

March 11, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Psalm 130.

1. Describe the depths from which we cry to the LORD.
2. Why is it so important for **you** to draw on the LORD's mercy?
3. Where do we see an example of God marking iniquities?
4. How do we connect "forgiveness" and "fear" in verse four?
5. Why is the LORD's steadfast love so trustworthy?

PRAY WITH CONFIDENCE; WAIT WITH CONFIDENCE
Psalm 130

This is another of the "songs of ascent," songs that the pilgrims sang as they traveled to Jerusalem for the required feasts. Like many of those psalms (120-134), we are not sure who the author is. This psalm does sound very similar to the songs David wrote.

That is especially true when we realize that this is a song about repentance, the confidence of sins forgiven. For that reason this psalm is called the sixth of the seven penitential psalms, which are Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143. Of those seven, we know that David wrote five. He seemed to know a lot about sin, repentance, forgiveness, and confidence to pray to the merciful God who forgives. "This is the penitential psalm of the series in which the guilt of the chosen people is distinctly acknowledged as the case of its calamities, but not as an occasion for despair." (Joseph A. Alexander,

Commentary on Psalms, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publication, 1864 reprint, p.529).

This psalm is so encouraging to the person who has become aware of his or her sin, confessed that sin, and discovered sweet fellowship with God who forgives sin. That fellowship is especially sweet because it is experienced against the backdrop of relationships with people who don't forgive sin. People, especially religious people, are all about justice, consequences, retribution, and down right punishment. If God won't punish the sinner for sinning, no problem. The religious folks will make sure the penitent sinner gets what's coming to him or her. There is wonderful news in the fact that God is not like that!

When you became aware of your sin against God, when you felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit, you felt like you were in the depths of a pit, like the psalmist pictured it in the opening words of the psalm. From that pit you cried for help and mercy. You experienced the exhilarating spiritual breath of fresh air. You, either for the first time, or once again, experienced an intimate fellowship with your LORD who is merciful to forgive. Nothing in the world, nothing in life can give a forgiven sinner such confidence to talk to God. Genuine and real fellowship with the God who forgives gives us reason to pray to Him and confidence to wait for Him to answer our plea in His timing and according to His will.

Religious people know the acceptable mantras, the approved creeds, the expected words to say and are quite satisfied with that. But forgiven sinners know the LORD in the most intimate way which gives us confidence to pray to Him and wait for His answer.

Pray Because You Are Forgiven (vv.1-4).

As you pray, it is good to plead for mercy (vv.1-2). This is especially true for us when we can identify with the writer who, out of the depths, cries to the LORD. He wrote, *Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD (v.1)*! The depths is where the sinner finds himself when he becomes cognizant of sin. The sad reality is that we who are born in sin continue to live in sin with little or not conviction about it. In mercy, God graciously awakens our hearts to the reality of our sinful condition. This must happen for a sinner to experience the miracle of the new birth.

But “the depths” is also where a child of God finds himself when he has fallen into sin. We will be in depths when we are like David who fell into sin or adultery and murder. Peter was in the depths when he fell into the sin of denying any association with Christ. We are in the depths like other Christians when in the process of maturing in likeness to Christ we realize that what has been a normal practice of living is actually a sin of unbelief or rebellion. Periods like that are the expected norm for growing Christians.

At those times, the Holy Spirit does His work of conviction of sin, which leaves the convicted person feeling like we are in a pit, in the depths. Those depths are as real, and foreboding as David described them in Psalm 69. He cried out, *Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God. More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies. What I did not steal must I now restore?”* (Psalm 69:1-4). *Deliver me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters. Let not the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the pit close its mouth over me”* (Psalm 69:14-15).

This is called hitting the bottom, which is often necessary before we are willing to cry out to God for help. It isn’t like commiserating in self-pity until you feel like helping yourself out because it rightfully leads to dependence on God. From the depths we are wise to cry out to God. It is a deeply serious prayer. To *cry* is to make a loud sound, to shout. This is a perfect tense which gives the idea of having done this before and doing it again. This is what we who know the LORD do when we become aware of sin.

When we cry out of the depths, we ask the Lord for mercy. *O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!* (v.2). The plea is for the LORD to hear. It is not just a desire for God to hear a voice or so much sound. It is a plea for God to listen to attentively, and not to all voices, but to my voice.

The person who becomes aware of sin should long so much to be right with God who is offended by the sin. That is why we plead for mercy. The English translation “*pleas for mercy*” is one word in the Hebrew text. It pictures well the inferior or needy person pleading

with the superior to be kind and merciful. An interesting use of the word is when God questioned Job about Job being able to control Leviathan: “*Will he make many supplications to you, or will he speak to you soft words?”* (Job 41:3). That is not very likely! And in comparison, God is more powerful and mightier than any beast He has created, and so we cry out to Him to show goodness to us who are in misery and distress.

Sensing misery because of sin is a most wonderful condition in which to be found. Pity the person who never has any conviction about sin, never is aware that he or she is at odds with God. That is like a person with a fatal disease growing in his body, but being completely unaware that there is a problem. Or it is like a company CEO who is oblivious to the fact that the controller is absconding company funds. If there is a problem in life, we want to know. So why are we not concerned to know when and how much we need God’s mercy?

We must know God’s mercy and appreciate His mercy (vv.3-4). Something that will help us think about God’s mercy is to ask, “What if God kept track of our sin?” The psalmist put it like this, *If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?* (v.3). One good way to become aware of our need for God’s mercy is to come face-to-face with the reality of our iniquities. The words *our iniquities* refer to our bending, twisting, or distorting of God’s righteousness. It is true that sin is missing the mark of God’s standard, which is God’s righteousness. But worse is that our sin twists God’s standard so that we attempt to make it mean something God never meant.

This is why many people do not seem to be convicted by sin. Sin just isn’t what it used to be. Why not? Human nature has the ability to twist and distort what God said. It might begin with the conclusion that there is no absolute truth. The Bible has been so distorted that it is no longer viewed as the standard of truth. Therefore, everyone does what is right in his own eyes. Therefore, also, it is impossible to call anything iniquity, even though most of human thoughts and actions are just that.

This drives us to the question posed by the psalmist: “What if God kept track of all our twisting and distorting of His truth?” To *mark* is to watch, to keep, or to preserve. On one hand, that is exactly what God does. At the end of time, everyone who has not been redeemed from sin will stand before the Great White Throne of

Christ's judgment. Listen to what will happen: *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done (Revelation 20:12).* God will eternally condemn the unrepentant based on their twisting and distorting of His righteousness.

The good news is that on the other hand, God doesn't mark the iniquity of those who confess it and repent. What if God kept track of my iniquities? But He doesn't. Why doesn't He? *But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared (v.4).* With God there is forgiveness. That is the essence of mercy and grace. He created all things perfectly. Our original parents disobeyed God and twisted His standard of righteousness. Their sin infected and impacted the entire creation, including each one of us born in their line (which is every single human). We are born distorting God's righteousness and quickly learn how to seek our own way as opposed to His. Our lives are characterized by rebellion.

But God our offended Creator calls out to us to come to Him to be forgiven. His promise of forgiveness is the most precious gift in eternity. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).* To forgive is to lift up and send away. When we say the same thing about ourselves as God says about us, He removes our sin as far as the east from the west. When God forgives our iniquities, He throws them into the depths of the sea to never bring them up against us again. The Heavenly Father can forgive sin because He placed all our sins on the Beloved Son as He hung on the cross. And the Beloved Son took my sins to hell and left them there.

That is a most astonishing blessing of God's mercy. But our response to God's forgiveness might be even more astonishing. How can the result of forgiveness be fear? It is fear that drives us to cry out to God for help when we become aware of how our sin offends Him. Fear that the Mighty Creator will send us to hell out of His sight for eternity causes us to seek forgiveness and the removal of guilt.

Fear is a matter of relationship. It does begin with the trembling soul that becomes aware of the consequence of twisting God's righteousness, breaking God's law. But awareness of God's mercy removes the trembling and replaces it with deep reverence for Him

who loves us so much. That deep-seated reverence for God is the fear that cements our relationship with Him. Right fear brings us great confidence in the LORD to whom we cry and who has forgiven our sins. When that is true, we are learning to wait on Him.

Wait Because the LORD is Faithful (vv.5-8).

We are challenged to wait upon the LORD and as we wait, we must wait patiently. The writer confessed, *I wait for the LORD, my soul waits (v.5a).* He wrote, *My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning (v.6).* The true penitent seeks not merely the escape of God's judicial punishment. He seeks the LORD's person. We are to be like the loyal dog waiting at the door wagging his tail every day when the master comes home from work. This is what mature fear looks like. It flows from the Lord's forgiveness and flows toward the Lord's presence and attention.

Twice the psalmist pointed out that this waiting takes place in the soul. He could have said, "I wait for the LORD." That is true, but the reference to the soul causes us to think on a deeper level about our relationship with the LORD. The soul is not only the inner most part of us, the real being, but it is the eternal part. The soul lives somewhere forever. The soul is the real us. It is possible for any of us to put up a front that is not sincere.

Many people reared in Christian environments *appear* to be on track and all in. But in time these people seem to turn away from all that they pretended to be. Time is always on the side of truth. Eventually the real condition of the soul will become obvious in the outward person. This is what the writer to the Hebrew Christians meant. *For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt (Hebrews 6:4-6).*

In contrast, the soul of the redeemed and forgiven person waits patiently on the LORD. We cry out in prayer to Him who forgives and sends away our iniquities. Then we wait like the watchman who waits for the morning. No doubt there are times when to the watchman the

night seems like it will never end. But in his heart he knows that morning is inevitable. So, too, there are times when we pray to the LORD for so long that it seems like He will never answer. Again it is good to remember that at any given time there are three answers to your prayer. There is the answer, “No.” Or sometimes God’s answer is “Yes, immediately.” More often God’s answer is, “Wait and mature and grow in grace.”

And while we wait, it is good for us to remember other answers to prayer. We need to set up those “stones of remembrance” to which we look to be encouraged that God has answered in the past. If God has never answered your prayers, you are right to be concerned. I will be the first to admit that “wait” is difficult for people who live in an “instant” world. I like the Christmas season because almost without fail, someone will be making real hot chocolate. Real hot chocolate is made by slowly stirring real chocolate in milk as it heats. It tastes great compared to the mediocre taste of instant hot chocolate. The same can be said for instant grits, instant oatmeal, instant potatoes, instant anything. In fact, there is a company now that advertises instant approval for your mortgage application. How can they do that? Back in the good-old-days, we had to go meet a banker who sat across the desk and asked a bunch of questions and looked you up and down as if to query whether you could be trusted to pay back the loan.

And when we cry out to God, it is sometimes as though He says, “Now just wait awhile and let your faith grow because it takes a long time to grow a sturdy, faithful vine that will produce good fruit.” And that fruitfulness is the result of learning to trust what God says. Those are the times when we learn to hope in His Word (v.5b). While the psalmist cried out and waited, he learned to hope in the words of God. That being true, because the source of hope is God’s Word, the penitent expresses more than a wistful hope. We are able to wait on the LORD because our confidence is based on what God has already said. This is why it is a good practice to pray the psalms. Many of these psalms were actually prayers in the original. When we pray them ourselves, it helps us understand better what the writer was experiencing at the time he wrote them.

Surely God loves for His forgiven children to come to Him and rehearse His wonderful promises. Last summer I took two of our grandchildren fishing. We went to Lake Robinson and fished off the

dock with no success. While we were there, we talked to a fellow who had been out on the lake the day before. He told us they had caught dozens of fish. I said to my grandchildren, “Next summer we will get the boat out and do some real fishing.” The other day I was at our grand son’s chapel program. I talked to him just a few minutes but in that time he reminded me that this summer we are going to get the boat out and do some real fishing. I think he trusts me. I will do all I can to keep my promise. God does better than that!

While we are hoping in the LORD, we are also hoping in the Lord’s steadfast love. With the Lord there is steadfast love. *O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love (v.7a)*. The call is for us to hope in the LORD. This is not “hope so” hope. It is not like buying a lottery ticket. It is calm, unwavering assurance because it is fixed on the unwavering object. The foundation of our hope is the LORD’S steadfast love. This is unchanging love because it flows from the LORD who is unchanging. We do not need to worry that the LORD is going to change His mind or mature or begin to act according to a changing culture. The world and culture is always changing. Typically, we all have to change with it or become Amish, who have actually changed a lot compared to folks who lived in the Roman Empire.

This is also unchanging love because it stands on the promises and covenants of God. If God’s Word changes, we will have reason to fear and doubt. That can never happen. David concluded, *Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens (Psalm 119:89)*. Jesus taught, “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away*” (*Matthew 24:35*). We hope in God’s love for us because it is as unchanging as His Word.

And in His Word, the LORD has promised to redeem all who trust in Him from the penalty of our sins. With the LORD there is redemption. There are two statements about this back-to-back in this psalm. *With him is plentiful redemption (v.7b)*, and *He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities (v.8)*. To redeem is to pay the price to buy the object out. This is what you do at a pawn shop. Someone needs some cash so they take the cherished, somewhat worthless, trinket to the pawn shop. The owner of the shop assesses it and says, “I’ll give you \$20.” You take the twenty to pay your bill and then, if you so choose, you can go back later, pay the \$20 and redeem your trinket from hock.

The Lord Jesus paid the redemption price to buy us out of the slave market of sin. Notice His price was to buy us from all our iniquities – all that twisting and distorting of His righteousness. The law of God reveals just how great the redemption price had to be. *Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more (Romans 5:20).*

We praise God that He has provided the redemption price for our iniquities. We praise Him because He offers that price to us freely. We praise Him because He invites us to cry out to Him for help. We praise Him because He gives us His Word which is the foundation for His Love for us. Should not we who have been redeemed pray to God with all confidence knowing that He will always do the best thing?