

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; O Lord, hear my voice.

During the holidays this year we visited London for three days

- Combining our trip with going to Heathrow Airport
- As we were staying near Wembley we visited the outside of the new stadium
- As you might imagine, the new stadium is surrounded by car parks
- And it was on these car parks that I did a driving course
- My instructor was a mild mannered man and I got on with him well
- One of the other instructors was more robust and I asked my instructor about him
- ‘Ah! He makes grown men cry when he tells them the truth about their driving’

I seem to have done a fair bit of driving over the summer

- London, Heathrow, Southport, South Wales, Dorset
- I don’t think I sounded the horn of the car once
- The only time I might have done so I did not have time
- You know if someone sounds their horn at you on the road – they had time
- It’s the times they did not sound their horn that you need to be worried about
- When I see someone driving badly, I sometimes comment
- ‘Of course, they are confident that they are really good drivers’

When we lived in West Cornwall I sometimes would need collecting from Truro station

- As the children were small it was sometimes easier to get a friend to collect me
- For fun I used to ask these friends if they would like me to comment on their driving
- Without exception my kind offer was declined
- About the same time, a farmer friend offered to take me to a meeting in Exeter
- It was a Christian meeting and all Christians are agreed that prayer is a good thing
- Though I can honestly say I learned a lot more about prayer on the journey
- Than I have ever done in a Christian meeting – prayer with your eyes open!
- Perhaps wrongly I never offered to comment on this man’s driving
- I just never accepted a lift from him again – though, as far as he was concerned
- He was a good driver

If you can drive you can probably recall the experience with your instructors

- And you allowed them to comment on your driving because you wanted to pass
- And since you passed, you’ve not been so keen on anyone else commenting at all
- The other day, I was following a driving instructor’s car
- And to be fair, the standard of driving was not all that good
- Even driving instructors are not perfect drivers

But now apply the same thinking to daily living – who comments on a person’s living?

- I believe that the preacher is called to do that, from the word of God
- He makes grown men cry when he tells them the truth about their living
- Probably, not the contemporary Christian’s idea of a popular preacher
- In fact any comment about how individuals are living is likely to be resisted
- Possibly because people think that there is nothing wrong with how they live
- Possibly because they know for certain that preachers are not perfect
- But the faithful Bible preacher declares the word of God on his authority

While we were in Southport we took an afternoon off to go to a big shopping centre

- Our circular tour took us through Liverpool and back by the motorway
- While in Liverpool we visited the outside of the famous Anfield Football Ground
- Not far away across Stanley Park is Goodison Park home of Everton F.C.
- And just days later, within a few minutes drive, a teenage boy was fatally shot
- By the end of the month, in London, a 17-year-old boy had been stabbed to death
- Bringing the number of teenagers stabbed and killed in London this year to seven

‘Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD’

(Psalm 130:1)

Depths here undoubtedly have the sense of the chaos, the deep waters of the sea

- You might rightly say, I haven’t been involved in a stabbing or a murder
- But once you are drowning in the ocean it does not matter how deep you are in
- These deep waters are deathly waters and we are all in them
- They are a watery grave – often characterised by a feeling of alienation from God

But let’s not forget the errant drivers on the road – the rush on regardless

- Blissfully unaware, self-deluded, thinking nothing other than they are good drivers
- Lacking any real road-sense or self-awareness
- They are a danger not only to themselves but also to others
- No one welcomes anyone else commenting on their driving
- And it is scarcely helpful to have someone hoot, shout or gesticulate
- But who is going to comment on how we are living – it is life in the ‘depths’

People who pronounce themselves ‘not bad’ – are focusing in the wrong direction

- They are deluding themselves – and have little or no awareness of the holiness of God
- Little understanding of the call to holy living set out in the Word of God
- But then comes someone who realises his or her true state, who calls out to God

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, called out to God from the dungeon

- Daniel called out to God from the lions’ den
- Jonah called out to God from the belly of the great fish
- And it is our responsibility to call out to God
- For this is the likeliest way to prevent us sinking lower

It is easy to point a critical finger at those who live different lives from us

- But that is not the issue here – instead it is time for a true self-examination before God
- The hymn writer offers this prayer to God (HP 540):

Show me, as my soul can bear,
The depth of inbred sin;
All the unbelief declare,
The pride that lurks within;
Take me, whom thyself hast bought,
Bring into captivity
Every high aspiring thought
That would not stoop to thee.

This is not likely to be a great experience is it?

- We may not have stuck the knife into someone physically
- I doubt that many of are guiltless of that sin metaphorically
- But in any event, what about unbelief and pride?
- The Psalm writer is all too aware of this – he knows he needs God’s mercy

O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.

(Psalm 130:2)

In the first verse the Psalm writer calls on the LORD (four block capitals)

- This is the holy name for God and this is not just any old god
- This is God, the covenant God who made promises to his people
- This God is the Lord (lower case) who has authority over life and death
- It is to this God that he cries out for mercy
- Interestingly enough, there is no specific mention here of any sin
- But the Psalmist knows that he is caught up in that evil whirlpool of sin
- Anyone who has ever been faced with two choices, where neither seems right
- And has had to opt for the lesser of two evils knows what this is all about

There is little doubt that in our society nothing counts as sin anymore

- Some people are suggesting that we should not even speak of sin these days
- I’ll leave you to ponder that one, but whether we use the word or not
- The signs and symptoms are all around us
- Worse still they are present within us – and if you are confident you are not a sinner
- Then you have nothing to fear for not only will you never die
- But when you meet God face-to-face he will simply congratulate you
- In fact you have no reason to be here, because the cross and the gospel are not for you
- But if, on the other hand, in the presence of a holy God
- You admit that you are a mortal sinner rather than immortal and sinless
- That you are a mere servant to God your eternal master
- Then it is time to call out to God for mercy and to know

I THE FORGIVENESS OF GOD

If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

(Psalm 130:3)

You might call this an indirect confession, for the Psalm writer knows

- If God kept a record of our sins, if he were to write all our sins in a book
- he would not even have to drop them from a great height to crush us like a fly
- again he uses the two titles for God that both appear as ‘LORD/Lord’ in our Bibles
- the covenant God of Israel is the God who has authority in these matters
- the answer to the question, ‘who could stand?’ is quite clearly, ‘no one’
- but God, in his mercy, does not keep such a record of the iniquities of his people
- our sins might cry out against us but God has blotted them out

In several places in the New Testament we have judicial language

- and each of us might imagine being in the courtroom as the accused
- there is no option of justifying ourselves before God or entering a plea of ‘not guilty’
- the evidence is stacked against us and the sentence of death hangs over us
- if God were unmerciful and laid all the charges against us, there would be no hope
- men and women ought to be very careful before calling out to God for justice
- because they might get it – instead we must call out to God for mercy

That is why, in my opinion, the three prongs of Christian worship are:

- thanksgiving (for God’s mercy and grace)
- encouraging (one another along the Christian journey)
- and edification (that is teaching from the Holy Scriptures about the nature of God)
- then someone tells you they can worship God on a day out in the country
- as ever the company of believing people can gathered in the name of Jesus Christ
- to which we must reply in the words of John McEnroe, ‘You cannot be serious!’
- a day out in the countryside is a great place to wonder at the creative power of God
- looking up at the night sky is a time to wonder at the immensity of God
- but gathered around his Word and around his table is time for thanksgiving
- for encouragement and edification about the love, grace and mercy of God
- for these are supremely made known in Jesus Christ, and in his death upon the cross
- so we celebrate God’s mercy, his patience and his forbearance
- but because we know this God is full of forgiveness we also know:

II THE FEAR OF GOD

But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.

(Psalm 130:4)

The Methodist Bible scholar James Dunn translates the word ‘feared’ as ‘revered’

- We might more readily associate the fear of God with his wrath and judgment
- But his mighty power to forgive, his great love in forgiving, his grace and mercy
- These are awesome powers – increasing the sinner’s reverent awe for God

But there is forgiveness with thee - in all our approaches to God, there is forgiveness

- This was the nature of God as he revealed himself to Moses

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”

(Exodus 34:6)

This is a God we can trust, this is a God who can meet our every need

- One thing we learn about very powerful things is that they are not toys
- This is God who is not to be trifled with – this is not playtime
- This is a God who is worthy of our worship – with holiness and reverence
- This is not something trivial – this is something awesome

We live in an age where sentimental images of God abound

- But the Apostle Peter reminds the New Testament Christians

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

(1 Peter 1:17)

The great preacher of the Victorian Era, whom many Christians call the Prince of Preachers

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon said:
- 'None fear the Lord like those who have experienced his forgiving love'
- or, as possibly the greatest Bible Commentator ever, Matthew Henry, has written on the A.V. text, 'there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared'

"There is forgiveness with thee, not that thou mayest be made bold with and presumed upon, but that thou mayest be feared - in general, that thou mayest be worshipped and served by the children of men, who, being sinners, could have no dealings with God, if he were not a Master that could pass by a great many faults."

This is a difficult path for the twenty-first century Christian to tread

- we live in a generation of great informality and that presents us with a challenge
- we must not mistake informality for irreverence
- any more than we must mistake formality for reverence
- but we must not allow the informal to degenerate into the casual
- we must not allow the contemporary to degenerate in the trivial
- this is not a time to go back to a formalism that was left behind several decades ago
- this is the time to go forward and show that we have the highest respect
- for the things of God, for the presence of God, for the forgiveness of God
- because he forgives, and he alone can forgive, we revere him
- and we show that we revere him in whatever way we can
- and all the more so, when we are gathered as his people to worship him

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.

(Psalm 130:5)

What a wonderful evangelistic text this is – people are hoping for all kinds of things

- but what is the ground of their eternal hope
- it is an incredibly difficult task to have a serious conversation with people today
- but somehow, by conversation, or Christian literature, or invitation to a service/event
- we must enable these questions to be asked – what is the ground of your hope
- not simply for now, but for all eternity

Our Psalm writer is waiting in great anticipation

- he believes that God who spoke the great *creating* word
- will also speak the great *saving* word
- the ground of the Christian's hope is what God has promised in his Word
- and in that Word the believer can have unshakable confidence and trust
- that is why the phrase 'the Word became flesh' is so significant to Christians

When God spoke his saving Word, he did so by his Son

- God speaks and acts as Saviour in Jesus – and the decisive work of Jesus
- Is his death upon the cross, for it is by Jesus that the believer may know God's mercy
- This is what the Apostle John wrote to the New Testament Church

The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. ... If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

(1 John 1:7-2:2)

The mercy and forgiveness of God are made known by his Word made flesh in Jesus

- Hope in God is not something intangible – it is made manifest in Jesus
- It is the blood of Jesus that cleanses from all unrighteousness
- It is Jesus who speaks to the Father in our defence
- It is Jesus who is the atoning sacrifice for our sins
- This is the hope that the Psalmist anticipates and celebrates
- the promises of God are more certain than day following night

My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

(Psalm 130:6)

The night-watchman is becoming an unfamiliar figure to us

- but in this passage the watchmen are waiting to be released from duty at daybreak
- through the night they must guard the city from attack while others sleep peacefully
- God's covenant, his promises, are more firm than the order of day and night
- For day and night will pass away but God's promises endure for ever
- All this directing us to:

III THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

(Psalm 130:7-8)

It is because of his own experience of the mercy of God, the Psalm-writer cries out

- To all his people to renew their hope in the LORD
- But why should anyone hope in the LORD
- Because with the LORD is unfailing love
- And with the LORD is full redemption
- And he is personally involved to redeem his people from all their sins

Most of us can tell of some experience of being let down by someone we love

- I guess we also recognise that we have been guilty of letting down our loved ones
- This might be through circumstances beyond our control as well as our shortcomings
- But God has neither shortcomings nor circumstances beyond his control
- His love is unfailing – his mercy has no limits
- The same is true of his redemption
- His redemption is so great that he can forgive his people from all their sins
- And free them from whatever they suffer as a consequence of sin

If Israel seems remote to us, who are, for the most part, European and Gentile

- We must understand that this name is the proper name for God's covenant people
- The God of Israel is a merciful God and Father of mercies and we are his people
- The eternal redemption that he gives is given to us through Jesus
- For it is he who saves his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21)
- It is he who redeems them from all iniquity (Titus 2:14)
- And when God bestows his redeeming grace, his grace is sufficient for us