

HOPE
Psalm 130
September 13, 2009 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

We come this morning to the best-known of the psalms of ascent, Psalm 130. It is a penitential psalm—one of seven. It provides a snapshot or a summary of the movement of the psalms of ascent, beginning in deep despair as Psalm 120:1, “In my trouble I cried the LORD...” and it ascends to the hope of the people of God. This psalm has been cherished by many through the years, some as one of the means of their salvation. Many are aware of John Wesley’s conversion upon hearing the reading of Luther’s introduction in his commentary on Romans. What is not as well known is that same day Wesley attended a service at St. Paul’s Cathedral where Psalm 130 was sung as an anthem. He was greatly moved by the psalm and stated that it was one of the means that God used to open his heart to the gospel.

And on mentioning Luther, we cannot proceed without commenting on his love for Psalm 130, which he called one of the “Pauline Psalms.” He cherished it because it set forth forgiveness for sin apart from the works of the law. In fact, Luther said, we find in it one of the best expositions in the Old Testament on salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. For him, it was but a commentary on justification by faith.

I agree with Luther, for in this psalm we have a portrait of the gospel—a lucid declaration of man’s need to be reconciled to God. In it we see the doctrines of grace—from the depravity of man through his perseverance in the hope of redemption and the promises associated with that redemption. May our hearts be gladdened, as was Wesley’s and Luther’s, Augustine’s and Calvin’s, and countless others, who read and contemplated this psalm as we look together at it this morning.

1. The Misery of Sin (130:1-2)

The opening words reveal despondency and despair, “**Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD.**” “**The depths**” in which the psalmist finds himself reflect a severe distress. Figuratively, he was caught and drowning in the deep waters of despair, overwhelmed by his misery, and he knew what awaited him apart from God’s mercy. The prophet Ezekiel pictures a man such as this and the misery of God’s judgment:

Ezekiel 27:32-36 – ³²“Who is like Tyre, like her who is silent in the midst of the sea? ³³When your wares went out from the seas, you satisfied many peoples; with the abundance of your wealth and your merchandise you enriched the kings of earth. ³⁴Now that you are broken by the seas in the depths of the waters, your merchandise and all your company have fallen in the midst of you. ³⁵All the inhabitants of the coastlands are appalled at you, and their kings are horribly afraid; they are troubled in countenance. ³⁶The merchants among the peoples hiss at you; you have become terrified and you will cease to be forever.”

The psalmist is under this type of anguish, recognizing that apart from God he is helpless and hopeless. It is likened to the misery in Psalm 69:

Psalm 69:1-2 – ¹Save me, O God, for the waters have threatened my life. ²I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me.

What has brought the writer into this condition? Some believe that he is describing the sufferings that the people of God might encounter simply for being the people of God. However, the context suggests that this is not simply referring to suffering and persecution. The psalmist writes about “**iniquities**” in v. 3, “**forgiveness**” in v. 4, and “**redemption**” in vv. 7-8. Given these things, it is clear that the problem is *sin* and the misery associated with it. This is the view of John Owen, who wrote the following in his 323-page study on this psalm:

He cries out under the weight and waves of his sins. This the ensuing psalm makes evident. Desiring to be delivered from these depths out of which he cried, he deals with God wholly about mercy and forgiveness; and it is sin alone from which forgiveness is a deliverance. The doctrine also that he preached upon his delivery is that of mercy, grace and redemption, as is manifest from the close of this psalm... Sin is the disease, affliction only a symptom of it.¹

Given that sin is the problem, we should examine what sin is. The *Baptist Shorter Catechism* asks: **Q15: What is sin?** **A:** Sin is any lack of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God. Who does this effect? Who has sinned according to this definition? **Romans 3:23** – For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And what are the consequences of this sin? **Romans 6:23** – For the wages of sin is death...

Q20: What is the misery of that estate whereinto all mankind fell? **A:** All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under His wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.

This is what the psalmist felt – the enormity of his sin and his separation from God. It is only when a man is in this state that he will cry out to God as his only source of hope and plead for His mercy as the psalmist does here.

Why do you think there is a lack of awareness of sin in our culture today? The correct answer is because there is very little awareness of God. In opening his Institutes, Calvin wrote that for man to have a right view of himself, he must first have a right view of God. Where there is a low view or little awareness of God, there will be a low view and little awareness of sin. This is illustrated biblically at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 32.

ILLUS: Exodus 32—Exodus 32:31 – Then Moses returned to the LORD, and said, “Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves.

James Boice is right, “Where God has been abolished an awareness of sin is inevitably abolished also, *because sin is defined only in relationship to God.*”²

The psalmist knew this. He is overwhelmed by the sense of his sin; he is overwhelmed by the guilt associated with it in the sight of God. He understood that man deserves nothing but hell. He continues in verse 2, “**Hear my voice,**” and then, “**Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.**” It’s as though the psalmist is saying ‘I want You, Lord, not only to hear my words; I want You to hear my voice. I want You to hear the tone of them. I want You to hear the anguish in my soul. I want You to hear how my soul really feels.’ Here is a believer who is greatly troubled, and he sounds as though he is greatly troubled, and cries to the Lord to hear him and to hear the voice of his supplications. He desires that the Lord relieve his misery.

¹ John Owen, “Prefatory Note” to “A Practical Exposition upon Psalm 130,” *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 6, 324; from James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, vol. 3, 1138.

² Boice, 1139.

2. The Mercy of Forgiveness (130:3-4)

The psalmist asks one of the most important questions in Scripture, **“If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?”** It is a rhetorical question, magnifying the wonder that God somehow does not mark iniquities as well as stating that if He did, we have no hope. What does his question suggest but that it would be terrible for all men if God did keep a record of sins? If He did keep a record He would only be in agreement with His own inspired words from both the psalmist and the Apostle Paul:

Romans 3:10-12 – ¹⁰ THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE. [see Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3]

That describes man apart from God, separated from Him because of sin—but not those who have been reconciled to Him. In this psalm we encounter that glorious word marking a contrast, **“but”** in v. 4, **“But there is forgiveness with You.”** God is the only one who can forgive us for our sins, the only one who does not keep a record. And the good news of grace is that He provided the way for forgiveness in Christ and that He is ready and willing to forgive all who come to Him through the finished work of Christ’s atonement. You see, it is in Christ’s death on the Cross of Calvary where the sins of those who are called to be children of God were fully and finally dealt with. In His death, our sins are atoned for—His sacrifice is full payment for our sins. At the Cross, our sins were put on Him, and buried with Him, never to be counted again! And there was full cancellation of the debt associated with sin, that debt being more than we could ever pay. There is full redemption in Christ Jesus. This means that for those who recognize as the psalmist did, who are convicted of the depth and seriousness of their sins and the penalty of death that awaits and their utter helplessness to do anything for themselves, and cry out to Him through Christ, trusting in His work on their behalf, there is full pardon, complete forgiveness, for their sins—never to be marked again! Others may not forgive you, your spouse may not forgive; your children may not forgive; your parents may not forgive; your friend or co-worker may not forgive. But there is One who always forgives, and He is God because our God is a forgiving God. And in His forgiveness He will not remember our sins against us. He will remove them as far as the east is from the west—if we cry out to Him for His mercy.

There will be judgment for sin. Sin affects our standing with God. At the judgment, we will either be in Christ, forgiven based on our faith in His merits on our behalf (justified/not guilty) or we will stand alone, judged according to our merits (guilty/condemned). The truth of v.3 is that no person can stand alone. When a person truly experiences this full forgiveness, how can they do anything but worship Him? That is exactly what the psalmist says will be the effect on those who are forgiven, **“That You may be feared.”** Steve Lawson writes, “The result of true forgiveness is never a lackadaisical attitude but holy fear toward God. Divine pardon, rightly understood and humbly received, will always lead to deep reverence for God.”³ That is why Spurgeon translated the verse this way, “There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be loved and worshipped and served.”⁴

The test of forgiveness then is that you love Him and worship Him and serve Him. The glory that we have been forgiven by God in spite of our sin and former disregard for Him leads

³ Steven J. Lawson, *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Psalms 76-150*, 299.

⁴ In Boice, 1142.

us to love Him and others, to proclaim His forgiveness and forgive others as we ourselves have been forgiven.

3. The Wait for Restoration (130:5-6)

Verses 5 and 6 are repetitive, both in word as well as by illustration. The emphasis is, “**I wait for the LORD.**” What is the psalmist waiting for? It is important that we recognize that he is not waiting for forgiveness. As we have already said, when one cries out to God for forgiveness it is granted and received. But here we see the true effects of sin in the believer’s relationship to God. While one’s salvation is secure in the reconciling union with God that comes the moment one is forgiven, in other words, nothing can ever separate the believer from God in Christ, his sin does affect his communion or fellowship with God and others in the body. So the psalmist is not waiting for deliverance or salvation or forgiveness, but on his communion with God to be restored. And as he waits, his hope is in the promises of God’s Word (v. 5).

“It is God whom he has offended by his sin, and it is fellowship with God that has been broken and needs to be restored. *Notice that the forgiveness does not depend on his feeling forgiven.* He is forgiven whether he feels it or not, because he has asked God for it and God has promised to forgive. Now he also wants intimacy with God that should and will follow, and he is waiting for it. He is waiting in faith.”⁵

So while our union with Christ can never be broken (Rom. 8:31-39), sin does affect our communion or fellowship with Christ. This is why we need continued confession of sin in our lives. Fellowship and confession go together. Look at 1 John 1:6-10:

1 John 1:6-10 – ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷ but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

Here we see that there can be no fellowship with God apart from confession of sins and the forgiveness and cleansing that come with it. There are two false assertions in these verses. The first in v. 6 denies that sin affects our communion with God. That is false. Sin does affect our fellowship with Him. The second false assertion is in v. 8, claiming that sin is non-existent as far as the believer is concerned. John called these assertions deceptions and lies and the remedy is found in v. 9. The only way the breach that our sins make in our communion with God can be closed is by confession of sins, literally agreeing with God that our sin is sin. That is what the psalmist does. Confession of sin makes us see ourselves in light of the living God and his holy law. We stop excusing ourselves or commending our selves or blaming others or circumstances for our sin. We agree with God that sin will damn us to everlasting hell unless He forgives and cleanses us.⁶ Confession keeps us in a position of humble dependence upon the Lord and causes us to recognize our unworthiness and constant need of the sufficient work of Christ.

So the psalmist confessed his sin, and he patiently waits for that blessed fellowship with the Lord to be restored and renewed.

⁵ Boice, 1142.

⁶ Joel Beeke, *The Epistles of John*, 46.

4. The Proclamation of Hope (130:7-8)

Upon his confession and restoration, the psalmist cries out with confidence to all others, encouraging them to do the same, **“O Israel, hope in the LORD.”** Having found forgiveness, he now desires all around him to experience it as well. He was their hope; and He is our hope. And it is important that we notice the basis of this hope. The psalmist grounds his experience of forgiveness not in the experience itself, but in the very nature of God, **“For with the LORD there is lovingkindness, and with Him there is abundant redemption.”** And how did he know this? Was it simply because of his experience? NO! Remember v. 5—**“In His word do I hope.”** Did the psalmist have His word?

Exodus 34:6-7 – ⁶ The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.

That was his confidence. That was his trust. That was his hope. In other words, the psalmist believed that God was the God of covenant, and that He would fulfill His promises of blessing and forgiveness for all who would confess their sins. So, having experienced forgiveness, he desires all the people to cry out to God for His **“abundant redemption.”**

So we see in this psalm a portrait of the gospel, a man who is delivered by God from the pit of despair and placed on the pinnacle of grace, an ascent from the very gates of hell to the heights of heaven.

Conclusion

1. There are no flood waters for the redeemed! Isaiah 51:10 – “Was it not You who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; Who made the depths of the sea a pathway for the redeemed to cross over?”

2. Many today try to deal with the afflictions associated with sin, the symptoms, rather than with sin itself. That is the nature of man. Rather than deal with sin, they blame others, excuse sin and/or themselves, and try to eradicate the symptom rather than the root. They put it off on something external rather than the internal, that being the heart. Sociologists blame drug abuse on the environment one is brought up in; psychologists write off homosexuality to heredity. I ask a question: “Is God’s wrath against those sins excused because of environment and/or heredity?” Again, the issue is that God is a holy God and *must* punish sin—all sin. Is there such a thing as unpunished sin? This psalmist understood the magnitude and sinfulness of sin: **“Out of the depths...”**

3. Many today say they are Christians but continue to live as if they are not forgiven. This leads to despondency and despair. It suggests that they do not really grasp the justifying merits of Christ’s work on their behalf. That does not necessarily mean that they are unbelievers in a saving sense, but that they exhibit unbelief in God’s promise of full forgiveness. This person is akin to the man in Mark 9 whose son suffered from seizures. When the boy was brought to Jesus we find the following:

Mark 9:22-24 – ²² “If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!” ²³ And Jesus said to him, “‘If You can?’ All things are possible to him who believes.” ²⁴ Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, “I do believe; help my unbelief.”

Do you believe there is full satisfaction for your sins in Christ’s death on the Cross? Do you believe that not only all of your sins, but all of the sins of all of God’s people, from Adam to the last believer, is forgiven? That is the nature of the atonement. Christ’s sacrifice satisfied the punishment of all the sins of all who repent and believe in Christ. Believe in what? Believe that He has paid the price in full for their sins, that those sins are fully forgiven, and that they now stand before God clothed in the righteousness of Christ so that God sees them as though they never sinned!

4. How does the truth that you are forgiven in Christ affect your actions towards others? Are you as forgiving as you are forgiven? Do you have a passion to share your forgiveness with others? Are you a quicker forgiver?