

From the Depths

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could turn back for a short time this evening to Psalm 130.

Psalm 130, and we'll read the whole psalm again together. A Song of Ascent Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy. If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope.

My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord.

[1 : 10] For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Well, friend, the Christian life is, is it not? A life that is very much characterized by seasons.

Times in our Christian lives, we can feel very much that we are in the summer of our soul. We're enjoying the warmth of the light of the countenance of our Savior shining upon us.

We have, as it were, a spring in our spiritual step. We're enjoying a closeness, a sweetness in our communion with the Lord. Other times, we can be so aware of a winter in our soul.

Those times that we find ourselves with the prophet Isaiah crying out, My leanness, my leanness. Those times that it's almost as if there's a cold, hard, thick layer over our soul that is coming between us and our Savior.

[2 : 32] We all know what that's like. That is the way of the Christian. That is the reality tonight of what it is to be a pilgrim on the road to that great celestial city.

And you know, as we come around Psalm 130, we see something in this Psalm of this reality. Not only do we see something of the reality of what it is to be a pilgrim battling with the leanness of our soul, but we also see the implications of such a reality.

This is a penitential psalm. That is a psalm of confession. It's the sixth of seven psalms of confession.

And this psalm is a particularly famous psalm. It's a well-known psalm. It's a psalm that I'm sure many of us here tonight know of by heart. It's a psalm that we've learned from a very young age.

Martin Luther, he loved this psalm. He called this psalm the appalling psalm. He called it an appalling psalm because he saw very much in this psalm the theology that Paul seeks to promote.

[3 : 55] That theology that speaks so clearly of an offer of forgiveness by grace alone that has nothing to do with our own works.

This is a psalm of ascent. You'll see that at the beginning of the psalm. This is not something that's been added in by the translators. This is something that would have been found in the original manuscripts telling us that this is a song of ascent.

This is a song that would have been sung by the people of God as they went up to worship God. But yet in a very real way, this is a psalm of ascent in another way because we see that this is a psalm that starts at rock bottom.

It's a psalm that deals with the realities of the natural norm, the realities that you and I are so accustomed to in this world.

And as it deals with that reality, as we go through the psalm, we see that it begins to ascend. The tone of the psalm, it ascends higher and higher and higher until we reach those heavenly heights of the reality of the redemptive work of Christ.

[5 : 19] So friends, let's turn together to this psalm, Psalm 130, the first verse. Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy.

Here we see, do we not, that the psalmist is in the depths of despair. And a picture is here being painted for us. This is a picture of someone who's at the bottom of the sea.

Someone who's being overwhelmed by the waters around him, so much so that he almost cannot breathe. He's suffocating, he's fighting for his life, he's gasping for a breath of air.

That's a picture that's been painted here. And as we look at this picture, we might ask ourselves, well, why is he in such a state? What is the cause of the despair of the psalmist?

[6 : 29] Is it his providence? Is it that he's found himself in life in a rocky providence, a difficult providence, that he's been pressed from every side so that he's struggling to come to terms with what life is throwing in his direction?

We know, too, what that can feel like. We sometimes say, what now, Lord? Where are you going to take me next? Why is this happening to me?

And so we ask the Lord, why? Friends, this is not a cry that is because of a providence.

This cry that we see tonight before us is a cry from the soul. A cry that comes from within, that is related to the very depths of the being of the psalmist.

This is a cry that tells us that the psalmist here is battling with something that you and I battle with each and every day.

[7 : 42] Here, the psalmist is battling with sin. And he's distressed. And he's distressed. He's distressed because he found himself in such depths.

We know that his distress is due to sin because we see that the whole of the rest of the context of the psalm, it follows on with that theme of forgiveness, of deliverance.

And so we see that he's distressed because he's experiencing a fracture in his communion with God, an alienation from his heavenly father.

We don't know the exact cause for this, but yet we see it. Here it is. It's very real. And we see him as being in a pit, unable to move.

Do you know, friend, tonight what that feels like? Do you know what it feels like that during those times where you're so aware of the wickedness of your own heart, that you're almost paralyzed?

[8 : 54] That you feel like you're in the darkness, that your communion with your father has been overshadowed by the sinfulness of your heart? Do you know tonight what that is like?

As children of God, we are called forth to show the fruit of the Spirit.

That is what is to characterize us as the Lord's people. That is our identifying feature, the fruit of the Spirit. That's how those around us will know that we are the Lord's people.

Nothing else but the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

These are what characterizes the Lord's people. You and me tonight, if we profess to be his. Yet as we examine our hearts tonight at the beginning of this communion weekend, as we stand against the standard that has been set before us here in the fruit of the Spirit, we see that we fall so far short of what is required of us.

[10 : 19] We're unkind. We're unkind. We're unloving to one another, even as the people of God. We're unfaithful.

We're unfaithful with our tongue, what we say about other people. Instead of joy, we're so consumed with negativity. We're always looking at the negative.

We're so taken up with that which is wrong. We never come to think about all that is ours in Christ. We're quick-tempered.

We're quick-tempered in a way that we lose control of ourselves. Yes, we're happy to sit at the Lord's table, but yet we go out and we make a show of ourselves. Yet as we reflect, friends, on what we see within, it bothers us, does it not?

And we wonder, is it really possible for a true child of God to be able to act like this? Surely this is not the way a Christian should act.

[11 : 26] Friend, if that is you tonight, and I dare say we can see ourselves, all of us, in this, take heart.

Take heart. Because the ironic thing is that such an awareness of the sinfulness of our hearts tonight, although unpleasant it is, in fact a sign of spiritual life, a sign that tonight you are indeed alive in Christ.

We see this with the psalmist. Notice where he turns in his time of distress. Yes, he knows he has sinned, but where does he turn? What does he do?

Lord, hear my voice. When he's at his wit's end, he turns to the Lord. Is that where you go? When you're brought to rock bottom, when you've got nowhere else to go inside, when you find yourself going to the Lord, Lord, help me.

That's what we see here. More than anything, the psalmist longs to be heard. He longs for the Lord to hear his voice. Now notice he doesn't ask for anything specific.

[12 : 45] He only asks to be heard, to know that God is still listening to him, to know that his disobedience hasn't left him forgotten, forsaken by God.

Lord, hear my voice. That's how it is when we're in the depths. When it would seem to us that there's such a great gulf between us and our Saviour, we just want to be heard, do we not?

We just want that assurance, even through a word of rebuke from his word, that he is still inclining his ear unto his voice.

It was Spurgeon who said that deep places beget deep devotion. Depths of earnestness are stirred by depths of tribulation.

Diamonds sparkle most amid the darkness. Diamonds sparkle most amid the darkness.

[13 : 54] And so such a desire, such a calling out to God, it is a sign of life, a sign of life in you and in me tonight, that no matter how far we fall into the depths, inevitably, invariably, what do we do?

We turn to the Lord. Weak and feeble, yes, but we turn to the Lord in prayer. Yes, it might take us some time to do so. We're slow to do so.

Often that can be our last port of call, but we're brought to that place, are we not, in the depths where we see that there's nothing in this world that can bring balm to our soul as his children, and so we turn to the Lord.

And in doing so, we show forth a diamond among the darkness. But you know, as well as prayer being a sign of life in the soul of the psalmist here, we see something else.

We see, do we not, an uncomfortable awareness of the consequences of sin. We turn to verse three. If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

[15 : 12] It's as if here, the psalmist is saying, if you were to deal with my sin accordingly, I simply could not stand up to it. I know you are a holy God.

I know you are a just God who cannot look upon my sin. And neither could the psalmist stand. Neither could you stand. Neither could I stand tonight.

Just picture the scene. Imagine if all of our iniquities, every single sin that we have ever committed in this life, imagine if every one was recorded in our book.

How many volumes would be set before you? There would be quite a number, would there not? And when we think of the punishment that will be due to all of these sins, it's almost unthinkable for us tonight.

Yet friend, the reality is that even if there was only one, one sin written on one scrap of paper, one seemingly inconsequential sin that you have committed, something that you've brushed off as being not that bad, even if there was only one, you and me with you, we would be guilty of an eternity subject to the wrath of God and hell itself.

[16 : 46] And so it's no wonder the psalmist is saying, if you, Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand? This is not the mind or the heart of the natural man.

This is not the mind or the heart of the unconverted man or woman. Yes, they might have regret for their sin. They might be sorry for their sin.

They might be scared or feared that their sins might be exposed by their fellow man. But they don't have a real grasp of what their sin is, of what it is to sin before a holy God.

And so that's why they quite happily go merrily along their way, week after week, carrying on in blissful ignorance, submerging themselves in the sinful things of this world.

Maybe that's you tonight. You hear about sin preached, but yet in reality, you have no grasp of what it is. sin cost.

[17 : 56] It cost our Savior so much. We must never minimize it. We must never call it just a mistake or a short giving or something along those lines that seeks to make it smaller than it is.

It cost our Savior. it led him to that cross. It led him to take hell to himself. The fact is tonight that if you are convicted of this sin, if you are aware of this sin in your heart, that ought to be an encouragement to you because, you know, one of the most fearful places to be tonight is in that place of indifference.

when we are in the depths, even as the Lord's people, when we are in the depths, in the hovels of our own sin, and it doesn't seem to bother us.

We don't cry out to God because we're unaware of the need of mercy. We don't come to the Lord for help because we don't see that we're in need of any help.

We're oblivious to the fact that we're not in communion with God because our conscience has been seared. It's been numbed.

[19 : 20] It's been numbed so that we have no sensitivity to the fact that spiritually speaking, things are far from what they ought to be in our lives.

And so that's when we need to worry, when our sins don't bother us, when we carry on with an unrepentant heart.

And so we need to come and be thankful tonight when this Lord speaks to us, even with a word of rebuke, when sin distresses our soul because it reminds us, does it not, that we are engaged in the battle, that we have been enlisted as soldiers in the army of God, that we are fighting that good fight of faith, the flesh warring against the spirit each and every day.

My friends, although we do have this season in our soul, it's true that following such a dismal spiritual winter, and it can feel so long, it can feel so harsh, maybe you're experiencing that at this point in your Christian walk, that your heart has grown strangely cold in things of love the Lord, you wonder when will it ever end?

Yet, friend, the reality is spring will arrive without fail. Why? Well, let's look at the words of verse four.

[21 : 01] How do we know this? But with you. What a precious word that is. We see it in scripture time and time again.

But with you there is forgiveness. In spite of all that has gone before, in spite of all I've done, in spite of all of who I am by nature, there is forgiveness.

What a wonderful verse this is we have before us here. Spurgeon said that he that cries in the depths, what will happen to him?

He will soon sing in the heights. So it is with the psalmist. So it is with every repentant child of God.

Because the psalmist is here saying, yes, I am in the depths, that is true. But there is forgiveness with you, O Lord. Yes, my communion with you has been affected by my own sinful heart, yet I am still united to you.

[22 : 10] That unity can never be severed. I will always be united to you because it is forgiveness with you. That's what all of this is about.

That's why we gather together as the Lord's people. That's why we're here for this communion weekend. that yes, we are sinners by nature.

Yes, we are sinners by practice. But our testimony is that there is forgiveness with him.

Notice the tense here, the present tense. There is forgiveness. Not there was. It might feel tonight that this was something in the past. Not now, though.

You're not forgiven. Once forgiven, always forgiven. Nor does it say there will be forgiveness with you. This is an inclusive forgiveness.

[23 : 11] There is forgiveness for you now. The psalmist is acknowledging the fact that although, yes, he's turned his back on the Lord, the Lord will never ever turn his back on him.

This is a far-reaching forgiveness. forgiveness a forgiveness that is fully and completely dealt with every single sin, past, present, and future.

An all sufficient forgiveness. That doesn't cause our hearts to bow down and worship tonight.

I don't know what will. Did you notice how many times I repeated that word, forgiveness? That's who we are.

That's what we're all about in this world. That's why we're here professing his name. This is not some cold religious sect.

[24 : 13] We are a people, we are a bride, who are showing forth the wonders, the mercy, the love of the one who has forgiven us in that sacrificial act of love.

We need to come back time and time again to our first love. Because we drift. We drift.

You know, these words that are so precious, they're words that affected the Methodist preacher, John Wesley.

They're words that caused him to bow down and worship. The words of Psalm 130. He was a minister, and he was a minister who was a graceless minister.

A minister who preached the gospel, yet was a stranger to grace and to God himself. He preached the word of God, and this is solemn, week after week, yet he himself knew not the God of the word.

[25 : 21] But yet the spirit began to work in his heart. And on May the 24th, 1738, he went to a meeting house on Aldersgate Street in London.

And he wrote in his journal that now famous account of his conversion. He said in the journal, in the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street.

And often that's the way we are. We come unwillingly. Perhaps you came here tonight unwillingly. You don't really want to be here. You're here to show face, but in your heart of hearts you don't really want to be here.

Well, that's the way he was. I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street where one was reading Luther's preface to the epistle to the Romans.

About a quarter before nine while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed.

[26 : 26] Wouldn't it be wonderful tonight if someone in here felt their heart strangely warmed. As the word of God goes forth, there's nothing that we would desire more for you tonight.

But yet perhaps what's not so well known about the conversion of this man is on that same afternoon he found himself at a service at St.

Paul's Cathedral. And during that service he heard the words of Psalm 130. I don't know if they were being read or chanted or repeated but he heard these words being spoken.

And these words being spoken acted as one of the means that God used to free him from the bondage that he was in.

You see friends here in this Psalm we see words that speak the gospel. Yes we have the depths but we also have deliverance.

[27 : 28] Do you know this deliverance tonight I wonder? Is it so that you're trudging through life? is it so that you're going through every day basically allowing yourself to go through the motions but nothing more?

You know nothing of the deliverance of Christ. Well friend can I respectfully and lovingly suggest to you tonight that you too are in bondage and you need to be released.

You need to be released from that bondage that is hemming you in, ensnaring you into the flimsy and temperate things of this world.

Here we have deliverance. You know friends when you know something of this deliverance as many of us do here tonight we see that this is a deliverance that demands a response.

we see this in verse 4 but with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared. He's to be feared.

[28 : 40] In light of this forgiveness God is to be feared. Now this doesn't mean that we are to cower in a corner before God. That somehow we're to be scared of God.

That is not the kind of fear that is spoken of here in such a view of God as a complete and utter misunderstanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is not the God we worship tonight.

This is a fear of letting our heavenly father down. A fear that leads us to reverence him. A fear that leads us to worship him, to serve him.

A fear that shows forth what the relationship between a father and his child truly looks like. That is a fear that is here spoken of.

And that's what repentance leads us to do. That is a mark of grace. Remorse will never lead us to that godly fear.

[29 : 45] It will never lead us to submitted hearts on our lives and worship him. But repentance will. Yes, we know we will continue to sin.

Sadly, that will be the case until we draw our last breath here in time. But yet, deep down in our heart, we don't want to. And when we do, what do we do?

We find ourselves, do we not, hastening back to the Lord for deliverance, waiting, just like the psalmist for the Lord, waiting for him to reveal himself to us once again.

I wait, we see in verse five, I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word, I hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

What a picture is painted here. Because, friend, the darkest hour is often as it is not before the dawn. we know that in our spirit. The psalmist himself knew that.

[30 : 53] Experience had taught him that the Lord will not leave him. The Lord will not forsake him. And so he here has this sense of anticipation of that communion with his father being reinstated.

He's waiting. He's waiting and he's watching. I wonder, are we waiting tonight for the Lord to reveal himself to us once again? He's waiting, he's watching, just as a watchman.

As a watchman, that person who would guard a city, who would guard a city at night and who would wait until the morning for dawn to arise so that he could be relieved of his duty, so that he could go home and rest.

Perhaps you know what that's like if you've been working on night shift. You're longing for the dawn to come so that you can get some rest. Or perhaps if you find yourself in the darkness of the night unable to sleep, it can be a very lonely place.

And you're waiting, are you not, for the sun to rise so that you can see another day. That's how it is when we find ourselves in the darkest hour of our soul.

[32 : 10] We long for dawn. We long to know something of our Savior drawing close to us. That's the picture that we have here.

You might think that the psalmist is being presumptuous. How can he assume that the Lord will return? it is far from presumption.

There's nothing presumptuous here. It would be presumptuous if he was leaning on himself. It's presumptuous tonight if we are trying to be right with God because of our own good works.

that's presumptuous. But he's not leaning on himself, on his own ability and his own confidence to get him out of that pit.

He knows that is impossible. And so what is the basis of this watching, this waiting? What is he leaning on in the knowledge that the Lord will come back?

[33 : 16] The clue is in verse five. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits and in his word I hope.

In his word, as sure as the day will dawn, a new day will dawn, as the morning will come, so too is the psalmist convinced that yes, the Lord will come.

He knows something of this plentiful redemption, and because he knows something of this redemption, because he is a child of the covenant, who by faith has cried out to the God of the covenant.

He knows that this self-same God is duty-bound to keep his word, to keep his promises. That's where the psalmist's confidence lies.

that's where your confidence and my confidence ought to lie tonight, as we think about coming to the Lord's table.

[34 : 19] Perhaps you're here tonight and you're a Christian. The Lord has worked a change in your heart, in your life, and yet you refuse to come forward, because you look within and you think you're not worthy.

Well, you're not worthy and neither am I and neither is anyone in here and you never will be. And if you're waiting for your worthiness, you'll never ever come forward. But the point here is that he is worthy.

His word is sure and steadfast. We don't lean upon our own feeble efforts at being right with God. we fail time and time again and so we come and we lean upon the promises of God.

He who has begun a good work will bring it on until the day of Jesus Christ. That's not a lie. The world tells us lies time and time again. This is truth.

So what exactly is keeping you back? Dear friend, what is it? Ask yourself that. Is it Christ?

[35 : 31] No. He asks you. In fact, he tells you to do this in remembrance of him. And yet you say, no, I'm not worthy.

He's worthy. And he's able to give you that strength that you need. need. And as the psalmist meditates on the wonder of such a dawn, there's a beautiful picture here at the end of the psalm.

It's so relevant to us here at the beginning of this communion. He longs for it not only for himself, but for the whole of Israel. Look at verses 7 and 8.

This is an inclusive redemption, a redemption that doesn't just stop with the psalms.

Some people nowadays will say that their faith is private and so they don't come out to the means of grace because they're quite happy. Yes, believing in the Lord, but they're going to go it alone.

[36 : 44] It's a private faith. It's an unbiblical faith. We are a community. We are a bride. We are a people who are united together as one.

How on earth do we expect to spend the endless ages of eternity with that number that no man can number? If here in time we cannot tolerate one another, it makes no sense.

So here we have that picture of the far-reaching redemption of Christ. Here the psalmist, he started in the depths, he ends at the heights, the heights of the redemptive love of his Savior.

He started on his own, but he ended not only with the sure hope of his Savior, but also with that acknowledgement of the wider redeemed of the Lord.

We are the body of Christ. That's what we're doing this weekend. We're looking in, we're seeing the corruption in our heart, that is true, but that in turn, if we are his, that leads us, or at least ought to lead us to reflect on that forgiveness that is ours in him.

[38 : 02] But we don't stop. They're like the psalmist, we don't stop there. Because what we do is we take our place at the table of the Lord this Sabbath, and in doing so, as the psalmist does in verse 88, we identify, do we not, with the Israel of God.

And as we come together as one body, as one bride, just like the psalmist, our eyes are taken from ourselves and from our pit, to our saviour and our security, to the one with whom, and we pray that we'll be granted even a glimpse of this, to the one with whom there is plentious redemption ever to be found.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, our God, our heavenly Father, we come this evening hour and we give thanks for the wonder of thy grace, for the wonder of the very fact that although we find ourselves here in the darkness of this world, a world that even at this present moment is being reminded of the very fact that there is a higher being than them, than us, that if we are Christ tonight, that we are but passing through, that yes, we enjoy many blessings here in time, but for those of us who are in Christ, the best is yet to come.

And so we pray, oh Lord, that we might be granted even the smallest of tastes of what is to come for us, as we gather together as thy people in the days to come, that we would know a little bit of heaven here on earth, as we partake of that sacrament reminding us that we are a redeemed people, a people who have much to give praise and thanks and adoration for until he comes.

Go with us then we ask and forgive us, in Jesus' name, Amen. Well, we'll conclude our time of worship singing to God's praise from the very psalm we can think on, Psalm 130.

[40 : 19] Lord, from the depths to thee I cried, my voice, Lord, do thou hear, and to my supplication's voice give unattentive ear.

Lord, who shall stand if thou, O Lord, should smack in equity, but yet with thee forgivenesses that feared thou mayest thee. We'll sing the whole psalm now to God's praise.

Lord, from the depths to thee I cried, my voice, Lord, do thou hear. Lord, from the depths to thee I cried, my voice, Lord, do thou hear, unto my supplication's voice, give an attentive ear.

Lord, who shall stop if the Lord should mark inhumanity.

May and fear. I wait for God.

[42 : 19] My soul doth wait. My hope is in His word.

More than may that for morning watch.

My soul waits for the Lord. I say more than may that to watch.

The morning light to see. Let Israel open the Lord for with mercy see.

sea sea. I plenty of redemption is never far with and and and from all his iniquities iniquities in iniquities Israel shall redeem.

[44 : 20] Now, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, rest on and abide with you now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.