

“OUT OF THE DEPTHS”

Psalm 130

At one hundred and fifty chapters, the Book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible. It is also one of the most personal and devotional books, emphasizing the individual believer's faith, struggles, and relationship with his loving God. Consequently, we find many personal and emotional expressions in the Psalms. **“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God,”** Psalm 42:2. **“Hasten, O God, to save me,”** Psalm 70:1. There are even instances in which the psalmist debates with himself, as we have all done: **“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?”** Psalm 43:5.

The Psalms were written in the form of Hebrew poetry; and the poetry was easily adapted to music and hymns. At times, psalms were addressed to a specific music director and assigned a specific melody. For example, the title of Psalm 80 reads: **“For the director of music. To the tune of ‘The Lilies of the Covenant.’ ”** Not surprisingly, the Psalms were an important part of Old and New Testament worship. They were sung, chanted, and read responsively, as they still are in our own Sunday worship services.

Additionally, many of the Psalms were Messianic in nature; that is, they foretold the Person and Work of Christ, and often in amazing detail. Centuries before the birth of Jesus, various psalms prophesied of His true identity—true God and true Man; that He would be zealous for the House of God; that He would be praised by children and wrongly accused by enemies; that soldiers would cast lots for His clothing; that His hands and feet would be pierced, yet not one of His bones would be broken; that He would be crucified, rise from the dead, and ascend into heaven; that He would rule supremely over the Universe and His Church.

Indeed, some of the final words Jesus spoke from the cross were from the Book of Psalms. **“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani,”** meaning **“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”** was a direct quote from Psalm 22:1. **“Into Your hands I commit My spirit”** was a direct quote from Psalm 31:5; words often used by Israelite children as a bedtime prayer. Those same words were on the Savior's lips when He died.

The apostle Paul emphasized the importance of the Psalms to Christian worship when he wrote to the Ephesians: **“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,”** Ephesians 5:18-20.

Decades ago, one of my college professors asked me, “Mark, which book of the Bible is your favorite?” I replied, “The Book of Psalms.” My answer surprised him. “That's unusual for a young man like you,” he said. “Many people don't fully appreciate the Psalms until

they've lived for a while"—meaning, of course, until they have lived long enough to experience the headaches and heartbreaks of life; until they have personally cried out to God "from the depths". The author of Psalm 130 was such a person. He knew about the depths of trouble from personal experience.

Listen to His words: **"Out of the depths I cry to You, O LORD; O Lord, hear my voice. Let Your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If You, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I put my hope. My souls 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, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with Him is full redemption. He Himself will redeem Israel from all their sins,"** Psalm 130:1-8.

Out of the depths. Is there anyone here today who hasn't been in the depths? Granted, we may use different terminology. We may lament, "Oh, I feel so low. I'm so depressed. I'm in such a rut. I have that sinking feeling." Or as my grandmother often described it, "I'm down in the dumps." And some words express far greater depths: "I hate myself. I'm useless. I wish I were dead." Would it surprise you to learn that Job, amid his many trials and heartaches, voiced similar words? **"May the day of my birth perish,"** he said, **"and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!' That day—may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it. May darkness and deep shadow claim it once more,"** John 4:3-5a. And he went on to say, **"Why did I not perish at birth. and die as I came from the womb?"** Job 3:11. Job was in the depths.

The Hebrew word translated as "depths" in Psalm 130:1 is also used in Isaiah 51:10 to describes the depths of the ocean. That's deep. So, deep trouble. Deep sorrow. Deep pain. Deep disappointment bordering on hopelessness. And frankly, nothing is more hopeless than admitting to ourselves or admitting to others, "I'm sorry, but there is no hope. None." At the same time, perhaps nothing is more inappropriate for people of God to say than "There is no hope." People who profess to believe in the God Who Does The Impossible. People who declare with the psalmist: **"My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth,"** Psalm 121:2.

In Psalm 42:2 we read the heartening words: **"I waited patiently for the LORD; He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, and gave me a firm place to stand."** And yet, there are so many circumstances that can drag us back into that slimy pit, that low, sinking place: illness, injury, constant pain, the death of a loved one, job loss, financial worries, addictions, troubled marriage, divorce.

The writer of Psalm 130 understood such problems. We're not told who wrote this

psalm, though it may have been King David. And if there was ever a man who understood the meaning of being “in the depths,” David was that man. During his life, David endured great hardship and heartache. He spent years fleeing from the murderous intentions of King Saul. He mourned the death of his best friend Jonathon. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, and arranged for the murder of her husband Uriah. David’s own son, Absalom, turned against him. And when Absalom died, David’s heart was broken. He wept, **“O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son,”** 2 Samuel 18:33. A lament any grieving parent would understand.

Yes, David knew what it was like to be in the depths of hurt, pain, and despair. But he also knew the way out, and described it in Psalm 130. For David, the way out of the depths lay in giving his burdens to God in prayer, verses 1-2; relying on God’s forgiveness, verses 3-4; and finally, turning to God’s Word for hope, strength, and patience, verses 5-8. Let’s consider these.

First, prayer. “Out of the depths I cry to You, O LORD; O Lord, hear my voice. Let Your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy,” Psalm 130:1-2. The Hebrew word translated as “cry” in this verse means to cry out loudly, and at times even wordlessly. And there are numerous examples in the Psalms of this type of crying. Psalm 18:6, **“In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help.”** Or Psalm 22:2, **“O my God, I cry out by day, but You do not answer; by night, and am not silent.”**

You know what this type of crying is like, don’t you—at times to be so hurt and so depressed that you can manage no more than moans and groans and sobs? But did you also know that sobs and groans and moans are prayers too; prayers received, understood, and acted upon by Almighty God? Did you know that the Spirit of God interprets and supplements our groans with groans of His own? Paul wrote in Romans 8: **“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to prayer, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”**

When in the depths, David cried out to God in prayer. As Christians, we do the same, especially amid our difficult circumstances—at least in the beginning, at least for a while. However, leaving our burdens with the Lord is not always easy, is it?. Often we say, “Lord, I’m in deep trouble. I lost my job. I’m not feeling well. I’m not appreciated or loved. I’m in such debt. My marriage is in trouble. I’m so unhappy with my life.”

And then what happens? I won’t speak for you, but I will describe me: I give my burdens to the Lord. Then I check the nearest clock. I tap my feet. I cross my arms. I sigh impatiently. And when the Lord of Heaven and Earth does not act in accordance with my strict instructions and timetable, I take my burdens back again. Is it any wonder that the horrible, slimy pit I find myself in—indeed, may have dug for myself—keeps getting deeper and

slimier; and therefore more slippery and more difficult to escape? Is it any wonder that I feel so helpless and alone?

Some years ago, I was living in a subdivision still under construction. Day after day, dump trucks rolled in and out of the neighborhood. When they arrived, they were full of dirt. When they left, they were empty. Watching this, I thought to myself, “In some ways, I’m like those dump trucks when I pray. I come to God loaded with problems and dirt. I leave the problems in His divine care. I go away happy. But the next day, and sometimes the very next hour, I go back to the construction site with a shovel, scooping my burdens one by one into the truck-bed of my heart, then driving away more loaded down with concerns and worries than I was the day before.

None of us would dream of telling God to His face, “God, I’m smarter than You are. God, I’m stronger than you. God, I’m better qualified than You are to govern the universe and solve my problems.” None of us would say such things. But isn’t this exactly what we do say when we give the Almighty our burdens and then take them back again—because we suddenly doubt His ability or willingness to take care of them and us?

Yes, sometimes we’re tempted to think that God isn’t listening to our prayers. And on occasion, the psalmists felt this way too. For example, David wrote in Psalm 27: **“Do not hide Your face from me, do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior.”** At other times we may think, “Well, why should I have to tell God my problems. Isn’t He all-knowing? Do I have to tell Him the obvious?” God is all-knowing. God does know our every need, deed, thought, and desire. Jesus said, **“Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him,”** Matthew 6:8. And David wrote in Psalm 139: **“O LORD, You have searched me and you know me...Before a word is on my tongue You know it completely, O LORD.”**

Why then does Psalm 130 encourage us to pray to God when we find ourselves in the depths? Is it for His sake? No. It’s for ours. It’s to keep our faith focused on Him. It’s to rely on His power and wisdom instead of our own. Its to find the certain relief that can only come when we give our burdens to the Lord. This is not vain theological thinking or a locker-room pep-talk or a last resort to try when all else falls. This is divine truth.

When writing to the Philippians, the apostle Paul clearly linked prayer to God and peace of mind, saying: **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,”** Philippians 4:6-7.

Second, forgiveness. **“If You, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness; therefore are You feared,”** Psalm 130:3-4. At

times, we find ourselves “in the depths” because of a spiritual crisis; because we feel the weight of our sins and find it difficult to believe that God, even a merciful God, would ever forgive us.

And what if this were true? What if God, instead of forgiving our sins in Christ, kept a ledger, an Excel Spreadsheet, of them—every sinful thought, word, and deed; everything we did wrong and failed to do right. What then? Then the answer to the psalmist’s question—“**O Lord, who could stand?**”—would be blatantly obvious. And that answer is NO ONE.

When we are “in the depths,” when we feel hopeless and worthless and utterly sinful, how important that we remember the words of Psalm 130:4, “**But with You there is forgiveness.**” Or Psalm 130:7, “**With the LORD is unfailing love and with Him is full redemption.**” And to this we could add a host of other Bible passages on forgiveness. Because forgiveness is what the Lord Jesus Christ died to give us. “**In Him,**” wrote Paul, “**we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins,**” Ephesians 1:7.

The Bible uses many words for forgiveness, each with a distinct meaning. For example, David included three Hebrew words for forgiveness in Psalm 32; a psalm he likely wrote after committing adultery with Bathsheba and then orchestrating the murder of her husband Uriah. At first, David refused forgiveness, because he refused to admit his sin. And when he did confess his sin, he must have wondered if even God could forgive him for such atrocious acts. Yet, he discovered this: “**I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD, and You forgave the iniquity of my sin,’**” Psalm 32:5.

This is how God forgives us, and this is how we are to forgive others. Such forgiveness has nothing to do with merit or worthiness, just as the way God forgives us has nothing to do with our merit or worthiness. Instead, we are simply told: “**Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you,**” Ephesians 4:31-32. If God forgives you, forgive yourself. Forgive others. Because when you do, you not only release them; you release yourself. And there is no sweeter, more healing freedom.

Third and finally, the strength, patience, and hope that come from the Scriptures. “**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,**” Psalm 130:5-6.

No one likes to wait, even for God; and perhaps especially for God, since He has the power, according to Ephesians 3:20, “**to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.**” Even in the best of times, waiting for the Lord to act or to answer can be difficult. But when we are in deep trouble, as was the writer of Psalm 130, waiting can seem all but

impossible. We begin to ask ourselves painful questions: “Where is God? If He cared about me, would He make me wait?”

Yet, amid all his fears and troubles, the psalmist declared, **“I wait for the LORD, my soul waits.”** And the Hebrew word he used, KAVAH, like many Bible words for waiting, contains the idea of strength and stamina and patience. The psalmist was willing to wait for the Lord because he fully expected the Lord to deliver him; the same certain expectation in which watchmen waited for the first gray sliver of dawn and the new day certain to follow. And it was this certain hope of deliverance—of being brought out of the depths to the heights of joy and salvation—that enabled the psalmist to go on waiting for his faithful God to deliver him.

Where does this hope, this strength, this patience, originate? The psalmist tells us this too. His ability to wait, to hold on despite the most difficult circumstances, came not from within, but from the same infallible power source that you and I have at our fingertips; namely, the word of God. **“I put my hope in His word,”** wrote the psalmist.

Today, if you feel low, down in the depths, forgotten, forsaken, worthless, unloved; I can give you no better advice than that given to David by the Spirit of God: “Put your hope in God’s Word.” If you do, you’ll say with David in Psalm 40:2, **“I waited patiently for the LORD; He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, and gave me a firm place to stand.”**

When in the depths, remember to pray; remember to rejoice in God’s mercy and forgiveness; remember to turn to God’s word, and in its power, wait patiently for the Lord to act. In the words of the hymnist:

“Out of the deep I call;
To Thee, O Lord, to Thee.
Before Thy throne of grace I fall,
Be merciful to me.” LH 327:1