

Out of the Depths

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Date: 07 January 2024

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[0:00] Well, as you are seated, please grab your Bibles, if you could, and turn back to Psalm 130 as we begin this series on these psalms.

So it's page 618, page 618. There's also an outline in your bulletins that you might like to use as well. Well, our psalm today starts on a rather somber note.

A cry from the depths of trouble. Perhaps a bit like seven-year-old Max Morgan, who went on holidays to England, and while visiting an old manor, ignored his mother and started climbing over the stone monument, only to fall down the hole.

There he is, stuck in the hole. He's unable to save himself. He's wearing a fireman's hat because his mother had to call the firefighters to work out how to get him out.

And the only way the firefighters could get him out was to cut the historic stone monument and pull him out. I guess that's why you're not supposed to climb on historical landmarks, are you?

[1:06] But there are much more serious and somber examples than that, aren't there, of people who are in the depths of trouble and cry out. Do you remember 2018, the Thai cave rescue, where 12 kids plus their coach couldn't save themselves, and for 17 days cried out from the depths of the cave for help until they were rescued by divers.

And of course, there are still the hostages in Gaza, some of whom are still down in tunnels, silently crying out for help.

And I say silently because those who have been released, and we thank God that more have been released recently, have said that if they didn't remain silent, they would be further mistreated.

And we continue to pray for their release and peace in that whole area, don't we? And the point is, out of the depths of their trouble, all these people cried out for help because their situation was serious and they couldn't save themselves.

And I want us to feel this, which is why there's no funny story to start with, because that's how the psalm starts. Point one, verse one. Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord.

[2:26] Lord, hear my voice. Lord, let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. This psalm is known as De Profundus, which is from the Latin of verse one, out of the depths.

And it's out of the depths that this psalmist cries out to God for help. For he knows his situation is serious, it seems, and he knows he cannot save himself.

And so what is his situation then? Is he stuck in a monument, a cave, a tunnel? Well, verse three. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?

The psalmist's situation is sin. It has to do with sin. It's why this psalm is known as one of the seven penitential or repentant psalms. But it's hard to know any more of the historical setting than this.

Whether it's Israel's exile for their sin or some sort of famine because of sin, or whether it's a particular sin of Israel's king. Whatever it was, the underlying issue is sin, which prevents him from standing before God.

[3:40] It's why the psalm is probably included as one of the songs of ascents. Do you see the title under Psalm 130? That's part of the original Hebrew Bible. There are 15 songs of ascents in the Psalter.

Psalms 120 to 134. Perhaps the most famous is 121. You know, I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? And they were probably sung as Israel journeyed up or ascended, hence songs of ascents, to the temple at Jerusalem for one of the three annual festivals.

And as they headed up to the temple, it would have been natural to think, well, who can stand before God at the temple? Who could come into the presence of God, enjoy relationship with God, and blessings from God?

And for the psalmist, this is more serious than any other situation. After all, it's the only thing he mentions, doesn't it? There's no mention of famine or any other sort of suffering.

For him, this is the most serious thing. Even more serious, dare I say it, of being held hostage in a tunnel.

[4:55] As unimaginable as that is. I don't want to take away from that. I mean, which would you say is more serious, being hostages in Gaza or sinners before God?

We want to say both, don't we? And yes, both are unbearable, aren't they? And yes, both would mean hell, wouldn't they?

But only one leads to eternal hell, doesn't it? And yet, we often don't treat sin this seriously, do we? But the psalmist does. He knows no one could confidently stand before God at the temple because of their sin.

No one could confidently enter his presence and enjoy his blessings. I mean, is anyone good enough to confidently become before God? Would you be confident to stand before God?

But the great news is, we can be. We've already given a hint of this at the start of verse 3, and it's confirmed in verse 4. So, have a look at verse 3 to 4.

[5:55] We're at point 2 now. Verse 3 to 4. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

Now, what's the first word in verse 3? It's the word, if. The word, if, implies conditional or hypothetical situation. It says, if God kept a record of wrongs, then we'd all be goners.

But the implication is, he doesn't keep a record of wrongs, so we can all be standers. We can stand before him in relationship with him, enjoy blessings from him.

And verse 4 confirms this. For it goes on to say, for or but, there is forgiveness with God. It's why the psalmist cries out to God in the first place, because he knows this.

With God there is forgiveness. Now, I know that you know this. I know that you've heard this oodles of times before. But we mustn't forget the sweet relief of this.

[7:11] For if the depth of sin's situation is worse than the depth of being down a cave or a tunnel, then should not the relief of being saved from it be even greater too?

So much so that it should move us to serve him who forgives us. Do you see the purpose of forgiveness in verse 4?

With God there is forgiveness, so that, with reverence, we can serve him. You see, without forgiveness, we cannot be in relationship with God, where he helps us and guides us, and we serve him.

But with forgiveness, we can be. But this forgiveness not only enables us to serve God, it not only enables us to come in relationship with God, it should also motivate us to serve him with reverence.

In fact, it literally says, so that we may fear him, be motivated to treat him with affection at all. It's like that saying that I showed you a little while ago.

- [8:23] The fear of the Lord is that humble and affectionate awe by which the child of God bends themselves carefully to their father's law.

To fear God means to humbly or reverently, to affectionately or gratefully serve him, all because he has forgiven us.

And yet it seems the psalmist doesn't yet know God's forgiveness. For he now says he will wait for it. Point 3, verse 5.

He says, I wait for the Lord. My whole being waits. And in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord. More than watchmen wait for the morning.

More than watchmen wait for the morning. I hear the psalmist has stopped addressing God, talking to him in terms of you. And now he seems to be speaking to himself or perhaps to Israel.

- [9:22] And he says he'll wait for God. That is, he'll wait for God's forgiveness. But notice there's an eagerness to it, both in terms of being confident of it and a longing for it.

And we've already seen his confidence in verse 4, haven't we? Where he says, with God there is forgiveness. I mean, that's a statement of confidence, isn't it? It's why in verse 5 he puts his hope in God's word.

Because God's word points to God's character. Where he does forgive. But we also see his longingness in verse 5 too. Notice at the beginning of verse 5 he says, I wait for the Lord.

My whole being waits. Isn't that not a statement of longingness? His whole being is waiting for it.

It's why in verse 6 the watchman makes such a good illustration. He says he waits for the Lord's forgiveness more than watchmen wait for the morning. And had a watchman wait for the morning. Well, not just confidently, knowing that the morning will come, but also longingly.

- [10:32] Because it means they've had another night of safety. It means they can now knock off work and let the day shift keep watch now. They can go and sleep. So the psalmist waits like this even more so.

That's how eager he is for God's forgiveness. Because that's how much it matters to him. You see, we are often eager for the things that matter to us. The things we value, aren't we?

Whether it's good news from our doctor or the arrival of some order. I mean, to use a silly example, just last week, the week before actually, I ran out of coffee beans.

It was horrific. I had ordered some earlier that week and even paid for express post to get it before New Year's Eve because I knew it would be a long weekend.

But the coffee place posted them late. And so they sat at Australia Post all long weekend. It's probably why I was so tired last Sunday. But by Tuesday last week, the day after Newsday, I got an email to say that they were coming today.

- [11:37] And so I was waiting for them eagerly. I was even looking out the window like the watchman waiting for the morning. Why? Because they mattered to me.

Does forgiveness matter this much? In fact, it should matter a whole lot more than coffee beans, shouldn't it? Or has our familiarity with it meant we've forgotten the importance of it or perhaps even devalued it compared to other things in our life?

Not for the psalmist. It matters to him. It's valuable to him. So he waits for it eagerly, confidently and longingly. And he encourages Israel to similarly hope in the Lord too.

Verse 7 and 8. 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.

Just as he puts hope in God's word that speaks of God's character, so he tells Israel to put their hope in God and his character. His character of unfailing love and full redemption.

[12:53] The Hebrew word for unfailing love here is that word *hesed*, which refers to God's abounding, overflowing love. It's a love that is literally out of this world.

We don't see it in this world. And the words for full redemption are elsewhere translated as God's plentiful redemption or as the hymn we just sung, which is based on this psalm, says *plenteous* redemption.

Abounding love and *plenteous* redemption. How good is our God? It's a great way to start the new year remembering his character.

And it's his character, which is why Israel can be confident of forgiveness too. Not just for some sins, but notice at the end of verse 8, for how many sins?

From all their sins. This psalm that started in the depths and sounded rather disheartening, somber, well, the psalm ends out of the depths and ends very heartening, doesn't it?

[13:59] Of course, for us, we can see God's abounding love and plentiful redemption even more clearly in Christ, can't we? As we heard in our second reading, we were once dead in transgressions, in the depths of spiritual deadness, even before we could cry out to God for help.

He worked in us, gave us faith, and forgave us. Why? Or remember what verse 4 of our second reading said? Because of his great love for us.

It's because of his great love, his *hesed*, his abounding love, that we know his forgiveness, his redemption. As the Apostle Paul puts it elsewhere, we also know Christ's redemption.

So he says, God has rescued us from the dominion, the depths of darkness, and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, *plenteous* redemption, and the forgiveness of sins.

You see, it's in Christ we see God's abounding love and plentiful redemption, even more clearly. And so it's in Christ we are to put our hope.

[15:07] As the Psalmist told Israel, it's in Christ we are to put our trust. In fact, the Psalmist said he put his hope in God's word. Well, Christ is. God's word become flesh.

That was Christmas, wasn't it? The Psalmist told Israel to put their hope in God himself. Well, Christ is. God himself with us. Emmanuel.

I mean, that was Christmas too, wasn't it? And so it's in Christ that we are to put our hope, our faith, our trust. And so have you. Because if you haven't, then you won't be able to stand before God now to enjoy relationship with him, nor on that last day when we'll all have to give an answer to him.

So do put your hope and trust in Christ Jesus. And for us who have, then this Psalm ends on an even more heartening note for us than the Psalmist. If you like, there's a key change.

It's kind of like when Bruce plays the organ. You always know when the last verse of the hymn is because there's that musical interlude where he repeats or goes up a key.

[16:19] I think that's a key change. Is that what it's called? Yes, thank you, Joy. She's nodding. It's all above my pay grade. I just sing and enjoy. But that's what this Psalm is like for us who know Christ.

It goes up a key because we don't have to wait for God's forgiveness like the Psalmists. No, no. We already have God's forgiveness in Christ, don't we?

It's kind of like my coffee beans again. Last Tuesday, the package arrived. So it's already here, isn't it? It's already in my cupboard and so I can put some beans in my machine and enjoy them anytime I like.

Well, so too with God's forgiveness. It has already arrived in Christ. And so we can pray for forgiveness and enjoy it anytime we like. And so do we?

Do we make the most of the forgiveness we already have in Christ or do we kind of leave it sitting in the cupboard? Perhaps we don't pray for forgiveness very often because we think our sin is too bad that it can't be forgiven or more likely, I suspect, because this is what I sometimes think, my sin isn't that bad that it really needs forgiving.

[17:35] But either way, we're to make the most of God's forgiveness that he's already given us in Christ. And we're going to do that later in our service. And secondly, since we already have this forgiveness, then we have even more reason to serve God than the psalmist.

Remember verse 4 of the psalm? With you there is forgiveness so that with reverence we may serve you, it says. So that we might be moved to reverently and humbly, affectionately and gratefully serve God.

As we heard in our second reading, we are saved by grace to do good works, which God has prepared for us to do, to serve God his way. Or again, as the Apostle Paul puts it in Romans chapter 12, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, his love, his redemption, his forgiveness, to what?

To offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. In other words, to serve God. After Max was saved from the depths of the monument, he sat in his ambulance and before that he apparently hugged his mother with affection and said from now on he'd always listen to her.

Not just to stay safe in the future, but because she had saved him by calling the firefighters. Now, I don't know how long Max's obedience lasted, but his response to being saved out of the depths of his situation was to fear his mum with affection and obedience, if you like.

[19:13] Well, how much more so us? If we understand the depths of sin that we were in and the abounding love and plentiful redemption that brought us forgiveness, then it will move us to serve God afresh this new year, won't it?

Our service this year may look different to last year depending on our situation and our circumstances, but will you commit yourselves afresh this year to serving him who has forgiven us?

As one of my favourite hymns says, love so amazing, so divine, it demands my life, my soul, my... Let's pray and then we'll sing that hymn.

Our gracious Father, we thank you for this reminder this morning that with you there is forgiveness, forgiveness, that we might be enabled and motivated to serve you.

Help us, we pray, not to let our familiarity with forgiveness stop us from asking you for it nor serving you because of it.

[20:26] But help us, we pray, to make the most of it that we have in the Lord Jesus. We ask it in his name. Amen. Amen.