

PRAYING IN THE DEPTHS

Psalm 130

Intro: I doubt if there is any way we can learn who wrote “the Psalms of Degrees,” or “Psalms of Ascent” which appear in our Bibles from Psalm 120 to Psalm 134 – fifteen Psalms. But there seems to be very strong evidence from Biblical scholars that they are traceable to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. I have found it especially profitable to think of Psalm 130 which I want to consider with you this morning in the light of that glorious event in the history of Israel. Many thoughts must have filled the minds and hearts of the people as they worked at restoring the walls of the city. Walls, as we know, were built for the protection of those who lived in those ancient cities, protection from their enemies. But the walls of Jerusalem were not sufficient for the people of Israel when the Lord brought the Babylonians against them. And our Psalm for today brings out the reason why the walls were not enough.

I think that it is very significant that we are hearing a lot about a wall today, not wall around Washington, D.C., or New York City, or Portland, Oregon. But a wall along the southern border of the United States where our country touches the country of Mexico. Now I am very much in favor of such a wall, but if we know our Bibles, we should know that it is going to take more than a wall along our southern border to solve the problems that we have. The problem that we have all through our country is the very same that Israel had in the days before the Jewish people were building the wall around Jerusalem. And Psalm 130 has a very special message for all of us today.

But let us start with the Psalm, see the condition of the people, the cause of their trouble, and what the remedy was.

The Message

Note that this is not only a Psalm, that is, a holy song, but it is a prayer which is addressed to God. And notice that in the first six verses the speaker appears to be an individual. Let me read the first six verses pointing this out. You see it especially in verses 1 and 2, and then again in verses 5 and 6. (Read.)

Then in verses 5 and 6 notice that the Psalmist addresses the whole

nation. Why? Because the Psalmist knew that the solution that he had found for his trouble, was the only solution that there was for every person in the nation regardless of what his age was, or whether he or she was male or female.

But notice first:

I. THE CONDITION OF THE PSALMIST (Psa. 130:1-2).

He was in “the depths.” or he had been. What does this mean? It meant that he felt like he was in a deep hole and he was not able to get out. Do you remember how Jeremiah’s enemies put him in a deep pit from which they knew he could not escape? And earlier than that Joseph’s brothers put him in a pit, and then when some traders came by, they pulled him up out of the pit, sold him to the traders, and that is how Joseph got to Egypt. In Psalm 40 David told what the Lord did for him: “He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay” (v. 2a).

The Psalmist here in Psalm 130 was in “the depths.” But this meant that he was not only depressed and discouraged, but he was deeply distressed. Have you ever felt that way? I have. And it doesn’t take you long in listening to your TV or radio to find out that a wave depression has swept over our country. We are overwhelmed with problems of all kinds. Many are fearful of what is going to become of us. It seems like we go from one emergency to another. Oil is still pouring out into the waters of the Gulf and nobody seems to be able to stop it. Our national debt is so great that most of us don’t understand how great it is. Then there are accidents which take the lives of many people. And on and on we can go. I wonder how many of you came to church today feeling like you were in a pit, in the depths. There is plenty to be discouraged about.

But now let me ask you a question.

Have you ever felt like you were in a pit because of your sins? Usually it is discouragement about sin that is the first step that the Lord causes us to take leading to our salvation. And even after you were saved, have your sins and the guilt you have felt swept over you to such a degree that it was like you had never been forgiven.

Let me try to picture for you what I believe was going on in those days of Ezra and Nehemiah as the people were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

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They began to think, Why are we doing this? Our fathers and grandfathers who build the original wall did not build it with the idea that it was going to have to be rebuilt in a few years. *And then they began to think about why they were doing what they were doing! It was because of their sins.* And I can imagine that if you had walked around when the people were working, you would have found worker after worker who had to stop occasionally from their work because they could not see what they were doing, and that was because of their tears, tears of sorrow and regret because of the many ways they had despised the Lord by doing what He had specifically told them not to do.

Look at the question in verse 3. In preparation for my message this morning, I read all that Matthew Henry had to say in answer to this question. It made me realize in a deeper way what the answer is to this question is. Here is what he wrote:

To own the power and justice of God, which are such that, if he were extreme to mark what we do amiss, there would be no hopes of coming off. His eye can discover enough in the best man to ground a condemnation upon; and, if he proceed against us, we have no way to help ourselves, we cannot stand, but shall certainly be cast. If God deal with us in strict justice, we are undone; if he make remarks upon our iniquities, he will find them to be many and great, greatly aggravated and very provoking; and then, if he should proceed accordingly, he would shut us out from all hope of his favour and shut us up under his wrath; and what could we do to help ourselves? We could not make our escape, nor resist nor bear up under his avenging hand.

Matthew Henry was not talking about the worst of men, but of the best of men, and that if God should mark their iniquity, if He should expose all of our sins, apart from His mercy, there would be absolutely no hope that any of us could ever be saved. That is a picture of the depth of our sin and that God would be perfectly just in condemning us all to an eternal hell.

And the depth and intensity of our sins is seen in the fact that even after we have been saved, we still continue to sin. Let me ask all of us, How many tears have we shed because of our sins.

Now the Psalmist's prayer was very intense. Notice at the end of verse 1 we have LORD all in caps, and then Lord (capital L, with "ord" in lower case – Jehovah, and Adonai. And then you have the same spellings in

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verse 3. This is to indicate the awful majesty and infinite glory of the God with Whom we have to do. Even we as God's people often are guilty of forgetting what an awesome, holy, and glorious God He is. When we realize that, we will have no argument about what the Bible has to say about s-I-n. With all of the problems that we as individuals have, and all the problems we see in our nation and in the world, the most amazing fact about our society today is that practically nothing is being said about God, or about Christ, or about the Bible, the Word of God, and so next to nothing is being said about sin, our sin.

But what do we find when we learn what the Bible tells us about God? Does He investigate to see how big our sins are, or how many there are? No, He knows all of that without any investigation. No, what He wants us to know is that with Him there is "forgiveness." And remember that it was during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, and mainly the work of Ezra, that for the first time the books of the OT were put together. So it is very likely that the Jews who had come back from exile were well acquainted with the prophecy of Isaiah in which he spoke of the coming Messiah, or Christ, in these words which we find in Isaiah 53:5-6:

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

We all know that the Lord Jesus Christ had not come when Psalm 130 was written. But the prophecies about His coming and about His sacrifice for sinner are spoken of as having already taken place because it was absolutely certain that He would come, and that He would did for the salvation of sinners, that everyone who believed in Him in those days were forgiven of their sins and given the gift of eternal life.

In the great prayer of confession in Nehemiah 9 which the Levites prayed on behalf of the exiles who had returned from captivity. The prayer reviews the disobedience of the people of Israel and their sins which had caused God to send them into exile, and then we come to these wonderful words found in Nehemiah 9:31:

31 Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God.

Because of what the Jews were, and because of what they had done, they deserved eternal death. But because of Who God is, and because of what

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God sent Him to die for sinners of all time, instead of being condemned to eternal hell, we have the gift of eternal life.

The people of God in the OT looked ahead to a coming Redeemer. We look back upon the Lord Jesus Christ Who has come and Who has taken our penalty upon Himself, paying it in full by His death, we have the gift of eternal life. For all of time, there is only one Gospel, and only one Savior.

But what do the last words of verse 4 mean, “That Thou mayest be feared.” What does it mean to fear the Lord? It means that just as we used to live without giving God a thought, now we seek by His grace to be careful that we please Him, and worship Him, and find our greatest joy in fellowship with Him.

So how did this exile, speaking for all of the exiles who had turned to the Lord, declare for himself? Here we find in verses 5 and 6 the answer to our former distress. “I wait (with assured expectation) for the Lord.” “My soul doth wait.” So this is genuine. “And in His Word do I hope.” Not only does he live by faith, but his faith is centered in and strengthened by the Word of God.

And in verse 6 the Psalmist expressed his strong confidence in the Lord as similar to those who wait assuredly in the night that the morning is coming. But there is also this additional thought. The best way to make sure that we are going to live our days for the Lord, is to begin with Him in the morning. We all have our trials and testings, but waiting for the Lord has turned despondency and gloom into daily expectation of the blessings of the Lord.

The last two verses give us the testimony of those who have really discovered what they have in the Lord. The answer to despondency and the consciousness of how we have grieved the Lord, is not to be found in ourselves but in the Lord. It is in Him that we find “mercy” for our misery, and “plenteous redemption.” We will be like the Queen of Sheba who came to hear the wisdom of Solomon and so see the great wealth with which the Lord had blessed him. And you remember that her response was, “the half was not told me” (1 Kings 10:7). She had heard of Solomon, his wealth and wisdom, but she didn’t believe it until she came and saw it for herself.

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It is impossible for us to know how “plenteous” God’s “redemption” is, until we experience it for ourselves. It does not just mean the forgiveness of some of our sins, but from all of them. It means deliverance from the power of sin which before enslaved and dominated our lives. There is a new understanding of the love of God. We have a peace which passeth all understanding. We experience God’s care over our lives, and how He keeps us from falling. We have “joy unspeakable and full of glory.” He keeps us, and has promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us. Twice in this Psalm the Psalmist mentioned his “hope.” The crowning part of the hope is not only that we will be with the Lord forever, but by the power of His redeeming grace we will be like Him. Sin will be thing of the past, and it is good to know that there are no depths, no deep pits in heaven. “And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”

Concl: Let me point out a feature about this Psalm that I don’t want you to miss. This Psalm is basically the testimony of one person. He is overjoyed in what he has found in the Lord, especially the forgiveness of all of his sins. But he speaks as one child of God who has prayed and had his prayer answered. He was saved the same way. He may have had wonderful parents, but he was not saved, nor did he grow in the Lord because they were growing in the Lord. God deals with all of us individually. He saves us one by one. He teaches us one by one. We grow in the Lord one by one. You and I need to put ourselves in this Psalm, wherever we might be spiritually. Then and only then will we experience the blessing of the Lord. Remember, as this Psalm teaches us, that the way to the heights that we have in Christ, is often through the depths. Our Psalm teaches us that prayer in the depths reaches the ears of the God Who dwells in the heights of heaven.