

Out of the Depths, Redemption!

Psalm 130

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A Song of Ascents.

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!

² O Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.

⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.

⁸ And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

Introduction: Singing the Blues to God

I love music, and I tend to like music that has a bit of a dark edge to it – good music, that is, like the blues. I enjoyed listening to Muddy Waters on the flight back from Dubai in July. My favorite Christian singer-songwriter is Andrew Peterson, who also tends to have a raw, honest edge to his music, which is both dark and hopeful, a blend of melancholy and joy. Perhaps the same thing which makes my taste in music tend toward the blues also makes me love Psalm 130.

I don't know if I can say for sure that Psalm 130 is my absolute favorite psalm. That's almost like asking me which of my children is my favorite. But Psalm 130 is definitely on my short list. I love Psalms 27, 34, 51, 103, 130 and 139 for different reasons. Psalm 130 is perhaps the most complete Gospel psalm, laying out beautifully how to be made right with God.

Psalm 127 is the center of the Songs of Ascents, and "He gives to His beloved sleep" is the central line of that central psalm, as we saw a few weeks ago. However, as I read and re-read the Songs of Ascents, I find Psalms 130-131 to be the emotional and redemptive climax of the series. Psalm 130 clearly proclaims the Gospel of God's steadfast love and plentiful redemption, and Psalm 131 most beautifully portrays the peace and contentment God alone can give us in redemption.

I'm certainly not alone in my deep love for Psalm 130. In my opinion, the three most brilliant theological minds in the history of the church were Augustine of Hippo, John Calvin, and John Owen. All three of these great men of God named Psalm 130 as their favorite psalm, and it was also among the favorites of Martin Luther, John Bunyan, and John Wesley. Luther called Psalm 130 a "Pauline Psalm," saying it so clearly lays out the Gospel, it could have been written by Paul himself.

I see four distinct movements in Psalm 130's 8 short verses, and so I agree with the ESV's divisions of the psalm into 4 sections. I take my outline from Alistair Begg, as much as from anyone else, though my headings are a bit different from his. In verses 1-2, the psalmist is crying to the LORD from the depths. In verses 3-4, he is reasoning with the LORD about his sin and God's forgiveness. In verses 5-6, he is waiting on the LORD. Finally, in verses 7-8, he is preaching hope in the LORD, or proclaiming the Gospel of the LORD, to his fellow Israelites.

It is amazing how the psalmist goes in such a short time from the depths of despair to the heights of hope. As part of the Songs of Ascents, Psalm 130 is itself truly a song of ascent, rising from the depths to the heights in 8 beautiful verses.

A. Crying to the LORD, vv. 1-2

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!

2 O Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

Psalm 130 opens with a plaintive cry "out of the depths." The specific nature of "the depths" is not identified, which I believe leaves it open for us to sing whenever we are "in the depths" for whatever reason. Psalm 129 had addressed the issue of the affliction and suffering of God's people at the hands of their enemies.

Whatever might have been the cause of putting the psalmist in the depths, it becomes clear to him in the depths what his true need is: Mercy. God is so merciful to us, that when our sorrow or affliction or suffering of any kind brings us to Him, He shows us our truest and deepest need and meets it. Think about the paralyzed man whose four friends brought him to Jesus, tearing a hole in the roof to lower him to Christ. Jesus looked at this paralyzed man and said, "*Your sins are forgiven!*" The man came to Jesus for healing and he left healed and forgiven!

God often puts His people into the depths so we will cry out to Him. In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis said, "*Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.*" It is God's love for us that causes Him to bruise us so that He might truly and deeply heal us.

Note the earnest desperation in the psalmist's plea:

O Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

He wants God to not just hear his plea but his voice. He wants to know not just that God receives the message, but that God hears his cry! He needs to be heard by God as he pleads for mercy.

B. Reasoning with the LORD, vv. 3-4

Having pleaded to the LORD in his agony, the psalmist now begins to reason with God, on the basis of his own need and God's character:

*³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?*

*⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.*

If God were to keep an indelible track record of everyone's sins, no one would be able to stand before Him. The psalmist knows this. He knows his guilt and his need before a holy, holy, holy God. His sin makes him unable to stand before God, if indeed God were to keep a record of his wrongs.

Here's the problem: God sees all and God knows all. Nothing escapes His view, even things which escape our own. God knows our hearts better than we know our own hearts, and even what we know of our own hearts is enough to condemn us before Him. We have failed to love Him with our heart, mind, soul and strength. We have failed to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. We have lied, coveted, cheated, hated, lusted and been puffed up with pride. We have judged and condemned others as somehow lesser or worse than ourselves.

So, how can we stand before God? Verse 4 gives us the answer, "*But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.*" How did the psalmist know with such confidence that there is forgiveness with the LORD? He knew from the way God had revealed Himself. In Exodus 34, God revealed His character to Moses: "*The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.*" (Ex. 34:6-7, ESV)

This self-revelation of the LORD's character had become very important to God's people. Psalm 86, written by David, echoes these words in verses 5 & 15 –

*For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.*

*But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*

Psalm 103, also written by David, echoes these words and the glorious truth of God's forgiveness, in vv. 8-10:

*The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

*He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.*

So, the writer of Psalm 130 knew, like David, that the LORD had revealed Himself as a forgiving God. But the psalmist also knows that such forgiveness from God must not be cheap or taken lightly. God forgives that He may be feared, that is, worshiped with reverence and awe.

When we see God's holiness and our sin, we know deeply and truly that we have no hope of standing before God in our sin. When we know that God forgives, the relief and the joy brings a reverence and a wonder to our worship of God.

The same self-revelation of God's character that tells us the joyful news of His forgiveness – "*forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*" also tells us something very sobering, that He "*will by no means clear the guilty.*" How can we reconcile these two aspects of God's character, each equally clear and strong and uncompromising? We will have to wait for the answer to that question.

Once the psalmist had reasoned that God forgives, he resolves to wait on the LORD. He knows what he needs and he knows God alone can give it to him, and so he waits.

C. Waiting for the LORD, vv. 5-6

Our modern American lives don't have much patience for waiting, and our modern American evangelicalism doesn't have much space for the concept of waiting on the LORD. When we don't get what we think we need, we often settle for an emotional experience that might move us into thinking we have received it, when we have really just received a cheap imitation. What we need is grace, forgiveness, and transformation, not a spiritual high, a cheap rush of emotions, which quickly fade/

The psalmist knows what he needs and he is resolved to wait –

*⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.*

Notice first the basis of the waiting: hope in the word of the LORD. Hope here is not wishful thinking, but an eager expectation that God will in fact do what He has promised to do, with a patience to wait for Him to do it.

Romans 8:23-25 describes well this waiting in hope: "*we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*"

And so, on the basis of God's promise in His word, the psalmist waits with determined expectation and settled hope.

D. Preaching Hope in the LORD, vv. 7-8

As he waits on the LORD, the psalmist receives His answer, which he clearly proclaims to others. What answer? The answer to the reconciliation of the seeming contradiction at the heart of God's character, the resolution of the tension between God's forgiveness and His unflinching justice: steadfast love and plentiful redemption!

⁷ *O Israel, hope in the LORD!*

*For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.*

⁸ *And he will redeem Israel*

from all his iniquities.

We can hope in the LORD with confidence because of three things:

1. With the LORD there is steadfast love
2. With the LORD there is plentiful redemption
3. God Himself will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Steadfast Love: Where can we find true steadfast love? Where can we find a committed, secure and compassionate lovingkindness? With the LORD and the LORD alone! God's steadfast love is the foundation of our hope and confidence. God has committed Himself to His people, and His love for His people will never fail. As the psalms proclaim again and again "His steadfast love endures forever!"

Plentiful Redemption: Out of God's steadfast love, He has plentiful redemption for His people. This phrase can be translated various ways – great, abundant, plenteous, or full redemption or ransom. The root of "plentiful" here is the same as the word translated "greatly" in Psalm 129:1-2:

Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth" —

let Israel now say—

² *"Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth,*

yet they have not prevailed against me.

So, if we take these two psalms together, they begin with the complaint that our enemy has afflicted us greatly from our youth, but they end with the good news of great redemption from the LORD. If we understand the world, the flesh and the devil to be our true enemies and temptations and sin and guilt and shame to be our deepest and truest afflictions, then these psalms proclaim together what Paul declares at the end of Romans 5: "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (vv. 20-21)

God's grace, His steadfast love, causes Him to redeem us again and again, to give us grace abundantly in the face of increasing sin.

4. **He will redeem Israel:** The psalmist's confidence in the steadfast love and the abundant redemption of the LORD leads him to conclude that the LORD will indeed redeem His people from all of their sins. This means that the LORD Himself will pay the full price to deliver His people from bondage to sin and death forever.

As Christians, we are able to look back on the redemption price paid for our sins on the cross, just as the psalmist looked ahead to it by faith. We confessed together earlier that our only comfort in life and in death is that we are not our own but **“belong-
body and soul, in life and in death— to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all our sins with His precious blood and has set us free from the tyranny of the devil.”**

This is redemption! Christ has paid the price for all our sins. He has bought us back from our bondage, our slavery to sin and the fear of death. He has made us His forever, setting us free from the tyranny of the devil and the many great afflictions with which he afflicts us.

And yet, here's the truth: While our redemption has been accomplished – the price has been paid in full by Jesus on the cross – and our redemption is being applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit, who unites us to Christ and all His benefits by faith, we are not yet fully free from all our sins. We are not yet fully enjoying the reality of our accomplished redemption.

In other words, we still find ourselves “in the depths” at times, crying out to God from out of those depths for the redemption which Jesus has already accomplished. We still experience the sorrow and the darkness of sin and shame and fear.

So, we can still cry and pray and sing Psalm 130, and we can still look ahead in faith to what is yet to come, the finishing of the great work of redemption in our lives. We can echo Paul's words in Philippians 1:6, *“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”*

In Christ, you can pray, cry and sing Psalm 130, knowing you have been redeemed, you are being redeemed and you will be finally and fully redeemed from all your iniquities. God's steadfast love and plentiful redemption will never fail you. Like the psalmist, you can believe this for yourself and also proclaim it joyfully to others.

Conclusion: From Blues to Gospel

And that allows you to move, like Psalm 130, from singing the blues to singing Gospel music, sweet words of affirmation and celebration of the goodness of God. Looking back of our accomplished redemption, looking now at the redemption being applied to our hearts and lives as we trust in Jesus, and looking ahead to the coming day of completed, perfected redemption, we can sing and proclaim the steadfast love and the abundant redemption, from the depths to the heights of life into eternity!