

From the Depths to the Heights

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[0 : 0 0] Well, it's nice to be back with you once again today and to be able to go through another psalm. Last week, those of you who were here will remember that we looked at two psalms last week and they were both to do with David as he was running away from Saul and how the Lord watched over him and how his confidence was in the Lord, his God. We're just dealing verse by verse with Psalm 130 today and you will notice that these psalms are referred to as songs of ascent. What does that mean? Well, they were songs that were sung by the pilgrims as they made their way up to worship in the temple. They were required by the law to go up three times a year. Exodus 34 and verse 23 says, three times a year all your men are to appear before the sovereign God, the God of Israel. So as they made their way up, so they sang these psalms. And one can imagine the Lord Jesus himself on his 12th birthday or round about that time as he went up to the first Passover, singing something like this,

I rejoice with those who said to me, let us go into the house of the Lord. There are 15 of these psalms all together, beginning in Psalm 120 and going right through to Psalm 134.

They're psalms of ascent. Of course, they come under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. Men wrote them as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. What they wrote were literally breathed out by God. But they benefit us today, of course, for all scripture is God breathed and is profitable. But it's real men speaking about their real experiences. Sometimes the psalms speak about the sadness in their lives or sickness or problems in their family. Other times the psalms are full of worship. Sometimes they speak of God's providential overruling. But they're all there for our learning. So what's happening to the psalmist here? Well, the psalmist, you'll notice, goes from the very depths to the heights. That's where he begins. Out of the depths I cry to you,

O Lord. That's his position at that particular time. But at the end of the psalm, he's on the heights. O Israel, put your hope in the Lord. For with the Lord is unfailing love, and with him is full redemption.

He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. The mood has changed as he's reflected upon the goodness of God. So as we look at this psalm, if perhaps this morning we have come here feeling in the depths for whatever reason, I trust that before we leave we'll know what it is to reach the heights because of God speaking to us from his word. So there are four points I want to bring to you this morning. The psalm divides itself nicely and neatly for us. Each section is in two verses, verses 1 and 2, 3 and 4, and so forth through the psalm. So let's look at verses 1 and 2 to begin with. And you'll notice that they are a petition. Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. Now we're not told the identity of the psalmist on this occasion, only that he's in the depths. He's obviously hurting for some reason or another. And out of the depths he makes his call to God. He petitions the almighty, the living God.

[4 : 2 8] What's bothering him? Well it doesn't seem to be danger. It doesn't seem to be illness. But it does seem to be a question of sin because he speaks of sins in verses 3 and 4. So he's bothered by sin.

And that would be understandable. To be bothered by one's sin. Certainly he was bothered. I remember a young man in Waterford. He didn't live a particularly bad life. But he was conscious of his sin when he became a Christian. Before it didn't bother him. And when asked what it meant to him to now be a Christian. He said, now sin bothers me. And the psalmist is in that sort of position. Sin is bothering him.

And he's crying out to the almighty God for mercy. Because it's only the almighty God that can deal with his problem. Of course Jesus himself spoke a parable, didn't he? We read that parable in Luke 18 and verses 9 to 14. Remember the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. They both go into the temple.

They are both seeking God in their own particular way. And the Pharisee, we're told, prayed thus to himself. His prayer didn't go higher than the ceiling. But more or less he's telling God how good and how righteous he is. He's a cutter above others in the moral realm. And he looks over at this tax collector.

This man who fraternised with the Romans. This man who was looked at them. And he said, well I'm just not like him. I'm somehow different. But here's the tax collector who can't go near the front. He's way at the back. And all he can do is beat himself as it were and say, God be merciful to me, a sinner. And that's the same idea that we have with the psalmist here. The psalmist is bothered by his sin. And he's crying out to God for mercy. Oh Lord, he says, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. He's aware, you see, of the gulf that existed between him and God.

[7 : 15] Let's remember the context of the psalm. He's going up to meet with this God in his temple. That was a very dwelling place of God. He could possibly see the golden dome of the temple in those days, in the distance. God dwelt there. And God was absolutely holy. And he sees himself as totally unfit to meet with God. What can he do? Well, he can cry out for mercy. And from the depths, he addresses this God. He makes his petition known. Just before the service started, and they say confession is good for the soul, but bad for the reputation. And just before the service started, Rosemary said, you've got a dirty mark on your sweater.

And here am I at the front with a dirty mark on my sweater. You didn't know that, did you, until I pointed it out? Perhaps you did. But I didn't notice it, but there was a higher authority on this occasion who was pointing it out to me. Who was pointing it out to me. It was seen. But in all seriousness, aren't we all before a much higher authority? We were before God himself. We might consider ourselves clean, but to his all-seeing eye, what can we do? We can only cry out for mercy. And that's what all of us must do. Even if we're Christians here this morning, we constantly need his mercy, we constantly need his grace.

And as we think of his petition, he not only sees the God that exists, but he must ask himself the question, would God listen to his petition? Would this absolutely holy God show him mercy?

Would God really care about his condition? Or would God shut his ears? Was there any hope for him? Or maybe his mind would go to another psalmist like David. Remember the depths of sin to which David sank was in the death of her husband, O God, that he could take hope? Because that same David, in confessing his sin and asking God for mercy, is able to say the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Or maybe he thought back of Israel's history and thought of various people who had known the grace of God.

Noah, who found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Jacob, that cheat and liar who held on to God until God was blessed him. Yes, God would hear his cry for mercy. And isn't it wonderful that we do have a God who does hear our cries.

[10 : 37] He does hear the cry of every penitent sinner. And that leads us to the second point. And that is, not only is there a petition in this psalm, there is also pardon. Verses 3 and 4.

If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness. Therefore you are feared. Conscious as he is of his shortcomings, he knows that he deserves to be shut out from the presence of God forever. If you kept a record of sins. If you kept a record of sins, O Lord, who can stand?

Again, I say we don't know the writer. But here is a writer who is calling out to the judge of all the earth. Imagine this man, if you will, in the dock. He sees his sin and he knows the record of his sins.

Imagine him in the dock. And the judge of all the earth is asking him the question, have you loved the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength? How do you plead?

And he might say, well, I've done my best. I've tried to live a good life. No, no, I'm not asking you that.

[12 : 13] Have you loved the Lord your God with all your heart? And he would have to say, no, I haven't. And we all fail.

Because we've all sinned and come short of the glory of God. And then the judge of all the earth would ask the second question. Have you loved your neighbour as yourself?

Well, I've tried not to do it. No, no. Have you loved your neighbour as yourself? And again, he would have to plead guilty.

If you would keep a record of sins, O Lord, who can stand? Another psalm puts it like this.

Psalm 76 and verse 7. Who can stand before you when you are angry? From heaven you pronounce judgment. And the land feared and was quiet.

[13 : 15] You see, sin is serious. And sin has to be dealt with. God is not a benign being up there in the sky who teaches, looks down upon us as a father might his child and spoil that child and become indulgent with that child.

No, God isn't like that. He must punish sin. Because he's holy. And we see his holiness again and again brought before us in Scripture.

If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand? But with you is forgiveness. Therefore you are feared.

Again, remember the context of the psalm. Here is the psalmist. He's going up to Jerusalem to meet with God. Why is he going up? Well, it was a time of sacrifice.

That's the reason they went up to the temple to offer sacrifices to God. So the man would not be going up to the temple empty-handed. As he ascended to the temple, he might be bringing a lamb with him.

[14 : 32] If he was a more wealthy farmer, he would be bringing a bullock. If it were a poor person, they would have money in their pocket, ready to buy a few turtle doves in order to sacrifice them.

Perhaps it was the time of Passover when they were going up. What would happen at Passover? Well, a lamb would be sacrificed and they would remember God's deliverance out of Egypt and remember how the children of Israel had sheltered under the blood of the lamb.

The lamb had died in the place of the firstborn. But where there was no blood, the judgment of God came upon those particular houses.

So the man going up would know that there was forgiveness because he could go up with a sacrifice. And the man of faith, if he was bringing his bullock, would come to the temple and he would present this bullock and he would bring it before the priest and he would take hold of the head of the bullock and he would say, Yes, Lord, I have failed to love you with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my strength and I know I haven't loved my neighbour as I have myself.

I know I have done wrong and offended you and as he laid his hands upon the bullock, so his sins would pass to that sacrificial animal and the animal would die in the man's place.

[16 : 10] So the man going up to worship would know that there was pardon for him. He would know that there was forgiveness if he offered that animal in faith.

And the man who offered that animal in faith would also be looking forward to one who was promised. Because right through the Old Testament we have this pointing forward to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And as we think of him, isn't that exactly what we do? Our sins are laid upon him that the judgment of God might not come upon us.

with you there is forgiveness therefore you are feared. It should produce in all of us a sense of awe that God has loved us so much that he sent his son into the world for us.

That Christ came into the world to be our Passover, to be our perfect sacrifice, to be our once and for all sacrifice.

[17 : 33] And pardon is obtained for each one of us who put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. So the pilgrim makes his way up as he sings this song of ascent.

He's conscious of his sin. He's conscious of his faults and failures. But he's conscious also that there's pardon that can be obtained.

Let's move on to the third point in verses 5 and 6. I wait for the Lord, he says. My soul waits and in his word I put my hope.

My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning. More than watchmen wait for the morning. What's happening here?

He's patiently waiting for God. They use the word patience in the sense of hope, in the sense of confidence.

[18 : 35] Psalm 40 says, I waited patiently for the Lord and he listened to me. Those who wait on the Lord, we're told in Isaiah 40 and verse 31, or those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

So the psalmist makes his way to the temple, conscious of his sin, conscious of the fact that God is ready to pardon, conscious of the fact that his only hope is the Lord himself.

I wait for the Lord. My soul waits for him and in his word I hope. There's an anticipation here, isn't there?

There's a longing. He's going up and he can't wait to be in the presence of his Lord. He's pinning everything upon his God.

There is, if you like, the patience of faith, the patience of hope. As he takes his sacrifice, as he offers it, he's looking forward to being able to do that.

[19 : 47] He has to wait because he's not at the temple yet, but he's getting near and his hope is in God who will pardon his sin.

And notice there's nothing uncertain about his waiting. In his word he says, I put my hope. The pilgrim, you see, knows that God doesn't lie.

That God is absolutely trustworthy. That the promises of God can be depended upon. Wasn't the temple, the dwelling place of God in those times, didn't God come down among his people and meet with them there?

Didn't God say that he could be approached there? Yes, all of these things were said and so much more. So the psalmist comes to offer his sacrifice with utter confidence in God.

He traveled along difficult and dusty roads, sometimes a week's journey in order to be there. But he came with the word of God ringing in his ear.

- [20 : 59] That if he sinned and if he failed, God would be ready to forgive. You see, when the temple was erected, God had spoken to King Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7 and verse 14.
- If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.
- I will wipe the cellmate clean. In his word, do I hope, said the psalmist, God's promises will be kept.
- And notice how his whole being is taken up with his waiting. He describes himself just like the watchman. And notice how he repeats himself in verse 6.
- That's not a mistake. It isn't like going to sleep at the computer with your, you know, your finger on the A and you get a whole long of A's.
- [22 : 04] You know, perhaps you've never done that. You know, I have. But it's, you know, it happens. But he hasn't made a mistake. He knew what he was doing. He wanted to emphasize the fact, I wait for you as watchman, he says, wait for the morning.
- Yes, just like that, more than watchman wait for the morning. Now, I've never been on guard all night long. I've never been in that position.
- But I can imagine what it must be like for the century. He can't wait for the morning lights. He's been up through the night.
- There are dangers to watch out for. How does he stay awake? Because most of the time, nothing will happen. But there is that occasion when something will happen. So he has to be alert.
- He has to be watching. Now, said the psalmist, I'm just like that century as he's looking for, I'm longing. And I'm longing after God.
- [23 : 07] As a century watches for the morning, I'm more than that, he says. Because he wants to meet with his God.
- And he's waiting with his patient confidence. Trusting in his word. Looking forward to meet with his Lord.
- And shouldn't this be the longing of each forgiven sinner? We're not looking, of course, for Jerusalem. We don't have to go on a pilgrimage.
- We don't have to come to any temple. But we do have to come to God through that once and for all sacrifice. Even our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.
- If we would come before God, we cannot come in our own righteousness. Because our own righteousness is just like dirty rags. But we come with the righteousness of another.
- [24 : 10] Even the righteousness of our Lord and Saviour. And by him we have access into God's holy presence. Because doesn't the promise come to us that the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin.
- That there is one who is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So from the depths he comes with his sacrifice.
- He's waiting before his God. And finally there is this proclamation. O Israel, he says, put your hope in the Lord for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.
- He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. From the depths his petition the promise of pardon.
- Patiently he waits. But he's now no longer in the depths is he? He's risen to the heights and he longs that others might join him there.
- [25 : 23] And his proclamation is an appeal to his fellow citizens. He can't be quiet. He sees the wonder of God's forgiveness. The wonder of God's salvation.

And he says, now put your hope in the Lord. What Lord? Well he tells us the Lord of unfailing love.

He looks back into the past. And he thinks of Abraham and how God took him from a life of idolatry. He thinks of Joseph who was sent ahead of the children of Israel so that they might not die of starvation in the land of Egypt where they went to live.

He thinks of Moses and that deliverance out of Egypt. He thinks of the judges perhaps that God raised up. there were no shortage of examples of God's love to his people.

And you and I have so much more to go on. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

[26 : 36] In Christ we have life. In Christ we have hope. In Christ we have a victory that the world cannot give and a peace that the world cannot give.

Put your hope in the Lord of unfailing love. Rise from the depths of sin to the heights of blessing. Is his love unfailing?

Well didn't he think of us from before the foundation of the world? In eternity God put upon us in love. Will he not take us into eternity with that same love?

Put your hope in the Lord of unfailing love he says for in him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from some of their sins most of their sins no he doesn't say that.

He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. How is he going to do it? Well through himself. He himself will redeem Israel from their sins.

[27 : 49] He would send his son into the world the perfect sacrifice and the psalmist ends that by pointing us forward to the one who would purchase us with his own precious blood.

So the psalmist shouts it out put your hope in the Lord. Let us go with that note ringing in our ears.

And as we share the bread together and drink the cup once again we put our hope in the Lord who has loved us with an everlasting love.

From the depths to the heights. Amen. from the Boys to theicos sometimes hurt a day Arizona writes on parking over amps ■■■■ ■■■■ lines the