

Psalms 130

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[0 : 00] Psalm 130, we are going back into a series for the next four weeks on why we do what we do. Why do we do certain things? When we gather to worship God on a Sunday morning, it's easy, isn't it? Just to go through the motions.

And we've been looking at various aspects of what we do in worship. We're going to look at four more before December and then some in the new year. And looking at these aspects of what we do in worship, why do we sing? Why do we read the scriptures? Why do we pray? Why do we have a call to worship?

Why do we confess our sin? And what we think about is when we come to worship, it's not so much something that we do, but something that shapes who we are as Christians.

We come on a Sunday morning to be remade, to be renewed, to be reshaped. Last time we think is specifically about the call to worship. A call that focuses our minds, right at the start of our series, and it focuses our minds and our hearts on the awesome power and the redeeming love of God. It is God who calls us to worship. And so from the call to worship, to the opening songs, to the prayer for God's blessings, we are invited to behold our God.

[1 : 28] To taste and see his greatness and his goodness and his grace and his glory. To recognise that our God is God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But that vision of God particularly prompts a response or a reaction on our heart. As we recognise the goodness and the greatness of God, invariably that has got counter-recognition of our own smallness, and our own humanity, and our own weakness, and our own sin.

And so when Isaiah walks into the temple, he says, I saw the Lord seated on his throne. The angels are crying, Holy, Holy, Holy.

And so Isaiah cries what? He cries, Woe is me. For I am man undone. I'm a sinful man. When, if it was from Peter, when Peter recognises who the Lord Jesus Christ is, sees something of his glory after that amazing fishing trip, he says, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.

And that is the pattern of scripture. When you recognise who God is, you recognise something about yourself as well. They say something that the Grand Canyon, I've never been there, the Grand Canyon is one of those few things in life that never disappoints.

[2 : 50] And when people encounter the Grand Canyon, with its vastness and its beauty, it literally takes your breath away, I'm told. You can't help but feel small and vulnerable as you stand in a place like the Grand Canyon.

And maybe you've had similar experiences to that. But that experience is just a shadow, isn't it? It's just a shadow of how we will feel when we compare the greatness of our Creator God with our own lack of greatness.

With our own weakness. And sin and failure. And that is the progression of the Gospel working in our hearts.

God's greatness and goodness contrast to our weakness and our sense of sin. And that progression is reflected by what we do in worship.

There's a part of us that may well look at this part of the service, this confession of sin, and we see it, don't we, as welcome as a kick in the shins. As welcome as root canal surgery.

[3 : 56] Why do you want to talk about sin? Or to think to ourselves, I've got enough pain in my life. I've got enough struggles. Don't you think I know about my sin enough that I need to be reminded of my failure and my sin and my weaknesses?

And so there are lots of churches that you go to, don't they? And they've just blotted it out. They don't have a confession of sin. But I want to say to you, to fail to take this opportunity as a church family, week by week, to confess our sin, actually forfeits a huge opportunity for the Gospel to

reshape us, for the Gospel to remake us, to give us renewed hope, to hear that wonderful words of God and the assurance of pardon.

The novelist, Kingsley Amos, in an interview shortly before he died, I've told you this before, said this, one of the great things about organised religion is that you can be forgiven your sins.

Amos paused for a long time and bowed his head. I mean I carry my sins around with me. There is nobody to forgive them. And I suspect there are some of you here like that this morning.

Who like Amos, are carrying your sins around with you. And some of you may be doing that because you haven't yet come to the place of faith in the Lord Jesus.

[5 : 23] And found that there is indeed someone, there is indeed a man, there is indeed this person who can bring you this morning forgiveness of sin. But some of you may be doing it, why do we see ourselves as Christians?

We somehow live with this constant burden of guilt and shame. The stuff in the past. And so this morning I wanted us to get to grips with why do we include this confession of sin with the assurance of forgiveness every week when we gather in worship.

And we're going to look at Psalm 130. And hopefully we will see this, that God's assurance of our forgiveness comes as we confess that we are worse than we ever thought, but more loved than we ever dreamt.

So cheer up this morning. You are worse than you ever thought, but you are more loved than you ever dreamt. We are a Presbyterian church.

Our mouth points this morning all begin with P and R. Pre, pre, pre. They're perfect for a Presbyterian music. So we are predicament, promise, process. Predicament, promise, process.

[6 : 33] Verses 1 and 2. The predicament of our guilt. Look at verses 1 and 2. The predicament of our guilt. Verse 1. Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. O Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy. Right out of the blocks. Right from the start, the psalmist is crying for mercy and he's in a pit, isn't he? He's in a pit from which he cannot extricate, he cannot get out himself.

He is drowning in crooksand. He is in the depths, which will soon bury him if God doesn't come to his assistance. And verse 2, it becomes clear, it says that he's in this pit because of his own fault.

It's not that he's been pushed in the depths by his brothers like Joseph. No, this is a cry for mercy. It's a cry for mercy because it's a desperate plea to not receive what he knows he deserves.

He knows he deserves the depths. He knows he deserves the pit. He's desperate to be rescued, but he cannot rescue himself. And so he's crying for mercy from the Lord.

[7 : 44] So why, we might ask, does the psalmist know that he deserves the depths? Well, it's because he's aware, isn't he, that he's far worse than he ever imagined. Look at verse 3. If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, that is the inward bias towards my sin, my sins, if you, O Lord, should mark my sins, O Lord, who could stand?

The question, of course, is a rhetorical one, isn't it? O Lord, if you should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? And the answer to the question is no one.

No one could stand. But underlying this statement is the truth that God is a God of absolute justice. Before whom, one day, every single one of us must give an account.

Every word, every deed, every thought, and because he is absolutely just, he has to have a record of our sins. Otherwise, his judgments and his evidence could be called into question.

The psalmist knows that such a record is very, very bad news indeed, isn't it? That as he thinks upon his life, he feels overwhelmed by the weight of that record, completely burdened by how he has wronged God and grieved God and failed to love God with all his heart, mind, soul and strength and to love his neighbour as himself.

[9 : 16] He is literally as guilty as sin. And as a result of his record of this, this just God would have to condemn him.

Now I'm aware, I'm aware that this kind of language of sin and guilt and condemnation and iniquity is considered, isn't it, antiquated, par se, by many people in our culture.

It's outdated. It's thought to be so inappropriate and inappropriate in many churches. And people might say this is exactly why I want nothing to do with Christianity.

You're always talking about sin. You're always talking about how bad we are. You're always talking about how guilty we are. I've got enough issues in my life. I don't need that on top of everything else.

I'm just trying to survive. And anyway, who is to say that I am accountable to these laws? Who is to say that I am accountable to the rules in the Bible? I live by my own rules.

[10:15] I have these to live by and I don't need the Bible to load all this guilt on top of me. Here's the problem with that. So as a culture, what have we done?

We have tried, haven't we, to do away with the notion of God's law. Who cares what God thinks? We've tried to do away with the notion of God's law and our guilt.

But even when we do that, we can't, for the life of us, shape feelings of shame, can we? You can't. Well, neither can I. So, you might want to get rid of the language of guilt, but still the feeling of shame is there, isn't it?

Isn't it? Deep down, you know there is something fundamentally wrong. Don't you? your conscience tells you that.

You might not like it, but your conscience tells you that. And we live in a world today where we don't believe in judgment, where we don't believe in objective sin, and we don't believe in guilt.

[11:23] We don't have those categories anymore, and yet still we have this feeling, don't we, that there's something wrong with us, don't we? Even though we don't have any of those old categories, we have this deep sense that if I was to be examined, I know I wouldn't pass.

That if I was to be inspected, I know I'd be rejected. And we have this deep sense that even though we don't have those old categories, there is still something that is fundamentally wrong with us.

And that is the human predicament. Because we are in fact guilty. We are far worse than we ever thought. So let's try and think, what does our culture, what does our culture suggest that we do with our shame and guilt?

What do people say that we do with our shame and our guilt? Well firstly, let's look at the kind of pop psychology, let's look at the self-help books, let's go into Waterstones, and in the kind of self-help section.

And the theme of those self-help books is believing in yourself. You've got to believe in yourself. That is the message of Oprah, Dr. Phil, loose women, you name it.

[12:38] That's the message. Whoever it is, you've got to believe in yourself. So failure, guilt, transgressions, iniquity, they're all negative energy.

They're negative energy, and what that negative energy does is it runs down to your self-esteem. So you need to block out the negativity. Don't listen to the negativity, and keep believing in yourself. And it runs, doesn't it? It gives you a form of assurance. Do you notice that? Believe in yourself. Run down, get away from the negativity, believe in yourself.

It gives you a form of assurance that you're okay without any confession. Do you see that? Without any chance, without ever dealing with the root guilt, and the root shame.

So, our pop culture says you can get assurance that everything's okay without confession. And that's a lie. The other path is the path of advertisers, marketing.

[13:50] So, they want you this morning to acknowledge you've got faults, and you've got failures. And as you watch the adverts, as you listen to the marketing, it leads you to shame that all of us are suffering with some sort of issue that can be solved by a product, or by a service, or by a computer.

So, advertising makes you feel overweight, or too bored, or not beautiful enough, or not young enough, or not rich enough, or more likely, actually, not cool enough.

And it meddles with your hearts. It meddles with your hearts sufficiently that you feel ashamed as a result, and then you buy what they're selling. And so the marketers, what do they require from you?

They require from you confession. They require from you confession, that not all is right, I'm too bored, I'm getting fat, I'm middle aged. So they require from me confession.

But do you know what they never do? They never give me assurance. They never give me assurance of pardon. And they never give me peace. Why? Well, because they want me to keep buying the product and the service, don't they?

[15:14] So your pop psychology, which gives you assurance with no confession, and you've got the advertisers, which give you confession, but with no assurance. And so neither of them can deal with your guilt and your shame.

But here's the good news. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ provides you with real pardon and peace. Because it calls you to a genuine confession of sin.

And that triggers this assurance, this knowledge of forgiveness. Here's the promise that rescues us from our predicament.

The promise of forgiveness. 2nd verse 3. If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, my sin, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness.

The psalmist connects my record of wrongs, the record of wrongs that he senses, to God's forgiveness to us. It's so important to grasp.

[16:22] We are guilty of wrong. We are guilty of sin. There are specific charges against us. Charges that require a penalty or a payment. But what I hope we're about to see is good news.

Let me try and tease out the difference between guilt and shame for you. When you and I feel shame, it has to do with something that we are.

When we feel shame, it's that we failed a particular version, of who we think we are. We think we're something, and yet we failed that vision of who we are, and we feel shame about it.

But guilt has to do with something that we've done. Specific wrongs that require payment or penalty. Guilt can be traced by sins of omission, things that we've not done, and commission, things we should have done.

Guilt can be traced by setting our hearts on false gods, on idols. And every time you and I have acted in such a way, we've increased our record of wrongs.

[17:35] And yet the psalmist says, if you look at verse 4 again, with you there is forgiveness. What does that mean? Is the psalmist saying, God just sweeps our sin under the carpet.

Sweeps our wrongdoing under the carpet, and he says, ah, forget about it. It's not such a big deal. He'll say, I won't worry about it if you don't worry about it. God can't do that, can he?

Because he's a just God. God has to punish sin. God's eyes are too pure even to look on evil. He has to punish sin.

Even if God is going to forgive us, there still has to be a payment. But somehow the psalmist knows that God is willing to take care of that payment himself.

Think about it this way. You invite me in the family for dinner, and we have a great meal, and it's a dessert to die for, that you serve, and you serve it in your best crystal glass dishes.

[18:42] And being the nice guy that I am, I help to clear the table after the meal. And I overestimate how much I can carry, and I proceed to drop two crystal dishes on the floor.

And they're broken to pieces. There's that sudden silence. I am horrified and embarrassed, and I say, of course, of course, of course, I will pay to replace them. And you say, it's okay, Paul, I forgive you.

What happens at that point? You've forgiven me. So is there no payment necessary, right? Well, no, that is wrong.

The cost of breaking those glasses, it didn't just disappear, did it? By forgiving me, you say, I'll bear the cost myself.

The cost would either be for you, it would either be buying two new dishes, or it would be the pain of having two less dishes than you did earlier that day. But somebody has to pay.

[19:40] And if you forgive me, and you say, I forgive you, Paul, you're saying, you don't have to pay, Paul, I will. I'll pay.

Forgiveness always, always, always, always, involves payment. And when the psalmist said, but with you, Lord, there is forgiveness, he understood that the Lord God is so gracious, and so merciful, and so kind, that he's somehow going to pay for the sin of the psalmist wrongdoing himself.

He didn't know fully how God would do that, but we do. And so in the gospel of Mark, Jesus is speaking to his disciples about what it means to serve others, and at the end he gives essentially his own understanding of his job description.

He says Mark 10:45, the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many, as a payment for many.

Jesus came as the ultimate servant for you, and for me, and the ultimate act of service was to pay the debt that you and I owe for our sin, and wrongdoing, and forgiveness, forgiveness for our wrongdoing means payment.

[21:02] For God to forgive us, it meant for him to absorb the payment himself, and he did that by giving up his only beloved son in our place.

Jesus is the only person who, verse 2, has no record of wrong, verse 3, and he exchanged his record with our record, our record of sin and rebellion.

He took our bill and he said, I'll pay for theirs. That is exactly what he did at the cross. Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe.

Sin has left its crimson stain, he washed it white as snow. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like me his praise should sin.

All our guilt is taken away from us. And with our guilt goes our shame. So there is absolutely no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, Paul writes.

[22 : 06] Here is the promise of forgiveness. But understand this, we repent and confess because we are forgiven, not to gain his forgiveness.

Do you understand that? We repent and confess because we are forgiven not to gain this forgiveness. The reason why we confess our sin here every week is not because God's forgiveness is conditional upon our confession and our repentance.

Rather, it is the certain and completeness forgiveness that is like a magnet for our confession.

Because we know how gracious God is, we run into his arms with our sin-sick hearts.

Because we know that his grace is sufficient and is boundless and is free and is already there, that Jesus has paid for our guilt and our sin in full. So we repent and we confess forgiveness because we are forgiven.

Not to gain forgiveness. We are forgiven because he was forsaken. Not because our confession is somehow heartfelt enough or adequate.

[23 : 29] It is because of Jesus that we have this absolutely sure promise of forgiveness. Lastly, let's look at the process of assurance. Look at the Psalms.

Isn't verse 4 strange? Look at the odd verses when you read the Bible. Look at verse 4. It's so odd, isn't it? It's a strange deduction from the good news of God's forgiveness. But with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared.

Now I don't know about you but that sounds strange doesn't it? Doesn't that sound strange to me? If I give you the words of this verse but left the last word blank, I think most of us would have filled it with a different word wouldn't we?

With you there is forgiveness therefore you are thanked, with you there is forgiveness therefore you are praised therefore you are loved but that isn't what the Sabbath says is it?

He says verse 4 but with you there is forgiveness therefore you are feared. forgiveness and at the very least this verse teaches us the fear of the Lord the fear of the Lord is not some slave like fear but it is a relationship of reverence and awe before God but above that because God is a God of forgiveness it completely reorientates your relationship to him let me give you a poor illustration it's about that time of view as the weather is about to change we've had glorious sunshine and we're going to get freezing cold this week but when that happens what happens to the mice the mice and the rats come in don't they I hope you have never any yet but let's say that I am terrified of mice and rats I'm terrified of them I come into the church office I'm working in the church you find me as you come into the church office standing on a chair petrified

[25 : 29] Jess also walks in she's got the service sheet for me to look at she hands me the service sheet and I said I can't look at the service sheet I'm petrified of the mice it's the mice I'm not going to pay any attention to the service sheet or what you've got to say because nothing is going to distract me from the mouse I'm terrified of the mouse I'm a spider to you if I have a fear of mice so much so that I'm consumed by it my fear of that mouse orientates everything I do at that moment I can't think of anything else I'm not concerned with anything else that's not a perfect analogy by anyway but in a similar way to fear God means that all of your life is centred around him to fear God means to orientate your life around him that when you fear God nothing ultimately distracts you from living for him you don't fear other people because you are more concerned with fearing

God you are completely centred on him and the psalmist is saying because you are the God who is forgiven my sin and you are the God who forgives my wrong and you forgive my idolatry because you are the only one who can do that and your forgiveness delivers me from my guilt and my shame I am compelled to order my whole life around you and this relationship with God becomes the primary thing in our lives and it changes what we are looking for and so when we come to repent and confess our sin we are being remade we are being reorientated we are being re-sentence and this psalmist is not longing just for an escape from punishment some kind of get out of hell freak out some get out of jail freak out he longs for the Lord himself look at verse 5 and 6 I wait for the Lord my soul waits and in his word

I hope my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning more than watchmen for the morning it's that in a sense is the proof that you fear the Lord that your life is completely shaped around him that you repent and confess your sin because you want more of God you repent and confess your sin because you want more of God you want a fuller and a greater taste and sight of God and his goodness you know your sin is a barrier to that so you repent of your sin so that you might enjoy the sweetness of your fellowship and friendship with the triune God evermore and somehow some of us have believed the lie that it's better actually not to confess our sin because if we do God will somehow know how bad we are and then he won't love us as much so we'll not bring that sin or that wrongdoing up with him and we'll hope that God just somehow doesn't notice do you realize how ridiculous that is do any of us here this morning honestly think that God doesn't know absolutely everything about our hearts already and that is from the pit of hell because true repentance doesn't give us less of

God it gives us more of God true confession opens us up to a greater enjoyment of his love and his grace not less and so the first words of Jesus that are recorded by Mark are these the kingdom of God is near therefore repent and believe the good news on the 31st of October 1517 Martin Luther posted his 95th thesis on the door of the church in Wittenberg and the first thesis was this when our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said repent he called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance all of life is worship all of life is repentance not because we somehow think if I confess and repent somehow I earn God's forgiveness no forgiveness is ours completely through Jesus Christ but our greater enjoyment of God comes when we repent of those things that grieve and offend him do you get that let me redo that again it's not because we think somehow confession and repentance somehow earn God's forgiveness no forgiveness is ours completely through Jesus Christ but our greater enjoyment of God comes when we repent of those things that grieve and offend him let me conclude you're a Christian and there's something in your past that holds you still a source of guilt and shame and if I used to say to you this morning you know that God has forgiven you and you would say this to me

[30 : 57] I know that God has forgiven me and maybe I know that the person who I wronged has forgiven me but but but what and some of you as I say that are filling in the end of that sentence yourself but I just can't forgive myself a very good friend of mine said that to me this week I think I've heard those words more from the lips of Christians than I have from those who have got no faith at all I want you to see what the psalmist ends up in a very different place than where he started O Israel O people of God hope in the Lord for with the Lord there is steadfast love and there is plentiful redemption there is covenant love there is a promise bound by God to love his people and with him is plentiful redemption and he will redeem

Israel from all his iniquities he comes to see at the end of Psalm 130 that God is a God of forgiveness because he is the God of unfailing love he is the God of plenteous plentiful redemption he knows doesn't he look at verse 3 that the God who keeps a record of wrongs verse 3 who marks iniquities will verse 8 redeem Israel from all his iniquities he will redeem all those who trust in him from all those sins the whole record is paid for so the psalmist says I have a redeemer I have a new redeemer what do I mean by that I have a new redeemer I mean this when you and I say that God has forgiven me but I just can't forgive myself what we're saying when we say that is there's something else there is something else other than

God that I hold as my real redeemer there is something else in my life that I am trusting will take care of me will sustain me will give me meaning it could be your reputation that you're trusting in your reputation has somehow been stained it could be the expectations that were placed on you or verbalised by your mum and dad and you've never lived up to them and they still control you it could be the kind of internal mental picture of who you want to be and you've never lived up to it but any time we say that we cannot forgive ourselves what we're really saying is my life is orientated and centred around or I fear or I love something more than God and that thing won't forgive me I've let it down I've violated it and it won't forgive me and the only way out of that bondage this morning is to discover a new redeemer it's what we've talked about a few weeks ago it's the expulsive power of a new affection my nephew

I saw him this week some of the young people Ed was a grotty little teenager for years and then about a year ago he started gelling his hair working out in the gym he's kind of Adonis why what's happened he's discovered girls and that kind of expulsive power of girls has driven out the dirt and the mess he spends too much time in the bathroom and that's what happens isn't it there is

something within us that expulses the false gods it's called the love of Jesus Christ it's called plenteous redemption what you have to do today you have to demote the false gods the false redeemers and you have to take hold of the true redeemer the only redeemer and yes he calls you to repent because he is the only redeemer who keeps all his promises and he always forgives he always forgives us when we fail him the only redeemer who gives genuine forgiveness and unfailing love and plentiful redemption the only redeemer who is utterly forsaken so you and I can be forgiven and the assurance of forgiveness comes with confessing that we are worse than we ever thought but we are more loved more loved more loved than we ever dreamed so friends brothers and sisters men and women boys and girls repent and believe the good news let's pray let's pray