The Lord Pardons the Penitant

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Preacher: Alex Cowie

[0:00] I want to turn now to the Book of Psalms this evening and to Psalm 130 on page 551 of the few Bibles.

We may just read these words. We'll read from the beginning, Out of the depths I have cried to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you that you may be feared.
I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I do hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning.
Yes, more than those who watch for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord. For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is abundant redemption.
[1:09] And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. And we want to look particularly this evening at the words in verses 3 and 4, If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with you that you may be feared. And I want us to think about this in terms of the Lord pardons the penitent, those who repent.
I want us to look into that and see man's plight and to see God's provision for man. These are the two points that we'll be looking at.
And when we say the Lord pardons the penitent, or those who turn to him, who repent of their sin, what we're saying is that they recognize that they are guilty in God's sight.
We're thinking a bit about that in the morning. They, on the one hand, recognize their guilt before God. It is something that they simply can't deal with themselves.
[2:20] They are sinners in the hands of an angry God, to quote Luther on it. And also there are those who, by faith, turn and accept God's provision of pardon.

And it's good for us to be clear on these things and to have such familiarity with them that we can talk to others about them. And we say this because religious people of all perspectives, and that down through the generations, have wrongly believed that penitence, that repentance, to acknowledge one's sin, merits God's pardon.
That's a very subtle thing, but it's totally wrong. It's unbiblical. When we say God pardons the penitent, we're not saying that people who claim to repent of their sins merit God's pardon.
We've got to be absolutely clear on that. That's not the Bible's teaching. It's not the way we are to think. God is not obliged. He's not indebted to the sinner who turns, or who claims to turn, to God for pardon.
That overthrows the whole business of God working in free and sovereign grace. God is no man's debtor.
[3:53] He's not obliged to pardon. No, what we're doing here is we're thinking about the fact that if we are truly those who receive the pardon of God, then we are truly those who have come by God's grace to accept his terms.

And we see repentance as an important part of that package. The very thought that God is indebted, God is obliged to pardon the person who claims to repent, the very thought is abhorrent to the Bible's teaching.
God is not a debtor to anyone. Rather, the Bible teaches very clearly on the subject we're looking at tonight, that God pardons the sinner freely.
He pardons the sinner unconditionally. He pardons him sovereignly by his grace. And what we have here in the psalm, and in this section we're looking at tonight, is we're looking at a writer who has discovered his own guilt and his own corruption.

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We're looking at a saved sinner, already saved, who has gone wrong and who has come to see the error of his ways.
[5:28] We thought a little bit about this earlier today, in Psalm 51, and with regard to David, king of Israel. And we're looking at something that's in a similar vein, but we're looking at it in terms of repentance and pardon received.

And what the psalm later discovered is that repentance is an ongoing thing. It's not something we claim we did once, many years ago, when we had some experience of the Lord.
But that's all in the past now. No, repentance is an ongoing thing. And the more serious we are about the things of God, the more we will recognize the importance of ongoing repentance, of recognizing our shortcoming, our guiltiness, our sin, and of seeking that pardon from the Lord that, as we were saying earlier today, restores us into the fellowship of God.
So what I want us to do, to begin with, is to consider, quite simply, man's plight in God's sight.
Man's plight in God's sight. And put in a few words, man is guilty before God. The psalm writer says, in a few words, If you should mark iniquity, O Lord, who could stand?
[7:14] And he takes us to the days of the very beginning of human history. He takes us back in his thinking to our first parents in the garden.

That's why we read in Genesis 3. We need to keep that in focus. We need to remember that that's where it all went wrong for mankind.
Our first parents sinned and fell. The serpent was no mere adder on the ground. The serpent was that being called Satan, the devil.
That old serpent, the dragon, and so on. The accuser of the brethren. And he worked in the way he worked. To deceive our first parents.
And we touched on this earlier today. Because Adam was our covenant head, he represented his posterity.
[8:22] They in him fell. That's why again, this evening we read in Romans 5. Paul is emphatic about it.

Sin entered the world by one man, and death passed upon all men, because all sinned. Well, they all sinned in Adam in his first transgression.
That's the bottom line. That's the only way we can understand it. What Adam did, what Adam did, was put to our account. We didn't ask for it.
That's true. But we can't undo it. We can't send the cheque back. It's there. And it's ours. And it's stuck to us.
With something more effective than superglue. It's in our heart. We can't get rid of it. We are transgressors in that sense.
[9:22] And there again, you remember this morning in Psalm 51, David said that he was born in sin and shaped in iniquity. He was a sinner from the womb.

He was part of the ongoing story. All sinned in Adam and fell with him in his first transgression. You remember that great evangelistic passage in the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah 53, where he's setting forth to us, yes, the plight of man in the sight of God, but he's setting forth God's provision.
And he says in verse 6, all we, like sheep, have gone astray. We have all turned, each one to his own way. So you not only have original sin, we sinned in Adam, but actual transgression.
We do our own thing. So we've got the story about original sin in Adam, and we've got actual transgression from our earliest days.
There is no one, said the psalm writer in Psalm 14, verses 1 to 3, there is no one that does righteousness, no, not one.
[10:51] And so we're in a situation, a horrid situation by nature, as we come into this world, that death has come upon all men, because all men sin, they are sinners, by nature, as well as practice.

And to say we have no sin, is to deceive ourselves. I probably told you this one before, but it struck my mind just now, and it's relevant to you. Some of you, most of you will know that Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was one of the great preachers of the 20th century.
And I remember, a story he tells in preaching and preachers, he was, to be quite frank, at this precise moment, can't mind if it was at Oxford or Cambridge, but he was preaching to the lecturers there, and to their wives, that were there, and for a special occasion.
And because he was a very well-known preacher, he was invited. And it was a wife of the then principal, came to him after the service, so to speak, it was over, they were having something like

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tea and cakes.
Anyway, she came over and she thanked him for the word, and she said, you know, she said, the thing that struck me about what you were saying is, you talk to us like we were sinners.
[12:16] sinners. And in other words, sinners didn't come and talk to them, because they were the elite. They were better. I can't go and talk to the principal and his wife and all these dons and their wives as if they were sinners.

sinners. And they were a bit smooth. But Lloyd-Jones went and he preached and taught the word of God and he called a spade a spade. He called people sinners.
And that lady came under the power of the word. And we need that. We need to see the plight of man in the sight of God.
Otherwise, we'll never be able to help others to see that too. It's important. This is in its own way back to basics.
It's reminding ourselves. You see, John says in 1 John 1 and the first part of verse 8, If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.
[13:20] And to say we have no sin means, you know, it's not that important. Well, I might be a kind of a sinner. No, you're not. You're through and through.

You're originally in the heart, from the heart, a sinner. And you're that way actually too in your behavior. We need that.
We need to come clean with God. We need to acknowledge that. That that is our plight by nature. We are sinners and we are guilty before God.
So then, when the judge, our great judge of the earth, weighs us in the balance, he finds us wanting. The Bible tips, the scales tip rather, heavily against us.
We are found wanting. Weighed in the balance and found wanting. we are in ourselves condemned.
And you see, what we are looking at here, and this is the important thing, we're looking at God's verdict and not man's verdict.
[14:34] Sometimes, you know, preachers like me get into hot water with some people because they think that I am making myself out to be perfect and I'm telling them they are wicked sinners and they are guilty before God.

And it is not the preacher at all. You are frowning. It is not the preacher. The preacher is simply telling them God's verdict. That is what matters. I don't know your heart.
You don't know mine, really. The verdict is God's verdict. We are thinking here about the plight of man in the sight of God. Lord, if you should mark iniquities, if you should weigh us in the balance, your scales, your judgment, we are found sorely and sadly wanting, guilty and condemned.
The Lord expects perfection in motive, in thought, in word and in action.
nothing else will do. And we are in an impossible position at that level. The whole world is guilty before God.
[15:53] And that has to be accepted. If we are to have acceptance with God, if we are to have a friendship, a living relationship with Him, then we have to, in the first place, recognize man's plight in God's sight.

The relationship we need with the Lord cannot depend upon what we can do. It can't depend upon us fulfilling the law's demands.
It cannot depend on us fitting ourselves for that acceptance and that relationship with God. We simply can't do it.
Now, let me add something in here, because that's not to encourage people to throw caution to the wind and to live a profligate life, to live a reckless life.
It's not saying that at all. It would be iniquitous to say that. Nobody is encouraged to be careless and selfish and self-centered.
[17:15] Not at all. It is right and proper for us to do our best for all, on all occasions that are put in our way. But we must at the same time recognize that as to gaining acceptance with God, these things will not do.

And they'll not do because we haven't begun to put the thing right. Our plight is an awful plight. In and of ourselves as sinners, we are separated from God.
I often think, and I would love it in a way, that if this message would be carried far away, the world over, and that somehow or other, celebrities would hear it, and Bill Gates would hear it, and these philanthropists that spend, I say, well done to them, spend millions indeed, billions, on the poor and

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deprived in Africa and in other places, one just praises God for that.
people who could see that it matters not a whit in establishing a relationship with God that is real and true, because the very best of motives and actions are flawed.
we are sinners originally in Adam, and actually by our transgressions. And it is so important to be clear on that.
[18:59] We need God to draw near to us and to draw us near to him. and we must clear our minds of the false ways and be settled on the true way.

And you see, the psalmist is telling us something here that is spiritually and morally helpful to us and to others whose lives we will touch.
Lord, if you should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? The psalmist, you see, is restless with his proneness to sin, restless with his natural standing before God.
He wants that change. He wants to be more consistent in his life of faith. He is not whinging, over God and God's dealings.
He is not like Cain who said, my punishment is greater than I can bear. God, that is not fair. He is not like that.
[20:20] He recognizes that his sin has to be dealt with. sin has to be sin. You remember Saul, the king, Saul, son of Kish, in the book of Samuel, you read of him, the first king of Israel.

He was a typical case of someone who had what Paul calls worldly sorrow, the sorrow of the world. He was sorrowful when he was caught out.
He was sorrowful when he was caught out. He tried to kill David again and again and again. He plotted it, he strategized, he got people to try to him in, and he tried to kill him.
And when he was found out, he was sorry. But he was sorry for himself because he was found out. That is not godly sorrow. That is not repentance unto life.
That is not the evidence that God is at work in the human heart. And you see, the psalm writer is telling us about true repentance.
[21:29] That recognizes and accepts our true condition and standing in the sight of God as sinners. We need him to come and help us.

As we were saying this morning, we need to come clean with him and to be cleansed by him. And that part of that you see is acknowledging his rights in judgment and accepting that sin in the first place is against him.
And that you see brings us to God's provision of pardon. We see man's plight in God's sight and we say, I am the man, I am the woman.
But we see to God's provision of pardon. And we must emphasize this point. He says, that there is forgiveness with you, Lord, that you may be feared.
There is forgiveness for all that all my demerit, for all that I'm not.
[22:49] Blessed be your name. There is pardon with you. His senses that were otherwise delved to the real picture have been touched by God.

And he sees the thing God's way. The trouble with us in sin, the trouble is with us when we're switched off to God, is we don't see the thing God's way.
The sinful heart devises all sorts of ways to sidestep God's provision in Christ, or to modify that provision.
Remember, going forward a wee bit here, to Paul's letter to the Galatians. The Galatian problem was a problem of Jewish thinkers who were wanting a halfway house.
They wanted to accept that Jesus was the Messiah, the Messiah of Israel, the Savior who should come. But as for establishing a right relationship with God and experiencing God's salvation, there had to be a plus.
[24:10] It was Christ plus the religious ceremonies. enemies. They wanted to add something.

And wherever the Christian church departs from the gospel way, from God's way, God's provision of pardon to those who are true penitents, wherever the church departs, it departs on this, it either subtracts from the work of Christ, or it adds to it.
And in some ways he can push it logically further and say it's all about adding to Christ's work. Christ's work is inadequate, therefore we must add to it.
And they add to it by all sorts of means. That is a distortion, a lie against the sufficiency of God's provision of pardon in Jesus the Messiah.

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I remember not terribly long ago, a couple of years ago maybe at the most, reading, it was coming up to Yom Kippur in the Jewish calendar, and I was reading the prayer book as a service for Yom Kippur, the Orthodox prayer book.
[25:31] And in that prayer book there's an interesting and revealing passage and it goes like this, we do not say before you, we are righteous.

Now listen to this, because this is revealing. We do not say before you, we are righteous and have not sinned, but verily we have sinned.
sinned. you would hardly think that would come in a service in the Jewish Orthodox Jewish prayer book. We do not say we are righteous.
See, we are taught in a general way that they are very self-righteous and so on. But they say in the prayer book at Yom Kippur, we do not say, we do not come to you and say we are righteous and we have not sinned, verily we have sinned.
And then there follows pages and pages of the confession of sins, and they are called that, and transgressions, and they are called that, and iniquities, and they are called that.
[26:43] But then, having confessed endlessly for pages, you hear these words. For all these, O God of forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, grant us remission.

What's that saying? See, what's that saying? It's taking confession of sin, it's taking an apparent repentance as the basis for God to forgive them.
You see that? And that's absolutely wrong. That's what we were saying earlier on, to make anything a ground for God pardoning us, is to say to God, okay, here's the deal, God.
I'll do this, and you'll have to do that. No amount of confession of sin merits, earns pardon.
Let's be absolutely clear on that. God has provided the way, and even from the days of the exodus, God was holding forth in the typical lamb, the Passover lamb.
[28:07] Ruth will have learned it in Sunday school, I'm sure, or from mum. Our children were taught it, we were taught it as children, exodus, how did they come out, on what basis did they come out, God provided a covering for them, get into your houses, stay in your houses, put blood on the lintel, blood on the doorposts, and stay put, and when the angel of death comes, I will see the blood, and I will pass over.

And he goes on to say, I will redeem you from the hand of the enemy. And they were brought out, it was redemption. In the book of the law, in Leviticus, when Moses was told, put all this stuff together, the sacrificial system, the priestly ministry, the altar, and all the rest, it is the blood that atones.
the blood of bulls and goats and calves. The blood of bulls and goats and calves simply purified people outwardly for the going through the worship.
But at a deeper level it was pointing forward, as we very well know, to the work of Jesus. God's provision is pardon, is forgiveness.
In modern Israeli, the word is often used when people bump into each other in the supermarket or on the street, you will hear the word slicha, very commonly used slicha.
[30:10] And they put their hands up slicha. In other words, excuse me, pardon me. The interesting thing about slicha is that it comes from the Hebrew word for pardon, for forgiveness.

It's here in our text tonight. But you see, if we bump into somebody and we ask them to pardon us, or if we've done them wrong and we ask them to pardon us, they simply choose to pardon us or not to.
God can't do that. God has to provide a way whereby he will pardon us, a way that satisfies him.
And the Bible is all drawing our attention to the way of pardon through the shed blood of Jesus.
It carried the Israelites on through succeeding centuries. It held forth the promise that at last the Saviour should come, the Redeemer, God's provision of pardon.
And you get a Jewish believer like the Apostle John saying in 1 John 4 chapter 4 and verse 10 he tells us God sent forth his Son a propitiation a means of pardon for our sins.
[32:02] And that is the way, that is God's way, God provides the provision of pardon for us. He is both priest and sacrifice and he is the only way for man to rise to God's presence.

And if we have a true spiritual repentance into life, we are conscious of the cost of pardon for us.
When we read the words, but there is forgiveness with you, there is pardon with you, there is propitiation with you, Lord, that you may be feared.
We ought to be thrilled to our hearts that God has provided for us in his sin.

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There is pardon. And as he says himself, that you may be feared, that you may be loved and served, that you may be carefully followed.
[33:16] feared. Fearing the Lord means that we have become jealous for doing things his way. And the psalm writer in this short psalm had himself gone wrong.

He tells us that the Lord took him from the depths. Out of the depths I have cried you O Lord. And if you should mark my iniquities against me, I be cast away.
But there is that provision of pardon. You have made it. And I trust the promises concerning it. We look back and we see the work done.
Well may it be that we feel something in our own hearts of the preciousness of God's provision of pardon and receiving it.
That we may be kept from recklessness and carelessness and cold heartedness and courting the ways of the world. That we would be strong in the fear of the Lord that keeps us back from chancing it in the way of the world.
[34:35] From doing wrong. And if we as we were saying earlier today if we have discovered that somehow we went wrong in the way we are to come back on his terms.

I did not stay nor linger long said the psalmist as those who sloth fuller. But he turned back to the ways of the Lord.
He came clean. He accepted his plight in God's sight. pardon. And more he accepted God's provision of pardon.
There is propitiation with you. There is that sacrifice that effectively deals with my sin so that you may be feared.
That I may serve you acceptably in my life. My dear friends, may that be true of us, may we resolve quietly in our hearts, that we recognize and accept our plight in God's sight as sinners, and that we will receive gladly and freely by his grace his provision of pardon in Christ.
[36:00] Amen.

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