

# **Up From the Depths - *Psalm 130***

## **Introduction**

- I want to start with telling you a bit of a story.
- When I was younger, I used to counsel at a Christian summer camp named Camp Cherith.
- This camp has always had a special place in my heart, and it's actually the place where I first felt God calling me into ministry.
- And at the end of every week of camp, right before the kids would go home, the camp director would get up during lunch to give some important announcements.
- For the most part they were pretty standard, make sure you clean under the bed, check the lost and found, etc.
- But she would also end every week encouraging the kids to pick up a little book from the snack shop before they left.
- These were really small books that were part of a series called "Christian Heroes", and they told stories of different people throughout history, and how God had worked in their lives in amazing ways.
- And it was so cool to read these stories, most of them were pretty dramatic, and see how God cared for these people, but you almost couldn't help but think as you were reading these stories "I wish God would do stuff like that in my life".
- I wish my story looked more like theirs.
- Well today we're going to be looking at Psalm 130, and essentially what this passage is, is a song in which the Psalmist giving us a very similar type of story, talking about how God has worked in his life in some amazing ways.
- And the really cool thing about the story that we're about to read, is that we are invited into this story with him. The journey that he takes with God in this Psalm, is something that each of us are invited to be a part of as well.
- And as we work through this Psalm, you'll see that it almost unfolds kind of like a 4 act play, every two verses are like another step that the Psalmist is taking on his journey, and each new step he takes, is another step upwards.

## **Act 1 - Out of the depths: V. 1-2**

- As we look at this Psalm, we're introduced immediately to the state of the author, where he's starting this journey from. He describes this for us in the first two verses of the Psalm:

*“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!” - Psalm 130:1-2 (ESV)*

- This is act 1 of the story that’s unfolding here, and if we’re viewing this journey as an upwards climb, we’re starting here at complete rock bottom.
- And there’s a very desperate tone to these verses.
- The Psalmist is, in this moment, at his absolute lowest, crying out for God to hear him and have mercy on him.
- And there’s a lot of significance to the way that he describes his situation. He says that he is crying to the Lord from *“out of the depths”*. This is a phrase that is used a few other times throughout the Old Testament, and it’s meant to show just how far away from God the author really is here.
- Jamie Grant writes this:
  - *“Yahweh is depicted as the God of the heavens (e.g., Pss 113:5–6; 115:3; 123:1; 136:26; 144:5), and in Psalm 130 the poet seems worlds apart from this God. The spatial distance between God and the psalmist appears nearly insurmountable.”*
- And this really is rock bottom. We start with a picture of isolation, and separation from God. And it’s that separation that is causing the Psalmist cry out to God the way that he is here. With this desperate plea for mercy.
- And that is something that we can all relate to, because what these verses are describing, the separation and isolation from God, this is the effect of sin in all of our lives. It separates us from God.
- Romans 3:23 tells us:

*“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” - Rom. 3:23 (ESV)*

- And in Ephesians 2:1 Paul says:

*“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins” - Eph. 2:1 (ESV)*

- This is the exact issue that the Psalmist is facing, and the one that we all have to face.

- We have all, at one time or another, been in this same place. Lost in the depths, alone, and completely separated from God by what seems like an uncrossable chasm, because of our own choices, and the sin in our lives.
- It's important to look at the attitude of the author of this Psalm. This song, while being one of the Psalms of ascent, is also considered one of seven penitent psalms found in the book. A Psalm in which the author is seeking forgiveness for his sins. Penitence literally means "sorrow or regret over having done something wrong".
- He recognizes that he's in a desperate situation, which leads to this desperate plea.
- He recognizes that he has a big issue, that he can't deal with on his own. He sees his own sin and he's ashamed. He is in the depths, he is trapped. He's far away from God. He wants to make this journey, to climb up out of the depths, but he's overwhelmed because he recognizes just how far away he is from God, and how far he has to climb. He knows he can't make it alone, so he cries out to God to rescue him, and to help him.
- Like I said, this Psalm is going to show the author taking a journey that we are all invited to take in our own lives, but if we're going to do that, we have to start in the same place that this Psalm starts. It's going to be a beautiful journey, but we need to start by recognizing the need that we have for this journey to happen. That we are trapped in the depths, that we are far away from God, and we need to cry to him for mercy.

## **Act 2 - In him there is forgiveness: V. 3-4**

- In the next two verses, V. 3-4, we come into act 2 of this story and take our first step upwards.
- V. 3 says:

*"If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,*

*O Lord, who could stand?" - Psalm 130:3 (ESV)*

- So initially, this verse carries over some of the tone from the first two, again emphasizing the situation that we've started out in.
- We all have iniquities, and sin in our lives, and this is just nailing home the severity of that reality. God is a holy, and a righteous God, and if he were to "*mark iniquities*", really who could stand? I know that I couldn't. And the question here is rhetorical, meant to communicate that nobody could. We are all guilty before God, and deserve judgement for our sins.
- But there's such a powerful word in that verse, the word "*if*" that you have right at the beginning.

- And that little word is made all the more beautiful by the fact that V. 4 begins with the word **“but”**.
- If God marked iniquities, if he judged us the way that we deserved, we wouldn't have a hope because we all deserve death. But look at what V. 4 says.

*"But with you there is forgiveness,*

*that you may be feared."* - Psalm 130:4 (ESV)

- Wow.
- I want you to let that sink in. The magnitude of what those verses are saying, especially considering where we've started this journey from.
- If God were to count our sins against us, we would be utterly lost and hopeless, stuck in *“the depths”* forever, separated from God. But with God there is forgiveness.
- In God, the Psalmist is able to find the mercy that he was crying for. He cried to God for mercy from the depths and his prayers were answered because with the Lord there is forgiveness.
- There is forgiveness from sins, and therefore the opportunity to find freedom in him.
- And just as we started out in the same place as the Psalmist, lost in the depths because of our sins, we have been given the same opportunity for forgiveness.
- The freedom and the forgiveness that is found in Christ.
- V. 3 is true. If God were to count our sins against us, we would have no hope, but he had mercy on us. Mercy enough to send his son Jesus to die on the cross, taking the punishment that we deserve. Taking that death onto himself, and making it possible for us to receive forgiveness for our sins through him.
- All that he asks of us is to repent of our sins, and place our trust in him as our saviour.
- So we have come up from a desperate cry, from a position of guilt, to this statement of assurance in the forgiveness that is found in God. On this journey we've now taken that first step up, out of the depths, and into the forgiveness found in Christ.
- In this second pair of verses we really get a picture the need for God's forgiveness, and the beauty of the forgiveness that he offers us.
- The second part of V. 4 makes clear that forgiveness is found in God *“that he may be feared”*, and the fear that it's talking about there is really getting at a sense of awe and reverence, and ultimate respect for him. God's glory shines through in his forgiveness. The fact that we deserve judgement, not love and forgiveness, and yet God offers it to us anyways.

- If the first act of this story was all about shame and guilt, then this second act is all about forgiveness and hope, and as we keep reading you're going to see that hope getting brighter and brighter, as we continue on.

### **Act 3 - Waiting on the Lord: V. 5-6**

- And you might think that now that the Psalmist has found forgiveness in his Lord, that's the end of his journey. He's achieved what he wanted, and risen out of "*the depths*" into a relationship with God. Why do we need to keep going here? What else is there?
- But that's really only the first half of the story. We're still climbing here, and as we come to V. 5-6 we're going to take our next step upwards.
- Look at what V. 5-6 say.

*"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."* - Psalm 130:5-6 (ESV)

- Now this may seem like a bit of a step backwards. We've already had in V. 4 assurance that forgiveness is found in God, so what are we waiting for here? Do we have to wait for God to make up his mind and decide to actually forgive us? Not quite.
- These verses are getting at a beautiful theme of anticipation that runs throughout Scripture, a theme of "*already, but not yet*".
- Christ's work is already done on the cross. He has defeated the power of sin, and of death, and for those who have placed their trust in him, and cried out for forgiveness, that forgiveness has been given. That has already happened.
- But, we are still living in a messy world, full of sin and brokenness, and we are waiting now for the day that God will come to redeem and restore this broken world, and we will spend eternity with him.
- We have already been given such amazing hope through Christ, and yet we still have amazing hope to wait for.
- For those who have trusted in Christ, this is where we are in this passage. We've received the wonderful forgiveness that God offers, but we're still living in this broken world, waiting for Christ's return.

- I want to read you something written by an author named T.W. Aveling that I think sums up these two verses perfectly, and captures the beautiful waiting they describe.
- *“On the night preceding August 1, 1830, which was the day the slaves in the West Indian Colonies were to be freed, many of the slaves never went to bed. Tens of thousands assembled in their places of worship for devotions, singing praises to God, and waiting for the first streak of morning light that would make them free. Some were sent to the hills to signal the first view of the coming day, the day that was to make them free. They would no longer be goods and chattel, but men with souls that God has created to live forever. How eagerly they must have watched for the morning!” - T. W. Aveling, 1872*
- I think that’s such a perfect description of the kind of anticipation that’s being captured here in these verses. The law had already been passed, the slaves were freed, and yet they were so eagerly awaiting the day that the promise would be fulfilled, and they would feel the full force and effect of their freedom.
- And the same is true of us. We’ve already been rescued and forgiven through Christ. Our debt is paid, and through him we are set free, yet we eagerly await the fulfillment of God’s promise that one day Christ will return, and everything that is broken in this world will be put right and redeemed.

## **Act 4 - Eternal Hope: V. 7-8**

- And that idea of redemption leads right into the last two verses. The last act of this story that we’ve been watching unfold, and the final step of this climb that the Psalmist has been on.
- This is what these last verses say:

*"O Israel, hope in the LORD!*

*For with the LORD there is steadfast love,*

*and with him is plentiful redemption.*

*And he will redeem Israel*

*from all his iniquities.” - Psalm 130:7-8 (ESV)*

- After the journey that the author has been on in this Psalm, starting in the depths, and finding forgiveness, now being able to hope and wait for the Lord, this is his final declaration, the conclusion of all that he’s been through. It’s a statement of assurance, but you’ll notice that it’s also directed more outward than the other verses.

- As we're taking this last step upwards in this Psalm, we're also taking a step outwards.
- So far we've been dealing mostly with the Psalmist's own journey of finding forgiveness and redemption in the Lord, but now he is addressing his people, his nation, encouraging them to hope in the Lord.
- It's an invitation for others to join him in this journey, and the beautiful relationship with God that he's found.
- And he describes it so beautifully in V. 7. We've seen already that with the Lord there is forgiveness, but this verse continues that thought, that with the Lord there is also "*steadfast love*" and "*plentiful redemption*".
- Now that the Psalmist has found such amazing forgiveness in the Lord, such hope, forgiveness, love, and redemption, he can't keep it inside. He is rejoicing in the love that he has found, and he wants to share this beautiful relationship, so that others have the chance to take the same journey that he has. To find hope in the Lord.
- A hope that will last forever. Because as we're in this place of waiting, waiting for the day that Christ will return to redeem his creation, we hope in that reality that when he does, we will spend eternity with him.
- And again, for those of us who have trusted in Christ, the reaction that we see from the Psalmist here, this should be our attitude towards the new life, and the eternal hope that we have found in him.
- It is such an amazing, and a beautiful thing that has been done for us in Christ, and we should want to invite others into that as well. To invite them to cry to God for mercy, and take this journey, up out of the depths into the forgiveness and redemption that has been offered. To encourage others to hope in the Lord, just as we have learned to.

## **Conclusion**

- And now as we end, we've come full circle. We started this song with the Psalmist trapped in the depths, the place of isolation and separation from God, because of his iniquities and sins, and now we end here with such a powerful statement of assurance and hope in God. That with him is steadfast love, and plentiful redemption.
- This is such a beautiful Psalm, because this Psalm gives us the Gospel, start to finish. It lays out God's entire plan of redemption and the amazing gift that we've been given through Christ.
- The reality that we are all trapped in "*the depths*" along with the author of this song, but through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross we have the opportunity to receive forgiveness, steadfast love, and plentiful redemption.

- I love how Jamie Grant sums up this whole song at the end of it all. This is what he says:
  - *“One narrative exchanged for another—darkness for light, death for life. Despite the darkness, the psalmist leans forward toward the God he knows—the one who chooses to love us, redeem us, and forgive us ... the one who invites us all into a new narrative, a narrative marked by grace.”*
- So what’s your story? What narrative are you living in? Because this Psalm is giving us all an invitation to change our story, and enter into a new one that is marked by the grace of God through putting our faith in Jesus Christ and receiving forgiveness for our sins.
- And if that is a decision that you’ve already made, then rejoice in the Lord, and what he’s done for you, and share that message of forgiveness and hope with those around you as you wait for Christ’s return like a watchman waits for the morning.
- And if that’s not a decision that you’ve ever made, I would invite you to find forgiveness and hope in Christ today, and to start that journey out of the depths into a beautiful relationship with God.
- Because at the end of the day, we all deserve to be lost in the depths, separated from God, but with the Lord there is forgiveness, there is hope, there is steadfast love, and there is plentiful redemption, through the work of Jesus Christ.