

Advent in the Psalms: Guilt

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[0 : 00] Our scripture reading is Psalm 130 verses 1-8. 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 pleas for mercy.

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who should stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits.

And his word I hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen 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. Here ends today's reading. Once again, it is good for us to be together on the second Sunday of Advent.

And this morning we are continuing our sermon series, which we've titled Advent in the Psalms. Advent. The word Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means coming or arrival.

[1 : 16] But Advent is also the English translation of the Greek word *parousia*, which is a word that we find frequently in the New Testament, and it speaks about the second coming of Christ.

And so Advent is about looking in two directions. It is looking back to the first coming of Christ, but it's also looking forward to the second coming of Christ.

We can think of it in terms of commemorating the first coming and then anticipating the second coming. In the first coming, Christ came as Savior, and the second coming, and the second coming he will come as judge.

And so on this second Sunday of Advent, we continue to embrace this season of reflection, this season of preparation, that really positions us to celebrate Christmas in the midst of many distractions that will be around us.

Last Sunday, Brother Lyndon did an excellent job preaching from Psalm 51, and this morning we are considering Psalm 130. So what does Psalm 130 have to say to us about Christ's coming into the world as Savior and his return to the world as judge?

[2 : 56] That's a question that I will seek to answer in this morning's sermon, but first let's pray, asking for the Lord's help. Father, we bow our hearts this morning, thanking you for bringing us to this place.

Lord, you have ultimately brought us to this place in your providence that we might hear and experience all that we will hear and experience in this day.

Would you join air to us, Lord? Lord, you know what we need collectively and individually. So would you cause us to hear as we ought and then to respond as we ought.

Lord, will you anoint me with your spirit that I would be faithful to your word and I will be profitable to all those who hear. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, to help you follow along with the sermon, and in case you wish to take notes, I have organized a sermon around two points. And these two points communicate what we see the psalmist doing in Psalm 130.

[4 : 20] The first point is we see the psalmist lamenting over sin. That's what he's doing in verses 1 to 4. The psalms as a whole contain a good number of psalms that are referred to as psalms of lament.

And in these psalms of lament, we often find the psalmist lamenting over the problem of the enemies of God's people, oppressing them and afflicting them and persecuting them.

Psalm 130 is one of those psalms of lament, but it's different. It's different from the other typical psalms of lament that we find in the psalms.

Psalm 130 is a different psalm of lament because in it, the psalmist is not focused externally. He is not lamenting because enemies were afflicting the people of God, persecuting the people of God.

Instead, the focus of the psalmist in Psalm 130 is internal. It's not external. In Psalm 130, we see the psalmist looking within himself at his problem.

[5 : 53] And the problem that the psalmist faces is the problem of his sin and the weight of the guilt that it brings. And so in Psalm 130, he is lamenting and pouring out his sin-weary soul before the Lord.

But the problem with sin is not a unique problem for the psalmist. Indeed, the problem with sin is a part of the human condition.

It's a problem that we all face. Sometimes you can read a particular psalm and you may find the psalmist addressing something and you don't identify with it.

But friends, what the psalmist is addressing in this psalm comes home to all of us. It's no surprise that although the psalmist writes this psalm from a personal perspective, it became incorporated in the psalms of ascents.

This group of psalms, Psalm 120 to Psalm 134, 15 psalms that the children of Israel would sing as they would make their three times per year pilgrimages to Jerusalem to worship the Lord.

[7 : 13] And this would be one of the psalms that they would sing. It became a community psalm because this issue of sin is not a personal issue that was isolated to the psalmist.

It is an issue of all of God's people. The whole community of God is called to embrace this particular psalm. Look again at the opening words of Psalm 130.

The psalmist writes, 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.

On the face of these words in verses 1 and 2, it's easy to think that the psalmist is facing some major life crisis. Like some of the crises we sometimes face when our soul is overwhelmed and the griefs and burdens of life overtake us.

Perhaps the death of a loved one and the overwhelming grief and burden it brings to our souls. Or perhaps illness. These opening words of the psalmist could easily be the cry of someone who is facing a debilitating illness.

[8 : 31] They're dealing with pain that just cannot be addressed and just cannot be managed and they get no relief. As I was preparing, I reflected over the years of the times that I've been around people who are very, very ill, severely ill.

And I've heard them cry out in prayer, believers, asking the Lord to have mercy. No doubt some of you have experienced such illnesses where all we can do is say, Lord, have mercy.

Or maybe it's some other situation. But I believe all of us have lived long enough in this fallen, broken world where we have experienced overwhelming grief and difficulty where days fell short and nights long and all we could do is cry out and say, Lord, would you have mercy again and again.

But here in Psalm 130, the psalmist is not crying out to the Lord to have mercy because of the death of a loved one or debilitating illness or painful divorce or a financial reversal.

None of that. Instead, we see the psalmist in Psalm 130 being overwhelmed by sin that brought him to the depths and caused him to cry out to the Lord for mercy.

[10 : 04] Last Sunday, Brother Lyndon preached from Psalm 51 and we were reminded of David and his sin. And part of the reason we know what Psalm 51 is about is because it has a heading in our Bibles and the heading was read last week.

This is what the heading says, To the choir master a psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him after he had gone into Bathsheba. So we know why David was lamenting in Psalm 51.

He was lamenting mainly because of adultery and murder but there were other sins like lust and dishonesty and pride.

But when we come to Psalm 130, we don't know who the author is. It's one of those psalms that is not attributed to anyone. And we also don't know the circumstances of sin that the psalmist faced. We don't know what he was lamenting about. And the reason we're not told is that it's not important. All that we need to know in God's word, God tells us.

[11 : 14] So clearly, this sin of the psalmist or the sins of the psalmist that he's lamenting over, we didn't need to know them and so we're not told them. It really shouldn't matter.

Deceased preacher and theologian William Plummer in his commentary on Psalm 130 insightfully tells us why the sin or the sins of the psalmist in Psalm 130 shouldn't matter.

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

Dr. Plummer's point is that we should never think there's a particular sin that we can manage. There's a particular sin that's going to be less destructive, that can be less destructive than some other sin. He tells us that any kind or degree of sin can lead us into its overwhelming depths. [12:21] And this is why, brothers and sisters, that we should never be careless with sin or cozy with sin believing that we can manage sin.

Any kind or degree of sin may lead us into its engulfing depths. But Dr. Plummer goes on to say, but there are no depths of outward affliction or mental depression known to the penitent from which they may not cry unto the Lord.

And that's good news. That is good news. That no sin, it matters not what that sin is, it matters not how weighty that sin is, how great that sin is.

There is no sin that will take us to such depths that we, the penitent, may not cry out to the Lord for mercy.

As the psalmist laments over his sin in verse 3, he asks an important question that should be important to all of us. He asks, if you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

[13:44] to mark iniquities is to keep a record. It is to write down every sin in a recording book.

Now, when we think of sin, we tend to think of the things we do. We tend to think of the sins we commit, but sin is far broader, much deeper than that.

Sin includes wrong thoughts. Sin includes wrong motivations. Sin includes not only the things that we do that are wrong, but the things that we fail to do that we ought to do.

And so, when the psalmist is talking about sin, he's talking about sin in a broad manner with no exception of any kind of sin.

So, just imagine that for a moment. Suppose the Lord really is keeping a record of our sins, kind of like the way, you know, we have a system in the country where you commit a crime and they record your crime in a record and you go to get a police record and that shows up on the police record.

[15:05] Just suppose that God, we got sin records like that from the Lord. Well, the Lord just kept track of all of our sins and every now and then we had to go get our sin record.

You know, to do something, maybe to come to church or whatever. I mean, this is just imagination. You realize that, but first of all, how many pages do you think your sin record would be?

You know, would it be a ream or two reams? I don't think any of us could get, I don't think the best of us would be able to get a sin record in pages.

We would have to take a hard drive, an external hard drive, one of those multi-terabyte ones to record all of our sins. Brothers and sisters, to think of sin and the extent of it and how it is ongoing reality until the day the Lord returns can be overwhelming.

The psalmist says, Lord, if you were to mark iniquity, Lord, if you were to keep track of our sins, Lord, who could stand? But the point really is not the amount of sins.

[16:23] That's not the point that we should take away from what the psalmist is saying. Because one sin with the Holy God is too much. One sin. And a sin that we might call not a serious sin.

One sin with the Holy God is too much because God cannot overlook even the smallest sin. He cannot countenance even the smallest sin.

And the psalmist knows this. So what's the solution to this dilemma that sinners face before a Holy God who cannot countenance even the smallest sin?

What's the solution to that? Well, the psalmist tells us in verse 4, he says, but with you there is forgiveness that you may be fared.

The psalmist says, because God forgives, we don't have this mounting record of sin against us.

[17:35] And we can stand in his presence. Why? Because of forgiveness. And the psalmist also tells us in verse 4 that because of God's forgiveness, his people fear him.

They revere him. They worship him. Mindful of their many sins, but more mindful of his gracious forgiveness.

Now, if we step back for a moment and just consider these first four verses of Psalm 130, it begs the question, why is the psalmist lamenting?

He boldly proclaims in verse 4 that with the Lord there is forgiveness. So why then is he in the depths of crying out to the Lord and pleading with him to be attentive to his pleas for mercy and asking that God would have mercy on him?

This is possibly at least on the face of it. On the one hand, he says, God, there's forgiveness with you, and then he finds himself lamenting in the depths of sin and asking the Lord to have mercy.

[19 : 00] Well, the reason is that the Old Testament sacrificial system, which the psalmist was under, was never designed to be the fullness of God's redemption.

And so here in Psalm 130, starting at verse 5, we see the psalmist expressing how he is hoping and waiting for redemption.

He's hoping and waiting for something more. And this brings me to my second and my final point. Before we consider it, though, let's take a moment to consider the system of forgiveness that the psalmist was under.

The psalmist was under the Old Covenant system of sacrifice, the sacrificing of animals, which was what they were called to do.

Depending on what the sin was, if it was a serious sin, you had to bring a larger, more expensive animal. For a serious sin, you had to bring multiple ones of a certain kind of animal, and they would sacrifice these animals to the Lord.

[20 : 24] And this requirement for animals to be sacrificed, it immediately communicates that sin cannot be overlooked. It communicates that sin must be atoned for.

And that atonement had to be blood. It had to be the blood of an animal which communicated that the proper punishment for sin was death.

And so the Old Testament sacrificial system was a system of what we may call penal substitution. Rather than have his own people bear their sin, or the price of their sins, what the Lord did was he had a system where they could bring an animal in their place, and that animal took their place and died the death they deserved to die.

So what we see from Psalm 130 is that despite having this sacrificial system of the sacrificing of animals, it wasn't enough.

For the psalmist, it wasn't enough. He longed for something more. He hoped for something more. And the psalmist was not alone in this. This is the witness of the Old Testament.

[21 : 47] We are the saints. We find them longing and hoping for something more than what the Old Testament system of sacrifice could bring them. For example, when we think back to the sermon last Sunday in Psalm 51, in verse 16, the psalmist David, he cried out to the Lord, he said, for you will not delight in sacrifice.

or I would give it. You will not be pleased with it very often. David knew that this system of sacrifice, which he was under, was not sufficient to atone for the sins that he had committed.

Deep in his soul, David knew this was not enough. Why wasn't it enough? Well, the writer to the Hebrews, in Hebrews 10, 1-4, tells us why.

He writes, for the law, for since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come, instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, will no longer have any consciousness of sins?

[23 : 23] But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year, for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

That's the reason. The repetition of the Old Testament sacrifices year by year didn't serve as a reminder of forgiveness, it served as a reminder of sin.

It's important to see how the writer to the Hebrews says that in verse 3. He says, but in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year. sin.

And the reason is in verse 4. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Now, some of you might be asking, well, okay, were they forgiven or not?

Was the psalmist forgiven or not? Were the Old Testament saints forgiven or not? And the answer to that is yes, they were forgiven.

[24 : 34] They were truly forgiven. But here's what we know. They were not forgiven because of the blood of bulls and goats. Because the blood of bulls and goats could never atone for sin.

Because if the blood of bulls and goats could atone for sin, then God was most cruel to send his son anyway to die unnecessarily if the blood of bulls and goats could atone for sin.

But it couldn't atone for sin. The writing to the Hebrews in verse 1 of Hebrews 10 tells us that the law, and when he's talking about the law, he's talking about the sacrificial system as well, that the law was only a shadow of the good things to come.

It pointed to the good things to come. it pointed to Christ. It pointed to his coming and his living and his dying.

That would be the fullness of this redemption, this salvation that the Old Testament saints long for, even as they offered the sacrifices, they knew there was something more.

[25 : 47] And this is what I believe the psalmist in Psalm 130 in verses 5 to 8 is hoping for.

This is what he's longing for. Look at what he says 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 describes his waiting for the Lord like this night watchman. And you could only imagine how long the nights would have seemed without electricity in that day.

But the watchman knew the morning was coming. It was a long wait, but he knew the morning was coming. And there's something in the psalmist's heart that he's waiting for a certain outcome.

He's waiting for the morning to come, the morning of redemption to come. He is waiting for that. He says, and I'm waiting for it more eagerly than the watchman wait for the morning.

[26 : 53] If you were to ask the psalmist, what are you waiting for exactly? I don't think he could have told us. But there was something in his soul, there was a conviction in his soul, that he was waiting for something more than the sacrificial system that they had.

Because he knew in the depths of his soul that it wasn't enough. This becomes explicit when we look at verses 7 and 8.

The psalmist calls Israel to wait for what he is waiting for, and he actually describes it. Look at what he says, starting in verse 7, 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. The psalmist calls Israel to hope in the Lord for redemption.

And he says, with the Lord there is steadfast love and there is plentiful redemption. This expression, steadfast love, it's covenant love. This isn't puppy love.

[28 : 14] This isn't circumstantial love. This isn't love that changes when more information is revealed. No, this is comprehensive, all-knowing love. It's a love that God sets on his people that never ends.

It's a love that cannot be broken. And the psalmist is speaking as God's covenant child, who found himself engulfed in the depths of sin.

Despite his sin, he knows that the Lord loves him with a steadfast love. He calls Israel to hope in the Lord. And the other reason the psalmist cares for hoping in the Lord, he says, with the Lord there is plentiful redemption.

Notice what the psalmist does not say. He doesn't say, with the Lord there is plentiful forgiveness. He's already said that with the Lord there is forgiveness. But he says, with the Lord there is plentiful redemption.

And in this word redemption, he gets to the root of the issue, he gets to the root of why he is longing for more and hoping for more. Redemption is a release from whatever has us in bondage.

[29 : 35] And by implication, it requires a strong or rich person to do it. In this context, the release is the release from sin. And the psalmist says in verse 8 that God will redeem Israel, referring to his people from all their iniquities, no matter what those iniquities are.

And that's what the covenant Lord does. He redeems his people from all their iniquities. psalmist concludes in verse 8 confidently that this is what God will do.

The psalmist is confident that God is going to do something more than this sacrificial system which they had and they were called to obey but which was not enough.

And they knew it to the depths of their soul. And what the psalmist was doing even if he could not put his finger on it is the psalmist was hoping for Christ.

He was hoping for that which only Christ would do in his coming in his living and in his dying.

[31 : 00] But when he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit these things would not have been very clear to him. And this is what Peter tells us. Peter helps us to see how under the old covenant we had the prophets and the servants of the Lord who touched things but didn't understand what they were touching.

Listen to what he writes in 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 10 to 12. Concerning this salvation, the salvation that we have. The prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours

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 serving on themselves in the things that now have been announced to you. through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

The psalmist was among those who were waiting for the first advent of Christ, longing for this first advent and what it would bring that they did not have as the blood of animals was being offered in their sacrificial system.

The psalmist was longing and hoping for Christ who would come and pay the full redemption of sin. and really what God did for the psalmist and those others, the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is the lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world.

[33 : 03] And when God was forgiving them, he was forgiving them on the settled decision that he would not change because he cannot lie that he was going to send his son to be a sacrifice for sin.

And so what God was doing was God forgave in advance of the sacrifice of Christ the sins of those under the old covenant. So when Christ died, that was the full payment for their sins.

The blood of bulls and goats weren't going to do it, but God forgave their sins, and because he's holy and he wouldn't just say, don't worry about it, he did it with the certainty that he was going to sacrifice his son, and the death of Christ accomplished all that.

The psalmist was longing for that, but the psalmist could not know that, could not put his finger on all of that. Christ came, and Christ dealt with the penalty of sin, sin, and Christ dealt with sin in a preliminary way, and it's real for us, but brothers and sisters, we are not yet recipients of our full redemption, our full salvation.

In his first coming, Christ dealt with the penalty and the punishment of sin, but when he returns, he will deal with getting rid of the presence of sin.

[34 : 40] We're still very much in the presence of sin, and so in a way, we find ourselves where the psalmist found himself. The psalmist found himself where he had come into an element of redemption, but he knew there was something more, and even though Christ has come, and Christ has paid the penalty for our sin.

Even within our hearts, we know there's something more, because we still sin. Yes, not under sin's power, we're no longer under the bondage of sin, but we're very much still wrestling with the presence of sin.

And one day Christ is going to return, and what the Bible tells us is that he is going to usher in a new heaven and a new earth wherein righteousness dwells. And in his second coming, he will deliver us from the presence of sin.

And so as we celebrate Advent, as we commemorate this time, we look back and we can see with the psalmist coming. We look forward to the first coming of Christ, that Christ would come and he would deal with the penalty of sin, he would deliver us from the power of sin.

And now we find ourselves looking as well for his second coming, when he will deliver us from the presence of sin.

[36 : 20] I pray that we would long for that the way the psalmist longed for the first coming. The psalmist said, more than a watchman waits for the morning, more than the watchman waits for the morning, I hope in the Lord.

May we likewise hope in the Lord's return, because in the Lord's return is the fullness of our redemption. That is when we can truly say, we are finally saved.

Yes, we've been saved, we are being saved, but we will be finally saved when the Lord returns on that great day. And so I pray that in this Advent season as we long for the coming of Christ, we would join John, the Apostle John, and we would say, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Let's pray. Oh, Heavenly Father, we thank you that Christ has come.

We thank you that he has promised to come again. And Lord, we thank you that the same way that you kept your first promise over thousands of years, and Christ did come into this world as Savior, Savior.

[37 : 48] We know that you would keep your promise that he will come in the end as our judge. And Lord, we pray that all who belong to you would say with longing and hoping and conviction, even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Lord, work in our hearts that this may be the cry of our hearts. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's have our closing song. Amen.