

Psalm 130 “A Song of Ascents: Out of the Depths”
Psalm 121, 127, 129, 130, 131,
Titus 2

June 19, 2011

We continue our journey through the Songs of Ascents in Psalm 130 today.
But Psalm 130 is surrounded by these other songs
that use the same imagery in a variety of ways.

Psalm 127 connects the theme of the watchman:
in Psalm 130 the Psalmist is waiting for the LORD
more than watchmen wait for the morning;
in Psalm 127 the watchman watches in vain –
unless the LORD watches over the city.

Psalm 129 speaks of the distress and affliction
that is at the heart of Psalm 130’s cry to the LORD.
And Psalm 131 replies to all the “lifting up” language earlier in the songs of Ascents
by saying that I do not lift my heart or eyes *too high*.

The dominant trend in these songs is an abiding hope and trust in the LORD.
My hope is not that *I* can make something of myself.
My hope is in the LORD from this forth and forevermore.

Sing Psalms 127, 129, 131
Read Titus 2

Children,
what does the Psalmist mean by “the depths”?

“Out of the depths, I cry to you, O LORD!”
I think you know what he means.
I think you have experienced it.
The depths are those times when life isn’t fair:
when your friend says something that really hurts;
when everything is going wrong – and nothing makes it any better.

“Out of the depths, I cry to you, O LORD!”
The depths are those times when you just start crying for no reason.
The depths are those times when you lie in bed at night
and you have horrible thoughts that you don’t like!

Children, I want you to hear this:
everyone knows about the depths;
in fact, you’ll find out as you get older,
that the depths get even deeper!

You who have reached your teenage years know that -
don't you?

My teenage years were an emotional roller-coaster.
The highs were high!
And the lows were low!

But it was in those years that I learned one absolutely crucial lesson:

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

I want you to notice something about Psalm 130.
Psalm 130 is a song “from the depths.”
It is not a song about how I made it from the depths to the heights.
It is not even a song about how God took me from the depths to the heights.

Psalm 130 is a song “from the depths.”
Nowadays we expect everyone to be “happy” –
and happy is “normal” – right?

How are you?
I am fine.
How ya doin?
Doin' great!

But why?
Why am I fine?
I'm not fine!
I have sinned against a holy God and deserve death!

How are you? ☺
And even as one who is redeemed from sin and death by the blood of the lamb,
I am (with the Psalmist – with *Christ*)
often “in the depths.”

It is true:
Depression means that there is something wrong with you.

But there is something wrong with you!
And not just with you –
but with everyone – and everything in creation!

It is also true that science has come up with ways to treat depression medically.
And that's not necessarily wrong.

What is wrong – and dangerous – is the idea that we should be happy all the time.

The depths are a bad place to be – no doubt about that!

The depths are not pleasant – bad things happen in the depths!

But the simple fact is that sometimes (perhaps, often) I am in the depths.

Maybe even this morning.

Did you know that it's okay to be in the depths at church?

We often talk about worship as being lifted up into the heavenlies –

indeed, the songs of Ascents are all about lifting up our eyes and our hearts –

but why do we need to lift up our eyes and our hearts?

Because we are in the depths!

So, when someone asks you, “how are you?”

It's entirely appropriate to reply, “in the depths, crying out to the LORD!”

1. I Cry to You, LORD, from the Depths (v1-2)

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

If you look at the word the Psalmist uses for “the depths”

you find that elsewhere in the Bible,

the “depths” refer to the deep waters –

a word used in Psalm 69 to speak of drowning in a flood.

“Save me, O God!

For the waters have come up to my neck.

I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold;

I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me.

I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched.

My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.” (69:1-3)

The picture here is of a rising sea that threatens to engulf me.

Think of Jonah, crying out “from the depths” as he went down into the sea

and was swallowed alive by the great fish.

Kraus says well that “the depths” or “deep waters”

“are the image of separation from the realm of life

and therefore also the image of She'ol (cf. Jonah 2:3). [the grave]

The ‘deep waters’ are the kingdom of death,

the place of separation and of God forsakenness.” (Kraus II, p. 466)

But why do Christians experience this?

After all, Paul says nothing “can separate us from the love of God in Christ”! (Rom 8)

But the fact that we cannot be separated from the love of God in Christ
does not mean that we have the full experience of that love.

Think of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He was God in the flesh.

He was one with the Father by virtue of his very being!

But that did not prohibit him from experiencing “the depths.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ, very God of very God,
begotten of the Father before all ages –
of the same substance of the Father –

cried out from the depths,

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

And there are times in the Christian life
when you will receive a tiny glimpse of what that felt like.
Jesus will never leave you or forsake you –
he has promised you that!

But there will be times when you will drink of his cup –
there will be times when you will feel in your own soul
the pain that our Lord Jesus Christ endured for you.

But there is something else you need to see here.

You need to see that the Psalmist is not “resigned to his fate”!

We should not be surprised that we live much of our lives in the “depths” –
but that should not make us complacent about the “depths”!

You don’t enjoy the depths!

The depths are exhausting –
and deadly.

You *don’t* want to be here!

But also notice that what wears me out in the depths
is my crying out to God!

My eyes grow dim with *waiting for my God*.

The Christian does not have a Stoic attitude toward suffering.

Often, when Christians think about suffering,
we start with the question: “what is God trying to teach me?”

Scripture spends very little time on that question.

If you devote your energies trying to figure out what God is teaching you,
you will miss out on the important thing.

Because the most important thing is not that you will “learn something.”
The most important thing is that you cry out to the LORD!

*²O Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!*

This was the cry of our Lord Jesus Christ from the depths –
as he cried out to the Father,

As Hebrews 5 puts it,
“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications,
with loud cries and tears,
to him who was able to save him from death,
and he was heard because of his reverence.” (5:7)

And because the Father heard Jesus –
therefore you may draw near with confidence to the throne of grace,
that you “may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (4:16)

Do you understand how important this is?

It’s not that God will hear you because of how good you are.
God will hear you – God will be attentive to your voice –
because he has heard *Jesus*.

Who am I, that I should come before the LORD of heaven and earth?
I am nobody.
But I do not come to God because *I* am somebody –
I come to God because *Jesus* is somebody!

2. I Fear You, LORD, because You Forgive (v3-4)

Some might say, “whoa, Pastor! The Psalmist didn’t know about Jesus.”
But the Psalmist understood the same basic principles that you find in Hebrews –
and you see this in verses 3-4.

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

Verse 3 shows us why the depths exist in the first place!
Iniquity.

If God keeps a record of wrongs then all humanity is in deep trouble!
If God has an account book, where he “marks iniquity”
then no one could stand on judgment day!

By the way, Revelation 20 says that all that we have done is written in a book,
and Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:10 that
“we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,
so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body,
whether good or evil.”

So when Psalm 130 says that God does not “mark iniquities”
it does not mean that God does not “keep track” of our sins.
Rather verse 4 explains the point:

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

There are four things going on in verses 3-4:
First, there is the *fact* of my iniquity.
I have sinned.
Second, there is the *record* of my iniquity.
As long as my sins are on God’s record books,
as long as my “account” before God
includes my sins –
then I will never escape the “depths.”
But third, “with you there is forgiveness.”
We still speak of “debt forgiveness.”
When your debt is forgiven
then you no longer owe anything.
The wages of sin is death.
So long as you have outstanding sin on your account,
then death – the grave – hell –
are awaiting you!
But God forgives sin.
And so fourth,
“therefore you are feared.”

Derek Kidner admits (vol. 2, p. 446) that fear “may sound a strange outcome of forgiveness.

In reality it confirms the true sense of the ‘fear of the Lord’ in the Old Testament.”

The result of forgiveness is awe and reverence.

Solomon had prayed in 1 Kings 8:37-40 that God would forgive Israel’s sin
so “that they may fear you all the days that they live in the land you gave to our fathers.”

The question is not whether you should fear God or love God
(you should do both).

The question is whether you will fear God or fear something else!

What do you fear?

What motivates you?

We are often motivated by fear of man –
what *others* think of us can be a powerful motivation!

When I was single, I did all sorts of silly things
because I wanted various young ladies to like me!

One way you could put it is,
“whose record-keeping matters to you?”
whose opinion matters to you?

You will go to great lengths to please your god!
To make your god happy – and to ensure that your god blesses you!

That is why the Psalmist says:
with *you* there is forgiveness –
therefore you are feared!

God is the one who holds your eternal destiny in his hands.
Therefore he is feared!

But this fear is not a fear that drives us *away* from God.
True, godly fear eagerly waits for him.

3. I Wait for the LORD and Hope in His Word (v5-6)

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.*

The repetition in verses 5-6 emphasizes my waiting and hoping for the LORD.

Twice he says “I wait.”
Twice he says “my soul.”
(verse 6 in the Hebrew simply says “my soul for the Lord” –
the word “waits” is taken over from verse 5.)

The variation in the name of God,
Yahweh in verse 5, Adonai in verse 6,
is then followed by the echo of the line,
“more than watchmen for the morning.”

This repetition drives home the “intensity of anticipation” (Band *I Will Wake the Dawn*)

As I cry out from the depths,
I confess that my hope is in the LORD.
In the midst of my encounter with death, depression, and despair,
I wait for the LORD.

I wait.

I may wait long!

But I wait.

And my waiting has a firm foundation – a strong confidence –
because “in his word I hope.”

You see, the reason *why* you can wait on the Lord when you cry out from the depths,
is because God is *faithful* to his word!
He does what he promises.

Therefore I wait for the LORD – more than watchmen for the morning.

We saw the watchmen back in Psalm 127 –
the watchmen who watch in vain, if the LORD did not watch over the city!
We saw this theme as well back in Psalm 121 –
where we saw how the LORD is our *keeper* (our guard/watchman)
who guards and protects us in all things.

As I sit in the watches of the night,
and as I endure the dark night of the soul,
I wait for the dawning of the light.

You think the watchman is eager to see the dawn?
You have no idea!

In the darkness of the depths
there is a longing for light.

And my hope is founded in his word – that God will do what he has promised.

In all the repetitions of verses 5-6,
only one word is used once in verses 5-6:
the verb “to hope” at the end of verse 5 –

which, incidentally, is the first word in verse 7!

Hope is the transition from the personal statement of longing in verses 5-6
to the call for corporate steadfastness on the part of the people of God in verses 7-8.

4. And You Should Hope in Him, because He Will Redeem His People (v7-8)

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.*

Verses 7-8 tie together the themes of the Psalm.

The reason *why* Israel should cry out to the LORD from the depths –
the depths of exile,
the depths of despair,
the depths of discouragement and depression

is because with the LORD there is *hesed* –
there is steadfast love (covenant faithfulness).

With the LORD there is steadfast love.
With the LORD is plentiful redemption
(remember verse 4 – with you there is forgiveness).

Now we see that God’s forgiveness is not just a matter of brushing over sin.
It’s not that God is going to say, “Oh, never mind a sin – that’s no big deal!”

Sin is such a huge problem that “plentiful redemption”
will only come when God sends his own Son –
when the second person of the Trinity takes the wrath and curse of God
upon himself.

But with the LORD there is steadfast love.

He will be faithful to his promises at whatever cost to himself!

He *will* redeem Israel from all his iniquities,
even if he has to pay for them himself!

This is what we saw in Titus 2.

Titus 2 is perhaps most famous for its discussion of different people in the church –
how older men are to be sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness;
how older women are to be reverent, and teach the younger women;
how Titus is to teach the younger men to be self-controlled;
and how slaves are to be submissive to their masters.

But all of this is rooted in Paul's application of the principles we have seen in Psalm 130.
Why are you supposed to live this way?

Listen for how Paul uses the language of Psalm 130 –
as he speaks of “waiting”, “our hope”, and how we are “redeemed.”

Paul says in Titus 2:11-14 –

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,
training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions,
and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,
waiting for our blessed hope,
the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,
who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness
and to purify for himself a people for his own possession
who are zealous for good works.”

We cry out to the LORD from the depths
because we wait for our blessed hope;
we endure patiently as we bear the cross,
because we look forward
to the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

We renounce ungodliness and worldly passions,
living self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,
because our hope is not *for* the present age!