

# Caleb EVans (16)

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[0:00] If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So this morning's psalm is an example of what we call a psalm of a sense.

You'll see that if you look at it in your Bibles. As best we can tell, here's what I think is the most convincing theory. These psalms were used by pilgrims back in the good old days as they were going up to Jerusalem to worship.

These psalms are particularly striking at the moment for our congregation, I think, because we have two of our members in Israel for a meeting in Jerusalem. One member on his way there today. And finally, our deacon is getting ready to go as well. So, lots of people going up to Jerusalem from Holy Trinity. When we think about the content of this psalm, what it says, and then think about how it's used.

[1:13] Basically, as the Old Testament version of a praise song, seems a little confusing to us, doesn't it? If it was used to prepare the heart for worship, why, at first glance, does it seem like such a downer?

This isn't the kind of song that people call the Christian radio station to request every hour. Where is the joy in a song whose author begins it by saying that he is drowning in deep and stormy waters, basically?

It's hard to hone in on that until we stop to realize that this psalm is a song that's in praise of a God who rescues us from out of the depths.

He, the psalmist reminds us, is a merciful, prayer-answering, steadfast, perfectly loving, forgiving, and rescuing God.

Praise his name. As we look at the psalm this morning, I want us to keep a couple of things in mind. One, what this psalm means for us as believers, what it says about what God has done and is doing in our lives, and also what it means for those we're trying to reach with the gospel.

[2:36] Those who are drowning in the depths, we might say, whether they realize they are or not. So let's open our Bibles this morning and look together at Psalm 130. We'll be going through it verse by verse.

In verse 1 we read, Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Now the psalmist begins with what I must assume, a response to a very specific trouble in his own life.

But what that is for sure, we don't really know. With some of the psalms, we're given an idea of the occasion for the psalm's writing, like David writing after committing adultery with Bathsheba, for example.

But here, the only information that we get is that it's a song of ascents, and that's really it. But I would be so bold as to say that the specific situation that the psalm was written about doesn't matter so much.

In fact, I think we can agree when we look at the content of this psalm that it describes a state we have all been in. Doesn't it?

[3:49] Have you ever been drowning in the depths or fallen into a pit? Yeah, I sure have. The truth is that everyone has been there.

The only thing is that some people realize that they've been there, and some people are there and don't know it. That's the only difference. And our sin, of course, gets us into that mess.

Every last one of us. And I'm no exception. As a minister, I sometimes get the impression, not usually from people who know me, but from people who don't, that I have always walked the straight and narrow.

People get that impression about me. But that simply isn't true. For example, I have a lot of sympathy for unbelievers because I myself used to be one.

My form of teenage rebellion wasn't the usual stuff. It was rejecting the whole categories of right and wrong and believing that there was no God.

[4:47] But I deliberately rejected him. And his law. I'm honestly surprised that at that time in my life, I didn't do far worse than I did because when you don't really believe in right and wrong, you might do anything.

But then I did that most dangerous of things. I decided on a whim to sit down and read the Bible. I realized that I was drowning in the depths and I was converted to Christ.

I cried out to God to save me. And you know how that usually goes. How that always goes. He doesn't say no. And I have to say, I am still not perfect.

Now all of you know that, I'm sure. I still sin. I think sometimes the way we present our testimonies ends up looking something like this. I was in sin.

I became a Christian and now my life is awesome and I'm a great person. Does that match anyone's real testimony? No, not so much. Reminded of what the Anglican minister and hymn writer, Augustus Toplady, who wrote Rock of Ages, had to say.

[5:58] He was thinking about his life in the past year. He says, So, I think we relate here.

Jesus brought me out of the depths, but I have to confess and admit that I rely on his grace every day to keep me from perishing in those depths he rescued me from.

What about you? So, verse 2 is a prayer we should all know well. O Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy. When you realize that your salvation depends on the mercy of a God who delights in showing mercy, that changes the way you think about things, doesn't it?

So, reading in Matthew with Mia yesterday, and we read this passage. As Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and with his disciples.

[7:24] And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? But when he heard it, he said, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

Go and learn what this means. I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. So I explained to Mia, after we read through this passage, that God loves sinners and loves saving them.

Now, for a second, she seemed surprised that Jesus would love and save the bad guys, as she put it. But then she stopped and she said, Jesus loves the bad guys, and that means he loves us.

That struck me. It's a reminder how dependent we are and always will be on the mercy of God. We call out to God for mercy, knowing that we do not deserve it.

Why do we do it? Isn't that us admitting that our hope in the Lord has nothing to do with what we deserve and instead has everything to do with who he is?

[8:36] And that's good news, because if we are being honest, we know that we all fall gravely short, don't we? The psalmist writes in verse 3, If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who can stand?

Here's a question. Could you stand in the day of judgment if God were keeping a tally of all your mistakes and gave you what you deserved? I will answer that question for each one of us if I may presume to do so.

I would say no. Of course not. Realizing this changes how we think about ourselves and about how we think about other people.

When we come to realize that we are debtors to God's mercy in Christ Jesus, when we realize that it is only God's mercy in Christ that spares us from the judgment and the condemnation we deserve, that cuts our pride to bits.

But it fills us with hope because we believe that our God is a God who justifies the ungodly, who saves the broken, who saves people like us, who saves people that so many would be tempted to write off as the bad guys.

[9:56] And if we realize that we could not stand if God marked our sins, it softens our hearts towards other people, doesn't it? John Newton, the author of the hymn Amazing Grace, had this to say.

Whoever is truly humbled will not be easily angry nor harsh or critical of others. He will be compassionate and tender to the infirmities of his fellow sinners, knowing that if there is a difference, it is grace alone which has made it.

He knows that he has the seeds of every evil in his own heart. And under all trials and afflictions, he will look to the hand of the Lord and lay his mouth in the dust, acknowledging that he suffers much less than his iniquities have deserved.

Now, Newton said that as someone who had been converted from being a worker in the slave trade, who then went on to become a gospel minister and to play an important role in the abolition of slavery in Great Britain.

Newton saw, and you can see this when you read his hymns too, by the way, that Newton saw what God had rescued him from and knew, of course, that he would not be able to stand if God were to mark iniquities.

[11 : 18] With our current focus on evangelism, we should always have a focus on evangelism, but I think you know what I mean. I want us to keep this in mind. One of the greatest impediments to evangelism, I've been doing a lot of reading on evangelism lately, one of the greatest impediments is a self-righteous attitude.

If I think I'm better than those sinners over there, those people I don't like and look down on, how likely am I to share the love of Jesus with them? Not very likely, am I?

The truth is that the worst of the worst, however we want to define that, is simply drowning in the same waters that Jesus pulled us out of. Thank God that he is merciful because that makes all the difference.

We read in verse 4, With you there is forgiveness that you may be feared. With the true and living God there is forgiveness that he may be feared.

Now at first glance, that seems a bit perplexing, doesn't it? That's puzzling. Why would you fear a loving and forgiving God? That's a head-scratcher.

[12 : 34] But when we stop and we realize that what the Bible means by fear is different from what we might mean by it, it makes more sense. In the biblical sense, fear is simply having a healthy respect for God.

It's not thinking that he's going to zap us with lightning bolts at any moment if we don't walk the straight and narrow. It's respecting him and who he is. Now, that makes the true and living God whom Christians serve different from false gods, who are temperamental and probably will zap you if you bother them, who are constantly keeping score to make sure you get what's coming to you. No. The God we serve is feared and is respected because he forgives those who call on him for mercy.

Now, on the other hand, that doesn't mean, of course, that God thinks that sin is no big deal as long as everyone has a good time. That is a common misconception of God, I think.

You've basically encountered that attitude, I'm sure, right? We like to think that our own sins aren't that serious, that God will simply overlook our little mistakes because we're not as bad as those other people, whoever we want to cast in the role of those other people that are bad.

[13 : 59] Our sins, our sins are a little bit of fun on the side, so to speak. It's others who are bad people and not us. But the scriptures are clear that God takes sin very seriously.

So seriously that the weight of our sins was borne by the Holy Son of God, Jesus Christ, including the sins that we might like to think of as no big deal.

Our only hope is that Jesus paid the debt for our sins on the cross, not that our sins aren't as bad as other people's sins. That is not our hope. That means that the best of us, and I am not in that number, by the way, but I think some of you probably are, are saved by nothing but God's mercy in Christ, and that the worst of us the worst of us can find forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ because there is forgiveness and mercy with the true and living God.

Isn't that an amazing message we have? No matter who you are, no matter what you've done, repent and believe the gospel and you will find full and free forgiveness forgiveness in Jesus and new life with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

I can tell you with absolute certainty there are lost and broken people in Syracuse who need to hear that. Don't you think so? Are you committed to telling them? Psalmist goes on in verses 5 and 6, I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I hope.

[15 : 46] My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. Why do we wait for the Lord? Why do we wait in expectation?

Because God is always trustworthy. That's the answer. His word is always true and He always does what He says He's going to do. Always. We can take that to the bench.

So for example, in Romans 8 we read, we know that for those who love God all things work together for good. For those who are called according to His purpose, for those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.

And those whom He predestined, He also called, and those whom He called, He also justified. And those whom He justified, He also glorified. Now, why that long quoting of Romans 8 on my part? To demonstrate that God always hears those who call on Him for mercy and will not stop until those who trust in Him are with Him forever.

[17 : 06] waiting on the Lord is a safe and certain thing then, isn't it? I'm certain that the Lord's faithfulness to those who call on Him for mercy is even more certain than the sun's rising in the morning.

And so, we can hope in the Lord knowing that He always keeps His promise. The psalmist writes, O Israel, hope in the Lord for with the Lord there is steadfast love and with Him is plentiful redemption. God's love for His children to you and to me is unchanging so we can trust Him. Now, it's not unusual for me to talk with fellow Christians who are struggling with assurance of salvation.

I think it's not unusual because almost every Christian has struggled with that at some point or another. When you're thinking that, you say, how can God love me as much as I fail?

Ever felt that way? And the answer is always the same. And I'm talking to someone, my sister or my brother. God knew precisely the kind of people He was saving when He decided to save us.

[18 : 31] Didn't He? Paul on Him knowing that His love is steadfast and unchanging, that His redemption is plentiful, that His grace is greater than our sin.

And so we can say what the psalmist, the psalmist writes in verse 8, He will redeem Israel from all His iniquities. He will save His people from their sins.

We have that promise. He will forgive the sins of everyone who calls on His name and will then give us the Holy Spirit to change us, to transform our lives. There are people in our city who don't know that.

I suspect that some of them would wonder at the fact that anyone, let alone God, could love them and receive them.

How do we let them know that there is forgiveness, that there is healing, that there is new life in Jesus? These 40 days of prayer for mission and evangelism, really praying about that question.

[19 : 48] How do we let people know that there is new life in Christ? This morning, let it be our prayer that God would use us who have been pulled from the depths to reach those who are still there and are struggling.

Because there is forgiveness and there is mercy with the living God. Praise His name. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.