

Psalm 130

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the book of Psalms and Psalm 130. Psalm 130.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. O Lord, hear my voice. Let us be attentive to my cry for mercy.

If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? For if there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared.

I wait for the Lord. My soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord. More than watchmen wait for the morning.

More than watchmen wait for the morning. O Israel, put your hope in the Lord. But with the Lord is unfailing love, and with him is full redemption.

[1 : 02] He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

As John Calvin said long ago, we find in the book of Psalms all the emotions of the human heart. We find often the notes of joy, of jubilation, of exultation. The notes of contentment and thanksgiving and praise to God.

But we also find the somber notes of fear, of dejection, of alarm, of despondency.

And that's what we find especially in the psalm before us this evening. We find somebody who is a real child of God.

[2 : 08] Who is loved by God and who loves God. Somebody for whom God has a special care. Someone for whom God is working all things together for good.

Someone for whom God loves. Someone for whom God loves with all the force and power of his own being. And yet this person whom God loves finds himself at this moment a way down in the depths.

And it is so important to grasp that the fact of adversity is never itself a proof that we don't belong to God.

And furthermore, the fact that we don't cope sometimes all that well with adversity. And don't stand up all that well under pressure.

That fact again is no proof that we aren't children of God. Because here is somebody. And for the moment he is in very difficult circumstances.

[3 : 27] And furthermore, he isn't coping particularly well. He is down there in the depths. And that note is struck often in the Old Testament.

You find, for example, in the 40th Psalm, you find the Psalmist again, In a fearful pit and in the miry clay.

You find him in the 22nd Psalm saying that he is forsaken by God. And you find Isaiah coming with the same kind of message.

Telling us of those who fear the Lord. And to obey the word of God. And yet find themselves walking in darkness and having no light.

Now, let me say it once. That being in the depths is not the normal condition of God's children. I remind you that the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy and peace.

[4 : 36] I remind you of the contentment of the children of God. I remind you that those who follow the Lord are said to be blessed.

They are blessed in the favor of God. And I don't want to convey the impression at all that every Christian is in the depths.

Or that any of us are in the depths all of the time. But here is an episode in the life of one of God's children.

An episode to which really every one of us is liable. There are very few of us who escape altogether moments of this kind.

Sometimes we find ourselves in a real wilderness of a world. We find ourselves stressed and pressurized. We find ourselves in darkness.

[5 : 43] We find ourselves not coping very, very well. We find ourselves sometimes despondent and dejected and weighed down. Now, let me say that there is no reason to feel ashamed of that kind of condition.

That's why a moment ago I read that part of the Gospels where we see the Lord himself in the Garden of Gethsemane. And we find him weighed down with sorrow.

Now, of course, his burden was very, very special. It was the burden of the sins and the sin of the whole world.

And yet he knew too that it was a cup which the Father had given him. And yet there is, in all the glory of his humanity, in all the sense of his own integrity before God, knowing beyond a doubt that he's walking in the will of God.

And yet he is weighed down with sorrow. Well, let's turn for a moment to this condition. What is it that sometimes, and I underline that word, that sometimes leaves us, who are God's children, leaves us in the depths?

[7 : 16] Why do we find ourselves in this particular condition? Well, there are several factors. First of all, it may be because of our personal temperament.

There are some, and it is their nature, it is their disposition, to be melancholic and to be despondent, to see the gloomy side of all situations, and to latch on to the more sombre aspects even of religion itself.

Now, this seems to me to be a fact of enormous importance. There are some of us, and by predisposition, we are inclined to despondency and inclined to depression.

In fact, sometimes that condition has a distinct and ascertainable medical and biochemical basis.

And if that's so, then we ought to ourselves, we ought to our families, we ought to the kingdom of God, to take the requisite medical steps to keep that mood, that temperament of ours under control.

[8 : 45] Now, I know that many Christians say, oh, psychiatrists, or they say, can you find one who is a Christian? No, I don't, I confess, have much sympathy with this kind of reaction.

It is a known fact that sometimes depression is a matter of constitution, of temperament, of biochemistry.

Sometimes there is a very simple, straightforward medical solution to that problem. And if, as Christians, we find ourselves victims of such a temperament, and if we know that it can be controlled by simple medication, then it is a responsibility laid upon us by God to manage ourselves, to manage your temperament, and to do so in the use of this elementary medication.

If we don't, then not only do we make life misery for ourselves, but we also make life misery for our families, and furthermore, we disable ourselves from serving the church of God as we ought.

Now, you know yourself how it is with you. You know of my disposition, you are a melancholic in my temperament. You must deal with that for yourself.

[10 : 24] You know what steps to take. You know what controls to apply. Well, that's the first factor. Sometimes we find ourselves in the depths because that is our disposition.

And then sometimes it's due to circumstances. Sometimes in the providence of God, we find ourselves under enormous pressure.

We find ourselves experiencing trauma. And in those situations, the healthy human psyche, and I emphasize that, the healthy human soul feels despondent, and ejected, and depressed.

In fact, there are some situations, and if we do not feel despondent, if we take them as a matter of course and feel nothing, then that's a sign that there is something wrong with our own mental condition.

If we face personal loss, if we experience personal grief, if we experience disappointment in our own lives, if we suffer the loss through bereavement of someone very close to us, it is absolutely natural that we should sorrow.

[12 : 04] It is exceedingly dangerous to pretend not to sorrow. It is dangerous to try to prematurely eliminate or eradicate that sorrow.

How precious it is that the Lord himself at the tomb of Lazarus weeps. How precious that devout men as they bury Stephen made great lamentation over him.

how precious it is that Paul says to us, sorrow, but not like the rest who have no hope.

We have God's own mandate. We have the mandate of the word of God that we are not intended by God to take everything in our stride.

That we are allowed by God to bend with circumstances. That God himself expects that sometimes emotionally the cork will go under.

[13 : 19] That is absolutely natural. And we should accept it as so. Circumstances, something in Providence, maybe even the condition of the Church of God, problems in our own families.

These things cause us to fall right down into the depths, maybe sometimes almost limitlessly. And that, I say, is often perfectly natural.

And so, sometimes it's temperament. And sometimes it's circumstantial. and sometimes it is spiritual.

There is a form of despondency of being in the depths which we may properly label spiritual depression. Now, that doesn't mean that all depression experienced by Christian men and women is spiritual.

It doesn't mean that all depression in the lives of spiritual people is spiritual depression. But sometimes we are in the depths for reasons which are spiritual.

[14 : 42] The factors which have caused the condition are distinctly spiritual factors. Now, sometimes to avoid simplicity, let me say that our depths may be caused by a combination of all three factors.

It may be that somebody who is of depressive temperament may find herself in depressing circumstances and may at the same time find herself burdened with great spiritual problems. And that's why sometimes the professional help that is sought must involve doctors and ministers for example working together.

Sometimes, of course, you must handle it by yourself. That too can be perfectly healthy. But here is the possibility that we find ourselves depressed for spiritual reasons.

that the factors behind those depths, that gloom, the factors are distinctly spiritual. Well, what do I mean?

[15 : 58] Well, sometimes this. Sometimes, I believe, Satan himself, by that direct access that God has given him to our souls, can, in a very direct way, cause despondency in our hearts and minds.

Sometimes, the depression is inexplicable. We are not of depressive temperament. We are not in difficult circumstances.

We have no obvious spiritual problems. And yet, for some reason, there is a gloom over our souls. A spirit of dejection that I'm sure often has come directly from hell itself.

And sometimes it's caused by the problem of unresolved guilt. we have sinned against God. We have sinned against light.

We have wounded our own consciences. And for one reason or another, we have not dealt with that sin as before God.

[17 : 17] We ought to have dealt with it. Now, the problem is not the sin itself. The problem is our own response to the way we have dealt with that sin.

We have allowed it to lie unconfessed and unforgiven on our own consciences. We haven't brought our sin to the place where we ought to bring all our sin to.

Remember, God's word tells us that though our sins be as scarlet, they may be white as wool.

Though they be red like crimson, they may be white as the snow.

The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. Remember how it was with Cain when Cain slew his brother and God confronted him with a sin.

And rather than face up to a sin, what does Cain do? He goes away from the presence of God into the land of wandering, into the land of God.

[18 : 25] He goes away from God. He doesn't take his sin to the place of atonement. He doesn't confess it and lay it before God in all its horrendousness, but it lies festering, festering in his own conscience.

And because of that, he lives in this dejection. He lives in the depths because there is a problem of unresolved guilt, of unconfessed sin, of some deviation in life, the implications of which we are not prepared to acknowledge and so there we find ourselves in the depths.

Well, sometimes it's satanic. Sometimes it's because of unresolved guilt. Sometimes it's because we are being defeated by sin.

I mean defeated maybe by one particular sin. There is one area in life. There is one habit. There is one mood.

There is one difficulty, one temptation. And in that area, the devil is scoring a constant victory. And try as we will, you see, in our own strength and by our own resources, we are making no progress. [19 : 50] Every single day perhaps, we are beaten by the sin and we feel so defeated, we feel so useless in the service of God and we ask ourselves, well, if it's true that in Christ we can be more than conquerors, well, why am I being defeated by the sin?

And so sometimes it's satanic and sometimes it's because of unresolved guilt and sometimes because of being defeated by one prevailing sin.

And sometimes it's because we have no assurance that God loves us. And that becomes such a problem because it is so important to us to be absolutely certain with regard to this fact.

Now, I'm not going to ask how we come to lose the assurance because I'm certain that very, very often the way we lose assurance is itself so illogical and so chaotic and so disordered, but somehow this depth, this doubt arises in our hearts.

Does God love us? doubt in the most acute pain, just as in the most intimate of human relationships, doubt as to whether our beloved loves us.

[21 : 28] Doubt in that area can become a source of such torment. Remember how Shakespeare in Othello explores that theme so unforgettably, how the seed of doubt is sown in Othello's heart.

Is he really loved? And how that doubt drives him through torment to actions the most irrational and the most destructive.

love? And sometimes the lack of assurance of God's love becomes such a destructive force in the life of a child of God.

And that's why sometimes we find ourselves in the depths. Because the only thing that matters to us is does God love us?

And we have been led into doubt and torment on that great Christian. So there we are in the depths. Partly it's our own temperament. Partly it's our circumstances.

[22 : 38] Partly it's spiritual. It's satanic. It's unresolved guilt. It has been defeated by sin. It's doubting whether God loves us. But there we are. We are way down in the depths.

Now how do we cope? How do we cope with being in the depths? One of the great problems is that away down in those depths we sometimes simply want to luxuriate in the despondency itself.

Nursing your depression to keep it warm. And sometimes the most difficult and most important step of all is to stir ourselves to do something rather than just languish and waste our lives.

I'm told that sometimes the mental ill suffer from conditions which are catatonic. They become immobile and paralytic and they abdicate and they refuse to make any physical movement to take any decision and their lives rightly or wrongly, medically or otherwise, are lost.

Because why? They're catatonic. They're stiff. They're immobile. They're paralytic. They're inert. And I'm not sure but I have witnessed Christian lives which have been catatonic and I have questioned whether they haven't in fact been deliberately and voluntarily so.

[24 : 20] it is possible in a very subtle way to opt into inertia and to opt into paralysis to opt into a catatonic discipleship where we have no impetus and no motivation because we're simply in the depths and we say well can't you see I'm depressed?

Can't you see I'm in the depths? And I accept that there are clinical forms of this horrific condition that do indeed often preclude all motivation and all activity but I'm asking the child of God what are we going to do down in those depths?

Can we hear God's challenge? God saying to us why are you here? What do us though hear Elijah? Can we take this great first step of listening away down in those depths that maybe there is something we can do?

Well I want for a moment to watch this man in the depths and to watch this man dealing with his own problem away down in those depths well what does he do?

Well the first thing I see is this I find this man vindicating God and I find that so remarkable you see there in verse 3 if you O Lord kept a record of sins O Lord who could stand?

[26 : 03] why does that interest me? Why do I find it remarkable? Because of this if you read the modern literature of tragedy and despair there is one great prevailing note and it's this Lord it isn't fair Lord it isn't fair why me Lord and behind every such plea and every such protest there is the argument that God is not being as good to me as I deserve and that is the wonder of verse 3

because here is a man saying if God kept a record of sins none of us should stand

I am not being dealt with as harshly as I deserve he doesn't say Lord it isn't fair he's not saying Lord I've been so good Lord I should be away on the mountain tops because I've been so good there is a recognition that he has no rights that he cannot say Lord it isn't fair remember Hamlet himself says on one occasion treat every man according to his deserts and who should escape whooping if it's a matter of fairness then what do we deserve at the hand of God and it may for the moment do something to ease our torment if we could pause to remind ourselves that really we have no legitimate quarrel against

God if he kept a record of sins each one of us would be in worse case than we actually are and the second thing I find is this I find that this man has hope with you there is forgiveness forgiveness he is grasping that with the Lord there is mercy and there is mercy for him in a way I'm not saying it's much and yet it's so hugely important because here you are perhaps and you are hemmed in by utter and total hopelessness and despair and everything is so dark and your imagination is working over time and you are and you are enlisting all that could go wrong and how horrific everything could be and you see no way out why because you have forgotten the

Lord you have lost your apprehension of the mercy of God of the way that God is able to deliver you remember for a moment Abraham as he goes to offer up Isaac what a hopeless situation that was in a few hours he be left bereft of his own son and he staggers on confident in the promise of God and in the grace of God God has his own solution and sometimes for you and me in the depths there is no obvious way out we have racked our brains to find solutions to find some way that we could change our circumstances or could change our temperament we have we have used our imaginations put them into overdrive to try to work out some way that

God could deliver us and we have found no way and yet he's clinging to this he's clinging to hope with the Lord there is forgiveness you remember the early church in that great terrible moment when they put their Lord in the tomb they put their very Lord in the tomb never was the church in more difficult circumstances and yet if they had hoped which they didn't they would have been fully entitled to that hope that the Lord had a way out I don't know tonight what kind of impossible situation you're in

[31 : 52] I don't know in what specific forms the universe is closing in on you but what I do know is this that we have reason to hope in God who will do immeasurably above what we're able to ask or even to think and so first of all this man vindicates God doesn't quarrel with God this man keeps us hope alive and then there is this this man cries out of the depths I cry to you oh Lord and I want you to imagine because he's crying this man is not offering a discourse to God he's not indulging in rhetoric and making orations or presenting

God with recent arguments but he is crying to God he's crying to God because there is nothing else to do it's incoherent it's incoherent it's desperate all it can do is let God know where he is and let God know he's in trouble it is an emergency it is a mayday signal it is the soul simply saying SOS SOS mayday mayday mayday it is there wrought out of the agony of his heart out of the depths have I cried to thee he's not concerned about style about presentation he's concerned simply to cry to God I'm asking are we doing it as I prayed just a moment ago

I remembered the words of Abraham Lincoln who once said many a time he said every day I go on my knees because there is nowhere else to go that is the great reason for prayer I'm not sure sometimes that her father would have understood all her talk about a prayer life elegant organized disciplined that is a discipleship of ease not the discipleship of crisis maybe I'm thankful for it the discipleship of ease but these men they went on their knees because there was nowhere else to go that was a great thing you see they were in the depths they were in a pit if you're in a pit you don't write a speech and send it off three times a day but you cry to

God and I want to ask well does God know where you are this moment have you told have you let your father know have you cried to God have you made the desperate urgency of your plight known to God away down in the depths God's not unfair this man said I'm not left without hope I'm crying to God and I'm waiting for God I wait for Jehovah he was waiting because God didn't give him an instant answer and yet he waits waiting he said in Psalm 40 waiting I waited on the Lord I wait for the Lord my soul waits in his word it with my hope and verse verse six there my soul towards the Lord more than watch men watch for the night it mattered it did so desperately matter that God would come and so he wasn't simply crying but he was waiting and waiting and waiting there was there was desperation and there was hope there was none hope and hope you see mixed up

together this man was in a desperate condition this man yet had this hope his only hope was that he cried to God God would hear and so he waits and his soul is towards the Lord and he waits for the Lord more ardently than anyone watches for the morning is thinking especially of the invalid tormented physically and tormented emotionally distraught distressed waiting waiting for the morning it's two o'clock and then after what seems like hours you look at the watch again and it's ten past two and then hours hours hours afterwards it's two thirty and you're waiting you're waiting for the morning and this man was waiting for the

[37 : 52] Lord and so he says God is fair I have hope I'm crying to God I'm waiting for God and then all of a sudden you see he preaches oh Israel put your hope in the Lord I shan't say much about this but at this point the psalmist has been delivered he's no longer in the pit and how wonderful it is you see the whole focus changes and he's now thinking of Israel oh Israel the depressive self obsessed obsessed with his own pit with his own condition but now he's thinking of Israel and he begins to preach to Israel and he tells Israel those great things with the

Lord this unfailing love and a terrible terrible thing it is in many ways this unfailing love this loving kindness of God this yes of God literally this love that will not let me go love this love to whom the relationship matters so much that God will do whatever has to be done to maintain the relationship and sometimes what God has to do is painful but there it is in God there is unfailing love a way down in the pit you were saying God's love has failed where is your God now gone where is the loving kindness of God why is this happening to me and this man delivered from the pit saying with God there is unfailing love there is steadfast love oh love that will not let me go I rest my weary soul in thee that in thine ocean depth its flow may which shall fuller be that's what he saying to us and I would like that word to reach down tonight to the lowest point in this congregation the love that will never turn its back on you the love that will never let go and whatever you plight tonight you must know this God loves you and sometimes that is the only light there is with

God there is unfailing love and with him is full redemption with him is plenteous redemption we saw the role played in our depressions by unresolved guilt by the power of sin well what's the answer plenty is redemption redemption from many sins redemption from aggravated sins redemption from the power and dominion of sin the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses from all sins sinners said Paul of whom I was chief do we know what it is plenteous redemption I was saying to God oh I've had my I've had my allocation of redemption I've had my allocation

I've had my one dose my one experience or do we know this plenteous redemption this full redemption and so he says with the Lord there is unfailing love with the Lord there is plenty of redemption and he closes with an exhortation you put your hope in the Lord always feel hope in the Lord so dark so dark there is no light right down in those depths no light you put your hope in the Lord are we doing that are we able to do it terribly conscious that maybe all of you are so prosperous and all of you are so close to God and all of you are so blessed maybe all this is so strange to you yet maybe in some tomorrow in some far off tomorrow you too may have your depths maybe then all that you will have is hope in the

[43 : 28] Lord Lord and the only place you can go to is on your knees because there is nowhere else to go oh Israel don't lose hope never never lose hope never lose your hope in Jehovah Israel put your hope hope in the Lord for with him there is unfailing love and with him there is plenteous redemption may he bless his word to us let us pray O Lord our condition is known to you we bless thee for all in our gathering tonight we're on the mountain tops

Lord long may such experiences continue remember that soul oh Lord whoever he or she is who is in the depths the condition aggravated by knowing that it is so different to the mood of everybody else in your grace reach down touch that heart with your peace give it grace we pray you to cry to wait