



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 130

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Introduction

- This Psalm is another in the series titled *A Song of Ascents*
- The author's name is unknown
- However, some think it has been written by David when persecuted by Saul, and in great distress, and fearful he should perish by him
- Or when he was in great distress of mind because of sin, after the affair of Bathsheba; and it is regarded therefore among the repentant Psalms which are seven; (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143)
- These Psalms express sorrow for sin and ask for God's forgiveness



Introduction

- Others think it was written by Ezra, or some other godly person in the captivity
- Some think it was most probably composed during the captivity; and contains the complaint of the afflicted Jews, with their hopes of the remission of those sins which were the cause of their sufferings, and their restoration from captivity to their own land
- Yet others think it belongs to the time of Nehemiah
- It carries some similarities to the confession in Nehemiah 9, as well as with Nehemiah 1:4-11
- The Psalm begins with a personal testimony of God's rescue from the depths of guilt



Introduction

- From there, the author ascends step by step to a place where he can give confidence to others in their trust in God
- Although the language of the Psalm seems to be that of an individual; but most commentators suppose that it is an individual speaking in the name of the nation, and representing its adversities and its repentance
- It may be applied to any person in distress, outward or inward; praying to God for help and deliverance; encouraging himself and others to hope for it



Introduction

- So, the Psalm is a call for help, a cry for forgiveness, and it is all about waiting for the Lord in hope
- Some of the church fathers say that St. Augustine supposedly had Psalm 130's words inscribed on the wall in the bedroom where he lay dying so that he might make its words his own
- This Psalm is one of the 12th Hour Psalms of the Agpeya, the Prayer Book of the Hours



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- The Psalmist Prayer with Confession of Sin 130:1-3
- Confidence in God's Mercy, and Waiting upon Him 130:4-6
- The Psalmist Expectations from God 130:7-8

The Psalmist Prayer with Confession of Sin 130:1-3



- The psalmist here is in a low and deep place, crying to the Lord from *out of the depths*
- So, the whole Psalm begins with this desperate cry to the Lord
- The *depths* portray a place deep beneath the surface
- Some believe it is a water image, a picture of the sea depth
- There is a similar cry and imagery in Psalm 69:1-2, where the psalmist cries out: *"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."*
- The word, as used here, would be applicable to deep affliction, sadness, or distress

The Psalmist Prayer with Confession of Sin 130:1-3



- St. Augustine, in his exposition on this Psalm, compared the depths to the belly of the whale in which Jonah was trapped
- He says, “Jonas cried from the deep; from the whale’s belly. He was not only beneath the waves, but also in the entrails of the beast; nevertheless, those waves and that body prevented not his prayer from reaching God, and the beast’s belly could not contain the voice of his prayer. It penetrated all things, it burst through all things, it reached the ears of God: if indeed we ought to say that, bursting through all things, it reached the ears of God, since the ears of God were in the heart of him who prayed.”

The Psalmist Prayer with Confession of Sin 130:1-3



- So as Jonah cried out a similar prayer from the belly of the fish, we also read in Lamentations 3:55: *"I called on Your name, O Lord, From the lowest pit."* (Lamentation 3:55)
- And according to St. John Chrysostom *the depth* means *out of heart* and explains saying: "Such are the souls of the distressed: they stir up their very heart in its entirety, calling on God with deep regret which is precisely the reason they are heard."
- The psalmist cries out to God from the darkest *depth* of human suffering
- That depth takes different shapes; people experience depths of poverty, sorrow, confusion, and pain

The Psalmist Prayer with Confession of Sin 130:1-3



- Yet the depth that the psalmist cried from here was the depth of the awareness and guilt of sin as he says in verse 3
- The condition is that of one who, in deep sorrow, or under deep conviction for sin, pleads earnestly that God would have compassion on him
- Though the psalmist was in the depths of distress for sin, yet not in the depths of despair; he cried to God, he hoped in Him, and believed there was forgiveness with Him
- Many have been spiritually drowned in these depths
- From all these depths of sorrow, one ought to call upon the Lord

The Psalmist Prayer with Confession of Sin 130:1-3



- In those depths of sorrow it is proper thus to implore His help
- Often God brings people into these *depths* that they may call upon Him
- *hear my voice*, This is the prayer; this is what he cried
- *Let Your ears be attentive*, Do not turn away from me; do not disregard my cry
- The psalmist's initial plea is simply that God might listen to him
- He first asks God to *hear* his voice, and then expresses his plea more intensely by asking God to *let* God's *ears be attentive* to his petitions

The Psalmist Prayer with Confession of Sin 130:1-3



- In this instance, *hear* means more than just hearing
- It has the added dimension of taking seriously what is heard—and responding to what is asked
- *be attentive*, suggests the idea of being responsive or caring
- The psalmist is asking *the Lord* not only to hear his pleas, but to care and respond
- The psalmist asks God to care enough to turn *His ear* in the psalmist's direction so that He might hear better
- The psalmist prayed in a humble suppliant manner, for mercy; not pleading merit and righteousness

The Psalmist Prayer with Confession of Sin 130:1-3



- He desires that God would hearken to and hear, listen unto, bow and incline His ears, as He is sometimes said to do
- In asking for God to help, the psalmist also understood that he had no certain reason to ask or to be heard by God *apart* from His great forgiveness
- Without this graciousness, no one could *stand* before God, *You, Lord ... O Lord*
- Verse 3 is actually a confession of sin and a plea for forgiveness
- *should mark iniquities*, kept a record of people sins
- The psalmist says that if God keeps a close watch on our sins, if He preserves them, we don't have a chance

The Psalmist Prayer with Confession of Sin 130:1-3



- God does observe the sins of men, He sees all the evil actions and all the iniquities of men, so as to correct and chastise them, but not with His eye of unforgiving justice
- If God should thus look with an examining eye; if He should deal with us exactly as we are; if He should overlook nothing, forgive nothing, no one could have any hope
- *who could stand*, No man could acquit himself, or escape the sentence of condemnation, because all men are sinners
- The psalmist is telling us that God is not the kind of God under whose judgment the sinner perishes
- Rather, there is forgiveness with God

The Psalmist Prayer with Confession of Sin 130:1-3



- St. John Chrysostom says, “In other words, in case anyone were to say, ‘I am a sinner, I am full of sins beyond counting, I cannot approach and pray and call on God,’ he strips away this pretext by saying, ‘*If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?*’ Who here means ‘no one’ you see. It is impossible for anyone to render a meticulous account of one’s affairs and never attain mercy and lovingkindness.”

Confidence in God's Mercy, and Waiting upon Him 130:4-6



- In verse 4, the psalmist gives the reason for the truth implied in the preceding verse: *If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, because there is forgiveness with You*
- Years of previous relationship with God had taught the psalmist that there is, in fact, *forgiveness* with God
- When we have clear awareness of sin, it can be hard to believe, but it is true: *there is forgiveness with God*
- When we come before God, the ground of our hope is not that we can justify ourselves; not that we can prove we have not sinned; it is only in an honest and full confession, and in a hope that God will forgive them

Confidence in God's Mercy, and Waiting upon Him 130:4-6



- One of the great purposes of God's great forgiveness is to build a sense of gratitude and reverence in those He forgives
- His forgiveness should lead to purity and to an appropriate fear of displeasing the One who has been so gracious
- Once we are forgiven, we also fear the Lord in that we hold Him in even greater reverence and awe
- Certainly, the true fear of God, loving fear, could not exist, unless we had a confident hope in God's mercy and willingness to forgive us our trespasses, if we turn to Him
- Gratitude for forgiveness produces far more fear and reverence of God than the fear of punishment

Confidence in God's Mercy, and Waiting upon Him 130:4-6



- This invites those who have sinned to repent, and return to the fear of God, *“Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.”* (Joel 2:13)
- St. John Chrysostom says, “It is not in our good deeds but in Your goodness that the possibility lies of escaping punishment; in other words, avoidance of judgement rests with Your lovingkindness.”
- *I wait for the Lord*, Having made his cry from the depths to God, the psalmist then determined to *wait* upon God and the rescue He would bring

Confidence in God's Mercy, and Waiting upon Him 130:4-6



- *My soul waits*; I wait for Him in sincerity, and not in profession only
- The expression, *my soul waits* is stronger than *I wait*; it implies heartfelt trust and confidence
- It shows that this expresses the intensity of his mind, the earnest desires of his heart after God, his affection for Him; his whole soul, and all the powers of it, were engaged in this work
- The psalmist does not base his hope on his feelings or his circumstances, but his hope is based fully on the Word of God
- He trust God's promises in Scripture

Confidence in God's Mercy, and Waiting upon Him 130:4-6



- God will fulfill that promise, and the psalmist will find a gracious answer to his prayers
- St. John Chrysostom says, "What he means is something like this: on account of Your lovingkindness, on account of Your Law I looked forward to salvation; for if I were to consider my own capabilities, I would long ago have despaired, I would long ago have given up. As it is, however, I attend to Your Law and Your word, and so have sound hope."
- *His word*, it may mean also in His essential Word the Messiah, who was the Hope of Israel as well as their Savior

Confidence in God's Mercy, and Waiting upon Him 130:4-6



- In His word of promise concerning the coming of Jesus Christ, and His salvation; concerning the forgiveness of sin through Him, and eternal life by Him; as well as in many other special and particular promises made to David, concerning himself, his family, and his kingdom
- *My soul waits for the Lord More than those who watch for the morning,* The psalmist used a powerful image to express his patient anticipation in waiting on God
- More anxiously than the watchman longs for the dawn which is to release him from his duty, does the devout Israelite long for the end of the night of trouble and the dawn of a happier day

Confidence in God's Mercy, and Waiting upon Him 130:4-6



- The watchman does not doubt that morning *will* come, but only wonders *when*, and watches for it diligently
- Thus, in affliction, the long, dark, gloomy night of sorrow, the sufferer looks for the first indication of comfort to the soul
- Thus, under deep conviction for sin, and deep fear of the wrath of God - that night, dark, gloomy, often long, the soul looks for some ray of comfort, some indication that God will be merciful, and will speak peace and forgiveness
- So, it was for the psalmist who watched for God and the help God promised to bring

Confidence in God's Mercy, and Waiting upon Him 130:4-6



- Some think the image of *those who watch for the morning*, may be of priests waiting for dawn so the morning sacrifices could be started for the day
- The repetitions express that fervent desire with which true repentant expects and longs for the salvation of God
- Verse 6 presents to us both the sense of longing and waiting along with the certainty that the morning will arrive
- St. John Chrysostom says, “Nothing is so effective for salvation as watching constantly and depending on that hope, even should countless problems beset us to drive us to despair.”

Confidence in God's Mercy, and Waiting upon Him 130:4-6



- According to St. Augustine, we wait for the Lord in hope for His resurrection, like those who watch the morning
- And as He is risen from the dead, we, as well will rise together with Him
- He says, “Since He then rose with the morning watch, our soul began to hope from hence: and how far? ‘Even unto night;’ until we die; for all our carnal death is as it were sleep....”

The Psalmist Expectations from God 130:7-8



- This Psalm is about waiting for the Lord in hope
- The first part of waiting on the Lord is to cry out to Him for mercy, *Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord*
- The second part is to wait for the Lord in anticipation, *I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope*
- And now the third part is simply to put our hope in the Lord, *O Israel, hope in the Lord*
- The psalmist closes by rejoicing in the promise of the Lord
- The psalmist is still in waiting mode when he suddenly turns and encourages the rest of his fellow Israelites to put their hope in the Lord

The Psalmist Expectations from God 130:7-8



- *O Israel*, With this verse the language turns from the personal to the public
- What the psalmist learned in waiting upon God and trusting Him from the depths is now put to use as he calls upon Israel to put their *hope in the Lord*
- He now exhorts the people to be encouraged by his example and to *hope in the Lord*
- He is encouraging them, in such circumstances of affliction and distress, to not despair
- The psalmist put his faith and hope in the Lord Himself

The Psalmist Expectations from God 130:7-8



- In the darkest night, in such suffering deep and long lasting, let not those who love God despair
- Why should they put their hope in the Lord? *For with the Lord there is mercy*
- What he learned in his personal life, he can put to application for the whole nation
- God's unchanging love is the essence of who God is
- When God's people humbly look to Him, there is *mercy* and *abundant redemption* for both the individual and the community

The Psalmist Expectations from God 130:7-8



- *abundant redemption*, This redemption was foretold in the sacrifices of the Old Testament but was brought to fulfillment in Christ's sacrifice on the cross
- We read in Ephesians 1:7: *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."* (Ephesians 1:7)
- Why should they put their hope in the Lord?
- With the Lord is unfailing love
- With the Lord is full redemption

The Psalmist Expectations from God 130:7-8



- St. John Chrysostom says, “What is the meaning of *For with the Lord there is mercy?* A fountain and treasure of lovingkindness is to be found there, he is saying, flowing constantly. Now, where there is mercy there is also redemption and not only redemption but also complete redemption, a limitless ocean of lovingkindness.”
- *Mercy ... abundant redemption* are two great characteristics of God who is love
- St. Ambrose in his writings he often recalled the reasons that motivated him to beseech forgiveness from God
- He says, “We have a good Lord who wants to forgive everyone”

The Psalmist Expectations from God 130:7-8



- He added: “If you want to be justified, confess your fault: a humble confession of sins untangles the knot of faults.... You see with what hope of forgiveness you are urged to make your confession”
- And then finally the Lord Himself will redeem His people from all their sins
- The psalmist ends with a wonderful promise: *And He shall redeem Israel From all his iniquities*
- He Who possesses this infinite love, wisdom, and power will deliver Israel from all his iniquities

The Psalmist Expectations from God 130:7-8



- God had done so much to redeem *Israel* already; delivering them from Egypt, giving them a land, rescuing them from all their enemies time and again
- God would redeem them in an ultimate sense in time to come from their sins and its consequences through the Messiah, who would die for their sins and rescue them from all their enemies physical and spiritual
- We could not redeem ourselves and no other human could do it for us, so God took it upon Himself to redeem His people from all their sins

The Psalmist Expectations from God 130:7-8



- God sent His own Son into the world to die for us so that we might be redeemed
- Even Jesus' very name proclaims this precious truth
- When St. Mary *"was found with child of the Holy Spirit."* (Matthew 1:18), God's angel told Joseph: *"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21)
- And when Jesus was born, the prophetess Anna *"gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem."* (Luke 2:38)

The Psalmist Expectations from God 130:7-8



- This Psalm is one of the Psalms *of Ascents*
- Perhaps it is also appropriate to refer to these Psalms as Psalms of Ascent in a metaphorical manner
- It is interesting that the general feel of these Psalms begins with the psalmist in a place of despair, but as the Psalm progresses the psalmist looks to the grace of God and *ascends* from his place of despair to a place of hope
- The Psalm begins with an earnest cry from the *depths*; it closes with the triumphant hope of complete and eternal deliverance



Discussion

- Where is the psalmist as he prays this prayer? What is his situation?
- What insights can you gain about repentance from this Psalm of repentance?
- In verse 1, the psalmist writes about an experience of being in “the depths.” What do the “depths” refer to?
- What does Psalm 130 teach us about the Old Testament sacrificial system?



Discussion

- What is the greatest news of all, shared in this Psalm?
- How does God's forgiveness inspire fear?
- According to the last verse, from what will God save all of His people?
- This Psalm begins in despair (v. 1) and ends in hope (vv. 7-8).
What are the key stages in the prayer as this change takes place?