

All sinners welcome!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 May 2022

Preacher: James Blackwell

[0 : 0 0] turn to the Word of God. We're going to read together from Psalm 130. This morning, if you're using the Church Bibles, it begins on page 518 of the Black Church Bibles, or it'll be on the screen in front of you as well, if you prefer. We're just going to read the whole Psalm through together.

Psalm 130 begins at verse 1, a song of ascent. There is forgiveness that you may be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I have hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchman for the morning, more than 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 iniquity.

Amen. We ask God to bestow his blessings upon his holy word to us this morning. So some of you know Edinburgh very well, some of you maybe don't, but when I was on my way ETS every morning and on my way back to the station every afternoon, I would go past Edinburgh Dungeon. Maybe some of you have been there, you've experienced the tourist attraction for yourself. But they have an interesting sign on the door to their gift shop. I wonder if you've seen it or if you remember what it says. It says, all sinners welcome.

And of course, as these things often do, they get me thinking, you know, okay, they're being a bit jokey here, aren't they? You know, it's a prison. Who goes to prison? Criminals. Criminals are generally sinners. So that's what they're getting at here. But also, you know, I've been to a lot of churches. You walk up to any church and they often have a sign outside, don't they, telling you the name of the church, the denomination they're a part of, who the minister is, if they have one, the times or the services, all the interesting, useful information, and usually accompanied by a Bible verse or something uplifting.

And it got me thinking, you know, okay, that's a prison that has that sign up upon its door. But what would happen if we put that same slogan on our church sign, that all sinners will welcome?

[3 : 0 1] Because after all, we're all sinners and we all go to find redemption for our sins in the church. So of course, it would make sense to say that all sinners are welcome in our churches.

And this Psalm 2 is a great and wonderful signpost for sinners. It's a signpost telling us that there is hope for those who are trapped in their sin.

If we've ever lied, cheated or stolen, if we ever thought something we shouldn't have, if we've ever done any of these things, then we are sinners and we need help.

But there is good news for us. So there's three things we're going to look at together from Psalm 130 this morning. We're going to look at how a sinner cries out, how a sinner waits, and then finally how a sinner hopes.

But before we begin, I want to tell you a story that my old minister, Angus Macrae, told me about a man who, I don't know if John Angus maybe remembers him from his time up north, but his name was Alec Campbell.

[4 : 1 1] Now, Alec Campbell was a regular soldier who was sent to France. Of course, France soon fell and the British and Allied troops had to be evacuated from France.

And I'm sure all of us know the story of Dunkirk, about how all those little boats went across and rescued nearly 400,000 soldiers in late May and early June of 1940.

He recently made a big Hollywood film about the event. Well, Alec didn't make it to Dunkirk, unfortunately. He and some 144,000 other troops instead made it to the western ports of Le Havre and Cherbourg and St. Mazer.

Now, as we understand it, Alec made his way to St. Mazer and, with many other soldiers, was put on board a large vessel to be transported home. We think the vessel may have been the RMS Lancastria.

Unfortunately, though, before the ship was able to set sail, an enemy plane flew overhead and dropped a bomb which went down the funnel of the ship, exploding the boilers and causing the ship to turn and sink in just a matter of seconds.

[5 : 26] Alec, along with many others, was plunged into the waters of the Atlantic Ocean. And as he was there, deep under the surface of the waters, he was sure that he was going to drown.

We'll find out what happens at the end of his story later on. So here we begin by hearing how a sinner cries out.

Verse 1, it reads, Out of the depths, Out of the depths.

I'm pretty sure at one time or another, each of us here today has felt that we are trapped in the depths, that we are drowning, that we cannot escape from our fate.

I'm sure that's what the man who wrote this psalm felt at that time, how he was drowning in his own sin, how he was unable to escape from it, that there was no hope, that all was lost.

[6 : 42] Even if you're a Christian, sometimes this can happen to you too. Sometimes we just become so aware of how sinful we really are, we become so overwhelmed by some of the things that we've done, that we just can feel this despair overcoming us and trapping us.

Perhaps we've maybe done something truly awful, or we've said something we shouldn't have, or we've offended somebody that we love dearly, and we think, I've crossed the line.

We've forgiven for this now, it's all over, it's all done, that's it for me. What does the psalm tell us? The psalm tells us that from the depths, we can cry.

Lord, we can cry to you. We can pray, Lord, hear me, hear my cries for mercy. Please don't ignore me right now, I need you.

Something else that's worth noticing here is, if you look at how the word Lord is written in your Bibles, in verse 1, the word Lord is written in all capital letters, whereas in verse 2, it is written with just the first letter as a capital.

[7 : 57] When this is done, when all the letters of Lord are capitalized, it's because the name for God that is being used is the covenant name Yahweh. God's personal proper name is being used here, and that's why it's written in all capitals in the English.

The proper name, the true name of God, which God told to Moses at the burning bush. So when the psalmist is calling on the name of God, he's not doing so in an abstract way.

He's not just saying, God, please help me. He's using his name, his personal name. It's a wonderful privilege that the psalmists have, and it's the same privilege that we ourselves enjoy as God's people, to call on God's true name.

Something else that's really wonderful here is the psalmist is obviously so full of awareness of his sin and his need for forgiveness.

And rather than just staying in the debt, staying trapped, he cries to God, knowing that God is the only one who can make a difference, knowing that God is the only one who can forgive him, because, as he says, God forgives.

[9 : 17] He knows that God is merciful. Verse 3, it reads, If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

But with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared. The psalmist knows that if God looked at his life and saw all of the awful things that he had done, then he was surely doomed.

There would have been no hope for him. Lord, who could stand? Imagine your life written down in a record book, every action, every word, every thought, all recorded for all eternity.

If that were the case, then when we stand before God, could we truly say to him that I am innocent, that I've done nothing wrong?

When this record book is brought out and shown to us, you're like, ah, well, okay, maybe not. If you're not a Christian today, this is the thing that you really need to consider.

[10 : 32] Because, can you truly say that you are perfect, that you've done nothing wrong ever in your life, that just because you're a relatively good person, you'll make it to heaven and everything will be fine.

Well, this part of the psalm is a warning because God does keep a record of sins. He does write them down in a book and keep it for all eternity.

He does remember them. And no person ever could ever stand before him on their own merit and say, I'm innocent. Only Jesus could have done that.

So that's the warning. But next, of course, comes the good news. The psalmist doesn't wait too long to give us hope. He reminds us that these sins can be forgiven.

That that record book can be erased, that it can be taken away, that in its place we are given a clean slate. Because when we put our trust in Jesus, when we put our faith in him, when we rely on him with our Lord and our Saviour, that is what happened.

[11 : 44] Our criminal record, our rap sheet, is given to him. He takes it upon his own back and he gives us his clean, perfect, sinless record. And then, we can stand before God because Jesus served our sentence for us.

On the cross, Jesus was given the punishment for the sins that we have all committed so that we could be forgiven.

With God, there is forgiveness. So then, the psalmist reminds us that it's only right and proper, having received this forgiveness as a gift from God, that we turn to him full of worship and awe and reverence of him and then serve him with our lives.

He who gave his Son to set us free on the cross. So we have a sinner who cries out and then secondly, we have a sinner who waits.

Verse 5 begins, I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope. My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

[13 : 02] Now, there's some younger guys here, there's some older guys here, but I'm sure all of you at some point have been really excited for something. If you're younger, maybe it's Christmas Eve or it's the day before your birthday and you're just so excited for the day to come and you'll get all the presents, all the food, and all the fun times the next day.

You know the feeling, don't you, when you just can't get to sleep the night before, you know it's 2 o'clock in the morning and you're still buzzing until you finally collapse from exhaustion in your bed at 4 o'clock, only to be up again at 6 because the day has finally come and you can enjoy it and all the things that it brings.

Maybe you're a bit more grown up than that, maybe Christmas and birthdays don't have the same appeal as they used to. Maybe you are really excited for the football season to begin or the rugby season or the shinty season or whatever it is that you're into.

Maybe it's the next blockbuster movie you've been waiting years to be made or the next book you've just been waiting to be written and published or whatever it is. It can be hard to wait for things we're really excited for, can't it?

Especially it's something we've been looking forward to for a long, long time. Again, the psalm tells us how the psalmist feels. This is how he feels.

[14 : 20] He is just waiting for God and he's just so excited and he just cannot wait for God to come. It tells us just how much he was waiting for God and it uses a rather interesting phrase as it does so.

It uses the phrase more than watchmen for the morning. Now, in our own context today in 21st century Scotland, this image is a bit strange maybe for us to understand more than watchmen wait for morning.

Well, let's go back in time. Let's put our thinking caps on and try and imagine what it would have been like all those years ago, centuries, a millennia ago. If you were a watchman, you had a job to do and that job was to watch.

It's kind of, it's in the title, isn't it really? But it's what you were watching for that was the important thing. Quite often you'd have been stationed on the walls of a town or a city or a castle or a fort or something along those lines and your job was to watch for enemy, was to watch for enemy armies who may be coming or bandits or criminals, those who could come and do damage or cause mischief in your town.

And of course, at night time, it was the riskiest time to have been a watchman because it was dark and they didn't have floodlights or things like that in those days.

[15 : 51] The best thing they had was a flame torch where you could see maybe a few feet in front of you and if it was a cloudy night and the moon and the stars were covered, you had no chance of seeing an enemy sneaking up upon you.

Especially if they were really quiet. It was really easy for people to sneak up on you. In the dark. So if you were on night watch, if that was your job, then the most desperate thing you could have been waiting for would be for the morning to come, for the first flicker of daylight on the horizon to appear and so you would know that you were safe for another day.

That nobody could come and attack you now because you could see and you knew you were safe.

It's a rather beautiful image of faithful patience, of eagerness and also of confidence. It's confidence because there's one thing that every watchman can always be sure of.

That's the simple truth that the dawn will eventually come. Well, something else that's really interesting is they will be the ones who will be the first to see the morning when it comes because they're the ones that are looking for it.

[17 : 13] They're the ones that are waiting and watching for it to come. Isaac Watts wrote a poem pardoning grace based on this psalm and this is what he said.

He wrote, I wait for thy salvation, Lord, with strong desires I wait. My soul invited by thy word stands watching at thy gate.

Just as the guards that keep the night long for the morning skies watch first beams of breaking light and meet them with their eyes. So waits my soul to see thy grace and more intent than day meets the first opening of thy face and finds a brighter day.

Of course, when was the last time we really had to wait for anything anymore? these days of the internet of Wikipedia and Amazon Prime and all these things waiting and patience are becoming a forgotten thing.

If we order something online and it takes more than a couple of days to get here we're just raging because we cannot cope with it being so slow. We must have it now. I don't know whatever it is but we need it now.

- [18 : 35] The psalmist is telling us here that there's one thing worth waiting for it's God. He is worth waiting our whole lives if need be.

So we need to make sure that we are watching for him to come. We're different from the watchmen because they're waiting out of fear but we are instead waiting out of joyful expectation of what is to come and what God has promised.

We wait not out of fear but out of love and out of joy. So we have a sinner who cries out a sinner who waits and finally we have a sinner who hopes.

Verse 7 reads 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 iniquity.

The psalmist moves on now. He moves on from his own personal experiences and moves to the whole of the people of Israel. The whole people of God are found in this short little psalm.

- [19 : 57] It starts off with the I talking about the psalmist's own experience and then moves on to the we the plural the experience of all of God's people. Because having found forgiveness for himself in the infinite mercies of God he now wishes all of God's people to experience those same things.

He wants all of God's people to trust in the Lord and to trust in his word. If we look in verse 5 that is where the psalmist puts his hope in his word I hope he writes.

The psalmist puts his trust in God's word. He trusts in God's promises. He trusts in God's truth. He trusts in God's faithfulness that he's shown to his people throughout all history.

He trusts in God's covenant that great bond of promise that God made with his people that they would become a great nation through whom God would bless the rest of the world.

The writer of this psalm has wonderful hope in God. He has hope in God's forgiveness of sins. He has hope in his merciful nature and in his word.

- [21 : 10] And he wants others to have that same hope. And because of Christ we can. do you know what the New Testament calls Christians?

It calls us saints. This isn't a special title reserved for very few select or special super holy Christians but instead all believers are given this title.

We are saints however we are still saints who sin which is why we constantly need to repent of our sins and why we always need Christ.

But why should we trust in God? Again the psalmist tells us because with the Lord is unfailing love. God will never break his promises with his people because his love is steadfast.

It's never ending. God is not only abounding in faithfulness. Sorry, God is not only abounding in love but he is also abounding in faithfulness.

- [22 : 20] He is faithful to his covenant. He is faithful to his people. He is unfailing in his love. Human love can come and go. Often it fails us when we need it the most.

We can be let down by people we love. But God's love isn't like that. God's love is unfailing. It will never let us down.

With the Lord we are then told is full redemption. Full redemption. Not just partial or temporary redemption but full, complete. This redemption of course was foreshadowed in the Old Testament through the sacrificial system but it was brought to completion.

It was brought to fulfillment in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Those wonderful verses in Ephesians chapter 1 verses 7 remind us in him we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

With Jesus there is full redemption to be found. So consider yourself this morning have I sinned?

[23 : 50] Have I done some awful things in my life? Have I thought some awful things or said some awful things? Or maybe I haven't done things that I really ought to have done. Well this morning I want to tell you don't be afraid.

Don't despair. Because it's time friends to come out of the depths. Because God has much grace for you.

He is merciful to you. God has full lavish overflowing grace for you which is much greater than all of your sin. If you trust in God you can never out sin his grace.

if you put your hope in him even when we are in those moments of despair. Even when we do find ourselves in the depths we are never outside of his reach.

There is always hope for every sinner. Of course remember this doesn't mean we can go on sinning freely thinking there are no consequences.

[24 : 56] But remember we are saints who sin. There will be times when we trip up, when we make mistakes, when we fall short. So we need to remember to repent and trust and hope and love our God for what he has done for us.

So we have a sinner who cries out, a sinner who waits, and a sinner who hopes. So we'll finish by going back to the story of Alec Campbell. I'm sure you've all been sitting on the edge of your seat to find out what happened to him.

So if you remember Alec was plunged into the waters of the Atlantic Ocean, he was pulled under the surface of the cold waters and was sure his life was over, that he was going to drown. And in that moment, in what he thought was going to be his last moment on this world, he remembered singing Psalm 130 back at his home church in the little village of Edmonton, just north of Dingwall in the Highlands.

He remembered singing the words, Lord, from the depths to thee I cried, my voice, Lord, do thou hear. unto my supplication's voice, give an attentive ear.

That was the moment when God saved Alec. That was the moment he knew that he was trusting in Christ, that literally from the depths of the ocean God had heard his cry.

[26 : 19] His next thought would be for his poor mother back at home who would fear that he had been lost for all eternity. the next moment, however, by the grace of God, Alec managed to break the surface of the water.

He managed to swim through the flaming oil and dodge the strafing runs from the enemy planes. He was later rescued, went on to survive the war, and lived to see the centenary serving as an elder and a presenter in that same church in Edmonton where he had heard that psalm sung all those years ago until he died at the ripe old age of 103.

At times, like all of us will, Alec struggled in his life, but his conversion was a real one. He ran his race, he kept the faith, God kept him on the path of faith and discipleship for his long and remarkable life, and it's my prayer this morning that he'll do the same for each of us here today.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the wonderful words of this psalm, these wonderful words that tell us of hope, that tell us of your mercies, of your forgiveness, tell us of your wonderful love for us.

Help us to trust in your words, to trust in your promises, to trust in the salvation you've given your people. Help us, Lord, if we are in the depth this morning, to call to you so you can lift us out and fill us with hope and life and joy.

[28 : 01] Be with us, Lord, as we go to our homes and bless us in the coming days. In Jesus' name we ask it. I encounter what we might not have on to you as for