

Psalm 130

Hope from the Depths

Introduction

There is **nothing worse** than a guilty conscience...

There is nothing worse than carrying around the weight and burden of sin!

People will spend **an exorbitant amount of time & money** trying to absolve themselves from the weight of a guilty conscience!

It would be John Bunyan who **would describe for us** Christian – the man who leaves the city of destruction with the **great burden of sin upon his back!**

And when he hits the slough (slew) of despond – the weight of his sin, the weight of sorrow, the reality of life, **was so great – it almost killed him!**

ROAD TO CANOSSA

Or what about the famous account of the 2 men found at the castle of Canossa!

Emperor Henry the 4th and Pope Gregory the 7th had a dispute sometime before the year 1077 A.D.

But when Pope Gregory the 7th had **excommunicated the Emperor** for political reasons... the Emperor would spend 3 days in a raging blizzard outside of the Canossa Castle seeking absolution from the Pope...

And so, for 3 days and nights **the Emperor** would wail and cry on his hands and knees **in the freezing cold snow** in order to get the approval of the Pope...

There is nothing worse than a guilty conscience!

If you know **the guilt of your sin** – if you know **the weight of your sorrow** – if you know the **reality of despair**:

Then Psalm 130 is a **Psalm for you!**

Psalm 130

Psalm 130 is a *Penitential* Psalm...

That is – it is a psalm **that expresses deep weight**, sorrow, remorse, and **conviction over sin!**

And so it is penitential in nature...

Pilgrim Psalm

On top of this, it is also known a Pilgrim Psalm...

That is – **part of those 15 Psalms** sung by the Jews traveling to Jerusalem for one of the three main Jewish festivals given throughout the year...

And in our bibles, they are the Psalms ranging from **Psalm 120 to Psalm 134...**

Luther – Psalm 130

Now what's **also cool** about this Psalm, is that historically, many famous theologians have loved this Psalm!

Men like John Owen, John Wesley, John Calvin, Saint Augustine, and **specifically Martin Luther!**

And in fact, one day when Martin Luther was in class – some of his students asked him:

Dr. Luther what are the best Psalms?

Luther with some tongue in cheek would reply to his students:

*The best Psalms are **the Pauline Psalms...***

That is, the Psalms that appeared to be written by the Apostle Paul...

Now Luther knew his bible, he knew that Paul **wasn't until** the New Testament, and that the Psalms were in the Old Testament – but nevertheless Luther did see a **Pauline flavour** whenever he opened up to particular psalms that spoke about God's forgiveness & grace, His mercy kindness **toward underserving sinners like us!**

And so Luther would say that the best Psalms are the Pauline Psalms... and **that's the flavour of our Psalm** here this morning!

Psalm 130 for the forgiven...

It is a Psalm **that depicts for us** the never-failing, never ending, ever-**faithful love and forgiveness** of God given to those **who wait, upon Him...**

This psalm will begin in the depths but by the end of it, it will end on the heights...

Main Point

The main point that I want us to see as we come to Psalm 130 is that:

In the depths of our sin, **our only hope** is in the unfailing love and forgiveness of God...

Outline

And we're gonna see this in 3 points:

The Sinfulness of Sin (verses 1-3)

The Greatness of Grace (verses 4-6)

The Herald of Hope (verses 7-8)

Verses 1-3

So Psalm 130 – beginning in verse 1 – the Psalmist writes this:

Out of the depths I call to you, LORD! LORD, listen to my voice; let your ears be attentive to my cry for help...LORD, if you kept an account of iniquities, LORD, who could stand?

Opening Gambit

There is an immediate danger present in verse 1 – the psalmist cries out in **desperation & help** to come from the LORD!

Out of the depths I cry to you O God!

Now the term *depths* is used throughout Scripture to describe **several different kinds of moods and locations** that the psalmist is in...

The depths are sometimes used to describe **deep valleys and dark places!**

The depths are sometimes used to describe *deep sorrow and dark calamity!*

Other times it is used in Scripture to express being in a place of *great fear and deep turmoil...*

And yet **so often in Scripture** the term depths is used **as a metaphor** for what's it's like to be drowning water!

And so the idea is that **if you are in the depths** – you are in a place that is completely **helpless** – and therefore **BASICALLY HOPELESS!!!**

In fact, the Hebrew repetition in verses 1 & 2 is **supposed to heighten the sense** of urgency – he's been crying out over and over and over again – and yet **nothing seems to be getting through!**

3 times in 2 verses the psalmist cries out to God:

1. Out of the depths I call to you!
2. Hear my voice!
3. Be attentive to the voice of my pleas!

In other words:

1. Hear me!
2. Answer me!
3. Help me!

But we shouldn't read these verses as if the psalmist were writing **a cute little love poem** directed toward the lover of his soul – He is **SCREAMING OUT TO GOD!!!**

Hear me!!!

Answer me!!!

Help me!!!

I mean what could possibly cause a man to yell out in such desperation & fear for his very life?!?!?

The Holiness of God - DROWNING

Well verse 3 actually tells us **what's going on** in the heart of the Psalmist here in verse 3:

*If you, O LORD, were to keep an account of iniquities...**who could stand?!?!?***

See the reason for the Psalmist being in the depths – comes from his own realization of **the holiness of God** – in light of the **sinfulness of his sin!**

And what the psalmist is doing – is **he is describing** for us the deep realization of **one's own sinfulness & comparing that** to the concept of drowning!

The Psalmist feels the weight of his sin – and the only way to express his deep emotion is by drawing our attention to concept of drowning...

Sebastian Junger

In his book titled a perfect storm – Sebastian Junger describes for us the concept & sensation of drowning – he says:

The instinct not to breathe underwater is so strong that it overcomes the agony of running out of air. No matter how desperate the drowning person is, he doesn't inhale until he's on the verge of losing consciousness. At that point there's so much carbon dioxide in the blood, that chemical sensors in the brain trigger an involuntary breath whether he's underwater or not...

Junger call this the break point – it's a **neurological optimism** that our brain is giving us that says:

Holding our breath is killing us, so we might as well breathe in and see what happens...

It's at that point the person breathes water into their windpipe – and **the drowning begins in earnest...**

And then Junger says this:

Lack of oxygen to the brain causes a sensation of darkness closing in from all sides... and so occasionally someone will make it back from this dark world, and it's from these people that we know what it is like to drown!

And in the same way friends this is the spiritual turmoil the psalmist feels!

All sin is bad

Now we're **not told** the specific kind of sin that leads the psalmist to these depths, and I think the Psalm is **purposefully ambiguous** to show us that **all sin (not just some) but all sin** should cause us to consider ourselves as desperate men & women **dependent on the grace of God!**

And so we're not told the specific kinds of sin that led the psalmist here –**but in light of verse 3** we are told **2 very specific truths:**

No one is innocent

Number one – verse 3 is there to show us that all sin is offensive to a holy God!

That **no one is innocent** when they stand before a Holy God – and that if God were to mark our iniquities we would be far worse off than we could ever imagine:

*If you O LORD should keep an account of iniquities, O Lord **who could stand?***

Answer: **NOBDOY!** Nobody can stand because **nobody is innocent!**

Romans chapter 3:

For there is none righteous no not one; for there is none who seek after God; for all have sinned and fallen short of God!

Jeremiah 17:9:

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked!

Mark chapter 7:

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person...

And so, the psalmist says that if God were to mark **each and every kind of iniquity** no one would stand **because no one is innocent!**

That:

Outside of Jesus Christ all of us are drowning in a sea of our sin!

Sin separates us from God

Secondly – verse 3 is there to show us that sin (by its very nature) separates us from the presence of God!

We saw this in the opening verses – the psalmist is screams out continually from the depths and yet **nothing seems to be getting through!**

Crying out to God, but **his scream is muffled** by the deep and dark waters!!!

In the same way if you've ever tried to scream while being underwater –perhaps as a kid while swimming in a pool... we know what that's like?

When you try to scream while being underwater, your scream is muffled, it's dull, and your scream **doesn't make any impact** upon those who are outside of the water...

And that's what the psalmist is describing for us:

He is crying out to God but it feels like nothing is getting through!!!

And this is what happens **when we understand** the sinfulness of our sin... in light of the holiness of God!

If you O LORD should mark iniquities, O LORD who could stand!

Transition to point 2

So friends what about you?!?!

What is the condition of your heart here this morning?!?!

Can you identify with the psalmist here in Psalm 130?

Have you have been crying out to God as a result of your sin & the separation you feel because of your sin?

Do you feel the weight of your sin and the desperate plea of your condition?!?!

Because if that's you here this morning – if you're in that place of deep darkness, then there is **great joy** coming for you in verses 4 to 8!

You see, while the psalmist is there in the depths, while he is there contemplating the sinfulness of his own sin... **he remembers something else!!!**

He remembers **the greatness of God's grace!**

The Greatness of Grace

Several years ago I remember doing a talk at Grace Kids...

And I titled the message *your greatest problem, and your only Solution... X2*

And I had **great fun** in seeing the kid's faces when I said:

Do you realize that your biggest problem in this world is God...

And they kind of looked at me like:

Huh God...

And I said to them:

Your biggest problem is that God is good, and you are not... God is holy, and you are NOT!

And I said, BUT!!!

God is also, your only solution to your biggest problem!

God is both your biggest problem (because He is holy), but He is also your only solution!!!

And see the psalmist here in verse 3 sees God as his biggest problem...

But then he hits verse 4, and he says:

*But with you... O God **there is** forgiveness of sins!*

See the psalmist knew that there was a **true and real event** that occurred in the courtroom of heaven where God was able to **look at a guilty sinner** like you and me and declare that their sins are counted against them no more!

That they are completely and totally forgiven of all of our sin based upon **God and God alone!**

THE OLD TESTAMENT SAINT

Now the question for us is, given that the psalmist here writes **thousands of years before** the cross of Christ, how did he know that with God there is forgiveness of sins?

Especially considering that he had just told us that God is a holy God who marks iniquities?

Well, I think there are number of things that the psalmist would have **looked toward in order to know** and to remember that with God there is forgiveness of sin!

ADAM AND EVE

Firstly the psalmist would **remember the character of God** – how God had dealt with Adam and Eve in the Garden!

That when Adam and Eve had sinned and broken covenant with God – **it was God who sought them!**

THE SEED OF THE WOMAN

The psalmist would remember that after the fall **it was God** who promised the seed of the woman to come and crush the head of the serpent!

God would do that!

THE EXODUS

The psalmist would remember that it was God who rescued Israel from captivity and oppression out of Egypt...that He is **slow to anger** and **abounding in steadfast love!**

THE GREAT DAY OF ATONEMENT

And **in the context of our Psalm** here this morning, the Psalm itself **being a pilgrim psalm** as the psalmist made his way to the Temple in Jerusalem.... He would have seen and remembered the High Priest going in before the people to offer **the sacrificial lamb** in order to atone for their sin...

And although that Lamb **was a shadow of the true Lamb of God**, the Old Testament Saints would have looked at that Lamb and been forgiven by faith alone in **that very promise!!!**

The great Day of Atonement had come and the psalmist proclaims:

“With You!!! There is forgiveness of sin!!!”

THAT YOU MAY BE FEARED

But then he says something rather odd...

In verse 4 the psalmist proclaims this:

*With you there is forgiveness, **that you may be revered!!!***

Some of your translations might have:

That you may be feared!

And so what in the world, does the forgiveness of sin, have to do with the fear of the Lord?

EASY BELIEVISM

Well there are many things we could come up with – but I think the **plain of the text** is that – the psalmist is **fighting against this idea** that forgiveness of sin means we can continue to live in sin after we have been forgiven **of our sin...**

He’s combating this idea of *easy believism* that says:

If I can just get the right formula in the right person’s head – and if I can get them to believe a certain amount of theological doctrine – and if they affirm that, then they’re a Christian and they’re going to heaven!

All the while forgetting that salvation is first & foremost **a change of heart** – **NOT JUST** a change of mind...

Does salvation include a change of mind – **Yes! Absolutely it does!**

But is it purely a change of mind – **NO!** – Even the demons believe that there is one God – James 2:19

So it's a change of mind resulting in a change of action – and the action that comes from the forgiveness of sins (according to the Psalmist) is a good & godly fear; a reverence toward the LORD!

Forgiveness of sin does **NOT** lead us to more sinful living, but it **always will lead us** to a good & godly fear!

Proverbs 1:7: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...*

Proverbs 10:27: *The fear of the Lord prolongs life...*

Proverbs 14:27: *The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life...*

Proverbs 19:23: *The fear of the Lord leads to life...*

And so **over and over again** this idea of **the fear of the LORD** is seen as a **positive thing** brings **life and godliness** to the soul of a believer!

THE FEAR OF GOD

But just in case you're unaware of what a godly fear according to the bible is – Dr. P.J. Buys explains it very well when he says:

*The true fear of God is a child-like fear...It is a combination of holy respect and glowing love...It means to experience **great awe and a deep joy** simultaneously when one begins to understand who God is and what He has done for us. Therefore the true fear of God is not a fear that makes a person run from God. It is a fear that drives him to God..."*

And so, friends – the Gospel **always comes** with a godly fear that says:

I love God, and I hate my sin...

And so, with you God **there is forgiveness** that He may be feared!!!

WAITING FOR THIS REALITY

Now what's important to see here, is the connection between verse 4 and verses 5 & 6...

I want you to notice something really important!!!

Although the psalmist knows that **with God there is forgiveness** (verse 4)...He is still holding out for this reality **to hit his soul** in verses 5 & 6)....

So his mind knows, but his heart isn't there yet...

He knows that with God there's forgiveness of sin – but he's still holding out **for that** in verses 5 & 6 and so he says there:

I wait for the LORD; I wait and put my hope in His Word. I wait for the LORD more than watchmen for the morning— more than watchmen for the morning.

WATCHMEN FOR THE MORNING

Now the watchmen were the men who would guard the city of Jerusalem in the long hours of the night against **any invading forces!**

They would wait upon **the city walls** in order to watch the city and alert the city **if any other army was coming to invade!**

And **this would obviously be** a very demanding task for the watchmen – **always being alert** – **always being ready** – **always focusing attention on this one task...** always looking forward to the land...and so naturally, they would be quite exhausted and **very eager** to see the dawn of the morning sun!

And so **it's NOT hard to see** what the psalmist is telling us:

I wait to feel the forgiveness of the LORD more than those (guards), **those watchmen** wait for the dawning of the morning sun!

In other words:

I'm **not getting any sleep** while I'm waiting!

In fact **I'm willing to lose sleep** if it means that he can feel that forgiveness the LORD gives!

And so he repeats himself for emphasis:

More than watchmen for the morning

More than watchmen for the morning

HOPE IN HIS WORD

But he's **NOT JUST WAITING PASSIVELY FOR THIS TO HIT!**

But **notice the object of his affections** while he waits!

Notice **what is he hoping in** – Verse 5:

*I wait for the LORD; I put my hope **in His Word!***

When your soul is pinning – when you feel dirty – when you feel sinful – **you don't go** to your emotions to know if God loves you... and you don't go to your feelings!!!

Why? Because:

Our feelings change! Our emotions change! Our hearts are deceitful!

But the psalmist says that **when you're waiting for the LORD:**

You go to His word... you hope in His Word!

Go to something solid and binding... something resolute!!!

You trust in His word!

That's where you go **when you feel distant** from God!

That's where you go to remember the promises of God... go to His word and hope in it!!!

Because here's the point:

It is the word of God that will bring us up from those depths!!!

HERALDING OF HOPE

And when this happens...when we meditate on His Word, when we trust in His word, when we stand on the promises of His Word...

We will come to experience the reality that with God there is forgiveness of sins and with God there is steadfast love!!!

And that's what we see in the final 2 verses of our psalm as the psalmist now turns his attention to **the heralding of hope:**

Have a look at verse 7:

Israel, put your hope in the LORD. For there is faithful love with the LORD, and with Him is redemption in abundance. ⁸ And He will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

2 REASONS TO HOPE IN THE LORD

And there are 2 reasons why the psalmist commands Israel **and commands us!!!** to put **our** Hope in the Lord!

STEADFAST LOVE

1. Firstly, hope in the LORD – Because with the Lord there is steadfast love (or faithful love)...

The psalmist skillfully draws **our attention** back to the **covenant faithfulness** of God in Israel's history!

That despite Israel having abandoned God over and over and over and over and over and over and over again!!!

The Lord still chose to rescue them, to redeem them, to save them!

He still chose to be their God!!!

Which testifies to the fact that if this was true for Israel back then... how much more is this true for us as Christians today!!!

That despite the fact that you and I war against the hand of God daily, He continues to love, pursue and extend grace to us!!!

With God there is steadfast love... with God there is covenant Love! With God there is unending love!

He has made a promise to be our God in the future based upon His unfailing promises of the past!

He remains with us! He pursues us!

Hope in the Lord because with the LORD there is steadfast love!!!

PLENTIFUL REDEMPTION

2. Secondly, hope in the LORD – Because with the LORD there is plentiful redemption!

Or redemption in abundance!

So the psalmist now draws our attention **to the price that God pays** when He rescues us from our sin!

Redemption always comes at a great & valuable cost!!!

It always costs God something!!!

The idea of redemption means to purchase... it means to pay the price for something!

And the redemption that God gives (says the psalmist) is never small and it is never lacking!!!

The redemption that God gives is plentiful; it is rich; it is abounding!!!

There is no part of God's redeeming work in saving us from sin that is small or lacking!

God **knew what He was getting** when he purchased you at the cross!

You're not surprising God with your sin!

He is abundant in His redemption; He is bountiful in His redemption... God is NOT stingy in saving us from our sin!

You cannot out-sin the grace of God!!!

He loves to take the worst kind of sinners and clothe them in the best robes of Jesus Christ!

He is plentiful with His redemption... He redeems us from our sin and the power of sin over and over and over and over and over again....

So that **HE MAY BE REVERED!**

GOD BOUGHT US TO SET US FREE

Years ago an Englishman had gone out to California and made his fortune in the gold fields...and he wanted to go back and live with his own people.

So he sent his money by check back to England and he came overland on the Santa Fe trail to Kansas City, down to Missouri and then the Mississippi and ended up in New Orleans and from there he was going to take a ship to New York and head back to England.

And as a tourist in New Orleans he did as most tourists did back then; and he went down to the old slave market. Only then in the early 1850's there were still slaves being sold.

And as he went into the market he saw a lot of men gathered there and one party of slaves were put on the stage and he heard these men as they were speaking about one particular slave woman...

And then **he** saw two evil looking men bidding for the woman quite heatedly...

And then he heard them say what they were going to do with her...and his heart just revolted against the whole swinish act.

And finally when they were bidding and the bidding prices were getting quite high, he just couldn't stand it anymore, and so he beckoned to the auctioneer and he said a figure which was exactly twice the last bid; ***utterly beyond anything that has ever been paid for a slave in that market before!***

He said *"Have you got the money?"*

The man came up and he said *"yeah I've got the money"*

And so the bill of sale was made out he went over to the block to take the woman that he had just purchased...and as she came down one step and stood just about level with his eyes she had made a mouth full of spit and she spat right full in his face and hissed through her clenched teeth *"I hate you!"*

He said nothing, with the back of his hand he wiped the spittle away, he took her by the hand walk down the street across this intersection through the mud down that street until he came to a little office building, she couldn't read, she didn't know what it was...

He went to the desk and began to speak, the man behind the desk began to protest he said *"I insist it's the law I insist"*

And finally he came back, paid some money and got a piece of paper

The gold miner walked over to the woman who was like a beast ready to spring on him, he handed the paper to her and said *“Here... Here are your manumission papers... You're free”*

She still hissed *“I hate you!”*

He said *“Didn't you understand... I said here are your manumission papers... You're free...”*

She said (stuttering) *“This.. I can't think... why would you... no!!!! You paid twice as much for me as they've ever paid for anybody in that market place, and you're giving these to me, I don't believe you.”*

He said *“Yes! These are your manumission papers”* and he put them in her hand, and he walked away...

And she said *“Stop! Mister! Stop!!! Do you mean to tell me that you bought me to set me free?”*

He said *“Yes! That's why I bought you, to set you free.”*

Tears came up into her eyes that hadn't known tears for a long time, they just spilled over, her face softened... And then she slid down on her hands and knees and she reached down and put her arms around that rough miner's boots...

And then she laid her cheek down on one of them and then through her tears she sobbed *“O you bought me to set me free... You bought me to set me free! You paid more than has ever been paid before just to set me free.”*

And then through her tears she looked up and she said to the man: *“O Sir, all I want in life is to be your slave... for you bought me to set me free!!!”*

CONCLUSION

Brothers & sisters the Lord Jesus **bought you!**

He bought you to set you free!

And the **Gospel promise** found in Psalm 130 is **the same Gospel promise** found in the Person & Work of Christ – because it's the same God who saves!

That when you are burdened by the gravity of your sin – when you feel the weight of your sorrow – when you are in the depths of despair – when you have upset & offended a holy God **you set your affections upon** the promises of God **found in the Gospel!**

Jesus Christ died to pay your fine!

He lived a sinless life – He died a perfect death – in order to take the punishment that we deserve – and in so doing, God pours out His wrath onto the Son, killing Him!

And then God raises Him from the dead 3 days later so that there is therefore now **NO CONDEMNATION** for those who are in Christ Jesus!

And if you would come & trust in nothing else but Jesus Christ alone to save you from your sin – then God's Word promises us this:

With the Lord there is steadfast love and with Him is plentiful redemption, and He will redeem you from all your sin!!!

This is the promise of grace given in Psalm 130 – that:

In the depths of our sin and brokenness, **our only hope** is in the unfailing love and forgiveness of God...

Let's Pray.

Psalm 130

Discussion Questions

Main Point: *In the depths of our sin, **our only hope** is in the unfailing love and forgiveness of God...*

Q1. What are the psalms of ascents and why does that matter for understanding Psalm 130?

Q2. The psalmist writes about an experience of being in “*the depths*.” What do the “*depths*” refer to throughout Scripture?

Q3. What is it that causes the Psalmist to cry out in lament to God in verse 3?

Q4. How often (if ever) have you felt a deep sense of urgency and conviction over your sin? – Where does the psalmist tell us to turn in those moments of grief?

Q5. What is the relationship between *waiting on the LORD* (5 & 6) and knowing the forgiveness of the LORD (Verse 4)? – In other words, if the Psalmist knows that God forgives sins, what is he still waiting for in verses 5-6? – Do you ever know a doctrine to be true in your head, but often struggle to believe it in your heart? – Where do you go in those times?

Q6. What guarantee would the Old Testament Saint have in knowing that Yahweh is a God who freely forgives sins?

Q7. Why do you think forgiveness in Christ produces a godly fear? – What would this look like in your life? – How does 1 Peter 1:17-19 & Titus 2:11-14 connect forgiveness of sins with the Fear of the LORD?

Q8. [Read verses 7 & 8]. What are the 2 reasons the Psalmist gives for us to hope in the LORD?

Q9. The cycle that is presented in this psalm is an important one for believers to know. Recognition of sin, crying out for mercy, remembrance of the forgiveness of God, fearing Him in committed devotion. At what stage do you usually break down when falling into “*the depths?*”

Q10. Is the Gospel present in this Psalm and if so, how would you explain it to a non-Christian?