

# Psalms of Ascent

## Part 11 – Out of the Depths

### Psalm 130

Psalm 130 is composed of four sections of two verses each. The first two verses record the Psalmist's cry to the Lord out of the depths of despair. The next two verses express confidence that with the Lord there is forgiveness of sins (this indicates that "the depths" of verse 1 is the despair of a guilty conscience). The third section (verses five and six) describes the psalmist's waiting for a word of assurance from the Lord. The final section is a call for the people to hope in the Lord for he is the one who will redeem them from their all their sins.

With this Psalm's emphasis on sin and full atonement, Martin Luther referred to it as a "Paulline Psalm." So deep is the hope in God's forgiving mercy expressed in the Psalm it could easily be placed in the book of Romans.



**The Luther Rose**

The theme of the Psalm is summed up in verse 4: "But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared." The "depths" from which the psalmist cries is the knowledge of his own iniquity. The problem of sin cannot be adequately captured in purely therapeutic language. Sin is iniquity which is another word for wickedness. It is from wickedness that the sinner must be delivered. In verse four the psalmist expresses the confidence that only a child of God can have; that with the Lord there is forgiveness.

Notice that the forgiveness which is found in the mercy of the Lord is not without its effect. God forgives the iniquity of his people so that they may fear him. That is, there is a direct connection between forgiveness of sins and fearing the Lord. God's redemptive work in the lives of his people is comprehensive. He not only washes them clean from their sin, he causes them to give him the glory due his name. Those forgiven by God of their iniquity become worshippers of God. Once committed law-breakers become God-glorifiers.

**Main Idea:** According to his covenant love God has accomplished forgiveness of sins and full redemption through the dying and rising of Jesus.

### 1. The despair of sin

Vv. 1-2

- Various psalms express dismay and offer cries of grief for various reasons. Here the psalmist's despair is the result of the knowledge of his sin. The imagery of the depths is meant to capture the devastating nature of his despair. This is no trifling or momentary sense of discomfort. Knowledge of his sin has pushed him to the brink.
- However, the psalmist knows to Whom he must go in his woe. He cries out for help to the Lord. What is more, he knows for what he must ask: "Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy" (vs. 2). It is for mercy that he pleads. His sin has left him bereft of any ability to engineer his own salvation. If he is to be saved at all it must be by the Lord's mercy.

## 2. The source of hope

Vv. 3-4

- How can a sinner find peace with God? This was one of the central questions which sparked the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Since God is holy and mankind is sinful then what hope is there to have peace with God? This is the dilemma described in verse 3: “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?”
- *Iniquities* is a strong word. It is roughly equivalent to *wickedness*. We will never adequately appreciate God’s saving acts until we grasp the true nature of our sin. Sin is far deeper than mistakes, flaws, or brokenness. Sin is rebellion against God. It is a wicked pre-occupation with self and a rejection of God’s law in favor of self-rule.
- Vs. 4 – “But with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared.” The only hope for the sinner is God’s merciful forgiveness. But God’s forgiveness is not a sentimental act. It establishes a covenant relationship whereby the saved sinner now becomes a God-fearer.

## 3. The wait of faith

Vv. 5-6

- The word translated “I wait” has the idea of eager expectation for something. This idea is further illustrated by the reference to the watchman on the city’s wall eagerly anticipating the reassurance of daylight. The repetition in verse 6 points to whole-hearted anticipation. This sort of waiting is not a passive activity but an active attentiveness.
- “I wait” runs parallel with “I hope” (vs. 5b). In this case the hoping and waiting are twin activities. And they are activities grounded in the word of the Lord. This waiting in faith is characteristic of the Christian life in a fallen world. It is fed by the ordinary means of grace provided to us by God. There is no substitute in the Christian life for the role of God’s word. While the Psalm does not go into any detail it is clear from the full witness of Scripture that God ministers to us through his word primarily within the church through proclamation. That said, the Christian waiting in hope through the night watch of a sinful world requires daily meditation of the word (Psalm 1:1).

## 4. The call to believe

Vv. 7-8

- God’s people are called to keep their hope firmly placed in the Lord for there will be full and complete (“plentiful”) redemption for them. Hope, here, is to be seen as synonymous with belief. To believe in God for redemption from sin is to anchor ones hope in his promise to save all who believe.
- Notice that this redemption comes as the fruit of God’s “steadfast love” (vs. 7b). The theme of God’s steadfast or covenant love is of central concern in the Scriptures. Indeed, the Bible tells the story of God’s commitment to his gracious covenant with his people. God will never break faith with his covenant of grace.
- The reference to “Israel” in verse 8 ought to be understood as referring to the people of God throughout the ages having now reached fulfillment in the church. God has always had one people since the time of his covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, 17). All that was prefigured in Israel has been fulfilled in the church of Jesus Christ.
- “The psalm is saying that the present (and repeated) cycle, for the remedy of sin – forgiveness and deliverance – is a harbinger of the final and complete deliverance from all sin. In other words, every deliverance is a preview and a pledge of that great day of redemption, and every experience of forgiveness is a foreshadowing of the final redemption from sin and everything connected to it” (Allen Ross, 711).