

Text: Psalm 130

Title: "Making a List ... Checking it Twice"

ILLUSTRATION – One of the songs you hear over and over again this time of the year is Gene Autrey's old song, "Santa Claus is Coming to Town." You know the lyrics: "You better watch out. You better not cry. Better not pout. I'm telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town. He's making a list and checking it twice. Gonna find out who's naughty and nice. Santa Claus is coming to town. He sees you when you're sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He knows if you've been bad or good. So be good for goodness sake!"

And so many people think about their relationship with God the way children think about Santa. People think that God has this list of people and he's checking it twice to see who's been naughty or nice. He's always watching and if you want God to be good to you you better be good for goodness sake.

Open your Bibles again to Psalm 130, where we see a different picture of God. The worshippers who sang these psalms were going to Jerusalem knowing they were going to enter into God's presence in their worship there. They understood that for them to be able to approach God as sinners they needed mercy. And that's where this psalm begins. This psalm is itself a literal Song of Ascent. It begins with **THE DEPTHS OF MY SIN** and ascends to **THE HEIGHTS OF HIS LOVE**.

As we prepare for the Lord's Supper we need to be reminded of our sinfulness so that the sweetness of God's love and grace shown us through Christ might be even sweeter still. The life God sent Jesus to give us is available when we understand and act upon three important truths:

1. MY GUILT (vv.1-2)

There are two aspects to guilt. There is the *feeling* of guilt that some people have and some don't. Some people have a very tender conscience and it doesn't take much to make them feel guilty. Some people seem to have no shame and therefore guilt is something they rarely feel. But then there's the *fact* of guilt. By that I mean that whether we feel guilty or not we are all guilty before God because of our sins. And the psalmist is feeling the debt he owes to God when he prays...

Psalm 130:1 - Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD;

One of the beauties of the psalms is that they show us how to pray when we are in the depths. We know about the depths, don't we? There are the depths of grief at the loss of a loved ... the depths of despair when we've been sick ... the depths of fear when we've lost a job. Out of the depths we should cry out to God like the psalmist did in...

Psalm 69:1-2 - Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me.

The greatest depth of despair we experience in our souls is the realization that we are guilty before a holy God. That's when we must cry out to God and confess our need for His mercy.

Psalm 130:2 - O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.

Friends, don't be reluctant or afraid to be broken over your sin. Only then may we experience the depths of the life God has for us in Christ. But there's something else we need to understand.

2. GOD'S FORGIVENESS (vv.3-4)

Psalm 130:3 - If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

So if God is like Santa Claus? If He's making a list and checking it twice to find out who's been naughty or nice, then we are all without hope. If God were to record and count our sins against us we would perish.

So the psalmist is thinking about His need for God's great mercy. He knows the holiness, greatness and righteousness of God ... and how far short we all fall in our sin and iniquity. It's only when we get to those depths that we begin to understand the height of God's great grace and mercy. And then he reminds himself...

Psalm 130:4 - But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.

So our real need is to be forgiven *by God*. Many people will tell us today that our real problem is that we just need to forgive ourselves. And there's some truth in that, but our greatest need is to first experience God's forgiveness. It is against a holy God that we have sinned.

You see, the OT people of God sang looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, just like we sing looking back on the coming of the Messiah. What we know looking back on this is that the forgiveness that the psalmist longed for in coming to the Temple in Jerusalem was finally and ultimately fulfilled and satisfied in the coming of Jesus. We read these verses and we rejoice today in the redeeming love of God through Jesus. Remember the angel said to Joseph...

Matthew 1:21 - She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, prophesied about the Messiah...

Luke 1:68,77 - "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people ... to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins..."

That's why we celebrate Christmas, the Incarnation and the birth of Christ. The realization that our dreadful guilt is covered by His gracious forgiveness leads us to...

3. OUR HOPE (vv.5-8)

Psalm 130:5 - I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.

Psalm 130:6 - My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Now it's not that we have to wait for God's forgiveness and hope that He won't forget to forgive us. When we confess like the psalmist has confessed here ... when we cry to God for mercy through Jesus Christ ... our sins are immediately forgiven. We don't have to wait for that. But what doesn't always come immediately is the full realization of that forgiveness ... the full experience of being delivered. And it is this, I think, that the psalmist is waiting for. He's waiting like the temple guards who looked after the place of worship at night ... watchman waiting for the light of morning to dawn.

Once you know you're forgiven there's hope. You can move forward. You can look at the future with the assurance that God has greater and better things ahead for you.

So now the psalmist is fully confident in the grace of God. Now he can say to others ...

Psalm 130:7 - O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.

Our hope is real because of two amazing attributes of God:

HIS UNFAILING LOVE – His love for us isn't fickle or conditional. It's steady and reliable. There's no sin so great that it empties the account of God's love for us.

HIS FULL REDEMPTION – We can hope in God because the redemption that He offers us is not just adequate; it is full ... abundant ... multiplied redemption.

And because of these two remarkable attributes of God we can sing with the psalmist...

Psalm 130:8 - He himself will redeem Israel (the people who are His people because they trust in Him) from all their sins.

Redemption means that the price, the debt, has been paid. For the fact is that God does record our sins. He never winks at sin, not even the “little ones.” He is a passionately holy God who must punish sin. But what He does is that He takes our sin debts that have been recorded against us and He transfers them into the account of His Son Jesus Christ. And He takes the righteousness of His Son and credits us with that. God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us so that through Him we might become the righteousness of God.

ILLUSTRATION - By the way, for those of you who like to read theology, this psalm happened to be the favorite psalm of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. This psalm also happened to be instrumental in the salvation of one of the great Christian leaders of the 18th century, John Wesley. Many of our hymns were composed by John and his brother Charles Wesley. When John Wesley graduated from Oxford he came to the US as a missionary. It was during those years that Wesley discovered he hadn't really been converted, even though he was a missionary. After returning to England, John Wesley attended a service at the great St. Paul's Cathedral in London where he had heard the choir sing an anthem based on Psalm 130 entitled “Out of the Depths.” Wesley went from the realization of the depths of His sins to the height of God's love when, that evening, he attended a Moravian chapel service where for the first time in his life he felt his heart strangely warmed by the wonders of God's love for Him.

Psalm 130:8 - He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

What a great psalm to meditate on as we prepare to take the Lord's Supper together.