

Psalm for a Summer Season: Psalm 130

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 0 0] The Bible is divided, loosely speaking, into two sections, the Old and New Testaments. Broadly speaking, the Old Testament tells us the story of what happened before Jesus came, and the New Testament tells us the story of what happened when Jesus came.

But what happens when you come across a passage in the Old Testament which looks like it belongs in the New Testament, something which to all intents looks like it was written after Jesus came.

In 1936, a jar was uncovered in Iraq which has confused archaeologists ever since. It dated from 250 BC, contained an iron rod and some nails. At the time, archaeologists suggested that it was some kind of prehistoric battery. But the lead battery was only invented in 1859, so the so-called Baghdad battery was 2,000 years before its time. In the same way, what happens when we come across a passage in the Old Testament which is hundreds of years before its time? Well, Psalm 130 is one such passage. It's often been said it could have been written by the Apostle Paul and belongs not in the Old Testament book of Psalms, but in the New Testament book of Romans. It spoke powerfully to its first readers in 500 BC. It speaks powerfully to Christians in the first century AD and it speaks powerfully to

Christians today. It's a New Testament song in the Old Testament, a song for then and a song for now because without Jesus it makes no sense.

This psalm passes through four stages, each of which wonderfully points to Jesus as our Saviour and our Lord. Depth, truth, weight and redemption. This psalm was written 250 years before the supposed Baghdad battery, but listen to its song, listen to its words, and you'll be amazed at how powerfully it can speak to you also. First of all then from verse 1 to 2, depth. Out of the depth I cry to you. The Latin version of this psalm is entitled *De Profundis*, which being translated means from the depths. We don't know from which depths the psalm writer was crying out to God. As we shall see as we go through this song, it would seem that the particular depth had something to do with his own sin and his own guilt. But whatever it was, as the Latin title reminds us, it was profoundly deep. In Old English, to talk about something being profound didn't just mean mysterious, but also to something's deepest part.

[3 : 1 5] The profoundest part of the Pacific Ocean is the Marianas Trench at nearly 11 kilometers deep.

And from the deepest part of who he is, the psalm writer is crying out to God. All too often when we pray, our mouths are moving, but our hearts are static. Our affections aren't involved in our prayers.

We're just repeating words. But there are times in our lives, other or not, when we're so hurt and we're so desperate that our prayers shift gears. And from the very depth of our hearts, we cry out to God.

At times like these, our prayers are very far from being cold and formal. Words may be difficult to say. What's left are the depths of our hearts crying out to God to listen to our prayers for mercy.

The profound cries of our hearts meet with the profound mercy of God. Now, sin and guilt aren't words we particularly use much in our society today. They've been cancelled by a society which hates the very idea of sin and that what it does may be wrong. But for all that people don't talk about sin and guilt, they're still there. People are wracked with all kinds of guilt over things they're told by the society around them aren't wrong. But all the time, their own consciences cry foul and they know that what they have been and what they have done is wrong.

[4 : 58] They're filled with fear and loneliness, anxiety and guilt, but they have nowhere to turn because they've been told there is no such thing as sin and there is no such thing as God.

Romans 3 verse 23, we read these famous words, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. From the depths of guilt, that inner awareness that there's something missing and something wrong, the psalm writer cries out to God. His guilt is gnawing at him, his sin is grieving him, the ways in which he has fallen short of God's standards of love and grace. He feels like a square peg in a round hole. He doesn't fit, he doesn't belong because he knows that in himself he's broken, he's guilty, he's ashamed.

And he knows that it's against God he has sinned, so it must be God to whom he cries for forgiveness. Oh Lord, hear my voice, he prays. Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my cries for mercy.

He is desperate, for without forgiveness he will forever remain in those depths he so hates, those depths with no light and no warmth and no hope and no rescue.

If only our world could listen to the psalm writer as he calls out to God. If only our world knew that the God whom we have offended is the God who shows mercy to all who call on him. There is something we can do with our sin today, something we can do with our guilt today, and it's to cry out to God for forgiveness. Have you ever been in the depths? Are you in the depths today? Rather than blindly ignoring or trying to drown out the voice of our guilt, is it not better to be done with it?

[6 : 59] Is it not better to go to the God against whom we have sinned and cry out to him to listen to the voice of our pleas for mercy? For as we shall discover, he is far more willing to forgive than we are to ask for forgiveness. He was more willing to forgive the murderous, hate-filled Saul of Tarsus than Saul of Tarsus was to cry out for forgiveness. When the sinful, guilty tax collector came to the temple to pray, he cried out, Lord, have mercy on me, the sinner. And God forgave him all his sin. He will us also. Lord, from the depth, I cry to you. Second, truth from verse 3 and 4. If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, it is of vital importance that we understand God for who he really is and not who we imagine him to be.

In the minds of so many, God is a pushover, an absent-minded old man who neither knows nor cares what we do or who we are. The reality of God is very different. If you, O Lord, should mark iniquity, O Lord, who should stand? The writer is aware of how perfect, righteous, and holy God is, and how by comparison sinful and righteous and guilty he is. Suppose God assumed the position of a judge in a court of law. Suppose God read out a list of all the sins the psalm writer had committed.

How would the psalm writer defend himself? It would be guilty to every charge. Greed, guilty. Guilty. Pride, guilty. Selfishness, guilty. Dishonesty, guilty. Lust, guilty. Unbelief, guilty.

Slowly and surely, the psalm writer standing in the dock would hang his head in shame and fall to the ground realizing that he stands condemned. God marked his iniquities. If God counted them and reckoned them against him, he would be forever doomed. Suppose now we change the scene somewhat.

We're no longer in a court of law. We're at the cinema. And what's playing on a screen isn't a Hollywood movie. It's what's going on inside our heads and our hearts, all our thoughts, all our motives, all our secrets playing on the screen so that everyone can see what's going on inside us.

[9 : 53] How ashamed we would be. We would never be able to lift up our heads again. Oh, for sure, we'd mark each other's iniquities and hold it against them.

We stand before God so fully exposed that he can see everything about us, all our thoughts, words, and actions, our secret and public sins, those we don't even know we've committed.

He sees the truth about us and the truth ain't good. Then comes one of the most amazing verses in the Bible. But with you there is forgiveness. But with you there is forgiveness.

The God against whom we have sinned, the God who has every right to find us guilty for every sin we have ever committed and righteously condemn us is the God with whom there is mercy and forgiveness.

This is the truth we must know today. God does not wink at sin. God does not ignore sin. God forgives sin. God does not cancel us for our sin. God cancels our sin for us.

[11 : 03] When we have a sin and guilt problem, when we're in the profoundest of depths, it makes ultimate sense to pray to the God with whom there is forgiveness. As human beings, we're finding it increasingly hard to forgive one another, especially in the media.

But God has no problem with forgiveness. For with Him that is forgiveness, full and free, He is the fount of forgiveness. This is the truth we must know. Our sin is not ultimate. God's forgiveness of our sin is ultimate. Does this make God a pushover? Not at all. For having been forgiven of our sin, we fear Him. We fear Him. Not in the sense of being terrified by Him, sometimes, but in the sense of respecting Him, worshipping Him, living for Him. We stand in awe before a God who can forgive so much and love so much. We stand in awe of a God who can be grieved by our sin and yet forgive us so lovingly and so freely. These are such amazing words. But with you there is forgiveness. You know,

I may struggle to forgive myself. I often do. And others may struggle to forgive me. And I don't blame you. But the God against whom I have sinned is, if I may use these words, desperate to forgive me.

He will hold nothing against me, but forgive me completely, entirely, and freely. This is the truth of the Christian gospel, the scandalous truth, the truth we must know.

Thirdly, verses 5 and 6, wait, wait. Now, we all know waiting is one of the hardest things in life to do. Ask the person waiting for results to come back from the doctor. It takes strength. It takes endurance to wait. But waiting plays a significant role in our faith as Christians because God never works according to our timescales. The sovereign God has wiser timescales which always work out for our good.

[13 : 22] The psalm writer, being aware of his sin and guilt, having cried out to God for grace and mercy, now waits for an answer. We can picture the scene. There are night watchmen in the walls of Jerusalem, and they're desperately waiting for the end of their watch. They're longing for the first rays of the morning light to break over the horizon. Perhaps they're nervous because in the darkness they can't see far and they don't know what's in the distance. Could it be an enemy army making ready to attack the city? But when morning light comes they can see for miles in every direction. They are watching, they are waiting, they are desperately looking to the horizon on the east, longing for the first rays of the sun to rise. In the same way the psalm writer is waiting patiently for the assurance that God has forgiven his sin and removed his guilt. He's longing for the accusing voice of his own conscience to be silenced. In the meantime he refuses to wait with uncertainty. Rather he says, in his word I hope,

God has spoken, assuring the penitent sinner that he will forgive his sin. God's word is enough. God's word is the foundation of the writer's hope. You see, the writer isn't focused here on his feelings, but on the reality of what God has promised in his word. Yes, he may wait for God to deal with his feelings, but until then he will stand his ground on the should and certain promises of the word of God.

God, we may ask ourselves the question, why does God make him wait at all? The answer is, I suggest, to increase the writer's hope in the word of God. The more he waits, the more he trusts, the more he waits, the greater his desire and longing for God and for an answer.

The writer knows that it's not sacrifices and offerings which will take away his sin. It's a contrite and penitent heart. He's heard the promise of Isaiah 1 verse 8. Fred's already read part of Isaiah to us.

Where God said, come now, let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. Or again in Isaiah 43, 25.

[15 : 50] I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake. I will not remember your sins. So he trusts in the words of God, promises like those we have just quoted. He knows that God will keep his promises and all he needs to do is to wait for the assurance of forgiveness. Waiting's hard, we all know that. But the sure and certain hope of forgiveness makes all the waiting worth it.

Now we who live in New Testament days have an even firmer foundation for our hope. For we have seen Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. We have seen him crucified. We have seen him risen. And we have heard his voice crying out, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

The word of God assures us that when we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We have a greater, deeper, more extensive word than the psalm writer did. Therefore, we have a firmer ground on which to stand and place our hope. We may wait for the assurance of our forgiveness, but God's word tells us the moment we confess, the moment we confess, we are forgiven. But then, maybe the depths from which we are calling to God aren't sin and guilt.

Maybe they concern another painful area of our lives. And we've cried out to God for help, but his timescales aren't ours. And we must wait for him to answer. Then our waiting becomes like that of the night watchman in the walls of Jerusalem. We long for the first rays of God fulfilling his promises to us. It may be the hardness of our children to the gospel. It may be the brokenness of our relationships. It may be our own poor health. Whatever it is, we must wait with patience, while all the time continuing to hope in the word of God.

We're not the first to have found ourselves waiting. We won't be the last. But in the meantime, let's use the wait for a good purpose. Let's use the wait to depend more upon God and less upon ourselves.

[18 : 17] Let's use the wait to make the most of God's promised strength and learn to trust him more. Though we cannot trust ourselves, we can trust him. And our faith in him will never fail us.

Then in verses 7 and 8, fourthly and finally, redemption. Redemption. Oh, Israel, hope in the Lord.

The writer does, as the writer moves to conclusion, he does so with astounding confidence and the proclamation of the glory of God. Oh, Israel, hope in the Lord, he calls out. We say the same, O church of Christ, hope in the Lord. What makes all our hoping and waiting worth it?

For with the Lord that is steadfast love and plentiful redemption is with him. This is the Lord upon whom we wait and in whom we hope, the God of never-ending, infinite, and selfless love, the God whose steadfast love reaches higher than the heavens, as we've sung in Psalm 36.

That love which shall never let us go, that love which shall never let our sins get in the way of his love. This is our God upon whom we wait and to whom we call the Lord of steadfast love.

[19 : 47] We're often told, are we not, that the Old Testament God is filled with wrath, anger, and judgment, condemnation. That may be what we have been told, but it's not what we have discovered through this short series of psalms for a summer season. He is filled with love and pity, compassion, and mercy.

He loves the sinner, and that's why we can say along with this man, with him is plentiful redemption. There is with God plentiful, abundant, overflowing redemption for a sinful people. Now, we know that the word redemption refers to the payment of a ransom.

A slave is released from her slavery upon payment of a ransom. And the psalm writer says, there is no ransom price which God is unwilling to pay to release his sinful people from their slavery.

Let's take Hamish's soppy comment in the children's talk. The most beautiful thing Finn's ever seen is his mummy. How much of a ransom price do you suppose Hamish would be willing to pay to release Kyrie from kidnap?

He would give everything he had. The more precious a person is to us, the more we pay to ransom them.

[21 : 16] And God is willing to pay for us an abundant ransom price. God loves us so much that he's willing to pay an overflowing cost for our freedom. How great a cost, we may ask.

In verse 8 we read, and he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. Grammatically, this makes most sense in English, but in the original Hebrew language, it makes more sense to translate it this way. He himself, he himself will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

In other words, God himself shall be the ransom price. God will pay it with himself. The people of God shall not be redeemed with silver or gold, with bulls or with goats, but with God himself. We remember the words of Titus 2.14, what of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, Paul wrote. He gave himself to redeem us. He gave himself to redeem us.

Again, in 1 Peter 1.18.19, You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

And then to cap it off, of course, Jesus says of himself in Mark 10.45, You see, this verse, Psalm 130, verse 8, points unmistakably to the cross on which God himself redeemed his people from all their sins.

[23 : 06] The ransom price for our freedom was the blood of Christ, and it was a ransom price which, because of God's infinite love for us, he willingly and freely paid.

There are many less direct references in the Old Testament to how God himself shall be the ransom price of his people, but none are as direct as this one.

This is why Psalm 130, like the Baghdad battery, is way before its time. It points directly to the ransom price paid on the cross by the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He himself redeemed us from all our iniquities. As the hymn, I was taught as a child, reminds me, there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin.

He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in. He himself paid the price of our sin. Jesus, the perfect sacrifice for us.

[24 : 14] Jesus, who went down into the depth of our sin and misery and guilt to set us free. Jesus, the Savior, for whom we have waited our whole lives through.

How plentiful and abundant the redemption price he has paid. Every drop of his blood can cleanse a universe of its sin and guilt.

We love to sing Psalm 130. We'll be doing that in a moment. Most often sung to the traditional tune, martyrdom.

But how many who have loved to sing Psalm 130 have not believed in the Lord of Psalm 130? They have underestimated their guilt and undervalued the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross.

They reckon that redemption is for others, but not for them. They don't need it. How wrong could they be? The Pharisees thought that way. And since then, millions of others have thought that way.

[25 : 16] There is only one way for our sins to be forgiven. It is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Even as we trust Him to be our Savior from sin, what He did upon the cross by paying that ransom price is applied to us.

So, we come. In the words of this psalm, crying out to God from the depth of our sin and guilt, confessing it all to Him, holding nothing back.

We come to Him recognizing that in Him, and in Him alone, there is forgiveness, redemption, and life. And then we look to the cross, and we see Him abundantly paying the price of our sin, and we cry out to Him, according to Your plentiful mercy, forgive me, O Lord, and I will live for You always.

That's where Psalm 130 leads us, from the confession of our sin to the confession of our faith.

So, I'm asking, are you ready to walk the road of Psalm 130? Amen.