

HOPE
Psalm 130

(sermon idea from *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* by Eugene H. Peterson)

Dr. Howard Batson
First Baptist Church
Amarillo, Texas
August 4, 2024

Today we come to our fourth Song of Ascents. We have been looking at the songs that were sung by ancient Israelites as they made their way to Jerusalem to worship. Songs for the road. Songs for the pilgrim going to the place of praise.

Today we come to the song of hope – Psalm 130.

Verses 1-2

Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord.

Lord, hear my voice! Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.

To be human is to be in trouble. Job's anguish is our epigraph: "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." Sometimes you feel like you're drowning in the watery chaos of grief, suffering, anguish and sorrow.

There is little that we can do to protect ourselves from the suffering, the losses. They are as inevitable as old age, wrinkled skin, aching bones, and fading memory. (Gerald Sittser, *A Grace Disguised*)

We want to have control of our lives, and we succeed a great deal of the time. We have so many things at our disposal in our western civilization. We have good medical care and education and entertainment, good jobs, comfortable homes. Therefore, we have the power to get most of what we want. It only makes it all the more painful when we find ourselves drowning in a sea of suffering. Loss deprives us of control. Cancer ravages. Violence erupts. Divorce devastates. Unemployment frustrates. Death strikes often with little warning. Suddenly, we're forced to face our limitations squarely. Our expectations blow up in our face. We wonder what has gone wrong. We resent the intrusion, the inconvenience, the derailment. It's not something we were planning on. "Why me?" we ask. (Gerald Sittser, *A Grace Disguised*, p. 108, paraphrased)

I. These ancient Israelites knew the feeling of suffering. They knew what it felt like to be drowning.

The psalm begins by speaking of the pain of the pilgrims as they go to praise. "Out of the depths I have cried out to you, O Lord." The word for depths here is the word that means the sea, the watery chaos of life. It is the cry of David in Psalm 69: "Save me, O God, for the waters have

come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing. I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary with my crying.”

The pilgrim elaborates on his cry to God in verse 2: “Lord, hear my voice! Let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.” He repeats to underscore his crisis. In the depths of the despair of drowning, he turns to God, “God, I am crying to you,” at his moment of darkness and depression, at his moment of loss.

Some of you here today suffer just like those ancient Israelites. Maybe it’s death. Divorce. Infertility. Sexual abuse. Failure. Pressures on every side. You cry unto the Lord out of your depth of despair.

Nicholas Wolterstorff, the Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology at Yale Divinity School, received a phone call at 3:30 on a Saturday afternoon – a bright and sunny day – a call that forever changed his life.

“Mr. Wolterstorff?”

“Yes.”

“Is this Eric’s father?”

“Yes.”

“Mr. Wolterstorff, I must give you some bad news.”

“Yes.”

“Eric has been climbing in the mountains and has had an accident.”

“Yes.”

“Eric has had a serious accident.”

“Yes.”

“Mr. Wolterstorff, I must tell you, Eric is dead. Mr. Wolterstorff, are you still there? You must come at once! Mr. Wolterstorff, Eric is dead.”

For three seconds I felt the peace of resignation: arms extended, limp son in hand, peacefully offering him to someone – Someone. Then the pain – cold burning pain. (Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, p. 9)

It’s the neverness, he says, that’s so painful. “Never again to be here with us – never to sit with us at table, never to travel with us, never to laugh with us, never to cry with us, never

to embrace us as he leaves for school, never to see his brothers and sister marry. All the rest of our lives we must live without him. Only our death can stop the pain of his death.

A month, a year, five years – with that I could live. But not this forever.

I step outdoors into the moist moldy fragrance of an early summer morning and arm in arm with my enjoyment comes the realization that never again will he smell this.

**As a cloud vanishes and is gone,
so he who goes down to the grave does not return,
He will never come to his house again;
his place will know him no more.
(Job 7:9-10)**

One small misstep and now this endless neverness.” (Lament for a Son, p. 15)

Wolterstorff says, **“I am at an impasse, and you, O God, have brought me here. From my earliest days, I heard of you. From my earliest days, I believed in you. I shared in the life of your people: in their prayers, in their work, in their songs, in their listening for your speech and in their watching for your presence. For me your yoke was easy. On me your presence smiled.**

“Noon has darkened. As fast as she could say, ‘He’s dead,’ the light dimmed. And where are you in this darkness? I learned to spy you in the light. Here in this darkness I cannot find you. If I had never looked for you, or looked but never found, I would not feel this pain of your absence. Or is it not your absence in which I dwell but your elusive troubling presence?

“Will my eyes adjust to this darkness? Will I find you in the dark – not in the streaks of light which remain, but in the darkness? Has anyone ever found you there? Did they love what they saw? Did they see love? And are there songs for singing when the light has gone dim? The songs I learned were all of praise and thanksgiving and repentance. Or in the dark, is it best to wait in silence?” (Lament for a Son, p. 69)

It’s the word of the ancient Israelites as they are on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. **“Out of the depths, the dark and chaotic waters, I have cried to Thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice. Let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.”**

The worst thing in the world is to cry for help and feel like no one has heard. And even worse still is to cry out and have no God to hear your voice from the pit of the depth of sorrow.

Lord, hear my voice.

In Psalm 130, we don’t have the presence of any of those things that rob us of our humanity when we suffer, that make pain so much more terrible to bear. No glib, smart answers. No hasty band-aid treatments covering up our troubles so the rest of society does not have to

look at it. Neither the prophet nor the priest nor the psalmist offer quick cures for the suffering. We don't find any of them telling us to take a vacation, use this drug, or get a hobby. Rather, here suffering rather than being hidden is held up and proclaimed and prayed, "O Lord, hear my voice. I'm in the depth of my sorrow. I'm drowning." (Peterson, page 135)

Such a short psalm, yet God's name is called upon eight times. God help us in our depth.

We identify with the psalmist of sorrow. We, too, find ourselves, in our own way, crying out to God. "Oh God, I'm in deep waters of chaos. Hear my voice. Hear my cry."

One lady writes, **"I'm sitting alone tonight thinking that suicide would be easier than living, now that my husband has died. It has been 14 months since Ed's sudden death. He was 55. We were married 37 years and did everything together. Ed's funeral was the biggest the town had ever seen. But where are all those people now? The couples we socialized with for years have dropped me like a hot potato. Don't they realize I'm still the same person, only now I don't have Ed? I joined a golf club. I volunteer one day a week at the hospital. But in the lonely hours I wonder what is the matter with me that no one invites me anywhere.... I am ready to give up."** (Ann Landers, 10/18/89)

O Lord, I'm in the chaos. Will you hear my voice?

Some of you here today are treading water, and your limbs are weary and you feel like you're sinking. You cry out, "O God, can't you see I'm drowning in the depths. Lord, hear my voice."

II. The next thing we see in this psalm, after we hear the call for the God of creation to hear the pain of His peoples, is that we get the fresh breeze of God's forgiveness.

Even as the psalmist cries for God to give him a positive hearing, he realizes very acutely that he has no claim upon God. In their master-servant relationship, in their covenant relationship, he has been an unprofitable servant. He realizes that now, because of his sin, he has no right to call upon the Almighty. That which is sinful has no claim upon that which is sinless. By right, God owes him absolutely nothing.

It's a powerful portrait of God. God is not indifferent to the suffering of His people. He's not rejecting. Rather, God is loving and God is merciful. God is forgiving. God is not stingy. He is ready to experience the pain of His people. God seeks the hurting, the maimed, the wandering and the lost. God woos the rebellious and the confused.

If God were any different than being exactly like He is, then no one would have a chance. "Lord, if you kept good accounts, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee."

In reality, we all know exactly how she felt. There was a moment of passion. The trap was set. Perhaps it had taken months to lure her there – maybe it was just moments. I can't be sure. But I do know that even as she unbridled her passion with someone other than her beloved husband, the Pharisees jumped from behind the buildings, pointing their fingers – having caught her in the very

act. Since the man was in on the deal, he was allowed to slip away quietly. There was no way for Jesus to get around this one. They put him to the test.

The scribes and Pharisees, the lawyers and religious men, bring her right out in front of Jesus while He teaches the people. “Hey teacher. We caught her red-handed, in the very act. Now Moses wants us to stone her. What do you think?”

It was all a test. That way they could accuse Him of not sticking by the commands of Moses. Jesus stooped down, wrote on the ground. They persist in the question. “Hey Jesus. What are we supposed to do? Here she is. Your call.”

The shutters swing open. The women whisper. The merchants stop selling their wares to point their finger. As quickly as the summer winds might blow in a thunderstorm, the hot breath of the people had scattered her sin before the whole city.

Jesus stands up, perhaps with a stone in hand, and offers it. “Whoever is without sin among you, let’s let him be the first to throw the stone at her.” He stooped down again and doodled in the dirt, perhaps He even began to write their sins. He was left alone with the woman.

Jesus stood up. “Woman, where are the ones who are going to condemn you?”

“There is no one, Lord.”

“Neither do I condemn you. Go your way. From now on, sin no more.”

The psalmist, as he suffers, realizes he must cry out to God, then he realizes he has no right to speak to someone who’s holy, since he’s so sinful. But then he says, “Lord, if you really kept up with our iniquities, who could stand?” He knows that God is forgiving and merciful. And God is. Not because sin’s no big deal, but because Christ has already paid for our sin on the cross. And He who says, “Neither do I condemn thee,” has paid with His very blood that we can be forgiven.

Yes, God hears us when we suffer. And yes, God forgives us when we fail and commands us to sin no more.

I wish you could really enjoy your forgiveness. It cost God His very Son.

I wish you could really feel the freedom He wants you to feel.

I wish when He says He remembers your sins no more, that you’d be willing to forget them, too.

I wish you’d let the blood of Jesus pay for your rebellion against God.

I wish you understood the cross that well.

I wish you could understand what it means for God to be merciful.

To enjoy the forgiveness of God is to have a thousand worlds lifted from your burdened back. To be forgiven is to find wings and be able to fly. To be forgiven is to be able to forgive others who also don't deserve it – as you didn't deserve it when God decided to forgive you.

Yes, first of all he cries for God to save him from the depths as he drowns. And secondly, he realized he had no claim on God, so he celebrates God's mercy and God's grace and God's forgiveness.

III. And thirdly, he calls upon us to hope.

Look at verses 5-8.

I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than the watchmen for the morning; indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is lovingkindness and with Him is abundant redemption. And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

He's drowning, and he cries for God to rescue him from the depths. He celebrates God's poor memory when it comes to remembering his sin. And even as he waits for God to rescue, he is a person of hope.

I'm not very good at waiting. I bet you're not much better. We live in such a quick world. The psalmist believes if he can just wait in the trouble of his trauma then, indeed, it will be resolved. He longs for relief as ardently as the city sentinels, peering into the darkness from the watchtower, long for daylight and danger's end.

We join the ancient Israelites, don't we? We join in the song of the psalmist as we wait for the Lord. We wait in the midst of our grief. We wait, covered by sorrow. We wait, longing for a future that is sure and not shadow-filled. We wait for the Lord to act on our behalf.

Nighttime is scary. These verses describe the waiting watchman who looks for the enemy to attack under the cover of darkness. How glad he is when finally he sees the breaking of dawn, when he sees just an ounce of sunshine that will keep away the things that creep in the night – the enemies that lurk in the shadows. For when the day has come, all is safe, all is sound.

So we too, as we wrestle the depth of despair in the darkness of our troubled beds – we are gleeful to see the sun, to feel the warmth and the promise that it brings.

Verse 7

O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is lovingkindness, and with Him is abundant redemption. And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Our hope is continual. We go into the depths to meet the God who is deeper still. And from this time forth, forever the psalmist says, God will redeem His people.

I don't know your hurt today. I don't know your soul's sorrow. I know that even as you cry to the Lord from the depth of the darkness of despair that God will hear. That God is a God of mercy and grace and forgiveness. That God will redeem you. That God is a God of hope.

Hope. Such a wonderful word. This is the song of hope.