at the microphone, Sabina writes, ...

At once a great silence fell on the hall. It was as if the Spirit of the Lord was drawing near.

Richard said that when the children of God meet, the angels also gather to hear about the wisdom of God. So it was the duty of all present not to praise earthly powers that come and go, but to glorify God the Creator and Christ the Savior, who died for us on the cross.

As he spoke the whole atmosphere in the hall began to change. My heart filled with joy to think that this message was going out to the entire country.

Suddenly the Minister of Cults, Burducea, jumped to his feet. "Your right to speak is withdrawn!" he shouted. He bawled orders from the dais to minions.

Richard ignored him and went on. The audience began to applaud. He was saying what they had all wanted to say.

Burducea bellowed, "Cut that microphone!!"

The audience shouted him down.

... They changed rhythmically, "The Pastor! The Pastor!" From "a pastor," Richard had become "The Pastor."

The uproar lasted minutes. The shouting and clapping went on long after the microphone wires were severed and Richard had stepped down. That ended the congress for the day. [\[5\]](#)

From that moment on, Richard Wurmbrand became a marked man. Richard's mother, who was at home at the time and heard everything on the radio imagined that she would never see him again. [\[6\]](#)

Soon afterwards, Richard was arrested, only to spend 8½ years in prison, where he was brutally tortured at the hands of the secret police. Three years after he was let out of prison, he was arrested again. He served more than 5 years of his 25 year sentence. His book, "Tortured for Christ" tells his story of 14 years of torture in prison, all because of his faith in Jesus Christ and his refusal to be quiet.

It was only because Richard Wurmbrand was well known that Western countries put political pressure on Romania to release him. "In December 1965, the Norwegian Mission to the Jews and the Hebrew Christian Alliance paid \$10,000 in ransom to the Communist government to allow the Wurmbrand family to leave Romania. Reluctant to leave his homeland, Richard was convinced by other underground church leaders to leave and become a 'voice' to the world for the underground church. Richard, Sabina, and their son Mihai left Romania for Norway and then traveled on to England". [\[7\]](#)

Richard would eventually found "Voice of the Martyrs," an organization that still exists to this day to give voice to those persecuted for their faith in Christ. You can find out all about it at persecution.com.

This morning, I direct your attention to this book, "The Pastor's Wife," because Voice of the Martyrs has sent us a bunch of extremely inexpensive copies of the book, which I am handing out today for free. Each family is invited to take a book. I encourage you to read it. So, throughout my message, I plan to quote extensively from the book, giving you a hunger to read it yourself.

In this book Sabina tells of her own experiences in prison. She spent three years in prison, herself. She spent the days in hard labor. Listen to her describe her time at "The Canal."

We were building an embankment, men and women together.

I had to keep filling a wheelbarrow with earth. Each time the barrow was full a male prisoner had to push it 200 yards, then run with it up a sharp incline to the parapet of the dam. He tipped out the earth and ran back for more. The men's task was harder than ours, but after the first few barrow loads I staggered whenever I tried to lift the heavy shovel of earth over the side.

Each gang had a "brigade chief" with several helpers to check how much work you could do. The "norm" required could be anything up to eight cubic meters a day. If after tremendous efforts, we fulfilled the norm it was raised the next day by so many barrow loads. If we failed to fulfill it we were punished. [\[8\]](#)

She spent the nights in rat infested [\[9\]](#), overcrowded cells. "Cell 4 had space for thirty people. By Christmas 1950 there were eighty. You

couldn't move without treading on bodies lying in the aisle. How the air stank!" [\[10\]](#)

On Sundays, the prisoners hoped for rest. Instead, they suffered through indoctrination lectures. Sabina writes, ...

In the afternoon the room chief marched us to the assembly hall, where a woman speaker addressed us. She began by telling us what she thought about God, which was not much, and she warned that anyone who spoke about Him would be punished.

"Outside, everyone is now Communist," she explained.

"Only you persist in this religious folly, and we mean to educate you out of it. The Party is in power now and it knows best. You're not here in prison. I won't even hear the word! You are in an institution for re-education. You'll be building your own future happiness! Working for future generations! And by passing the norms of work laid down you may well hasten your own liberty as a rehabilitated citizen." [\[11\]](#)

"Few resisted. And those who did were not unaffected by these indoctrination hours which went on every Sunday. ... Some of the rubbish they threw at you was bound to stick.

I couldn't applaud at the meetings. Everyone said, "Pretend, what does it matter? Is it worth a beating?" But when I heard God and fatherland slandered and saw beauty trampled in the dirt, I couldn't. There were always people standing at the back of the hall and I buried myself among them.

But I didn't escape. Someone reported me, and in the evening I was marched into the Commandant's office. Her eyes were unwinking under the peaked cap.

"I have information that you failed to clap during this afternoon's lecture and re-education class, Wurmbrand. All your behavior here has shown you to be a counterrevolutionary force, unamenable to proper re-education." She mouthed the ritual phrases, then licked her lips. "We've tried to be good to you. Now other methods will be used."

I wasn't allowed to return to the hut that night. I was marched to the guardroom and put into a carcer." [\[12\]](#)

A carcer was a box six feet high and two feet wide, lined with spikes. It was a common punishment in Canal camps. There, after a day's work, you had to stand without moving the whole night to avoid being impaled. The next day you went back to work again, with a good chance if you were tired of being ordered back to the carcer that night for not working quickly enough. [\[13\]](#)

That's just a small flavor of what this book is like. I hope that you read it. This book will help to give you a perspective on the persecution that Christians have endured for centuries. It will help to give you a perspective on your own life as well. May the Lord use this book to increase our zeal for Christ!

There is something about remembering the persecutions of others that will help our worship today. In fact, that's the message of our Psalm today: "Remember Your Troubles" from Psalm 129. If you haven't done so already, I invite you to open in your Bibles to Psalm 129.

As most of you are well aware by now, this is one of the Songs of Ascents. There are fifteen of them (Psalm 120-134). They were the songs that Israel sang as they made their journey up to Jerusalem. So far, we have looked at 13 of them. Today we are looking at Psalm 129. Next Sunday, we will look at Psalm 134 and we will be finished with the Songs of Ascent.

Let's read Psalm 129.

Psalm 129

"Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up,"

Let Israel now say,

"Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up;

Yet they have not prevailed against me.

"The plowers plowed upon my back;

They lengthened their furrows."

The Lord is righteous;

He has cut in two the cords of the wicked.

May all who hate Zion

Be put to shame and turned backward;

Let them be like grass upon the housetops,

Which withers before it grows up;

With which the reaper does not fill his hand,

Or the binder of sheaves his bosom;

Nor do those who pass by say,

"The blessing of the Lord be upon you;

We bless you in the name of the Lord."

Derek Kidner writes about these words: "Whereas most nations tend to look back on what they have achieved, Israel reflects here on what she has survived. It could be a disheartening exercise, for Zion still has its ill-wishers. But the singers take courage from the past, facing God

with gratitude and their enemies with defiance." [\[14\]](#)

Such an attitude was helpful to prepare their hearts for worship of the LORD. My first point comes from the first three verses:

1. They Persecuted Us (verses 1-3)

If you are reading this morning from the ESV or the New King James, you could easily say, ...

1. They Afflicted Us (verses 1-3)

If you are reading this morning from the NIV, you could easily say, ...

1. They Oppressed Us (verses 1-3)

Each of these translations is getting at the same thing. The author of the Psalm is reflecting upon the history of the Jewish people and says this: We have been persecuted. We have been oppressed. We have been afflicted, from my youth up.

Certainly, this refers to the early days of Israel. It refers back to the time of Abraham, when God first made His covenant with him. "I will make you a great nation," God said (Genesis 12:2). But, it wasn't all easy with this nation. In fact, it was difficult from the start. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all had difficult lives. Abraham was fearful of the Egyptians. He was fearful that they would kill him and take his wife (Genesis 12:12). Isaac was fearful of the inhabitants of Gerar. He was fearful that they would kill him and take his wife (Genesis 26:7). Jacob faced the treachery of his father-in-law, Laban.

And so began the history of the people of Israel. They are a people who have known much trouble. Soon after Jacob died, Israel found themselves as slaves in Egypt. They wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. These were hardly easy times.

During the days of the judges, they were constantly harassed by other nations because of their sin. Judges 3:8, "The [LORD] sold [Israel] into the hands of [the] king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served [him] eight years." Judges 3:14, "The sons of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years." Judges 4:3, "[Jabin king of Canaan] oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years." Judges 6:1, "The LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years." Judges 10:8, "[The Philistines and the sons of Ammon] afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel ... for eighteen years." The days of Samson were days in which Israel had constant conflicts with the Philistines (Judges 13-16).

And when the days of the judges were over, and the kings came in, it was the same story. Saul, the first king, had constant battles with the Philistines. So also David. It was only at the end of David's rule that Israel knew peace.

A couple hundred years after David's reign, the kingdom split in two. Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians. Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Jerusalem was utterly destroyed. She became a ghost town, worse than Detroit. Jeremiah wrote, ...

Lam 1:1, 4, 6
"How lonely sits the city
That was full of people."
...
"The roads of Zion are in mourning
Because no one comes to the appointed feasts.
All her gates are desolate;"
...
"All her majesty
Has departed from the daughter of Zion;
Her princes have become like deer
That have found no pasture;
And they have fled without strength
Before the pursuer"

The language of Jeremiah is consistent with verse 3, "The plowers plowed upon my back; They lengthened their furrows" (Psalm 129:3).

This is a picture of beating. It's a picture of whipping. It's a picture of scrapes and wounds in the back. Israel surely would have felt this, as they were driven from their city. But, more than being driven away, those who were brought to Babylon were enslaved

Listen again to Jeremiah's words, ...

Lam 1:1, 3, 5
... [Jerusalem] has become like a widow
Who was once great among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces
Has become a forced laborer!"
...
"Judah has gone into exile under affliction
And under harsh servitude. ...

...

"Her adversaries have become her masters."

And things were not easy for Israel in the captivity. They were enslaved (Lamentations 1:3, 5). They were mocked (Psalm 137). They were forced into idolatry (Daniel 3).

Let's get a taste of these things. Turn over to Psalm 137.

137:1-3

By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down and wept,
When we remembered Zion.
Upon the willows in the midst of it
We hung our harps.
For there our captors demanded of us songs,
And our tormentors mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion."

These words were written during the days of captivity in Babylon. They were sad days. They wept in those days (verse 1). They hung their harps in those days (verse 2). There were no songs of joy in those days. And yet, while there in Babylon, their captors "demanded" songs from them (verse 3). The Psalmist describes them as "our tormentors" (verse 3). It's not a pretty sight.

These words easily fit into Psalm 129:1, "Many times they have persecuted me." "Many times they have afflicted me." "Many times they have oppressed me."

Another picture of the captivity comes in Daniel, chapter 3. You don't need to turn there. I simply need to mention three names, and you will know of the affliction that Israel faced in the exile: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.

Nebuchadnezzar had built a large golden image. He made the decree, "every man who hears the sound of the ... music, is to fall down and worship the golden image" (Daniel 3:10). Those who refused the decree were to be thrown into the furnace of blazing fire (Dan. 3:11).

And when Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego heard the music, they refused to bow. So, they were brought before Nebuchadnezzar, who clearly explained to them what would happen to them if they refused to bow. And so, he ordered them to be thrown into the fire. And into the fire they went. They were saved only by the LORD's miraculous deliverance

These words easily fit into Psalm 129:1, "Many times they have persecuted me." "Many times they have afflicted me." "Many times they have oppressed me."

Things were no different after the exile. As I already mentioned, those who returned faced the harassment of those who tried to prevent them from rebuilding Jerusalem.

But, things got worse than this. Do you remember the story of Esther? The story tells of how she became queen of Persia. But, it also tells the story of how Haman, the Agagite, hated the Jews. He coerced the king to make a decree against the Jews. And so, "Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, ... and to seize their possessions as plunder" (Esther 3:13).

Providentially, Esther, a Jew, had become queen. She was able to approach the king to intercede on behalf of the Jews everywhere. Listen to the dramatic scene. Esther is with the king and with Haman.

Esther 7:3-6

Queen Esther replied, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me as my petition, and my people as my request; for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated. Now if we had only been sold as slaves, men and women, I would have remained silent, for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the king." Then King Ahasuerus asked Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would presume to do thus?" Esther said, "A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman!" Then Haman became terrified before the king and queen.

Soon afterwards, Haman was hanged in the very gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai, the Jew (Esther 7:10).

The story of Esther is a story of God's Providential care for His people. This is the second point of the Psalm. Yes, They Persecuted Us (verses 1-3). But, ...

2. God has Protected us (verse 4)

You can see this at the end of verse 2, "Yet they have not prevailed against me." This is the good news of the Psalm! Yes, the persecutions have been real. Yes, the afflictions have come upon us. Yes, the oppression has been great. But God has been greater still.

The Bible tells the story of a persecuted people -- the people of Israel. But, the Bible also tells the story of a protected people -- the people of Israel.

Even though they are knocked down, they are never knocked out! God has sustained them. The mere fact that Jesus was able to come "from the root of David" to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, is a testimony of God's sustaining grace to Israel. The mere fact that Israel is back in the land as a nation, is a testimony of God's sustaining grace to Israel. They had been scattered for nearly 2,000 years. But, in 1948, the Jewish nation was re-established. They are now back in the land. Efforts to extinguish them as a people have fallen short.

I believe that this is in direct fulfillment of verse 4, ...

Psalm 129:4
The Lord is righteous;
He has cut in two the cords of the wicked.

God promised to Abraham, "I will make you a great nation, ... And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse" (Genesis 12:2-3).

You just need to look through history. And in the broadest of terms, those who have sought for the welfare of the Jews have been blessed. Those who have sought for the harm of the Jewish people have been cursed.

And yet, a cloud still remains over Israel today. They are an unbelieving people. They have rejected their Messiah. They have sought their own ways. And so, Israel won't know the full blessing of verse 4 until the day in which Israel believes in Jesus, their Messiah. Paul says in Romans 11:26, that "all Israel will be saved" someday. I believe that Paul is referring to the day when there is massive Christian revival among the Jews.

The righteousness of God today, however, requires that His hand be heavy against them in the present day. Hear the cry of Jerusalem in the days of the exile, in the days when she was destroyed: "The LORD is righteous; For I have rebelled against His command." (Lamentations 1:18). The implication is this: thus, it is only right that I was destroyed. Yet, the promise of verse 4 comes to us today who believe in Jesus. Those who believe and trust in the Lord will know the protection of God through trials.

Peter says it this way ...

1 Peter 1:3-7
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Believers in Jesus "are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5). This is what Sabina Wurmbrand experienced when she was facing the trials that came upon her in prison. She experienced the protecting, sustaining power of God upon her life.

She writes, ...

"In prison, even at the worst times, we'd seen God's hand at work. We came to know that although we suffered, He would not leave us. We could trust Him. So a vital part of work in our Underground Church was to teach people this". [\[15\]](#)

How different her experience was compared with those who were political prisoners alongside of her. She writes, ...

In 1951 more and more Party members came into prison, arrested by former comrades. It was pitiful to see their confusion. Fascists could wallow in contempt and hate; they'd had their day of glory. Christians could love; theirs was to come. But the Communist women were lost. They trusted the Party like a God. Now it was like watching a massacre of the innocents. They suffered more than people like myself, who were ready for what was to come, who had seen what sort of regime was over us from the start. [\[16\]](#)

Did you catch what she said? The Communist women were lost because their god was gone! They had trusted in the Communist Party. But, the Communist Party had turned against them.

But, Sabina Wurmbrand knew the sustaining grace of God. But, that didn't mean that things were easy for Sabina Wurmbrand. Things were hard. But, God sustained her. God sustained many who trusted in His word.

Again, she writes, ...

"The Communists in prison were sure they would be shot. They had been ruthless, so ruthlessness would be returned.

In the meantime the loving and the lovable were executed.

The daughter of a high Communist official, herself a Christian, learned one evening that she must face the firing squad at midnight. Executions were frequent, and death sentences were passed on paltry pretexts, often for revenge.

This girl, before going to meet 'the midnight bride'--as execution was known--held a last supper of oat gruel and water with her cell companions. Calmly she lifted the earthenware vessel that had contained the food.

"Soon I shall be earth again," she said.

"Of the same stuff as this vessel. Who knows what it was before? Perhaps the handsome body of a young man. Soon out of my body grass will grow. But there is more to death than this, and it is for this that we are on earth, to tend our souls regally while we live."

As the girl was taken out, she raised her voice in the Creed. Passing through the vaulted gallery, it echoed from wall to wall. The words were those we say in church. But it was a different Creed, because she meant every word. She went to death for the one God, and was received into life everlasting. [\[17\]](#)

Such was an example of the sustaining grace of God. God sustained His people through His word. Once again, Sabina Wurmbrand, ...

After work, women came to religious prisoners and asked, begged even, to be told something of what we remembered from the Bible. The words gave hope, comfort, life.

We had no Bible. We ourselves hungered for it more than bread. How I wished I'd learned more of it by heart! But the passages we knew we repeated daily and at night, when we held vigils for prayer. Other Christians, like me, had deliberately committed long passages to memory, knowing that soon their turn would come for arrest. They brought riches to prison. While others quarreled and fought, we lay on our mattresses and used the Bible for prayer and meditation, and repeated its verses to ourselves through the long nights. We learned what newcomers brought and taught them what we knew. In this way an unwritten Bible circulated through all of Romania's prisons. [\[18\]](#)

Great application here. How ready are you? If you were thrown in prison, what portions of the word of God would sustain your soul? If you had no Bible, what would you be able to teach fellow prisoners?

Get in the word of God. Learn it. It will sustain you in the day of trial.

Sabina had learned this. During her three years in prison, she had one opportunity to see her son. He was about 13 years old at the time. She had one opportunity to see him, and she saw him for 15 minutes. Here's how she describes the encounter, ...

When I saw my son, I forgot I was a prisoner and what I looked like and where I was, and simply with my eyes I embraced him. How thin he was, and serious! I gazed at him and he at me, and in a flash the fifteen minutes had passed. Our emotion wiped out time. We barely spoke. Not that it was possible to say anything intimate.

I remember that I called across the space that separated us: "Mihai, believe in Jesus with all your heart!" I gave him the best counsel I could, knowing from my experience in prison among so many people, old and young, that only Christ can give the hope that lights the darkest place. [\[19\]](#)

God will protect and sustain all who place their hope in Him. Are you trusting in Christ?

Let's turn to our final point this morning, ...

3. May God Vindicate Us (verses 5-8)

We see this in verses 5-8, ...

Psalm 129:5-8
May all who hate Zion
Be put to shame and turned backward;
Let them be like grass upon the housetops,
Which withers before it grows up;
With which the reaper does not fill his hand,
Or the binder of sheaves his bosom;
Nor do those who pass by say,
"The blessing of the Lord be upon you;
We bless you in the name of the Lord."

These are harsh words here. May they be put to shame (verse 5). May they be like the grass, which withers away and is useless (verses 6-

7). May they be denied the common greeting of others (verse 8). May society shame these people. May they know a quick end. May society shun these people.

And it is only right for the persecuted to pray this way. When people are have sought your destruction, it is only right for you to desire their destruction. But, notice carefully, you will search in vain for a personal vendetta against others. The great principle here is this: Romans 12:19. "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

Paul continues in Romans 13 to describe how it is the government's role, as God's servant, to carry out justice. Paul says that the government, "... is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil" (Romans 13:4).

And that's what's going on here in this Psalm. This prayer is a general prayer against, "all who hate Zion" (verse 5). That is, against all those who hate the people of God, because they are haters of God. It is a prayer that God would set matters straight.

In many ways, this comes back to verse 4: "The LORD is righteous;" God's justice demands that evil be punished! We ought to rejoice when the wicked are punished. We ought to rejoice when God "cuts in two the cords of the wicked" (verse 4).

Proverbs 29:2 says, "When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan." And Proverbs 14:34 says, "Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to any people."

Now, one of the things that really struck me about reading Sabina Wurmbrand's book was how devoid the book was regarding vengeance toward those who did her wrong. Now, to be sure, there was pain. There was hatred. There was fear. There was disdain. Certainly, Sabina fought for what was right. She stood her ground and pointed out the wrongs to those who treated her so wrongfully. Certainly, she rejoiced when evils were punished. And after her experiences, you see her and her husband devoting their lives to making known of the persecution of the church.

But, through the entire book, Sabina expresses very little by way of Psalm 129 sorts of prayers. Even when she spent 3 years in hard labor in horrendous conditions. Even when her husband spent more than a decade in prison, often in torture.

The closest that you get is when she dealt with bitterness in her heart when fellow believers betrayed her husband. She writes, ...

There was bitterness in my heart. I knew that pastors and friends and even a bishop had some guilt for Richard's arrest. They loved themselves more than the principles they preached. I fought with myself, feeling hatred enter me toward those who had taken my husband. And so many husbands. I prayed, but could not find peace.

Then Marietta cut out from somewhere a picture of Christ on the cross, by one of the Italian masters. Often my eyes strayed to where it was pinned on the attic wall. And each time I remembered His last words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And also, "I thirst."

How the betrayers thirsted for forgiveness! Which I would not give them, which in my bitterness I withheld.

And with that thought something changed in me. I knew that even for saints a time may come when self-love is stronger than love of God. The Lutheran bishop Mueller, a good friend, used to say that those whom others call a traitor might be seen by God as a weak saint. He said it not minding at all that others might consider him a weak bishop for this. I resolved to give love and expect nothing in return. ^[20]

In many ways, this is the heart of my last point, May God Vindicate Us (verses 5-8). Sabina left room for the wrath of God. God will always do what is right. Trust Him to make all things right.

So, as we step back from Psalm 129, let us remember our troubles. Let us remember how the Lord has sustained us through them. May the Lord strengthen our worship.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 18, 2013 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] <https://www.persecution.com/public/ourfounders.aspx>

[2] Sabina Wurmbrand, "The Pastor's Wife". p. 23.

[3] Ibid, p. 23.

[4] Ibid, pp. 24-25.

[5] Ibid, p. 24.

[6] Ibid, p. 24.

[7] <https://www.persecution.com/public/ourfounders.aspx>

[8] Sabina Wurmbrand, "The Pastor's Wife". p. 90.

[9] Ibid, p. 87.

[10] Ibid, p. 80.

[11] Ibid, p. 105.

[12] Ibid, p. 106.

[13] Ibid, p. 91.

[14] Derek Kidner, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Psalms 73-150, p. 444.

[15] Sabina Wurmbrand, "The Pastor's Wife". p. 184.

[16] Ibid, pp. 111-112.

[17] Ibid, p. 162.

[18] Ibid, p. 97.

[19] Ibid, p. 101.

[20] Ibid, pp. 222-223.