

Out of the Depths

by Dennis Kinlaw

Dennis Kinlaw's sermon explores the depths of human guilt and the transformative power of God's forgiveness as expressed in Psalm 130.

Duration: 34:18

Scripture: Ezekiel 18:32, Matthew 6:33, Luke 24:1-7, John 3:16, Acts 2:33, Hebrews 4:15

Topics: "Depths"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of sharing the message of forgiveness and redemption that comes from God. He shares a personal story of a conversation with a Methodist bishop's son who had grown up in Brazil. The speaker also mentions a moment when the idea of having an altar rail is suggested as a way to humble oneself before God. The sermon concludes with a reflection on waiting for the morning with expectant hope, comparing the darkness of the night to the challenges and problems we face in life.

Transcript

I feel led to speak to you tonight about a very simple psalm, the one which was read to you a few moments ago, Psalm 130, and if you have your Testaments, you may want to turn and follow it, because I would like to follow it very closely. There is something very universal about the psalms. I am sure that that is the reason for their continuing appeal over the centuries.

It's almost unbelievable that a book that was written before there were automobiles or radios or any of the things that we enjoy in our world would be as apt and as appropriate as the latest book in psychology, and yet that is exactly what we have when we come to this portion of God's Word. As we read them, there is something about them that we find that they speak right out of life, the kind of life that you and I live, and they speak to life's problems, the kind of problems that you and I have, whether they are matters of loneliness, whether they are matters of sickness or death or hostility and alienation. If you search the book of Psalms far enough, you will find a psalm to cover the present problem that faces you.

I remember when I was a child how my mother used to find great comfort in the psalms. I enjoyed reading about Samson and about David and Goliath and the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace and that kind of thing, but the psalms just didn't turn me on. But as the years have passed, I have found that the wisdom that was hers and the taste that was hers has become more and more mine, because here in this wealth of devotional literature there are resources for the likes of me and there are resources for the likes

of you.

Now this psalm is one of the great ones. It was a favorite of Luther's. Luther paid it the supreme compliment from Luther.

He said it is a Pauline psalm. It was as good as if the Apostle Paul had written it. And when he said that, you knew that he loved it because it had spoken to him.

It had been the word of God to his own heart. Now as you read the psalms, you will find that one of the things that marks them is their psychological soundness. The astuteness, the insights that are there are as realistic as your life situation.

And as you read them, you will find that again and again the psalmist is speaking for the likes of you. The author obviously was one of us, and God met him in the midst of his situation and gave him an answer that is applicable to the likes of us. In this particular psalm, the psalmist is in trouble.

It is not superficial trouble. It is the profoundest of existential troubles. It is a trouble not that comes from being in the shallows of life, but coming from those moments when one is in the depths when life itself has flowed over him.

And out of the depths he cries out from his confusion and his darkness, his instability, his uncertainty, and his despair. Now what is it that has provoked it on this occasion? It is the fact that he has broken the moral law of God and has sinned against his Maker and his Redeemer, and he is loaded with his guilt. And in that guilt he cries out to God.

Now what is the proper thing for a man to do when he is sinned? You know, you and I say very quickly, of course, the thing that he should do is to pray. And that's exactly what the psalmist did. But did you ever realize that about the hardest thing that you ever have to do when you have sinned is exactly that? Because there is something about guilt and something about sin that when we have committed it wants to make us not open, but closed, wants to cause us to cover what we have done, not expose it.

So I think you can see very quickly the soundness of the psalmist and the indication of the goodness of the man that when he is sinned he does the hardest thing that we can do, he lays his heart open before God and he prays. Now it is not only hard to pray when a man is sinned because we want to cover and defend our own ego and hide, but it is also hard for us to pray because when we pray, prayer itself, if it is real prayer, is incipient confession. You cannot pour out your heart to God if you have sinned without beginning to lay before him what it is that you have done to grieve him, what it is that you have done to offend him, and what it is that you have within your life that you need to have him repair.

So the psalmist does what is right. He speaks and he says, Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord hear my voice, let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

Now, when a man comes to God and begins to pray and confronts God in his guilt and in his sin, there are always two emotions that come to him, and I think they are successive emotions. There is, first of all, a negative one. When I have sinned and confront God, I want to flee from him.

I do not want to come to him. I want to run away and hide. You will remember it is like Peter in that boat that first day that he heard Jesus preach in his midst.

Using his boat, you will remember, is a pulpit. At the end of that experience, he fell at the feet of Jesus and said, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man. There is something about the holiness of God that is so antithetical to my sin that when I have sinned, my guilt will not let me come freely to his presence.

I come wanting to run. But now there is something beautiful about it, if I will come in spite of the fact I don't want to come. And when I come, if I will stay, if I will wait in all of my hesitancy, in all of my reticence, if I will wait, I will find that that first emotion, that initial emotion that causes me to want to flee from him, will be turned into exactly the opposite emotion.

And there is something within me that will begin to say, But to whom shall we go? To whom shall I go? There is no one else that can do for me what I need, for there is forgiveness with thee. Now notice how the psalmist expressed both of these. If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? Can you feel the cry of his soul? It is indicated in the titles that he uses as he refers to God.

If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? Who can stand before this Holy One? But as one waits in the presence of the Holy One, then he begins to find that there is a hope that rises up within him, and there is a faith that begins to take hold. And then he cries out joyously, But there is forgiveness with thee. There is forgiveness nowhere else, certainly, but there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared.

What a joy to come to the place where a man knows that in God, in the One before whom he waits in his trembling penitence, there is forgiveness with him. You would think that if there is forgiveness with God, then there would be a momentary relaxation and a man can say, Okay, it's all right. It's not too bad that I sin.

He is the one who exercises forgiveness. Now I can put it behind me and forget about it, and so I can relax. He's a God that forgives sin.

But you will notice that that is not the attitude of the psalmist. He speaks and says, Yes, there is forgiveness with thee, but it is not the kind of thing that causes me to relax and presume. I am not like the French encyclopedist who says it's his business to forgive, but I look up and say, Yes, there is forgiveness with him, and because of that I kneel before him in humiliation, and in my penitence there is a deep awe within me, and I fear him because there is forgiveness with him and with him alone.

Now what's the attitude that I should take when I come to this point in my communion with God because of my sin, and I wait and know that there is forgiveness with him? How right the psalmist is. There is only one proper attitude for me, and that is that I wait before him. The psalmist speaks and says, I wait for the Lord.

My soul doth wait. I wait for him, and why do I wait? Because never is his forgiveness something that is automatically mechanical. It is not the kind of thing that comes like when you are in darkness and want light and stumble for the wall and find that light switch and flick it and suddenly automatically, mechanically, in a very instant way, it comes.

We are not dealing with that kind of relationship. We are dealing with a personal relationship between a sinning sinner and a gracious and merciful God, but it is not a relationship on which we can presume. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God until that he have mercy upon us.

He does not have to forgive us. The forgiveness that comes, comes out of the love of his heart. It comes out of the free voluntariness of his own soul.

He looks upon us with love and compassion, and he does not have to forgive us, but because he loves and he cares, if we wait before him, he will speak that word and forgiveness will be ours. Now how do you wait? You wait with hope. You notice how the psalmist speaks, I wait for the Lord.

My soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. Why do I dare to believe that he will forgive the likes of me? I dare to believe because he has spoken. He has spoken.

He has given the word to us in prophet and in priest. He has given us the word in sacred scripture that he is not the kind of God who enjoys destroying people, but he is long-suffering to us, not willing that any should perish. Why will ye die, O house of Israel? Turn, turn.

Why will ye die? My heart is tender toward those who turn unto me. He has spoken. The beautiful thing is, the psalmist who did not know what we knew, trusted in the word of God.

How much more should we trust in the word? Not only the written word which we have in his sacred book, but that incarnate word born of a virgin found in Bethlehem's manger, walked about Palestine, was nailed to a cross, rose from a tomb on that Easter Sunday morning, ascended into heaven, and now sitteth at the right hand of the Father to plead for us. We have hope and we wait in hope because he died for us. I ran across a book some time ago by an Englishman by the name of Rattenberry on the Eucharistic hymns of John and Charles Wesley.

As he spoke about the communion hymns of the Wesleys, he reached a point where he gave a bit of personal witness. He said, You know, when I was a child growing up in the church we had children's hymns, but none of the children's hymns ever impressed me. He said, The hymn that impressed me the most in my childhood was one that very few people would ever think of as being within the kin of the child.

But he said, I have a suspicion that we have deeply underestimated the power of the imagination of a child. He said, You know, the hymn that impressed me was that Wesley hymn, Arise, my soul, arise, shake off thy guilty fears, the bleeding sacrifice on my behalf appears. Before the throne my surety stands, before the throne my surety stands, my name is written on his hands.

And he said, You know, I wondered how that could be, my name written on his hands. I knew my guilt, I knew my sin, I knew my need, and I wondered what hope there was for me. And then I read that my name was written on his hands.

I wondered if my name in my childish imagination, I wondered if my name could be tattooed on the hand of Jesus. Isn't that beautiful? And then he said, When I heard that next verse, five bleeding wounds he bears, received on Calvary, they pour effectual prayers, they strongly plead for me. Forgive him, O forgive, they cry, nor let that ransomed sinner die.

And he knew it was in the marks on those pierced hands lifted to the Father that pled for him and for his redemption. Now, we wait, we wait in hope because of the one in whom we trust. Now what's the character of the expectation? Do you notice what he says? My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning.

I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Have you ever watched for the morning? The darkness of the night about you? The pain or whatever it was that troubled you, the agony that was yours? One of the advantages of getting older is that you find that things are not nearly as bad in the daylight as they are in the darkness. And you learn when you get those insuperable problems that you think can never be solved at two o'clock in the morning, you learn to put them aside and cut off your mental processes and wait until the sun shining bright, and then they're not nearly as big as Mount Everest, their controllable size is normally.

But how do you wait for the morning? You normally wait with a remarkable amount of expectancy. Did you ever have a night that didn't end? There's something marvelously consistent about the coming of the sunrise, and if you'll keep your eyes to the east, it won't be too long until that light comes, because the sun always comes. And that's what he is, that sun of righteousness.

We wait, we wait in anticipation, joyous expectation for him to look and say, they are gone, they are forgiven, you are restored. At this point there is an interesting change in the psalm. Up to this point it has all been first-person, and suddenly the psalmist shifts, and he says, Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.

Now, there are many scholars who believe that this psalm was originally what is called a corporate psalm. It was a psalm like a communion prayer, a prayer at sacred communion, the prayer of confession, where we pray not for an individual, but we pray representing the entire body of believers to acknowledge our need before our Redeemer. And so many feel that this was a corporate psalm, an expression for Israel, to Israel's God.

I don't believe that, and the reason I don't believe that is because of this. I do not believe that forgiveness comes corporately. When forgiveness comes, it comes in the loneliness and in the separateness of a broken sinner on his face before his God, pleading not for anything for anybody else, but pleading only for himself, that God in his infinite mercy will have mercy upon him.

That's the way forgiveness comes. Isn't that the way it came to you? Isn't that the way it always comes? But why this corporate word now? Because I'll tell you something. If God ever comes and speaks forgiveness to you, there is no way that you can keep it to yourself.

The minute that peace and freedom and deliverance comes, there is something within you that wants to go out and put your arms around the world and say, Let Israel, yes, let all the world hope in the Lord, for with him there is mercy and with him is plenteous redemption. I was standing in the Student Union building at Duke University. The son of a Methodist bishop was talking with me.

He had grown up in Brazil, born in a home with a dirt floor. Every member of his family except himself was a missionary back in Brazil. He never had any intentions of being a missionary.

When he came to this country, he came to get his education and become a concert pianist. He had a stint in the military, and he had come back. After he came back from the military, he was living in an apartment at Emory University in Atlanta.

He said, You know, I said my prayers every night. My wife was a graduate of one of our Methodist church-related schools, and she had a degree in religious education, and so we went through our formal prayers every day. But he said, You know, it was very meaningless to me.

I had a brother-in-law who came home. His name was Will Rogers, and he must have had something of the original Will's character about him, because he said everywhere he'd go, just effervescent, bubbling. He said most unexpected things.

If you were riding the streetcars or if you were sitting in a ballgame or if you were buying groceries or if you were on your way to church or if you were fixing your automobile, he said it didn't matter what you were doing, sooner or later he'd look at you and sort of explode and say, Si, isn't it great to be a believer? And he said, You know, that was all right for Sunday morning, but I never heard anybody do that while he was changing an automobile tire. And he said everywhere we'd go, sooner or later, here'd it come, you know, Si, isn't it great to be a believer? He said, You know, I listened to that, and I listened to it, and I listened to it, and I thought, You know, I never thought it was so great to be a believer. Of course, it ought to be, yes, I guess that's right, but it never turned me particularly on.

He said to me, You know, one night, Dennis, he said, I knelt by my bed to say my prayers with my wife, and he said, suddenly it came. I found myself weeping uncontrollably. My wife turned and looked at me and said, Si, what's wrong with you? And he said, I don't know, but he said, it's just begun to come home to me.

He died for me. He died for me. Marsha Lee, isn't it great to be a believer? He said, You know, I jumped up from my bedside, ran across the hall, banged on Will's door, waked him up, and when he came sleepily to the door, I looked at him and said, Will, isn't it great to be a believer? And he said, he stared back at me and said, It sure is, Si, let's get the orange juice and celebrate.

And he said, You know, while we were drinking orange juice to celebrate, there are different ways, aren't there? He said, While we were drinking orange juice, he said, You know, something exploded inside me. I wanted to go down on the streets of Atlanta and get my arms around the last, lostest, neediest soul I could find and embrace him and say, Isn't it great to be a believer? Jesus loves you, too. Now, there's something about it.

When it comes, you can't keep it to yourself. That's the reason that you people in the CNMA can't stay in the United States. No way you hold CNMA people in the United States.

The fifty states aren't big enough for you, and when the grace of God explodes, the whole world is your parish, and there's nothing you can do to keep people from doing it, because it is this. Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption, and he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. You know, I looked at that and I thought, Wait a minute.

He slipped something by me while I wasn't looking. Because do you notice what he said? Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy. Yes, with the Lord Jehovah, God of Israel, there is forgiveness.

But there's more than forgiveness with him, and with him is plenteous redemption. One translation says, hands full of redemption, and he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. And do you know what he's done while we weren't looking? He's moved from the theological subject of justification, he's moved all the way to the theological subject of sanctification.

You know what I think he's saying? He's saying, Let Israel hope in the Lord, because do you know what he's able to do? He's not only able to forgive you, but he says, You know, I've been misreared a number of

times, and do you know there is something in the grace of God that can bring a man to where he doesn't have to tread this path every day? He can get his sins and his iniquities behind him, because our God is the kind of God that can make you triumphant until he comes. Now isn't that priceless? That's the kind of God that we have. Now, you know, somebody will say, at least I assume he will, because I've already said it to the Lord, Lord, this is not the kind of sermon to preach to preachers.

And yet I know preachers, and I know that their days in preachers' lives when they need to walk that path of forgiveness. And do you know, there is no ministry if there's anything wrong with your relationship to God. And it's very easy for men like you, ladies like you who have been out in the thick of the battle to come into a conference like this, areas of defeat, pockets of bitterness, segments of great inner need, a place where we need to start.

As we come into this Bicentennial Council, it may be that we're the people where judgment should begin. For judgment must begin at the house of God with the best people, God's people. After the 1970 revival at Asbury, I was sitting in my office one day, and the phone rang and my secretary said, this is an overseas call, a telephone patch from a missionary overseas, president of one of our great missionary organizations.

And he said, Dennis, we'd like for you to come down and speak to our missionary council for our organization. And so it was worked out, and so I flew down overseas and met with about 200 missionaries. The man who was head of that missionary organization said, we hope you will tell us all about what God did during those days of revival.

So I told some. At the end of the next service he said, we hope you'll tell us all about what God did during those days of outpouring. So I relayed a little more.

At the end of the next service he said, now we hope you'll tell us all about what God did during those days. Well, after he'd done that five times, I'd run out of anything to say about that. And then he said to me, it was about 10 of nine for a nine o'clock in the morning meeting, and I could feel the pathos in him.

He said, Dennis, maybe what we need is an altar rail. He said, you know, we don't use an altar, but maybe God's never going to bless us until we get down on our knees. It was 10 of nine.

You couldn't build an altar before nine o'clock. And I said, well, we'll talk about that after the service. That morning when I got to the end of my message, I felt led to do something that I had not done before.

Once when I was in Korea, I was speaking to a group of social workers, welfare workers. The missionary who set it up told me, he said, Dennis, this is a very crucial time. I thought people who took care of lepers and boys' towns and orphans and widows, these were certainly the salt and the cream of the earth.

And I went with great humility to that group. And I thought I should not be speaking to them, they should be speaking to me. And the missionary said to me, Dennis, it's very easy when you're taking care of the bodies of people to forget about the spiritual.

If we don't have revival among these people, these could be the ones that corrupt our whole church. So I went with a bit of fear and trembling. My interpreter was a magnificent Christian.

After one of the sessions, we had a time of prayer. These Koreans sat on the floor, and when they prayed, they just bowed over their heads to the floor, just sort of globules on the floor like that. And I listened to

their praying in Korean, could understand none of it.

I finally turned to my Korean interpreter and said, John, what are they praying? He looked back at me and shook his head and said, not good. Sounded all right to me. He said, not good.

I said, what do you mean, John? He said, it's first-person plural. That's pretty perceptive for a Korean speaking about English grammar and the human heart. The next night we had a prayer time, and when we did, in the middle of it, I sensed a difference and I turned and punched John and I said, what are they praying? He grinned from ear to ear.

He said, first-person singular. After that session, the missionary said to me, great, we're on the way. And in that meeting with missionaries there, I said it may be that even with missionaries, there's somebody here who needs to pray in the first-person singular.

So we bowed our heads and waited. Suddenly a fellow about six foot three stood up and exploded, wept. He said, oh, God, you know any named, one of the other missionaries who was sitting ten feet from him, call him by name, said, you know what a great guy he is and how one minute I love him and the next minute I can't stomach him.

If you can't do something for me, there's no point in my staying here. I'm going home. And he wept it out.

When he got through praying, that guy was the guy who prayed. I don't know how long that session ran, but I didn't want to be in a position, I was a stranger, an outsider, prolonging it, felt it would be presumptuous. And so when there was a break, I stepped away from the pulpit and sat down.

The president of the mission organization stood up, started to speak, and found himself totally unable, face twitched, wept, moved so deeply he turned with his face to the wall with nothing but his back to us and stood there. And as he did, somebody else started praying, first person, singular. And after a second round of that, the president turned and started to speak again, couldn't, turned his face to the wall.

We looked at his back, and somebody else started in the first person singular. The next day I asked my host, I said, how are the business meetings going? He grinned from ear to ear, he said, great. But he said, you know, if it hadn't been for yesterday morning, I expect we would have been chewing each other's ears off.

Thank you. Thank God. God got us ready to do our work, out of the depths, inner depths, way down where nobody sees.

Have I cried unto thee, O Lord? O Lord, hear my voice. Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

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