

Sin and Its Solution

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[0 : 00] Psalm 130. And we are continuing a sermon series that we are in, In the Psalms of Ascents.

And the Psalms of Ascents are 15 psalms that run from Psalm 120 to Psalm 134. And these are the Psalms that we are told the children of Israel would sing as they made their annual pilgrimages from wherever they lived in the Promised Land up to Jerusalem.

These songs carried them and accompanied them as they went up to worship. And the reason we are studying them is that we get to see what they thought about as they journeyed.

How they thought about God. How they thought about life. How they thought about themselves and their sin. And God's mercy. And so we are praying that God will benefit our souls as we work our way through the Psalms of Ascents.

And we are now, as I said, in Psalm 130. So please follow along. If you are here and don't have a Bible, we have some Bibles under the chairs.

[1 : 13] It's on page 518. And please follow along as I read. Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

O Lord, hear my voice. Let your heirs be attentive to the voice of my pleas from mercy. If you, Lord, should mock iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

But with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared. I wait for the Lord. I wait for the Lord. My soul waits. And in his word I hope.

My soul waits for the Lord more than the watchman for the morning. More than the watchman for the morning. O Israel. Hope in the Lord.

For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

[2 : 23] Let's pray. Lord, we bow our hearts this morning before the God whom the psalmist and the pilgrims who were with him worshipped as they made their way to Jerusalem.

Would you speak to our hearts from this ancient psalm? Would you cause us, O Lord, to be affected by it as we should?

But, Lord, more importantly, would you help us to respond to it as you'd have us to? Lord, I pray that you would grant me mercy in preaching.

Grant us all mercy in hearing. May you be glorified through the preaching of your word this morning. In Christ's name we pray.

Amen. As we consider Psalm 130 this morning, I think it's helpful to contrast it with Psalm 129 that we considered last week.

[3 : 38] And if you were here last week, you'd remember that in Psalm 129, the psalmist is focused on the problem of his enemies, the problem of those who are hostile towards him, afflicting him and persecuting him.

It was as if the psalmist was pointing his finger and saying, they're the problem. Persistently, he said, from my youth, they were persecuting me.

But when we come to Psalm 130, the focus is different. In Psalm 130, the psalmist is not looking outside of this problem, but instead he's looking within at his problem, and his problem is with himself.

And his problem is sin. But as we see in Psalm 130, what the psalmist was writing about was not unique to him.

What the psalmist was writing about was the reality of sin and the human condition. And so it's no surprise that this psalm, though written by an individual, made its way in the songbook of songs that God's people would sing as they made their way to Jerusalem, because it applied to all of them.

[5 : 02] It was written by one of them, but it applied to all of them. And friends, I say to us this morning, it applies to all of us, because we are a part of the human condition. I think it's useful to point out that this psalm is also the sixth of seven penitential psalms, psalms of repentance that we find in the psalms.

And for those who are taking notes, the other six of them are psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, which I know many of us know, where David had committed adultery and he was repenting before the Lord. Then psalms 102 and 143. And again, I think it's instructive to us and for us to see that one of the penitential psalms made its way in the songbook.

That God's children used as they made their way to Jerusalem. They were thinking about God and they were thinking about their sin and the depth of it and the reality of it.

My prayer for us this morning is that as we consider this psalm, we will better understand why. So what is Psalm 130 about?

[6 : 29] Psalm 130 is about our problem of sin and God's solution for it. So let's consider the message of Psalm 130.

And this morning I have two simple points, which is helpful since we don't have the projection. Two very simple points. The first is our problem with sin. Psalm 130 begins with the words, Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my plea for mercy. When we read these opening words of Psalm 130, it's easy to think that the psalmist is facing one of the life circumstances, one of the crises that we face in life from time to time.

Perhaps the death of a loved one. This week, just a few days ago, I heard the sad news of the passing of my former youth pastor's wife.

They'd been married 55 years and she passed away and I called them and I could hear the grief. I could hear the anguish and the brokenness of his soul.

[7 : 56] And he's alone in the house now and I could imagine that as the weight of that rests on him, he would be saying, God have mercy. Those opening words of the psalmist in Psalm 130 might also be the words of someone who is sick, someone who is dealing with pain from which they seek relief that is long in coming.

Some of you are aware that two weeks ago I wasn't feeling well and I was painful at times and while I was pretty sure I wasn't going to die, it felt like I was going to die and that's because your pastor don't do pain well.

I don't do pain. And I must say, you know, I was up one evening and all kinds of thoughts were running through my mind and one of the thoughts that came to my mind is I respect women.

Because I knew that the pain I was feeling was nothing like childbirth. And I honestly, I grew in my respect. Not just, and especially not those who just have one child, but more than one.

I mean, the first one may surprise you, but not after. The first one you go again, I mean, I disrespect women because I don't do pain. I cry out, God have mercy. I did.

[9 : 22] I, Lord, have mercy. But there are other situations and maybe you have faced them that overwhelm us, that bring anguish in our soul, that cause our days to feel short and our nights to feel long.

maybe it's divorce, maybe it's financial reverse, maybe it's some other debilitating circumstance that cause you to cry out, God have mercy.

What is interesting is when we look at Psalm 130, the psalmist is not overwhelmed by any of those kinds of situations. The psalmist instead is overwhelmed by his sin.

He is overwhelmed by his sin that has brought him to the depths, that has caused him to cry out, O Lord, have mercy. In Psalm 51, one of the other penitential psalms, the heading of it reads as follows, To the choir master, a psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went into him after he had gone into Bathsheba.

And so we know the context of Psalm 51, we know all that happened. We know what David was repenting about. We know the big sins he was certainly repenting about. He was repenting about many sins, but certainly about the sins of adultery and murder and deceit and pride and dishonesty.

[11 : 19] But when we come to Psalm 130, we're not told, we don't have a superscription that tells us what this psalm is about and why the psalmist found himself in the condition in which he found himself.

We don't know what the sin or the sins were that the psalmist was in the depths concerning. And the reason we're not told is it doesn't matter.

And it shouldn't matter. The deceased preacher and theologian William Plummer, whose commentary on Psalm 130 has been helpful to me in preparing this sermon, he insightfully tells us why the sin or the sins of the psalmist in Psalm 130 don't really matter and shouldn't matter to us what they are.

he writes, there is no kind or degree of sin which may not lead us into its depths.

See, one of our tendencies is to think, well, what is that sin? And we really say, why want to avoid that sin? Because that takes you into the depths. William Plummer insightfully says, no, no, no.

[12:39] He says, there is no kind or degree of sin which may not lead us into its depths. So it matters not what sin or sins the psalmist in Psalm 130 was facing.

There is no sin. No degree of sin that may not lead us into its depths.

And I think this is important for us to understand because again, we can try to avoid what we consider the major sins like David in Psalm 51. one. But friends, whenever we are flippant or we are cozy about any sin, it's a sign of deception.

It's a sign that we don't understand that any sin, any degree of sin may take us into its depths. It is the mercy of God that oftentimes we don't find ourselves in the depths.

but it doesn't change the fact that any sin or degree of sin may take us into its engulfing depths.

Plummer goes on to say this, but there are no depths of outward affliction or mental depression known to the penitent, to the one who is repentant from which he may not cry unto the Lord to have mercy.

[14:09] And friends, that's good news. That's good news that no matter what the sin is or sins are that has brought us into the depths, no matter what our circumstance in outward affliction or mental anguish, from wherever we find ourselves, we may cry out to the Lord to have mercy.

in verse three, the psalmist asks an important question that all of us need to consider. He asks, if you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

To mark iniquities is to keep a running record of sins. It's to mark them all down. And no sin escapes the list.

It is not just the deeds we do, it's the thoughts we have and the motives we have that are sinful. All of them. He says, Lord, if you were to just take a running record of all of our sins, Lord, who could stand?

As I was preparing this sermon, I remembered a number of years ago when I did prison ministry, I met a young man in prison, and he had been in prison quite a bit, and he came out and somehow found me, and I was doing some work at home, work in the yard, and he needed some work, so I said, well, you can come and help me for a few days, but he needed to get employed, and his big concern was his police record, and so he was telling me, you know, he has a record, and he doesn't know that's going to work, and he asked me to pray with him, and so I certainly prayed that the Lord would have mercy and give him favor with someone who, knowing his record, would still give him employment, and I remembered the day after he had requested this police record, and he got the police record, I was in the yard before he arrived, and I saw him coming, and he was beaming, he said, Pastor Moss, the Lord is so good, I said, what happened?

[16:25] I said, you wouldn't believe it, so I get my police record, so I said, really? He said, Pastor Moss said, look at this, it's only two pages, he said, Norm, it's beat three, he said, he said, God, take that one page off, I don't know if it was God or just a merciful officer who did something to help him out, but it's the first time in my life, I've ever seen a police record on full eight and a half by eleven paper, never seen it, every time it's those short pieces of paper, his was full two pages, and he was happy, but I wonder, I wonder if God were to give us our record, I wonder if God was from the day we were born, every single sin, every sin, thought, I mean, even when you were in the crib, you were dry, and you were crying because you wanted your mother's attention,

I mean, all of those, you just put them all there, and we go to get our police record. I thought about that, I think, using a bit of license this morning, we would all, at least, let me speak for myself, I think I would get my police record on one of those external drives, the one with many terabytes, because I don't think it would be worth it to put it on paper.

And I think, to be honest, most of us would say, you know, our records would be long. But here's the thing, even if your record isn't very, very long, if there's just one sin on it, you can't stand.

stand. You can't stand. And so when the psalmist asked this question in verse 3, when he says, if you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

The answer to that question is no one. No one who has ever lived, no one who is living, no one who will ever live will be able to stand.

[18 : 44] sin. Because even one sin before a holy God brings us under condemnation. He cannot countenance even the smallest singular sin.

And friends, that is our problem. Our problem is we are all sinners who sin against our Lord and our Creator and we do it for the entirety of our lives on this earth.

And that's bad news. That's bad news because it's before a holy God that we stand and against the holy God whom we have sinned.

But there's good news. And the psalmist shares the good news in verse 4. He writes, but with you there's forgiveness that you may be fared.

And this brings me to my second and final point. In verse 4, the psalmist answers the question that he posed in verse 3.

[20 : 01] The question he posed in verse 3 is, oh Lord, if you were to mark iniquities, oh Lord, who could stand? And then he says, but with you there's forgiveness that you may be fared.

And the whole idea is that for those who are the people of God, they don't have that running record because God forgives.

And that record doesn't continue to run because God forgives. and this is good news.

This is amazingly good news. But it isn't good news if we gloss over our sin and we think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think.

Jesus told the parable that's recorded in Luke 18 where he talked about two men who went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and he lifted his eyes to heaven and he prayed, oh Lord, I thank you that I'm not like other men and I'm not like this publican.

[21 : 17] And he began to recount all the things that he did. He tithed and he prayed not once a week, which the Pharisees had imposed, he did it twice a week.

And then Jesus said, but the tax collector, he stood afar off and he beat his chest and wouldn't lift his head to heaven and he prayed seven words, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

And Jesus said the one who went away justified was the tax collector. Friends, good news is only really good news to those who understand their condition before a holy God.

If we do not understand that those who sin against God are objects of his wrath and stand in the full view of his judgment, then it is not good news to hear that there's forgiveness with the Lord because as far as you're concerned, you're like the Pharisee, you don't need forgiveness.

But when we recognize that we are utterly helpless and we are deeply in need of mercy and that only the one against whom we have sinned can forgive us, this becomes utterly good news.

[23 : 02] Why does the Lord forgive us? Well, the psalmist tells us, he says, he does it, in the latter part of verse 4, he does it that he might be fared, not in the sense of terror, but in the sense of reverence, in the sense of reverential worship, in the sense that we know that we don't deserve the mercy that God has given to us.

We deserve wrath, and there is a consequential reverence to God knowing that it isn't that he, like the young man I talked about, some things just fell through the cracks.

No, he forgives. He forgave. And that's the only reason that our sins are not stacked up against us and stand against us and make us objects of the wrath of God.

And friends, when we understand that, we want to reverentially worship the Lord. God's God's love. But the psalmist is clearly aware of this, but it seems, when we look at the language in verses 5 and 6, it seems that although the psalmist knows the Lord is forgiving, knows the Lord is merciful, it appears that the situation over which he was repenting, that though he had objectively been forgiven, subjectively he did not feel that in his soul.

[24 : 33] Subjectively he doesn't sense that, and so he writes in verses 5 and 6, I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope.

My soul waits for the Lord more than the watchman for the morning, more than the watchman for the morning. The psalmist is desiring to experience in his soul the blessed assurance of forgiveness and being right with God.

He's hoping in God's word, hoping in the promises in God's word, but there is in his soul this subjective sense of the weight of his sin and the guilt and perhaps the shame of it, and he is saying,

I'm waiting for God to come to me.

I'm waiting for God to really touch me and my soul. And I think if you've served the Lord long enough, you perhaps know what the psalmist is experiencing.

If you have sinned, and you have disappointed the Lord, and perhaps even disappointed yourself, and you've asked for forgiveness, and based on the objective truth of God's word, you are forgiven. [25 : 49] He says you confess your sins, he's faithful and just to forgive you of your sins. And that's true, that's objective truth. But there's a subjective experience, there's a subjective reality that we all long for.

We want to know the objective truth, but we want to sense it in our souls as well. And it seems like the psalmist in this moment was not sensing that, and he was waiting for the Lord to come to him. He was so eager to sense it in his soul, he says, I wait for the Lord. He says, I eagerly like a watchman who is in the peril of night, longing for the morning to come, waiting for the morning to come.

He says, I eagerly wait for the Lord. Friends, we don't wait for God's actual forgiveness like this. God doesn't say, sit here, and when I come back, I'm going to forgive you.

No, when we confess our sins, he forgives us. But there is a vacuum in our souls. There's a vacuum that only can be filled with the presence and the nearness of God, and that is what the psalmist was desiring.

[26 : 58] And friends, that's what sin does in our lives. It brings distance between us and the Lord. And even those times when he forgives us because he holds to his word, and he acts upon his word, and he fulfills his word, there is that emptiness, that distance.

The vacuum of the presence of God. And the psalmist was longing for that, crying out, oh God, draw near. I wait.

I wait for you. It's interesting when you see there's a transition in verse 7 that the psalmist now turns from himself, and he turns to Israel, and he's in a sense taking his whole experience and commending it to Israel, and he's saying to them in verse 7, oh Israel, hope in the Lord.

Notice that with the same exclamation that he lamented over the depths of his sin, crying out to the Lord, he now, with that same exclamation, commends this gracious and merciful God to Israel. He says to them, for with the Lord there is steadfast love. steadfast love. This term steadfast love means covenant love. Covenant love is the love that God sets on his people whom he has redeemed.

[28 : 34] It is a love that never ends. It is a love that loves in spite of. It is a love that cannot be broken. It is a love that God sets upon his children irrevocably.

The psalmist says, with the Lord is that kind of love. It's not a performance love. It is a covenant love.

And here the psalmist is speaking as a covenant child. A covenant child of the Lord who has found himself engulfed in his sin, in the depths of his sin, and yet he's able to say this is true of the Lord. He loves me with a steadfast love. And therefore he and all Israel can hope in the Lord.

The other reason the psalmist cares for hoping in the Lord, he says, with the Lord there's plentiful redemption. redemption. I want you to see something in this passage that he doesn't say there's plentiful forgiveness.

[29 : 51] He uses a different word. The psalmist was obviously familiar with forgiveness. He knew God forgives. He says, God, if you don't forgive, who can stand?

He's acquainted with that. But he comes to something else now. He says, with the Lord there's plentiful redemption. The New International Version says, with the Lord there's complete redemption.

What the psalmist is doing is the psalmist is now getting to the root issue. The root issue of sin is our need for redemption.

Not just for forgiveness but for redemption because really, redemption is the foundation that makes forgiveness possible. Redemption is the release.

It is the paying of the price to bring one from bondage. Bondage to whatever it might be. And to redeem, a person has to either be very strong or very rich.

[30 : 56] To redeem one who is in bondage. And the psalmist says in verse 8, God will redeem Israel referring to all the people of God.

He'll redeem Israel from all his iniquities no matter what those iniquities are. No matter how hideous. No matter how many.

He says he will redeem Israel from all of that. What did the psalmist have in mind when he said that?

What did he have in mind when he said the Lord will redeem his people from all of their iniquities? Clearly, he didn't have in view the system that he knew which was the law and the sacrifices.

He didn't have that in view. That had been around for a few thousand years at that point. The psalmist knew there was something more. The psalmist knew there was something more.

[32 : 05] Did he know what that more was? I don't think so. But under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the psalmist says that God will redeem Israel from all of his iniquities.

The apostle Peter gives us some insight into what the psalmist would have been experiencing in 1 Peter 1 verses 10-12.

Listen to what he writes. Concerning the salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be ours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven things which angels long to look into.

The psalmist unknowingly but under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was pointing to Jesus Christ the true and perfect Lamb whose sacrificial death would pay the price of full redemption to redeem God's people from all of their sins.

[33 : 32] The psalmist was looking forward in faith to that. We look back in faith on it. He was looking forward in faith to that though with a blur, though not fully understanding, but he had the conviction and he had the assurance that he could say God would redeem Israel from all of his sins.

And Christ has now come and Christ has paid the full price of redemption so that God's people may be set free from the bondage of sin.

And that's why those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ do not have a record against them. It's the only reason our record is not stacked up against us.

Because Christ has paid the price. Because God can forgive us because the price has been paid. If God simply just forgave us in a vacuum and there's no price that is paid, then God is unjust because he's ignoring his own law.

And even under the old covenant, when God forgave, God was forgiving almost on a credit as it were. He wasn't forgiving on thin air.

[34 : 48] He was forgiving on the basis that Jesus Christ, the one who foreshadowed before the foundation of the world to be slain for sin, was on that basis that he could forgive sin and he could forgive sinners.

Otherwise, friends, our record would be stacked against us and none of us could stand. If we belong to Christ, our sins have been forgiven in Christ.

And so if you've been, if you've trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, your record of sin has been forgiven in Christ, it matters not how you feel about it, it matters not what you think about it, it matters not that you may even experience what the psalmist was experiencing in Psalm 130, where in his soul he did not experience the subjective reality of that objective truth of forgiveness, there is no record of sin to stand against those who have trusted in Christ and those who have been forgiven.

when they stand before a holy God uncondemned. That's good news. But if you're here this morning or you're listening by live stream and you have not trusted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, friends, your record of sin is stacked against you.

Your record of every sinful act, every sinful thought, every sinful motivation, sins you know and sins you do not know, they stand in judgment against you before a holy God.

[36 : 39] And the only proper response of a holy God to that is wrath. Any other response would besmirch his holiness.

forgiveness. It is the only proper response for a holy God to pour out his wrath upon sin.

And that is the sad circumstance of every person who is not trusted in Jesus Christ. In a sense, what you're saying is I'll stand before God and give my own defense.

When seeing rightly, understanding our lack of righteousness, we throw ourselves on his mercy because of Jesus.

And so this morning, with every bit of awareness and strength in my soul, I say to you, come to Jesus.

[37 : 59] He's our only hope. He's our only hope to deal with this record that is against us. believe the good news of the gospel.

The Bible says those who come to Jesus, he will not turn away. It matters not what you've done. It matters not who you are. All that matters is that you come to Jesus, bring all your sin, and he will abundantly pardon, without exception.

exception. The late Dr. R.C. Sproul, he said something that has stayed with me for many, many years.

He said, oftentimes you hear people say, if you stood before God and God said to you, why should I let you into heaven? what would you say?

He said, just assuming that that question is asked of us, said, if you stand before God and he says to you, why should I let you into heaven?

[39 : 12] He said, the right response is this, you shouldn't. I deserve to go to hell. But, your word says, that you will receive and forgive all those who put their trust in Jesus.

I put my trust in Jesus and it is because of Jesus that you should accept me into heaven. Friends, Jesus was a perfect substitute for sinners.

And that is why God is able to accept sinners only because he was perfect, he was sinless, and he died in the stead of sinners who deserve wrath and judgment.

And so I plead with you this morning, come to Jesus and you will find mercy and grace and pardon that the psalmist writes about and celebrates in this psalm when he says, you will find with the Lord this plentiful redemption because he redeems Israel from all their sins.

Let's pray together. Oh, Father, we bow our hearts this morning knowing that the words of the psalmist are true, that if you were to keep a record of sin, who could stand?

[40 : 42] But Lord, we thank you that with you there is forgiveness. Thank you, Lord, for those present who have come to know that forgiveness. I thank you for others who are present, though they don't know that forgiveness, they hear the gospel and, oh God, have mercy.

Convict of sin, convict of righteousness, convict of judgment. And Lord, I pray that you would bring sinners to yourself.

And may we all rejoice in the mercy that comes to undeserving sinners. We pray and ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.