

Ascend:
Worship under Pressure
Psalm 130

Dr. Steve Horn

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Introduction to Text: This morning we are continuing a series called, “Ascend.” This series is an expositional study of Psalms 120-134. Each of these Psalms has the heading “Song of Ascents.” Most believe that these are songs that worshippers sang as they made their way to Jerusalem for thrice annual special times of worship. If this is so, then we learn a great deal about what was on their hearts as they approached worship and thus understand what should be upon our hearts as we prepare to worship or just give attention to the subject of worship. We are considering one each Sunday for the weeks of this summer. Today, we are studying Psalm 130. Here is a Psalm that helps us to think about worshipping under pressure.

Text: Out of the depths I call to You, Yahweh!

² Lord, listen to my voice;
let Your ears be attentive
to my cry for help.

³ Yahweh, if You considered sins,
Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But with You there is forgiveness,
so that You may be revered.

⁵ I wait for Yahweh; I wait
and put my hope in His word.

⁶ I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning—
more than watchmen for the morning.

⁷ Israel, put your hope in the LORD.
For there is faithful love with the LORD,
and with Him is redemption in abundance.

⁸ And He will redeem Israel
from all its sins.

Introduction: You might not have ever heard of him, but a man by the name of Jonathan Aitken, is sort of Great Britain’s version of America’s Chuck Colson. You know Colson? He was the high ranking member of Nixon’s cabinet that ultimately went to prison. He became a Christian before going to prison and dedicated the rest of his life to prison ministry.

Aitken was a cabinet member of Prime Minister John Major who succeeded Margaret Thatcher. I ran across his story this week in my readings and discovered that he has written a book on the Psalms and actually calls Psalm 130 his favorite. I am actually borrowing from the title of his book for the title of my sermon. His title for his book is *Psalms for People Under Pressure*.

He was accused of spending a week on vacation in Paris paid for by an Arabian who received a defense contract in return. Indeed a bad thing to do, and he went to jail for perjury in a civil case related to the charges. While in prison, he surrendered his life to Christ.

In his book, he tells of his first night in prison. He was scared. He heard all manner of shouts and howls directed toward him. Frightened for his very life, he remembered receiving a pamphlet that he had stuffed in his pocket. The title of the pamphlet was “Praying the Psalms.” The Psalm for the day was Psalm 130. Listen to how he describes what happened next:

As I studied its eight short verses, a warm and comforting wave of reassurance flooded over me. Suddenly, I realised that I was not as lonely, scared, helpless or vulnerable as I had thought. The author of the psalm had been there before me. Some 3,000 years earlier, he had experienced very similar emotions of despair to mine. He had found a route to climb out of his depths, with God's help, and he had signposted that route in beautiful poetry recorded for posterity in the 19th book of the Bible known simply as The Psalms.

It is good to know that we are not the first ones in despair. May this Psalm speak to us in the same way today.

What is Life's Greatest Pressure?

According to Psalm 130....

- Ambiguously, the Pit

In verse 1-2, we get a rather general perspective of the cry for help. We have seen this before in this series of Psalms. In fact, most of these Psalms are written from a perspective of despair.

- Specifically, past sin

In verse 3-4, we zero in on the more specific reason for the pit of despair in this case—it is the Psalmist's own sin. Before, the despair has been more national. The despair has focused on an enemy. But, here, we see that the real enemy sometimes is ourselves.

- And with that, the penalty of sin

The Psalmist is mindful that along with the sin, that there is a penalty of sin.

- And ultimately, the prolonged consequences

And, the Psalmist waits. He is aware of the prolonged agony of his sin.

In sum, the greatest pressure of life is our sin problem.

Jesus described this sin problem as a chasm. I have heard it described as a wall. That wall is so high, no one can climb it. That wall is so deep, no one can dig below. That wall is so long, no one can go around it.

What is Answer to Life's Greatest Pressure?

As we go back through this Psalm, we can note four wonderful parts to the answer that we have in relationship to God.

- God hears. (1-2)
- God forgives. (3-4)

Though we might see the sinner's problem, we also get the Savior's pardon. He is confident that God will hear, and he is confident that God will forgive.

- God speaks. (5-6)
- God loves. (7-8)

The language here is the language of God's covenant.

This is good news. The Gospel is good news. There is no sin area that God cannot transform.

So What?

This good news . . .

- Compels us to Worship. Notice the word "revered" in verse 4. It is in worship that we come face to face with so many things, including our own sin. This is not necessarily the goal of worship, but it is one of the by-products of worship.
- Calls us to Wait on the Lord.
- Creates in us watchfulness.
- Centers our Will in His.

Remember John Aitken. Two weeks before he was released from prison, his Bible Study group in prison invited him to give a message. He chose to speak from Psalm 130. Flyers were put up throughout the prison and a larger than normal crowd showed up to hear him, including Big Face. Big Face was the name given to the toughest man in the prison. His nickname corresponded to the days when "Most Wanted" Pictures were common. The person's face was displayed on the poster. Big Face was serving multiple life sentences for murders related to organized crime activity.

Johnathan began his talk that evening by saying that Psalm 130 was his favorite Psalm and had helped him through many a hopeless and hard day in prison. He also mentioned that not only was Psalm 130 his favorite Psalm but had been the favorite Psalm of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. He went on to give indication of how Psalm 130 had blessed him so. Toward the end of this talk, he looked up to see Big Face with tears rolling down his cheeks. Jonathan prayed and ended the meeting.

After the close, Big Face approached Johnathan. He said, "That there Psalm is really beautiful. It got to my heart. Would you do me a favor? Could you come over to my cell tomorrow evening and give that same message. I got some of my best mates that need to hear a talk like you just gave. And, if it makes you more comfortable, you can bring some of your friends, maybe some of those mates you talked about tonight like Augustus, and what's his name, and that other one you mentioned. Do they live in your cell block?"

Aitken says, " Although I was unable to produce, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, Psalm 130 went down well in Big Face's cell the next night." (From theguardian.com, February 2, 2004.)

And, so the power of God's Word! May His Word bring you that same hope today!