

Up From the Depths

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[0 : 0 0] to you I cried. And we've all cried to the Lord from the depths, every single one of us. We know that experience. But the thing is that when we cry to the Lord from the depths, it's a cry of faith, because it says that we're crying to the Lord. And even although we may feel distant and feel hurt and feel abandoned, whenever it is a cry to the Lord, it is a cry of faith.

Even if we feel that we've got no faith, a very weak faith, or little faith, it is faith, because it's faith directs the cry to the Lord. And so we can see that this cry is a cry of faith.

We don't know what was causing the problem for the psalmist. We don't know what his particular distress was. But it could have been many different things. But there's no doubt that whatever was happening or whatever had happened, it had a deep spiritual effect upon him. And that is very obvious that you can see this because his sins are troubling him. There's this sense of the heaviness that is brought about by sin. And so there's a great emphasis on sin and forgiveness. Now, as we know, this psalm is one of the songs of ascents which were sung on the way going up to Jerusalem to the feast there. And very often, these were times not only of company and fellowship, but also times of reflection. Because there were times it was often a long and arduous journey, and it gave people an opportunity to reflect and to think.

And it's sometimes when we are in situations where we're given time to reflect and to think, and also facing some difficulty or problem. Whenever all these things come together, they kind of sharpen our focus. And sometimes we begin to look in and see how things are. And maybe this is what's happening for the psalmist. And he's beginning to reflect and to think. And indeed, as the Jews were making their way up to Jerusalem, we have a parallel ourselves with regard to the Lord's Supper, to the communion, because we are told that prior to taking of the bread and the wine, engaging in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we're told to examine ourselves. And it's something that we ought always to be doing. Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith. Before the communion, we're told, let a man examine himself, and then let him eat and drink. And that examination, of course, is always against the word. And so it is important for us always to stop and to reflect.

And you know, this is possibly one of the good things. There's always benefits, even in the difficult things and in the hardships. And that's been referred to in our prayers tonight, just how much we miss each other. And we long for the time when we'll get back to being with each other. But the world that we were living in was going at an incredible speed. And we didn't have time. And the Lord has now given us time. And as we have this more time than we had before, it is surely one of the things that we ought to be doing is reflecting and examining ourselves.

[3 : 3 8] So it's very obvious that the psalmist, that he had been looking in on himself and just seeing how things were. And the psalmist obviously had been brought to, been made aware of the sin that is within him. And so he is saying here, Lord, if you should mark iniquity, if you should mark iniquity, who could stand? And so the psalmist is aware that if God was to deal with his sin, if God was to be just, and of course, God is just, but if God was to mark that sin, then he was done. He was condemned. He was finished. He didn't have a leg to stand on.

And you and I are also aware of that. There are times that it really hits us. And we say, Lord, if you were to mark my iniquity, I'm finished. There's nothing, there's nothing, I'm completely done. But as we know, the wonderful thing is that God has marked iniquity. And for us, he has marked iniquity on his son, Jesus Christ. And that is why the only reason why we are able to stand in the presence of God is because the father has marked our iniquity upon the son.

If he were to mark it upon ourselves, we would be done for. But God has marked it upon his son. And so it's on the worth and the merit and the work of the son that you and I are able to stand.

And that's a wonderful thing, because with his stripes, we are healed. And of course, when we think about our sin and the hate, sometimes we're quite blasé about our sin. Sometimes, if we're honest, it doesn't trouble us too much. And if we grieve the spirit and if we find ourselves living where we've lost the edge, as it were, spiritually, our sense of our sin becomes less and less and less and less. But every so often, God will bring something, a sharp reminder of who he is and who we are and what is required of us. And sometimes we find ourselves just like the psalmist and we're saying, oh Lord, Lord, have mercy, Lord, forgive, Lord, from the depths to thee I cry, because something of the heinousness of sin comes back into our own heart.

But the funny thing is here, here's the psalmist and he's aware of how his sin has been offensive in the presence of God and in the sight of God. And yet it is to this God that he goes.

[6 : 32] And you know, that's a wonderful thing about us, that the very God that we have sinned against and the very God that we have offended, rather than running away from him, we go to him.

And that's what grace does. Remember what happened with Adam? When Adam was conscious of having sinned against God, he tried to leg it, he tried to run as fast as he could away from God.

And a lot of people do that, I say, harbour guilty consciences. And they don't really know how to deal with it. They don't know what really to do. But grace brings us back. God's mercy and grace brings us back so that when we have sinned, rather than trying to run away and hide, we go to the one that we actually sinned against. And it's like David in Psalm 51. I have to remember he has committed adultery with Bathsheba. And then he has murdered one of his most loyal soldiers, the husband of Bathsheba, in order to try and cover his sin. And then when the weight of what he has done comes in upon his heart, David doesn't run away. He does the very opposite. He goes to God. And he's saying, O Lord, have mercy upon me. After thy loving kindness, Lord, have mercy upon me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned. And that's what grace does. Grace. And if you find that you're being brought back to the Lord again and again and again because of your sin, then that's an evidence of the grace that's there. Now, in this Psalm, you'll notice that there's both humility and there's boldness in the prayer. Because you'll see, out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord. Let your ear be attentive. And literally, what the Psalmist is really saying here is, Lord, hear my voice. In other words, he's saying to the Psalmist, listen. And it's really quite extraordinary because when you think, do we actually go to God and say, Lord, listen to me? Well, in a sense, that's what the Psalmist is doing.

And this is part of what grace does. It gives us a boldness, a holy boldness in going to God. But side by side with that, there's also the humility because it's a cry for mercy. That's what he's doing.

And it would appear here that it's an audible prayer. Now, I know a lot of our prayers are done in secret, done in private. And they're done whether it's whispering or sometimes it's, we're praying as we're praying, we're praying in our mind. It's an actual prayer. We're praying, maybe your lips move, but we're praying in our mind. Now, I know that in the past, you often used to hear people praying aloud. And it's not something probably that we often do. But do you know this, it really helps when we pray aloud. It helps, you have a greater sense of concentration, a greater focus. You're less distracted. Because when we pray within our heart, within us, we do silently before the Lord, it's much easier to be distracted than when we're actually engaged in praying audibly. I suppose in the day that we're living in with so many people around and about, we find it harder to pray audibly than they did in a generation in the past when people probably had more time to go away and pray audibly on their own. But it's very obvious that here, that is, the psalmist is praying audibly. And the psalmist, as we said, having noted his almost impossible situation, then realises, of course, that there is forgiveness with God. And what a balm that is for a troubled soul. You know, we never tire of knowing of God's forgiveness. And he's, as we so often quote, he's a God who delights in mercy, and he loves to forgive. You notice how often in the Gospels,

[10 : 55] Jesus will say, your sins are forgiven. And Jesus delighted to do that. It's a great work that he did on the cross. His work was in order that our sins would be forgiven. And this is why it tells us that as he faced the cross, it says the joy that was set before him, enduring the cross because of what was to be achieved. And so there is forgiveness. And the wonderful thing about God's forgiveness is, it's complete. It's not a partial forgiveness. It's not a temporary forgiveness.

It's complete. You know, sometimes we can forgive people, but we haven't really. We might forgive them at a particular time. But then what they may have done against us keeps coming back. And the forgiveness that we granted at that particular time has long gone. And a grudging spirit and a resentful spirit has grown up again. And that forgiveness, we discover, was really actually only temporary. And so often in our forgiveness, we might forgive, but we don't forget. We're very bad at forgetting and forgiving. But God gives a complete forgiveness. And God, as it were, forgets. Although it's impossible at one level for God to forget. But he acts as if he has forgotten. Not only forgiving, but he says, your sins and your iniquities, I will remember no more. So not only has God forgiven us, he's forgotten. Our sins are washed away. They will never be brought again to accuse us, even although our heart will bring our sins back to accuse us. And Satan will bring our sins back to accuse us. And we believe even that, I don't understand how it works, but as you look and say, for instance, in the book of Job, it would appear that in this, before Satan is finally chained forever into the lostness of hell. And as he has his roaming freedom in the world just now, that he has access even where he can bring accusations about us before God. I don't understand how this is. There'll come a day when that is impossible. But he is always accusing. But the wonderful thing that in Jesus Christ, not one accusation will stick, who shall lay any charge to God's elect? None. No accusation, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. And so God forgives us on account of his son.

It's on, it's in, as we said, we stand in him. It's in his merit and his worth and what he has done. And then it says, because of this forgiveness, that you may be feared. But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. You see, forgiveness doesn't diminish fear, rather it develops it. You develop a greater sense of awe and respect and reverence. And your sense of before God is such that you say, well, because God forgives me, I don't want to. You see, some people think that if God just continues to forgive and to forget, then we can just do whatever we want. And sadly, there are times that we forget and we don't live in the way that we should. But you know, when we have a sense of God's forgiving grace and his love towards us, it gives us a sense of walking more carefully with the Lord. We don't want to hurt him. You know, when you really love somebody, you don't want to hurt that person. And when we're right with God, we don't want to hurt him. And so we're more careful about what we do. And then we find just very briefly, we see there that we see that the psalmist, he says, I wait for the Lord, my soul waits. And in his word, I hope. Here's the psalmist and he's like the watchman waiting for the morning. He's waiting for the Lord. He's waiting for a word from the Lord. See, the psalmist isn't depending on his eloquence in prayer or his volume in prayer or his ability in prayer or his faith even in prayer. His dependence is upon the Lord that he's prayed to. And that's who he's looking to. This is, it's the Lord's word that he's waiting for. And this is, this brings faith into exercise. Are you tonight waiting on the Lord by faith for something, for some answer to prayer? Maybe there's something you've been praying for for a long time. And you're waiting and you're waiting and you're waiting. Well, you know, as you're waiting, you're waiting in faith. And you know, the wonderful thing is that the God that we're waiting upon is a God who cannot lie. God is not, it tells us that God is not a man that he should lie.

No, that, and he, that, because every word that he gives us is true. And it's a wonderful thing, although it can try us to the hilt to wait for God to fulfill his word in our experience. And you know, the thing is, if we wait his time, it will be wonderful. David was given the grace to wait the time.

There were days when David had Saul under his spear. Remember in the cave, David, David had his sword and it was above Saul. Well, it was in the sheath, but he could have taken it out. And the servant was saying, kill him. One strike. David said, no. And David knew he was going to be rightful king, but he was going to wait God's time. And he was tried to the hilt, but it was worth the wait.

[17 : 13] And it would be worth the wait for you as well, because God has a time to answer prayer. And we're told in scripture that God waits that he may be gracious. You see, God's, God isn't doing nothing as he's waiting to give you. And as we're waiting to receive what he is to give, he is preparing us for what he is to give. So God is gracious in that. And then we find at the very end of the psalm, it says, O Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is steadfast love. With him is plenteous redemption, and he will redeem Israel from all iniquities. What a difference to the start.

There's the psalmist in the depth. By the end, he's so assured of God's redeeming love. And that's what God has done right through the Bible, is to redeem his people. We have the great picture of it in Israel, taken out of Egypt. He redeems his people from the exile, and he redeems his people through the great Redeemer. So we know this is one of the great titles of Jesus. He is the Redeemer. Who is the Redeemer of God's elect? One of the questions in the Catechism, of course, it is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. His great work, buying back what once belonged to him.

That's what God has done with his Son, that Jesus has paid the price and has bought us back to God the Father, to the one that we once belonged to. And so may we have a sense of the wonderful redemption. May that redemption be ours, this sense of belonging to the Lord.

And may we be given the grace to wait for him. Let us pray. Lord, our God, we give thanks for we while together tonight. We give thanks for every prayer public and every prayer private.

We pray that you will answer us beyond our asking or thinking. We pray that your word will become ever more precious to us. Help us, Lord, to live in the light of eternity, because our days are flying faster than we realize. And one day, the call will come from the shepherd that it is time to come home.

[19 : 37] And so we pray that we may live in light of this. Do us good, then we pray, and watch over us, bless our homes and our families, protect us. And we know that it's a difficult time where families are separated. But in our separation, may we know your presence. And may we know, in a spiritual way, a presence with one another. Forgive us all our sins, we pray. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.