



Elder Fred Mollon

Sunday's Sermon

Wait for God

Romans 8-31-32; 37-39 and Psalm 130

July 30, 2017

Skyline Presbyterian Church

Here we are again, ascending further into the heights. We have to know that as the people are making their way to Zion, to the Temple, they are singing their way through these "Psalms of Ascent." As they sing these hymns, they are in a small way recounting their history. Their history hasn't always been good, yet in each psalm we have seen God's faithfulness extolled and praises given to Him for His steadfast love and faithfulness in spite of the troubles they had faced.

As you look through this series of psalms, 120 thru 134, you will notice that certain ones are ascribed to specific people. The most common and notable, is that some of them are ascribed to King David. This particular psalm has no such ascription. Some scholars think that it may have been written by David, particularly after being exposed for his affair with Batsheva, but others believe that this was written by Ezra, during the time of the captivity.

Psalm 130 starts out with the psalmist crying to God "from the depths." Usually in the Hebrew scriptures "the depths" refers depths of the sea, and the sea represented chaos, and the primordial cosmos. It speaks to disorder. However, in this verse the word literally means "deep" like when we say we are "down in the dumps," depressed or as the alternate translation which I read says, "the bottom has fallen out." Why would the writer be feeling this way?

What would make a child of Jacob feel like the bottom had fallen out? These were God's people, His chosen ones. They were a people who had been severely oppressed in Egypt and God raised up a leader who not only stood in their place to oppose pharaoh, but after many signs and wonders led them out of Egypt to a land "flowing with milk and honey." They were free! They could serve God as they pleased and in the manner in which they had been instructed to do so.

They had been made into a nation. They had their own king and government. They ruled and controlled their destiny. Their kings had led them into battle and they had been victorious, time and again. They had fabulous wealth and in some ways were the envy of the nations around them. As much as they could they had been faithful to God; they had even built a Temple in His honor to which they came three times a year to worship Him and offer sacrifices just as He had instructed them. But something has gone terribly wrong. The bottom had fallen out and now, here they are, under the rod of the oppressor once again. So the writer cries out to God but notice that he doesn't hide from his present condition; rather it is FROM the depths that he cries out; he pleads for God to listen and be attentive and begs for mercy. He does not try to cover up his anguish, depression and despair but rather turns that anguish into a prayer; a plea for help, a plea for mercy. This is the great thing about this psalm. It shows us that our problems, ones that are too big for us, are not to be shied away from. But rather, we are to take them in all of our despair and pray them to God. Cry out as the psalmist, "God, the bottom has fallen out. I don't know what to do or which way to go... have mercy Lord. Hear me!"

Notice the next thing that the psalmist does is to acknowledge the reason for this turnabout: SIN. This is the true test of an intercessor – he is the first to recognize not only the sins of himself or herself, but also they call out the sins of the whole people. Notice in the Old Testament how sin and blessing

are communal. As Jesus says, sin is like leaven in dough, it works to affect the whole lump, the whole community. When you or I miss the mark, it is not just “personal” between you and God; rather there is an effect upon the whole community. Think of it, when a leader of the church falls and it becomes public, it is not just that person who is affected but the stain is upon the Church as a whole. The questions come, “How can you follow a person like this; why didn’t you put a stop to it, especially when you became aware of it?” We are all guilty!

So, what had Israel done that brought them to this point? Obliquely the psalmist acknowledges that there is a laundry list of which they are guilty when he says, “If you were to keep a record of wrongdoings, who could stand?” What had happened?

From the very start, these folks were rebels towards God. In the wilderness, on their journey to Canaan, they asked Moses if he had led them there to die. They began to wish that they had stayed in Egypt where they had food and drink and a measure of safety. How quickly they forgot. At Sinai, they didn’t want to listen to God but would rather have Moses get the words from God and then tell it to them, written on stone tablets, thereby codifying it instead of having a living word. They didn’t believe that they could take the land and preferred to stay on the opposite side of the river until Joshua finally convinced them that God was on their side. Time and again God showed them that He would be their Protector and Shield, but they didn’t want a “spirit” leading them. Finally, they said that they wanted to be just like the other nations and they wanted a king; one person who would lead them and be their “symbol” to the other nations. The kings became just as rebellious and led the nation into sin. They began to worship the gods of those around them and encouraged the people to do the same. After Solomon died his sons couldn’t agree and so the nation split into two factions at war with each other. Finally God said “Enough!” and let the surrounding kings each take a piece, in its turn, into captivity and gave the land rest from these rebellious people. These were God’s people, His chosen ones.

The psalmist continues by declaring one thing that he knows about God; the one thing of which he is still sure – that God is one who forgives and if for no other reason, this is why He is worshipped. The gods of the other peoples of that day only demanded sacrifice and meted out retribution in the form of natural disasters or defeat in war. Here was a God who did the opposite. He did not require burnt offerings; He wanted pure hearts and a humble spirit. The psalmist could have gotten lost by making a list of all of the sins of Israel but rather he chose to focus instead upon God as one who forgives. It’s written that God is slow to anger but quick in mercy. Perhaps this is what is in his mind as he writes this. He knows that God’s word is true, and he chooses to believe God’s word rather than the dictates of his circumstances and so he waits. He waits with a sure hope that God will move in Israel’s favor and redeem them; God will buy them back. Isn’t this the same thing that Paul tells us: Be anxious for nothing; but pray in everything, with thanksgiving, and peace will keep you? This is what is happening here. The soul is quieted and rather than thinking upon all of the bad that has happened, the psalmist, as an act of his will, waits. What is he doing when he waits? The psalmist uses the picture of a watchman on the wall.

What does the watchman do? Along the top of each city wall there is a walkway and at certain points are towers which provide access to the walkway. Throughout the day, and especially during the night, guards were positioned along the wall to keep watch for any activity on the outside. They had to be paying attention at all times to anything that might happen. This was especially true if they were at war. As the battle progressed runners would come from the battle to bring news, good or bad, back to the city. The watchman had to be attentive, especially if the runner was coming back to tell them “we’re safe; it’s ok. Our army was victorious.” Just so in this psalm, the writer is saying that his soul is just like this – he’s paying attention and he is just like the watchman. In particular the psalmist compares himself to the watchman who works the overnight shift; the graveyard shift. This watchman can’t wait for the morning to come because in the dark it can be a little scary and through the dark he

still has to pay close attention.

There's a story of a watchman who worked the overnight shift. As his time was ending he noticed something on a hill outside of the city. He peered through the dark and realized it was a campfire, but whose? Friend or foe; and why suddenly at this time of night? So with three blasts of his trumpet he sounded the alarm. The army sent troops to investigate. When they returned they reported that it was simply a shepherd's hut that had caught fire. The watchman was commended for his attentiveness. The psalmist says his soul is more watchful than that. This is a person who is ready to see God at work; to see what marvelous thing God will do to save His people. This is like the writer of Hebrews who many times throughout the book exhorts us to pay attention. Watch for what God is doing. And our psalmist has a big reason to pay attention and watch for God.

He exhorts Israel to hope in God whose love will not fail and who has total redemption for them. In fact, God himself will save them! Can you imagine that God will come on the scene and personally save His people? Who would want to miss that? This is how sure the psalmist is of God's word and his hope is in God – in spite of how bad they have been, God still loves them and He himself will step in to save them.

This was the hope of Israel for centuries. A redeemer would come and save them, however, over time they became lazy. They forgot to keep watching. They stopped waiting. Instead they became caught up in everyday life and its problems and difficulties. The prophets had long spoken of this One from God but most were looking for a political leader who would lead an uprising against the ruling power. They became angry over being oppressed and lost sight of the fact that God himself would save Israel. When Jesus came, by and large they missed it; but as is always the case, a remnant saw it and followed. They followed this Messiah and learned over time that this life was not one of pleasantries just because of faith in God. They saw that suffering was a part of this life. They were taught that there were necessary times to watch and pray. But even this ragtag group didn't totally catch the lesson until they saw the One in whom they had put their hope, this Messiah, sacrificed by the ruling power. After three days of hope being lost, their greatest joy was found – this One was not dead but was risen victorious. These now saw the fruit of their watching. The night was over and the Son was risen with healing in his wings. God Himself had come to save us.

These believers then became like our psalmist. They became the watchmen and through the words of their testimony and letters which we have, they now give us the watchman's call to stay alert. Be prepared. Watch and pray.

Our first scripture is one of those warnings from a watchman. We expect that because we are God's children our life will be all sunny and bright. We are, after all, God's children. He has given us His Spirit. We are now under grace and not the law. We are victorious through the victory of Christ.

This is one who has found the redemption of Israel, who has seen God step in and redeem and now sounds the cry so that others may know too. Just like the psalmist who encourages Israel to watch, and wait, to put their hope in God's word, Paul also exhorts us to hope in God. Paul states that "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Paul certainly knew what it was to face opposition. In almost every city to which he went, either the locals or the authorities stood to oppose him and his message. Paul also knew what it was to suffer for the sake of Christ. Read II Corinthians 11, meditate on each thing that Paul mentions and realize his great love for Christ and His church. Paul also knew what it was to wait; be patient and, like a watchman, look for God and be attentive to His Spirit. After all that he had suffered, Paul can still write to us that "...in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." Paul never doubted God's love just because the bottom fell out. What Paul and least expected or hoped for happened but in the midst of a jail cell he can write, "Rejoice in the

Lord...” Here too, he writes “...I am convinced that nothing ...in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God’s unfailing love. After all that he has been through, Paul is persuaded, convinced, won over to the notion that nothing can separate us from God’s unfailing love. As Jesus said, “Fear not, for I have overcome the world.

How then do we react when “...the bottom falls out?” Cry out in our despair to God for help and for mercy. It’s at that moment we need to calm our soul and more than the watchman waits for morning we need to wait for God. As the watchman knows, so must we know that the dawn will come and place our hope, our confidence in the Lord. “O Israel, put your hope in the Lord...He, Himself, will redeem Israel.”

Finally we need to see Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith – God Himself, who came to save us.