

Out of the Depths

By Don Green

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Bible Verse: Psalm 130
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Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Psalm 130, a Song of Ascents.

1 Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD. 2 Lord, hear my voice!
Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications. 3 If You,
LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? 4 But there is
forgiveness with You, That You may be feared. 5 I wait for the LORD,
my soul does wait, And in His word do I hope. 6 My soul waits for the
Lord More than the watchmen for the morning; Indeed, more than the
watchmen for the morning. 7 O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the
LORD there is lovingkindness, And with Him is abundant redemption. 8
And He will redeem Israel From all his iniquities.

Now most of you know that on Sundays we have been preaching through the 10 Commandments since May, and my prayer has been that God would use that to stir our hearts to recognize the impossible demands of the law of God, his exceedingly great holiness, and that by contrast the Spirit of God would use that to stir our hearts to see our sin. Jesus said that he who has been forgiven much, loves much, and those who see sin deeply and feel it deeply are the ones who are going to love Christ the most if they have been redeemed because they will realize that they have been forgiven so much. There's a direct correlation between your sense of sin as a Christian and your love for Christ. If you think that you've been a pretty good person and you don't have much to be forgiven of, you're not going to love Christ very much because you won't realize the depth of what he has done for you.

So the gospel of Jesus Christ only makes sense with a knowledge of sin. Christ came to seek and to save that which is lost. He said, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." And so sin is crucial to the matter and that's why it is so important for us to take a deep contemplation of the law of God so that we would come to have a better appreciation for the gospel of Jesus Christ and the person of our Savior. One writer said this and I quote, he said, "Our problem today, especially in appreciating Psalm 130, is that most of us do not have much awareness of sin. We live most of our lives with very little awareness of God and where God has been abolished, an awareness of sin is inevitably abolished also. Sin is defined only in relationship to God."

So with that little bit of framework, we turn to Psalm 130 and as I've said many times, the Song of Ascents is a series of 15 Psalms, Psalm 120-134, that are in five sets of three, and each individual set, each triad, you could say, follows a pattern. The first Psalm in the triad describes problems for God's people; the second one, in one manner or another, describes God's protection for them; and then the third one describes the peace that follows from relying on the promises of God in the midst of our difficulties. I've talked about that so many times, I don't want to repeat myself yet again. This Psalm, Psalm 130 being the second in the triad, brings us then a theme of protection, and in particular we find in Psalm 130 the promise of God, the protection of God found in his grace to forgive our many many sins. So we're going to see that this Psalm breaks out in four different sections and as this prayer is given, you just see themes of repetition bringing emphasis, you see different names for God being used in the Psalm, but you see the grace of God most marvelously on display.

So it opens with the first section, the first two verses is a prayer of desperation. A prayer of desperation. I wonder as you come into the audience here tonight, perhaps listening over the live stream, I wonder whether you know something of the sense of desperation of being a guilty sinner under a sense of condemnation and knowing that you need deliverance that you cannot do on your own. This is what this Psalm is speaking about. The Psalm opens with an urgent prayer for God's help.

Look at verses 1 and 2 with me where he says,

1 Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD. 2 Lord, hear my voice!
Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications.

He is desperately calling upon God to hear him and to respond to him and to answer him in his kindness. The phrase "out of the depths" is a figure of speech that shows serious distress; something is greatly pressing on his soul. And he does not state the precise circumstances of what it is that is troubling him but as we go on in the Psalm, we're going to see that the context indicates that he is confessing sin. He is troubled by sin in his life. His conscience is weighing down upon him and he is demoralized and he feels like he is alienated from God. The priority of fellowship with God is so urgent to him that being alienated from God is the worst thing that could happen within his soul, and so this is a matter of prime urgency to him.

And again, and I say these things to myself as I say them to you, our pattern, I'm afraid, our pattern is that we get really urgent in prayer with God when there are earthly matters that are raining down upon us, financial matters, our health goes bad, you know, we're asking for prayer at all of these things because of earthly affliction. Well, beloved, I want to invite you, call you, exhort you to a different level of spirituality, to something that is more significant and profound, to be concerned about the state of your soul before God, that sin would be something that weighs on you to the point of wanting repentance, wanting confession and going, as David did in Psalm 51, saying, "O God, restore to me the joy of my salvation." I'm just afraid that too many Christians, and I'm not pointing fingers in the room here tonight, I'm really not, but I'm just afraid that too many

Christians are just so superficial and so concerned about earthly things that are all destined to perish with their use that they overlook the fact that the Lord saved us from sin, he intends to sanctify us and to conform us to the image of Christ as he works in our life over time, and that our priorities are just so messed up as shown by what it is that makes us urgent in prayer, and we'll see this as we go along.

Twice in these two verses he's asking God to pay attention to his voice. Look at it there, he says in verse 2, "Lord, hear my voice!" Then, "Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. God, I'm crying out to You. God, I'm speaking to You. Hear me! Listen to me!" And using the term "voice" is probably indicating that he's specifically highlighting the fact that he has verbalized his prayer, that he is speaking it out loud, he's not simply mentally rehearsing things but he is speaking out loud to the unseen God rather than speaking to God silently. And his voice, his voice is giving expression to the turmoil that's in his heart. "God, I'm praying to You. God, help me!" Those of you that have walked with Christ for a long period of time, you know, you can probably remember times where you've just cried out, "O God, hear me! Listen to me! This is pressing upon me, this is urgent, I need a response now!" And this is the spirit in which Psalm 130 comes to us.

This is urgent and so when we see a Psalm like this, when we see such spiritual vibrancy being expressed, I think it's just very important for us to realize that Scripture goes beyond a communication of information to us. We're not just getting exegetical data here as we study Psalm 130, we want to enter into the heart of the psalmist who feels the weight of sin and desires fellowship with God and we want to identify with that spirit, we want to be like that, we want this kind of urgency to be ours as an expression of what God is worthy of. You know, I don't know about you but I've just had enough of cold, lifeless praying. Haven't you? Don't you get tired of just the routine mechanics of going through your prayer list or maybe not even praying at all and, you know, prayer just becomes an irksome kind of duty to you? Well, we all go through seasons like that, I guess, but what we want to see is that that lifeless spirit, that cold indifference, that mechanical approach to prayer, or forbid the thought, you know, of just saying, you know, I've given my 15 minutes to my devotion today, check the box, that that mechanical lifeless spirit is so different from the spirit of biblical faith and we want to see what biblical faith is and respond and have the Spirit of God light that up in our souls so it's real to us and that Psalm 130 becomes our kind of experience also. We just cannot be Christians who are content with a dead lifeless faith and, you know, wearing the label of Christian without the Spirit that is supposed to animate that reality.

So the psalmist here with his urgency, "I've cried to You, Lord. Hear my voice! Be attentive to the voice of my supplications." You know, it lights us into a reality that I trust for most of you, you're drawn to this and say, "Do you know what? You know, I've been kind of in a spiritual stupor, a spiritual fog lately, this awakens me to what I want to be like. I want to be a living soul in connection with, in fellowship with the living God." That's what we're seeing here.

Now I want to point out something to you in your English Bibles. Most of your Bibles will have a distinction in the two names that are used for Lord. At the end of verse 1, you see the all caps LORD which is reflective of the Hebrew name Yahweh; the Lord in the beginning of the second verse is not like that, the font is different and it's a capital L but a lowercase Lord that is there. This is the translator's way of expressing two different names of God that are being used here. The all caps LORD is the divine name Yahweh, and that name refers to God especially in the context of his covenant love for his people. He's a promise-keeping God. He cares for his people. He's loyal to them. He is a God who delivers them. All of that is wrapped up in the name Yahweh. Now as you go on and you see the other name Lord that looks the same superficially in English, the lowercase Lord is the Hebrew name Adonai, and Adonai identifies God as the Master of his creation and so it's addressed to the same God but it's emphasizing different aspects of God's relationship to his creation and so on the one he refers to God's loyal love for his people, Yahweh, by which he says, "God of loyal love to Your people, hear me," and he appeals to the divine love, the divine attribute of love as he does, and then he calls him Adonai, Master, emphasizing, you could say, the sovereignty of God, God the Master of his creation.

So he's appealing to divine love and divine sovereignty, both as he opens up the Psalm and what's fascinating, you know, all of the Psalms have different distinguishing marks about their poetic features and the way that the psalmist expresses himself, this pairing of Yahweh and Adonai in these eight verses, these terms appear in three pairs in this Psalm. You see it in verse 1. Again, look, "O LORD," Yahweh, "Lord, hear my voice!" Drop down to verse 3, you see it again, "If You," all caps, "LORD, should mark iniquities, O Adonai, who could stand?" And in verses 5 and 6, "I wait for the LORD," in other words, "I wait for Yahweh, my soul does wait." Verse 6, "My soul waits for the Lord. My soul waits for Adonai," in other words. And so this usage of the names of God is a very significant aspect of understanding the Psalm.

Now sometime years ago, you could probably go, I know that you can go online and search. I did a message on the names of God, I would encourage you if this fascinates you to go back and look for that message online and listen to that because the names of God as expressing different aspects of his attributes, different aspects of his nature, highlighting different things. Here it's obvious that the psalmist is making a deliberate appeal to different aspects of the nature of God and you could put it together this way, he is relying on Yahweh's faithfulness to hear his prayer, "God, in Your faithfulness respond to me. As one of Your people I ask You to respond to me out of Your loyal love and Your faithfulness. I'm relying on Your kindness to Your people as a basis upon which to respond." And then on the other side, he says, "God, I'm appealing to Your sovereign might, Your sovereign power, Your Lordship over creation. You are my strong fortress that I can run to and be safe."

So take it together and don't miss this point that he's joining together two things in his appeal. He's appealing to the loyal love of God and the sovereignty of God. "God, in Your sovereign love, hear me and respond to me." It's expressing confidence in the strength of God and it is expressing rest in the goodness of God. And every time that we

go to God in prayer, we can refresh our minds about this. In fact, let me take you to a place, we went there last week, we'll go there again this week just because we can. Go to Matthew 6 and you see the exact same spirit being expressed in the way that our Lord Jesus Christ taught us to pray. It's the exact same spirit that is being taught to us by our Lord in Matthew 6:9. Jesus teaches us to pray in this twin reliance on these attributes of God when he says in verse 9, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven,'" our gracious Father who loves us and cares for us, the one who has fatherly care for us, he teaches us to rest in God's goodness as we open in prayer, and at the same time we remember that he is the God in heaven sovereignly ruling over the entire universe exalted in majesty, transcendent in his person, and yet also near in the theological term immanent meaning that God is near to us as our heavenly Father. As our Father, he is near and loves us; as the Father who is in heaven he is sovereign and rules over all, and we are to have both of those things in mind as we pray to him. The love teaches us to trust him, his sovereign majesty teaches us to fear him and to not trifle with his majesty, and both of those matters are things that you are to keep in mind repeatedly over the course of time as you pray to God and as you worship him. His sovereign majesty keeps us from trifling with him, his love teaches us and helps us to rest in him, and both of those are critical to our sanctification.

So we've seen his prayer for desperation, and in his desperate plight he cries out to God to hear him and to respond to him, that's the first section of the Psalm. Let's move on to the second section of the Psalm which we'll find is a prayer for forgiveness. A prayer for forgiveness. It appears that this urgent prayer has a spiritual issue that is central to his despair, and perhaps for some of you who have been conscience-smitten by the law of God as we've preached it, this is perhaps one of the most important passages in Scripture that you could turn to here in verses 3 and 4. Let's look at it together. The psalmist says,

3 If You, Yahweh, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

It's a rhetorical question. No one could stand, in other words. "LORD if You were one to mark iniquities, no one could stand before You. We would all be desperately lost and ruined," is his point. But he says in verse 4,

4 But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared.

There's a contrast that's going on here. He says, "Lord, on the one hand we're all ruined sinners before You, we are violators of Your holiness who deserve nothing but judgment and, Lord, because that's true, who can stand before You?" And there's kind of this recognition underneath the surface of the sovereign holiness of God that causes him to say that, but then on the other side is the recognition of the loyal love of God that says, "There's forgiveness with You that you may be feared."

So let's walk through this section. For God to mark sin, to mark sin, what does that mean that you're going to mark sin? Well, he's expressing the idea that if God would remember our sins with an intent to punish them, we would all be ruined. If God marked out every one of us, every one of us in this room, if God would mark us out by each individual

commandment of the 10 Commandments, and we've still got three more to go in the series and, believe me, it gets more penetrating than anything we've seen so far. It's amazing how spiritual and how searching the law of God is but my point for tonight is this, is that if God were to mark out against each one of us and just go through each one of the 10 Commandments with its outward and inner implications in the first table directed to God, the second table directed toward our relationships with men, our failures to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind, our failure to love our neighbor as ourselves, that's what the law is teaching is, we've seen that so many times, if God were to go through and mark out our individual iniquities and mark them out by each commandment and then mark it collectively, beloved, we would all be ruined. There would be no hope for us. There would be no hope for you whatsoever. None. We would be utterly ruined if God took note of our sin and marked them with an intent to punish them to the full extent that your guilt and mine deserved. There would be utterly no hope.

We cannot stand before a holy God. We can't, in fact, let me remind you of a familiar passage. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Isaiah. You know, you just see the character of God and the consistency of Scripture, the power of the word of God as you compare Scripture with Scripture and you see this unified voice of the living God coming out of the pages of this book expressing his nature and making it known in a way that explodes on our mind, explodes on our conscience, and explodes on our heart with shouting out, "Glory, glory, glory!"

Well, in Isaiah 6, I know that it's a familiar passage but let's look at it in this context: the prophet Isaiah in chapter 6, verse 1, says this, "In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew." Isaiah was seeing something supernatural. Verse 3, "And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.' And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke." That trembling and that smoke is reminiscent of the trembling of the earth that took place when God revealed his law to Moses in Exodus 20. When God manifests his holiness, the earth shakes and Isaiah saw it and he knew that if God would mark his own iniquities against him, he would be undone.

Verse 5, "Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.'" He says, "I am too sinful to have just seen what I witnessed. I have seen something to which I was not entitled and there must be a price to be paid for that." But God, not being one to mark iniquities against his prophet, sent relief in verse 6, "Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, 'Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.'" This holy, holy, holy God having just manifested his glory, looks upon the sinful prophet who knows that he is ruined, that he is sinful, that he is unfit for the presence of God, this holy, holy, holy God takes the initiative to forgive his sin. Isaiah could not have done that on his own. He had

no resources to provoke God to give forgiveness to him. God out of his loyal love, God out of his tender mercy has mercy on the prophet and symbolizes the forgiveness of sin by giving him that which would clean his unclean tongue.

With that in mind, go back to Psalm 130. We just saw illustrated in Isaiah the substance of the spiritual reality expressed in these two verses. Let's read them again. By the way, just a little thing here. I know that we turn to Scripture, we read it together, that's the way it should be done. Beloved, that's the way that it should be done. It's not enough to just summarize Scripture or to allude to it as the pattern, you know, we need to come to God's word and we need to read it; whether we're turning to the page and reading it or a preacher is quoting it verbatim in his sermon, we need to see the word of God for itself. That's one of the safeguards that you have as you listen to preaching is does this preacher take me to the word itself or does he kind of summarize things? When you're seeing the word yourself, there is protection for you in that because you can see for yourself where the preacher is getting his message from and what he's saying from. And you should demand that and expect that not only from me but from any preacher that you listen to, and that will go a long way to distinguishing the true from the false prophets and the true and false teachers. There are no prophets here today but, you know, just be mindful of that and not just simply somebody who throws out a verse here and there but that is coming to you and explaining Scripture in its context and explaining Scripture with Scripture and not trying to teach simply by illustrations and syllogisms and things like that. You need to see the word of God. You need to read the word of God. You need to have it explained to you in context and this is the proper way to teach the word of God.

So it's not just, you know, what we try to do here is not simply to teach you truth but to show you how to approach the word of God and how it is to be handled so that you can distinguish the true from the false. All of that to say I want to read verses 3 and 4 again in light of what we saw from Isaiah. Verses 3 and 4, "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" Such a fearful thought. If God's nature was not to be merciful, we would be ruined. But he says, "But You're not like that, there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared." And so if God counted our sins against us without mercy, none of us could stand in his presence.

These two verses identify one of the central themes about the human condition of all times since the fall of Adam. How can a holy God forgive sin and still be just? How can he uphold justice and grant forgiveness at the same time? If he upholds justice, it seems that we all would perish because we're all guilty and justice requires our condemnation. But if he forgives sin, what happens to justice? This is a great dilemma that is solved only at the cross of Jesus Christ where righteousness and mercy meet, where justice and forgiveness kiss each other, in the words of one of the past Psalms that we've looked at. And the remainder of the Psalm is joined together by this theme of justice meeting together with mercy. Look at the last verse there in verse 8 where the psalmist says, "And He," meaning this Yahweh Adonai, "He will redeem Israel," he will forgive Israel, "From all his iniquities."

So this theme is wrapped around the need for forgiveness in light of God's holy justice and he states the question rhetorically there in verse 3, "Who could stand, Lord?" It's a rhetorical question. The answer is obviously no one, and yet as he asks that rhetorical question, he holds out hope that there is a solution to his dilemma. He comes as a guilty soul to God, he comes as a guilty soul to God in hopes of forgiveness and he holds out this hope saying, "There is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared."

Now that word "forgiveness" means that God is a God who pardons our iniquity. Micah 7:18 to 20 talks about that. We won't turn there. God pardons our sin, meaning that he does not hold them against us, he does not punish us like our sins deserve. For his people today speaking in New Testament terms, for the one that has been redeemed by Christ, that has repented of sin and turned to Christ as Lord and Savior, the promise of Scripture is that God has removed our iniquities from us as far as the east is from the west. Think about being up on a tall building looking out over things and you look out to the left and you see the horizon there, you look out to the right and you see the horizon there and there's no end to it, there's such a separation between the left horizon to the right. Scripture gives us that picture of how far God has removed our sins from our account so that he will not hold them against us. It's wonderful to think that God is like this. And by the way, let me just, you know, just give you a little foretaste, we're going to cover this matter on Sunday. Sunday is a Communion Sunday in the life of our church. We're going to pause our series on the 10 Commandments in order to gather around the Lord's Table and remember the work of Christ on our behalf which enabled pardon to come to pass, and so you'll want to be anticipating that and asking the Lord to prepare your heart for it. But God forgives our sins. He pardons our sins and he accepts us as righteous for the sake of his Son. That's the sense of what justification means, God declares us righteous. He not only pardons our sin, he not only forgives us, he accepts us as righteous in his sight as though we had fully complied with every demand of his law. That was the theme of the song that we sang just before I stepped up to speak. His robes for mine. The righteousness of Christ given to me after my robes of filth and sin and guilt were placed on him where God punished them. The great exchange. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Look at verse 4 with me again. Plumb the depths of this verse in light of the coming of Christ, his death, his resurrection and his ascension. How much forgiveness is there with this great God? It is pictured and we see it clearly in Christ. So much forgiveness is in him, so much grace, so much mercy, so much kindness, so much love that he came himself in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He came himself. He himself came to earth. He himself went to the cross. He himself died. He himself was buried. That's how full of forgiveness the gracious heart of God is. That's how full of grace, full of grace and truth in the language of the gospel of John, how full of grace and truth Christ is that he did that for us. And beloved, I hope you understand and see that the coming of Christ and his sacrificial death on the cross is so much more an expression of the goodness of God than it could have been if he'd just unrighteously wiped away our sins and disregarded justice and just didn't do anything about it, you know, and he just made an accounting entry on the ledger so that without any context just declared us not guilty. Well, beloved, that would not uphold holiness, that would not uphold justice, and that would do nothing

to display the depth of the grace of God like the coming of Christ does. Now we see how much forgiveness, how much grace is there that Christ at personal cost suffered and endured the wrath of God on our behalf and underwent the shame of the cross in order that we might be forgiven. How much forgiveness is there in Christ? You cannot plumb the depths of it. We will go throughout all of eternity and we will not tap bottom on it. That's how great his forgiveness is, eternity won't be enough to display the fullness of it for us to fully grasp it.

I believe and this is just my opinion, I believe that we'll grow in our depth of understanding and eternity will get sweeter and sweeter as God deepens our understanding but we'll never plumb the depths of it. We will never plumb the depths, we will not have the infinite mind necessary to plumb the depths of such infinite grace and love. That's how much forgiveness there is in Christ. It's infinite because your sins brought infinite guilt to your soul and in his infinite person, perfect deity wed to perfect humanity, he absorbed all of that guilt at the cross for you and for me.

Now why would he do that? You know, what Matt read a great text to prepare for this text when he read Titus 2. He redeemed us so as to purchase a people for himself zealous for good works. Verse 4 expresses the exact same idea, "there is forgiveness with You, That," unto this purpose, "That You may be feared." God saved you in order that you might fear him. God didn't simply save you so that you would not go to hell. The reductionist gospel that so many places preach leave you with, "I'm not going to go to hell and that's it." Well, no. No, that's such a truncation of the gospel and the purpose of salvation that it's almost a misrepresentation if that's all you're ever told and all that you ever believe. God saved you in order to make you his own. God saved you in order to sanctify you to himself, to set you apart for himself that you would be set apart to be his, to be his people, and as his people you are to fear him. Christ saved us in order to have a people that belonged to him.

So why does God forgive us of our sins? He's building a people who would fear him. In other words, I'm about to define what fear means in this context, in other words, he saves us so that we would worship him and obey him out of grateful hearts, out of renewed hearts full of love and gratitude for such a gracious gift being bestowed on such a guilty soul as yours and mine. God does that so that we would respond in love and worship, what the Scripture calls fearing him. So God does not grant salvation merely to save us from judgment. There's a far greater purpose there. He saves us to fear him, to obey him, to worship him, in the highest sense, to know him. To know this God who is like this, this God who does not mark iniquities but instead grants forgiveness, this God who is Yahweh and Adonai, that we would know him in those ways. And beloved, when we talk in these terms as Christian people to one another, we are unfolding the reason that you exist. This is why you exist. It's not to pursue your career first and foremost, you know, or to have a spouse and family. Those things are great, those things are gifts from God. He certainly hasn't saved you just so that you can chase after all kinds of earthly activity that are all going to be forgotten in eternity. No. That's such a low level upon which to live. God saved you to know him. That's why you exist. You know, what's the purpose of man? The purpose of man is to know God and to enjoy him forever, to glorify God and to

enjoy him forever. That's why you exist is to know the God who is like this and who has done that in your life.

So he saves you so that you would serve him and at this point in a message like this, all I can do, it's a blessed place of liberation for me at the point like this, I just have to leave it to the Holy Spirit to work in your heart to affirm or contradict whether you're a person like that or not. I can't decide that for you. I don't even know what the affections of your heart really are as you sit here. I have good inclinations on a lot of you but I don't, you know, the Spirit of God just has to make that real. It's said of Spurgeon each time he walked up to the pulpit in order to preach, he walked up saying, "I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit." And trusting the Spirit of God to work through the proclaimed word for God to accomplish what he wants in the hearts of his people. I can't imagine doing ministry in any other way than that. But I can ask the question: do you define your life in that terms, "The reason I exist is to know God and to glorify Him with everything that He's given to me"? Somewhere in the truly redeemed heart the answer is, "Yes." Perhaps a sad, sorrowful yes that says, "Yes, but I fall so far short. But yes, that is why I exist. That's why I want to live. I live to glorify my Redeemer."

I don't need to tell this story but I do. I was on a flight in Russia 30 years ago. There was a Russian tour guide that I was sitting next to on this flight and we got into this wonderful conversation about the gospel. This was before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Her name was Marina. I gave her a Bible when I left and obviously I have no idea what happened to her since then. I hope I see her in heaven. But we were sitting there and we were going back and forth, it was kind of a late night flight. I was unmarried at the time and everybody else is trying to sleep and we're having this animated conversation. Everybody was irritated with us but she was engaged. I remember so clearly, 37 years later I remember her looking at me and saying with a Russian accent, a beautiful Russian accent that I won't try to imitate. But she said, "So you live your life to glorify your God?" And I said, "Yes, that's exactly it." She understood the purpose of salvation in that moment better than a lot of Christians do today. She said, "So what you're telling me is that the purpose of your life therefore is to glorify your God, that's why you live." I said, "Yeah, that's right, Marina, you get it." That's what this text is saying. I didn't know my Scriptures well enough to take her here but this is exactly what verse 4 is saying, "there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared."

So we serve this God who forgives us with exclusive devotion and with loving obedience. That's what it means to fear him. But as we do that, we all know that there are times of trial and discouragement that come our way. That leads us to the third section here this evening. A profession of faith. A profession of faith. You see, God saved us and he designed the process of sanctification, of spiritual growth, to test us, and just as athletes lift weights and the weights resist their muscles and their muscles grow stronger as they lift the weights, so in sanctification, heavy trials come that cause us to grow stronger in these desires. And we see this expressed in verses 5 and 6 when the psalmist says,

5 I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait [do you see the repetition there, the emphasis, I wait. I wait,] And in His word do I hope. 6 My soul waits for the Lord More than the watchmen for the morning; Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning.

So there's repetition, again, just in this compact text. "I wait. My soul waits. My soul waits more than the watchman in the morning, more than the watchman in the morning." He's so engaged and energized by trusting in God that he just repeats himself in order to express the fullness of what's in his heart. Just the poetry of it is stunning.

So after verses 3 and 4, the psalmist knows that he was forgiven but he's waiting for a restoration of his joy, just like David and we quoted that in Psalm 51, "Lord, restore to me the joy of my salvation." Now he knows that God's a forgiving God but his full joy hasn't been restored. He's waiting for it. And so in this portion of the Psalm he's stating the ground of his hope, "One day my joy will be restored to me. It's not now. I'll wait for it. I can wait. I'll look to the Lord and I'll wait for the restoration of my joy." Those of you with heavy grief, heavy sorrow, here's a text just for you. In his spiritual dilemma he is looking expectantly to the Lord for help and specifically he's trusting the word of God.

Look at the end of verse 5 there, "in His word do I hope. " This God whom he knows is a God who makes and keeps promises. That's the objective ground of his hope. His hope that God will restore him is outside of himself. "God, outside of me, before me, You have said things, You have made promises in Your word and I'm trusting them. And because You are Yahweh, the God of loyal love who makes promises to His people, I'm confident that You will one day honor that promise in a way that I will know is the fulfillment of it. I don't see it now, I don't feel it now but I'll wait until it does." Waiting with an expectant looking to God to honor the promise that he's made.

And he compares his attitude to the watchman waiting for morning there in verse 6. When a city's watchman stood on night duty, the nights would obviously get long and often wearisome. The light of morning would bring other guards to relieve them from their duty and the weariness of it all would be alleviated. In the toilsome darkness, they looked for the light that they knew would eventually come. The sun was always going to come up during their night watch and it would bring an end to the wait. The psalmist points to that simple picture and says, "That's like me right now. I'm in darkness but I'm waiting expectantly on the Lord and I know He will help me in due time. My soul is heavy but it won't always be this way. The light will dawn and dispel the darkness." And if you have ever walked through dark times and come out on the other side, you know how glorious that is. Those of you that have tasted the deep darkness of grief, the deep darkness of despair, the deep darkness of sin or sin gripping you, in the throes of sin's grip upon you and the Lord delivered you from that, you look back and you have memories of that darkness but now you're in the light, you realize how glorious it is to be delivered from that, for the clouds to be dispelled and the bright sun and the blue sky to be raining down upon your soul again. I know that's a mixture of metaphors but I don't care. You know what I meant.

This is what God does for his people. He never completely abandons us to the darkness. The light will come and we will see it most clearly when we're with him in glory, and all of the earthly darkness will be forgotten and there won't be anybody there asking questions, "God, why did You do this?" No, none of that is going to take place. When we are in glory, we are going to be so captivated, so enraptured by the glory of Christ we're not going to think about what happened on earth. The former things are going to be forgotten and never brought to mind again and we're not going to be scolding God, wagging our finger, "Why did You do that?" People who think like that can't possibly be redeemed, to think that I'm going to call God to an account when I see him. No. No, we're going to be so amazed at the glory of Christ that we're not going to want to go back even if we could.

The light will come and when the help of God comes, the distress will pass, and so in this picture of a watchman, the psalmist is vividly picturing his longing for the light, his dependence on God to bring the light, and his assurance that the light will come. It's a wonderful picture that leads us into our fourth and final section: a promise of redemption. A promise of redemption. The psalmist in verse 6 has stated his personal hope, now as so often happens in the Psalms, he exhorts the nation to follow him in this hope. Notice how he changes from a personal consideration to the third person. He says,

7 O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is lovingkindness,
And with Him is abundant redemption. 8 And He will redeem Israel From
all his iniquities.

Again the repetition. Israel, verse 7. Israel, verse 8. The psalmist has worked through his problem in the first six verses and he is now waiting on God for the finality of his deliverance, the fullness, better stated, of his deliverance. Now he looks outward, he looks beyond himself and calls others to follow him in this same hope, and the nation, the people of God needed this reminder often because they went through so much prolonged sorrow in the Old Testament. They spent 400 years in Egypt in slavery, 40 years in the wilderness. The exile to Babylon lasted 70 years. And then after the ministry of Malachi, there were 400 silent years from the end of the prophets to the arrival of John the Baptist who was proclaiming the coming of Christ. Centuries and centuries of waiting and this Psalm precedes some of those events that I alluded to, but just getting the broad sweep of things, there were a lot of dark discouraging times and the people of God needed a word like this, "Keep watching. Keep looking for the morning light. Hope in the Lord. Depend upon Him. Trust Him. Submit to Him."

Do you know what those long centuries mean, 400 years in Egypt, 400 silent years? Do you know what that means? Just think about what it means in human terms. Many many people in the covenant nation were born, lived and died without seeing any relief in their circumstances. That teaches us something: our hope is not found on earth, our hope is found in the person of our Lord. We know our hope is found in Christ who is our hope, Ephesians 2.

This idea of redemption, verse 7, abundant redemption, again it's repeated. Verse 8, "He will redeem Israel." Redemption has the idea of deliverance through a payment. It's clear that he's pointing beyond earthly relief. This redemption is from all his iniquities and as long as we're living on earth, we're going to have iniquity, we're going to sin. And so he has a spiritual redemption in mind, forgiveness of sin, and what he's saying is that those who have no merit of their own, those who grieve over sin can be confident of the Lord's forgiveness when they trust in his loyal love. When we trust in Christ, we can have complete assurance that the sun will rise and the darkness will be dispelled.

Beloved, the greatness of the love of Christ means that there will be an abundant redemption for you and me, far more generous than could be expected. Here in the Psalm in the context of the Psalm, the hope is confident but as the Psalm closes, it's unfulfilled. It's future tense, "He will redeem Israel From all his iniquities." He's looking to something future. The Psalm doesn't end on the note of fulfillment, it ends on the note of promise.

So with this wonderful Psalm pointing us to the nature of God in the person of Christ, beloved, let me just ask you this question: are you aware of sin and feel the weight of sin even though maybe many around you couldn't care less about such things? Do you have family or friends who refuse to forgive you for your past wrongs? I know people like that, you do too. I've got people that won't forgive me. Well, you and I, in light of Psalm 130, we can take heart. They may not forgive us but our God will. He's a forgiving God who does not mark iniquities. There is forgiveness in him so that he may be feared.

So beloved, it's my privilege to just point you to the Lord Jesus Christ one final time here this evening. He offers forgiveness to everyone who repents and comes to him by faith alone. For the world, they don't even care about a promise like that. For the weary sinner, that's the best news of all.

Let's pray together.

Father, we just bless Your name that there is forgiveness with You. And for those of us that You have graciously forgiven, we gladly fear You. The fear of love, the fear of respect, the fear of obedience, Father, we give our lives over to You. Our lives are for Your glory. Marina had it right so many years ago, you live your life for the glory of your God. Father, may it be true of each one of us and if Marina is still on this earth, Father, I pray that You would have mercy on her soul, not only hers but all those that she loves and knows, Father, would You bring the gospel with power even at this late hour. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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