

Plenteous Redemption

Psalm 130

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With God there is forgiveness. Psalm 130 is the eleventh in the collection of songs of ascents (120-134). This psalm is also included among the seven Penitential Psalms. The author depicts one in the abyss of depression, but, on the other hand, he also gives a picture of the penitent soaring into the heavens with the hope of “plenteous redemption.” This literary masterpiece starts in the depth of despair, but, at the same time, it climbs steadily upwards with renewed hope. As we reflect upon this poetic work, we hear a cry of desolation by the psalmist, but not total hopelessness. We cannot read this inspired piece of writing without observation of its progression. This psalm starts with sorrow over sin, then forgiveness, after that, faith in God, and finally, testimony as to the wonder of God’s mercy.

Many titles could be assigned to this inspired poetic work to summarize its message of despair and hope. To illustrate, the following titles portray the sumptuousness of this psalm in all its glory: “A Prayer for Help,” “A Sinner’s Cry,” “Out of Despair,” “Prayer for Pardon and Mercy,” or “Plenteous Redemption.” I have chosen “Plenteous Redemption” in order to zero in on the abundance of God’s mercy to the penitent. The title for this message is taken from verse 7: “Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD *there is* mercy, and with him *is* plenteous redemption.”¹ This expression, “plenteous redemption,” gives us hope when we put our trust in God’s mercy.

Before we undertake to unravel the mind of the author as he progresses from one stage of his journey to another, perhaps a reading of the entire psalm will set the stage for a clearer perception of the inner workings of his mind. The following chart lists two different translations to facilitate ease of reference:

PSALM 130 (KJV)

PSALM 130 (NIV)

A Song of degrees.

A song of ascents.

Out of the depths have I
cried unto thee, O LORD.

Out of the depths I cry to

¹*The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

²Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. ³If thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? ⁴But *there is* forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. ⁵I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. ⁶My soul *waited* for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: *I say, more than* they that watch for the morning. ⁷Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD *there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.* ⁸And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

you, O LORD; ² O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. ³ If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared. ⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. ⁶ My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. ⁷ O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. ⁸ He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

This psalm begins with a powerful image of one in dangerous and deep waters: “Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD” (Psalm 130:1). **There is never a time that we cannot call out to God; there is no distance downward from which we cannot pray. There is no depth so deep that we cannot cry out to God.** This psalm, unlike Psalm 129, takes up, not with a complaint about others, but rather about the writer himself. The writer compares his condition of distress to one who is overwhelmed when the floods of the deep engulf an individual. The writer is engulfed by the sorrow of sin. Psalm 130 is truly a song of ascent, for it climbs from the deep hole of depression to the high ground of hopefulness. This unique psalm is sometimes referred to as the Pauline Psalm. In other words, this psalm offers forgiveness by grace apart from human works. Listen once more to the words of the psalmist as he discloses the innermost thoughts of his soul:

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; ² O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. ³ If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared. (Psalm 130:1-4)

We see the progression of the psalmist in these four stanzas: (1) sorrow over sin, (2) forgiveness, (3) faith in God, and (4) testimony. Just a perusal of this psalm calls attention to the fact that suffering is not what is troubling the writer, but rather sin itself. He writes about a record of sin in verse 3, forgiveness in verse 4, and redemption in verses 7-8. This magnificent psalm of disclosure should thrill the hearts of everyone who reads the inner thoughts of the psalmist as he pours out his soul in despair and hope. The writer reveals that God not only notices sin, but he also makes known that God monitors the tears and faith of the penitent as well. He shouts: “If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?” (130:3).

The author was conscious of sin. What is sin? Sin is a transgression of God's Law. It is in this fashion that John writes: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV). The NIV translates this verse: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness." We, as believers, need to recover a sense of sin, even as the writer of this psalm discovers in his own life. We need to regain how desperate our lives are apart from God. Our lifestyles of sin can separate us from God. The writer desires fellowship with God. He is ever conscious of his failure to adhere to the Law of God perfectly. It is also in this same fashion that Isaiah (739 BC) rebukes the nation of Israel for its repeated neglect of God's Law: "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). Earlier, Isaiah records God's plea with the children of Israel to think about their condition:

"Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

Where do we stand? Are we in the depths of the deep? Are we heart broken over our sins? Are we troubled by our wrongs? Are we living a life of sin? If so, where can we turn for help? We will not find relief in ourselves. We will not find comfort in our relatives. We will not find aid with our spouse. **As Christians, we may find encouragement and strength from others, but, ultimately, our complete trust can only find hope and comfort from God Himself.** Where can we turn? The psalmist gives the answer: "Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; ² O Lord, hear my voice" (Psalm 130:1-2a). God is the answer to humanity's dilemma. The author cries out as he reflects upon God's forgiveness: "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared" (130:3-4).

If God kept a register of sin, we would sink into a state of despair that would overwhelm us as if we were in the depth of the ocean. If God kept a memo of our sins, no one could stand. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, cites from the Book of Psalms to illustrate that there is no one righteous. Paul calls attention to our plight with the following words:

As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."^b ¹³ "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit."^c "The poison of vipers is on their lips."^d ¹⁴ "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."^e ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ ruin and misery mark their ways, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they do not know."^f ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."^g (Romans 3:10-18)

^b Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccles. 7:20

^c Psalm 5:9

^d Psalm 140:3

^e Psalm 10:7

^f Isaiah 59:7, 8

^g Psalm 36:1

As we reflect upon Psalm 14:1-3 and Psalm 53:1-3, we realize the utter hopelessness that men and women find themselves in. The following chart cites passages from these two psalms in order to facilitate the ease of comprehension of the depth of David's writings:

Psalm 14:1-3

¹ The fool says in his heart,
"There is no God."
They are corrupt, their
deeds are vile;
there is no one who does
good.

² The LORD looks down
from heaven
on the sons of men
to see if there are any who
understand,
any who seek God.

³ All have turned aside,
they have together
become corrupt;
there is no one who does
good,
not even one.

Psalm 53:1-3

The fool says in his heart,
"There is no God."
They are corrupt, and their
ways are vile;
there is no one who does
good.

² God looks down from
heaven
on the sons of men
to see if there are any who
understand,
any who seek God.

³ Everyone has turned
away,
they have together
become corrupt;
there is no one who does
good,
not even one.

When we look at the Law of God, the Law silences every individual. The Law of God shuts every person's mouth. Paul forcefully states the problem of humanity for every man and woman:

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. (Romans 3:19-20)²

Earlier, as noted above, we observed that some scholars refer to this Psalm 130 as a Pauline Psalm. Why? The psalmist reveals the answer: "But with you there is forgiveness" (130:4a). The word *but* changes the scenario. What a breathtaking word it is. We may not find forgiveness with others, but with God there is clemency. There is One who forgives, and that One is God. Paul, too, paints a picture of forgiveness following his statement of utter hopelessness before the Law for everyone:

²For an in-depth study on Romans 3:19-20, see Dallas Burdette, "Overview of Romans," in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 249-281.

But now a righteousness **from God**, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness **from God** comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26)

We cannot reflect upon these words of Paul without reflection upon God's mercy and love for the wayward person. Paul expresses the same truth that he had read many times in the Book of Exodus. For instance, God, in passing before Moses on Mount Sinai, reveals his nature:

The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. (Exodus 34:6-7)

God's forgiveness is inclusive. That is to say, there is forgiveness for any sin committed by anyone. There is forgiveness with God for murder, for adultery, for lying, for stealing, for coveting, and for taking the name of God in vain. Even in the Garden of Eden, God did not leave Adam and Eve without hope:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

In this one verse, God himself reveals that He will provide a Deliverer by whom the tempter would be destroyed and humanity redeemed from his clutches. In this single verse, God lets it be known that through the seed of the woman He intends to have mercy upon humanity. As we read the Old Testament, we see the altars and the rivers of blood that poured forth upon the unhewn stones dyed crimson with blood. Why?—"There is forgiveness with God." What did the morning and evening offerings of lambs signify?—"There is forgiveness with God." What did the scapegoat that was let loose signify?—"There is forgiveness with God." Did not this goat carry the sins of the people into the wilderness? Ultimately forgiveness surrounds the One that God foretold to the Serpent in the presence of Adam and Eve. The author of the Book of Hebrews gives the climax of the story of the coming Messiah found in the Book of Genesis:

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (Hebrews 9:15)

What does all this shedding of blood mean? First of all, it means that God provides the sacrifice of substitution to redeem us who put our trust in Him. Next, we can say that the meaning behind all of these activities is God's way of demonstrating His justice and mercy at the same time. Without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness. God through the means of blood sacrifice accepts a substitute in order that we, as sinners, may go free. These

sacrifices foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice, namely, Jesus. The author of the Book of Hebrews captures this ultimate sacrifice when he writes:

For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. ²⁵ Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶ Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. (Hebrews 9:24-28)

Again, the author of the Book of Hebrews seeks to set forth the meaning behind all the sacrifices that preceded the coming of Christ:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, ⁴ because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (10:1-4)

Since the “blood of bulls and goats” could not take away sins, then God had to prepare a body for His Messiah:

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “**Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁶ with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. ⁷ Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.’**”^a (10:5-7)

Again, the writer of this Epistle drives home the point that God devised a means whereby He could do away with sin:

First he said, “**Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them**” (although the law required them to be made). ⁹ Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (10:8-10)

Is it any wonder that the psalmist of Psalm 130 writes with passion as he seeks to unfold God's unfailing love? Let us focus on the following words:

O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. ⁸ He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. (Psalm 130:7-8)

^a Psalm 40:6-8 (see Septuagint)

No wonder this psalm is often called the Pauline Psalm. Yes, with God there is “plenteous redemption.” As we turn our eyes toward Calvary, we see, as it were, the kneeling of Incarnate Deity. We catch a glimpse of His blood-soaked head; we grab hold of a quick look at His blood-soaked garments. We can see One weak from mistreatment. We watch as they drag Him away for crimes He never committed. Then in horror we gaze upon Him as they nail His hands and His feet to the Cross. Again, we hear the anguish of suffering when He cries out: “*ēli ēli lema sabachthani*” (ἤλι ἤλι λεμὰ σαβαχθάνι)—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Jesus cried this prayer to God so that we would not have to pray this prayer.

Following this address to God, Matthew, one of the original Twelve, informs his readers that Jesus cries out once more in a loud voice and gave up the spirit (27:50). Luke also adds the following words: “Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last” (Luke 23:46). John, too, inserts additional information concerning the final agonizing moments of Jesus’ death:

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips.³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “**It is finished.**” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:28-30)

“It is finished” (τετέλεσται, *tetelestai*, “all things have been finished) should ring loud and clear in the hearts of all. What God promised Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden has now been accomplished. What Jeremiah (627 BC) said six hundred years earlier has come to pass:

“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.³⁴ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Do you remember the words of the psalmist? Listen once more to the words that cause us to rejoice with ecstasy and delight that are overwhelming: “If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?⁴ But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared” (Psalm 130:3-4). There is forgiveness with God—at this very moment. At this tremendously split second, we can pass from death to life. Forgiveness is available for all who wish forgiveness. We must ask God for it and trust God to give it to us. The psalmist, too, realized his hope could only find rest in Him, the Forgiver:

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.⁶ My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.⁷ O Israel, put

your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.⁸ He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. (Psalm 130:5-8)

As we mull over verse 5, we cannot help but wonder how many Christians are waiting for the Lord. The psalmist says, “My soul waits for the Lord” (130:6). If we wait upon frail humanity for help, we wait in vain. If we wait upon ourselves, we wait in vain. The way of deliverance comes only from God. We cannot depend upon outward means for satisfaction from our sins. The psalmist says, “My soul waits for the Lord.” Faith in God is the answer. Are we in the depth of despair because of our sins? Have we asked God for forgiveness? Do we still feel the guilt of sin? If so, we should remember the words of John:

This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. (1 John 3:19-20)

We cannot read this psalm without identification with the conscious stricken psalmist. We can feel the depth of the words of the psalmist as we express our longing desire to experience forgiveness in a comforting sense. The psalmist reaches out to God as he endeavors to gather up his trust and hope in order to stay afloat and not wander from God. It is his hope in God’s forgiveness that keeps him from sinking under the burden of his frailties. This awareness of sin has a way of penetrating into our very being and can bring doubt about forgiveness. The words of John should ring loud and clear as we face the horror of confessed sins: “For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything” (3:20). Over again, we should mull over the words of John as he calls attention to sin and forgiveness through Jesus:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2)

Even though our hearts may condemn us, we should never forget that God is greater than our hearts. In the words of the psalmist: “with you there is forgiveness” (130:4a). Do we trust in the Lord God for forgiveness? Remember the psalmist says:

Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD *there is* mercy, and with him *is plenteous redemption*.⁸ And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. (130:7-8, KJV)

This summation of this writer is truly amazing. Prior to this outburst of praise, the author had centered primarily on his thoughts about his own predicament. He reflected upon his sin, his repentance, his prayers, his faith, and his hope in God. But now, he turns to those about him and encourages them to put their hope in God. For God is a God of mercy and a God of “plenteous redemption.” Forgiveness does not depend upon our feelings, but rather upon God’s nature. For this inspired poet, forgiveness is not something that takes place once-in-a-blue-moon; therefore, he writes: “Put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption” (130:7).

CONCLUSION

Many of the psalms are messianic in tone. Whether or not the psalmist understood the full implications of God's forgiveness does not distract from the ultimate sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins—namely, Jesus. Even if this author did not realize the specific details concerning God's justice and sin, nevertheless, every believer understands that God dealt with His justice and sin through His Son Jesus. God through His Son accomplished an effective redemption on Calvary. It was at Calvary that mercy and peace kissed each other.

The wages of sin, according to Paul, is death (Romans 6:23), but Jesus was put to death for sinful humanity. Through His Death, God is able to justify sinful men and women. Through His Death, there is "plenteous redemption." If we are willing to turn away from our sins, then we can know that through the Death of Jesus we can find "full salvation." Paul expresses himself in a way that causes us to soar, as it were, to the heights of heaven as we contemplate the salvation made available by His love and mercy:

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: **"For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."** ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^d neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31-39)

Psalm 130 opens with soul-depth and closes with soul-height. As we reflect upon this psalm, we are conscious that this psalm opens with despair and closes with ecstasy. We cannot sing this musical piece of poetic writing without singing hallelujah! What a Savior God has provided for lost humanity. "Plenteous redemption" is only in Jesus. Jesus is the only way for "full redemption." God in his mercy has given to His people a memorial called the Lord's Supper as a constant reminder of His forgiveness for the penitent soul. **As Christians assemble from week to week to commemorate the Lord's Supper, "plenteous redemption" is ever before the conscience of every individual.** This divine act of mercy is ever before the people of God in the Lord's Supper.³ Listen to the words of Jesus on that fateful evening: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

^c Psalm 44:22

^d Or *nor heavenly rulers*

³ See Dallas Burdette, "The Significance of the Last Supper," *From Legalism to Freedom*, 440-448.