

A Prayer, and a word from God

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[0:00] Well, let's turn in our Bibles to the Psalm which we read, Psalm 130.

The Psalm 130, and while I want to refer to much in this short Psalm, we'll just read, we'll concentrate on verses 3 and 4. Psalm 130 verses 3 and 4.

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand.

But with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared.

How does one go so quickly, so quickly, from the depths of despair to the heights of heaven as we have in this short Psalm?

[1:07] You remember how it began. Oh, out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord. That's how the Psalm begins. And how does the Psalm end?

Look at the confidence. He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. How can one go so quickly from the depths of despair to the heights of glory?

From lamenting sorrowfully, as it were, to singing heartily. From utter hopelessness, you might say, to absolute certainty.

How does one go from one to the other so quickly? What happens between verse 1 and the last verse? What's in the middle to change the psalmist from a man desponding to a man full of excitement in the glory of God?

What takes place in between them? Well, we read it. Two things. A prayer and a word from God.

[2:26] What a difference that makes. Psalm writing was not a spare time activity of psalmists.

It's not a case that the psalmist said, oh, well, I've a quiet afternoon. I'll catch up with some psalm writing. No, that's not how the Psalms are written.

And neither was it the case that a psalmist said, every Thursday morning between 10 and 12, I'll compose psalms. I've got so many to write in such a time. No, no, that's not the way Psalms are written.

The way Psalms are written is what we have in Psalm 45 tells us verse 1.

My heart overflows with a pleasing theme. I address my verses to the king. My tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe. In the New Sing Psalms version, it comes as, a noble theme inspires my heart with verses for the king.

[3:54] The psalmist is telling us later in the first verse of Psalm 45 how poets write poetry. That heart is bubbling up and bubbling over with some majestic theme of God, oh, God.

And he can't stop himself picking up his pen and putting it in writing. His heart is overflowing and he can get no peace until he does something about it, putting it in writing and letting others know.

A noble theme inspires my heart with verses for the king.

What's the noble theme in this psalm? What was it that made the poet grab his pen when he was down in the dumps?

And say, I've got to put that in writing. What was it? What was the noble theme? Well, it's the verses we've chosen. If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand back?

[5:10] Always watch the bats. This morning we had bat now. Something else has been revealed from heaven. Here we have the seriousness, the awfulness, the trauma of sin. But yet, despite that, the glorious good news there is forgiveness with God.

In fact, could we not say really that these two verses, verses three and four, or some 130, is essentially a summary of the whole Bible's teaching?

What's the Bible about? What does, what did God give us a message for to tell us? The plight, the hopeless plight of the human race.

But God intervened and sent hope and sent mercy. So this psalm and these two verses are giving us these two themes to think of, or at least it's really one theme and two.

The seriousness of sin on the one hand, but yet the reality of forgiveness on the other.

[6 : 37] My friend, do not separate them. Whatever you do, do not separate these two verses.

Yes, sin is serious. Yes, it's awful. But yes, there is forgiveness with God. So let's look at these two things. The seriousness of sin. The problem is sin.

The problem is not guilt feelings. The problem is guilt. That's our problem. That's your problem. It's my problem. Guilt. We are guilty.

Whether we have guilt feelings about it or not. Sin is something objective, not subjective.

You and I sin when we disobey God, whether we feel bad about it or not.

[7 : 41] Our problem is we're guilty before God. So you rightly ask, hey, what is guilt? What's the definition of guilt?

What's the proper definition, what's the biblical definition of guilt? It is liability to punishment. That's the definition of guilt.

Whether you feel bad about it or not. Because you've done this, because you've done wrong, because you've disobeyed God, you are liable to punishment.

Now that's objective. Whether you feel it or not. Because we sin, we're liable to punishment.

So we ask, okay, so what is sin? What makes us liable to punishment?

[8 : 42] Anything against God. What is sin? Something against God.

Someone has said, I heard a minister say, what is sin? Sin is saying no to God.

God tells you to do something. No, don't want to. That's sin. God, Martha, is trying to get rid of God.

The old testament defines sin as God not keeping God in our thoughts. No, the fact that I said the old testament is actually the new testament.

In fact, it's Romans chapter 1, if I remember correctly. Because they did not like to retain God in their thoughts. God came into their thoughts. Oh, they didn't like it. They put it out.

[9 : 46] They said, sin. In fact, since actually even worse than that, I can be keeping all the commandments.

I can be keeping them all. And then God gives me cancer. I'm not breaking any of the commandments, but he gives me cancer.

I'm not breaking any of the commandments. I'm angry with God. That's sin. Sin is disagreeing with God.

The psalmist here is so conscious of that. He's conscious of it. He is guilty. Because he is disagreeing with God.

He's sinned against God. We don't know particularly what specific sins that may have been relating to him. But he's aghast at himself and he's traumatized with his condition.

[10 : 52] And he says, who can stand if God would mark inequities? And that word mark is an interesting word.

Two ideas in it. Number one, intense scrutiny. The question is not really, does your wife know about it?

It's not really has your boss seen you. It's not really has anyone seen you. God sees. God knows. Even the thoughts that are in our heads. God sees. God knows. He marks it. As I said, intense scrutiny in the one hand.

But it also means this. It means to record something. Wow. Every sin is recorded.

[11 : 54] And you cannot wipe out God's hard drive. It's there. On God's hard drive.

Every one of our sins. Of course, Christ can wipe the drive clean.

And he has, which we'll know the outcome to. Cushed, the Bible tells us. Cushed is everyone who does not continue.

Continue. There's no probation period for sin. There's no probation period. There's no five year trial. Cushed is everyone who does not continue in all things.

All things which are written in the book of the law to do them. As we mentioned in the morning, righteousness is total allegiance and conformity to God's law.

[13 : 03] We have to continue in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them. And the standard rises to heaven.

It's not your standard. And it's quite a solemn thought this. And I hope I'm not seeing these things lightly. It's not good enough to do the best you can.

Because God is an absolute being. And he requires absolute perfection. And if the very best I can do is not reaching the standard of God's perfection, then the best that I can do is not enough. The depth in the inner hearts. As I said, disagreeing with God, being angry with God with some providence, a sin.

With to reach the standard of God's perfection from the innermost part of our hearts. The height, the depth, the breadth. No exceptions.

[14:16] No exceptions. No mitigating factors. The law of God is un-relaxable, un-changable in Eleanor.

That's the standard. It's frightening, it's alarming. And the length, the length, no probation period as we said, is to continue forever.

God's everlasting, un-changable standards. Listen, you haven't got a hope of reaching it.

And I haven't got a hope. And it's seen that, that makes all the difference, that solemnizes us and sobers us.

Especially when the punishment, just breaking it once, at the end of your life, liable to punishment.

[15:20] Guilty before God. Every single sin deserves God's wrath and curse.

Both in this life and that which is to come. Solom statement, that isn't it. Every sin deserves God's wrath and curse.

Both in this life and in that which is to come. Do you see why I said so seriously? Do not separate the seriousness of sin from the forgiveness of sin.

Here God joins them together. Now what God has joined together, let no one put us under.

Let no one divide. That's the noble theme that made the Samist pick up his pen and compose this Sam. Send us an awful trauma with two fists, a reality that makes us guilty before God.

[16:35] Pat, pat, pat, that's not the end of the story. Secondly, the reality of forgiveness with God, but with you there is forgiveness.

Aren't we strange, peculiar people? Hasn't sin made a mess of our psyche? No sooner do we sinful, more people have extremes.

No sooner do we become convicted of sin. The difficult thing, you know I always remember Christians and in our essay we were very enthusiastic with the Gospel.

And I remember them saying, oh we just love, we just love going into the prisons. I said why? Oh you see you don't have to bother convincing them, I said.

They jolly well know they're sinners. They want an answer. They want the cure. But in our churches, the real problem is convicting people of sin, making them realize we are guilty before God.

[17:53] Whatever we think, whatever people say and certainly whatever people feel, we are guilty before God. Fact, if we sin and when we sin.

But as I said aren't we strange, peculiar people? No sooner do we become convicted of sin and we go to the other extreme and say oh there's no hope for me.

You don't know what I've done, you don't know how bad I am with people of extremes. Let's be biblical. Yes sin is frightening.

Sin is terrifying. But, but never forget the buts in the Bible. But with God there is forgiveness.

Hallelujah. And I will raise his name. Do note very carefully the order in verse 4.

[18:57] But with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared. Now if you're here tonight and you're not a Christian, why might confuse you? I tell you what confused me.

For years and years I said to myself, God will never forgive me until I first fear him properly.

Until I first get my life in order. Until I first sort myself out. And that's for forgiveness and God may be giving it to me.

It's not what you find in the Bible, it's not what we find here. But with you there is forgiveness that, or as it could be translated, in order that you may be feared.

My friend, you do not begin to fear God until you fast taste forgiveness.

[20:12] Get it right? The power is realising my sin is forgiven. That's what will empower you to wash it properly.

You'll never wash it properly fast. You can't do it without the grace of God and the power of God working in your life.

Taste and see that God is good. Then you can begin to talk about feeding him properly, respecting him, revering him correctly.

Forgiveness first. It doesn't come naturally to you and me, does it? Certainly it didn't come to me for years.

It didn't come to me for years, until I realised I can't do anything until I taste the mercy of God first.

[21 : 16] Oh, that's the order. If you hear you want forgiveness, you can't sort yourself out first. You have to taste a full, free and deserving mercy of God.

Grace is a difficult concept for humans to grasp. Grace is mercy you just don't deserve.

We like to earn things. We like to be worth things. We can't, not with God. We must receive. We must receive.

The God who condenses is the God who is ready to forgive. Ready to forgive.

That's why some people might ask, how can I tell if my conviction of sin is the work of the Holy Spirit?

[22 : 28] Some people say, unless you totally despair of yourself, well, we ought to totally despair of ourselves, because there is no hope in us, but you must never despair.

There is no despair in grace, in hope. We need to hope in God, not hope in ourselves. Hope in God. Never, my friend, never hope for the best.

People say, oh, well, we're hoping for the best. Listen, here's something far, far better. Hope in God. How do I know the Spirit has convicted someone of conviction of sin?

Because when the Spirit convicts, it has this purpose. In leading that person to Christ for forgiveness.

That's the objective. We're not interested in Christ as we are by nature. So the Spirit has to convict us of our sin first. Now, listen, do you know Satan will convict you of sin?

[23 : 34] To get you to despair, like he did to Judas Iscariot. Like he did to Iphifel, to get you to despair, to say there's no hope.

Satan thinks of that. God, the Spirit convicts to make you interested in the only hope there is in Jesus, in Christ.

What does our catechism teach us? Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby convicted of all our sins, of our sin, and an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ.

That's a very interesting term, it's old language. An apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ. A little glimmer of hope, light at the end of the tunnel.

The Spirit's purpose and conviction is not to get you to despair, it is to get you to despair of yourself, of hope in yourself, but not of hope at all, but of hope to give you confidence in Christ, who can deliver, who can save.

[24 : 59] Now, remember I said, the two things that came between here was a prayer of the psalmist, All Lord, hear my voice, let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy, the prayer.

But listen, a plea for mercy as we try to explain in the morning has to be based upon something. Note what he says in verse 5, in his word I hope.

You don't just believe, you believe something God has said, you believe something God has promised in his word, do I hope.

So we ask now, what has God promised to sinners? Well, what has he promised?

Well, I read Romans 10 verses 11 and 13, for the scripture says, verse 11, Romans 10 verse 11, for the scripture says, everyone, not most people, some people, but everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame, for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord overall, is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on who?

[26 : 44] On those who call upon him. Verse 13, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

What do you make of that? Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Oh, you see, you don't believe if I call on the name of the Lord now, you see, now, that's precisely your problem, you don't believe it.

It's realising the truth of that which changes a person's character, that transforms his nature, calling on God and saying, Lord, I have no other basis for expecting you to forgive me other than that, you put it in writing.

You know what it's like, you walk by a house, by a business, whatever, and you come to a deal with someone, you say, right, get it in writing through the service, get it in writing.

You know, people sometimes say, especially with regard to guidance, and there's no one worse than myself or say, oh, I wish you'd speak clearly.

[28 : 12] If you find yourself saying, why don't God tell me what he wants like the way he told Adam? You shall not do this, I wish God would make it as clear as that to us today.

Oh, what would happen if he spoke like Adam? Well, exactly what happened to Adam would happen to you and to me. Because what did Satan do? He came along and said, God, I wish he'd had.

Oh, no, no, I know what he said. Get it in writing, you say. Something I can read off. Well, God has put it in writing. Whoever or call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

That's a promise to believe from God and is put it in writing. Do you believe it? Do you believe it? Whoever confesses, he who covers his sin will not prosper. But whoever confesses and forefakes his sin will have mercy.

[29 : 25] It doesn't matter how bad you are, it doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter how many times you've done it. It doesn't matter what your condition is. If you confess your sins, if you call on the name of the Lord, you will be saved.

Fate a complaint. God has put it in writing. Do you believe it? Do you believe it?

That's a problem. That's the key. That's what changes everything. Do you believe what he has promised in Psalm 34, 22?

I don't know why I didn't choose one of that Psalms to sing. No one will ask verses Psalm 34. No one. This is something God has put in writing. No one will perish who trusts in him.

No one, including you. That's the gospel. That's what changes lives, transforms characters.

[30 : 43] That's what makes all the difference, taking God at His word for no other reason but that He said it. That's the gospel.

And you know, that's glorious. But there's even more encouragement in this Psalm. If we move further down to verse 7.

O Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with Him is plentiful redemption.

With the Lord there is steadfast love and plentiful redemption. And what does she for that sing?

There's plenty, plenty of redemption available for the newcomer.

Plenty of redemption available for the newcomer. And then, once she's tasted and seen that God is good, there is God's steadfast love after that.

[32 : 03] What does that mean? Once he's steadfast love, it's God's determination to take you to heaven.

Despite how you may let him down, he's steadfast love. How many saints in the Bible have let God down?

In fact, have you noticed, have you noticed Hebrews chapter 11? Well, here, I've mentioned it the last time, I was here, didn't I? Hebrews chapter 11, the roll call of faith.

Do you notice something about all these people that's mentioned? Every single one of these characters, in Hebrews chapter 11, were flawed characters.

And one way or another, they all let God down. Moses was a murderer. Moses was a murderer.

[33 : 17] Jacob, well, where do we start? The basis of it getting into heaven is Christ.

Christ's faithfulness to the new covenant. We broke the first covenant in Adam and with Adam, and showed by our behaviour we were with him all the way when he said, we'll go it alone without God. We agreed with Adam, we'll do without God and do our own thing and work in his world.

But then God came a second time to the human race. Isn't it glorious? Isn't it glorious? God came the second time and he said, this time I can't trust the human being.

So I'll make the everlasting covenant with my son Jesus. I can trust him. I can't trust these human beings anymore, but I can trust my son.

Hear him. Hear him. Go to him. Trust in him. That's the Gospel. Go to him, friend.

[34 : 32] And immediately you'll taste, you'll experience God is God. Your sins are forgiven, whatever you feel like. And I believe, and it's probably true in this congregation as well, there are lots of people in our congregation and they're saved and they don't know it.

They don't realise it. They haven't meditated upon the truth. And it's realising the truth that changes your character, transforms your own nature.

So after tasting that God is good, after tasting, discovering there's plenty of redemption in Christ, there's God's steadfast love.

This love that will never let you go. This love that you cannot destroy. I have loved you, he said, with an everlasting love.

Everlasting love. The love that will not let you go. My friend, that's the love you need. That's the power you need.

[35 : 50] That's what we all need. The love that will not let you go. You see, the point is this. We will require God's mercy again and again and again in the future.

We will need to continue confessing our sins to them, because we're continually sinning against them. But we go again to the cross, confessing our sins and confessing our only hope is you, Jesus.

Now we believe you did not die there in vain. We believe it was for us you hung and suffered there. If you Lord, should mark in equity, oh Lord, who could stand? But, but with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared.

May God, the Holy Spirit, make his word be fictal to everyone else. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

[37 : 12] Our Father in heaven, be pleased to take the things of Christ and make them ours.

Make them ours tonight, here in this place. Help us enjoy that steadfast love which you give to your people when they taste and see that you are good.

Oh Lord, hear us in mercy, answer us in peace as we pray only and all. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Well, what can we do but conclude by singing a Ham Psalm 130, page 421.

Lord from the depths to the eye cried, my voice Lord, do thou hear, and to my supplications voice, give an attentively in the last verse, and plentious redemption is ever found with him.

[38 : 29] And from all his iniquities he is wrong. So I'm 130 to God's grace.

And to the eye cried, my voice Lord, do thou hear, and to my supplications voice, give an attentively in the last verse, Lord to Charles John, in the Lord, should not iniquity, but iniquity for goodness is not here, the legacy.

I wait for God, my soul the way, my hope is in His word, for loving God, for boring war, my soul is for the Lord.

I say more now, when I do watch the morning light to see, when is the end of the Lord, all the way, the mass is here, and plentious redemption is ever found with him.

And from all his iniquities he is well shall redeem.

[41 : 17] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore.

Amen.