

Adam - From Desperation to Hope - Ps 130

Psalms 130 says this, 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.

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. I wait for the Lord. My soul waits, and in his word I hope.

My soul waits for the Lord more than the watchman for the morning. More than the watchman for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord.

For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel. From all his iniquities.

Let's pray together. Father, we come to your word this morning because we desire to hear from you. And the promise that we believe is that when we open your word, that you, God, speak to your people.

By the same spirit who inspired these words, you illuminate them to our hearts. And so, Holy Spirit, come and teach us in not only our minds, but our hearts as well. God, cause us to desire you above all else.

Be our greatest treasure, Lord. That we would not only learn from you, but obey you. That we would not only be hearers of the word only, but doers.

Holy Spirit, come and meet us in the depths. And bring us into life, and hope, and love, and joy in your presence. We ask that you would do that in us now, Lord.

As you have drawn near, Lord, that we would experience your presence in this place. It's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.

Amen. Well, I am absolutely convinced that sunrises are way better than sunsets. No, that's a hot take.

Maybe. Okay, but lately, I've been taking some early morning walks out to like Padero Lane, out by Santa Claus Beach, along the bike path there. And it just happens to be, the timing just happens that I'm walking past the salt marsh, just as the first glimmer of light is coming over the horizon.

And for a few minutes in a sunrise, darkness and light seem to coexist. See, the season of Advent is like this. It's a reminder that light has appeared in our world, that Christ has come, and he has shown us the beauty and the radiance of God in this dark world.

But Advent also invites us to look around and to acknowledge the darkness that still exists, to name the darkness honestly while waiting expectantly for Christ to return and to make all

things new. And so it's in this Advent season that we learn that faith isn't pretending that everything is fine. If faith is learning to live in the tension between God's promises and their fulfillment, between sorrow in this life and joy in God's presence.

The tension between darkness and light. And this is the tension that takes place in the text that we just read. It's a tension between despair and hope.

The psalmist begins, Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. The depths or the deep is a reference to the sea. He's saying, Lord, I'm drowning.

I'm sinking in the waters. I'm sinking in deep mire. The waters are coming up over my head.

And from that place of desperation, God, I'm reaching out for you. I need you. You are my only hope.

And we don't know exactly what caused the desperation in the psalmist's life, but we don't need to. Because we recognize the sound of his desperation in our own prayers when life is hard. See, desperation isn't just circumstantial.

It's not just experiencing difficulty or hardship or suffering alone. Desperation is the emotional response to an inescapable life-altering and potentially life-ending reality. A reality that you cannot fix, that you cannot outrun, you cannot control it.

It's what you feel when you're trapped in a situation that you would never choose, but you cannot escape. It's the marriage that you can't fix. It's the addiction that you can't break.

It's the wayward son or daughter that you can't save. The body that you can't heal. It's that besetting sin that you swore you were done with until it crept back in quietly.

The psalmist calls that place that inescapable life-altering reality that you would never choose for yourself. He calls it the depths and he says, God, I'm drowning. Maybe some of you are feeling that way this morning.

Where do you turn for help when you're experiencing the depths? Where do you turn for rescue? See, it's in that place of darkness and deep desperation that the psalmist does the only thing he knows to do. He cries to God for rescue. He says, oh Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive to my pleas for mercy. That word mercy right there. It tells us more than we might expect.

Aaron last week did a great job of defining mercy. Mercy is not receiving the punishment that you deserve. But there's something else significant about mercy.

See, mercy can only be granted by someone who has the authority to punish you. If someone without authority feels bad for you, that's not mercy, that's pity. Pity is powerless.

But mercy, mercy belongs to the judge. And so the psalmist tells us something important about his cry for help. His desperation is not only circumstantial, it is at least in part also moral.

He's saying, I deserve punishment, but I desire mercy. And he names it in the next stanza. He says, oh Lord, if you should mark iniquities, oh Lord, who could stand? And so we still don't know the particular circumstances surrounding his predicament.

But we do know that it revolves around iniquity. Iniquity is a fun word. It's a Christian word.

It's a biblical word. We come across it in the scriptures all the time. But you know, what does it mean? Is it just sin? Is it something else? Iniquity is moral insufficiency.

It's more than just doing bad things. Iniquity is the inability to do what is good. It's the human condition apart from Christ that makes us unable to live as God intended.

And so the psalmist recognizes that his suffering is a result of a world broken by sin, and that he himself is not exempt from that brokenness, from that iniquity. And there's a harsh reality about our world that we need to understand. I need to be careful here.

I want you to track with me carefully on this, okay? Not all suffering is the result of a specific sin. Not every hardship you experience can be directly tied to a bad decision that you made. And yet all suffering exists because sin is in the world.

All death, all disease, all loss and betrayal and decay flow from a world operating in iniquity. God's good human creation has been so corrupted that we are unable to carry out God's good purposes apart from God's power. And so sometimes we suffer the consequences of our own sin.

And sometimes we suffer from somebody else's sins against us. But always we suffer because the world is not the way it should be. And the psalmist is honest about that.

So people today want to pretend like humanity is mostly good. You know, yeah, I know there's a few bad apples out there. But for the most part, humanity is good.

But the scriptures don't allow us to live in such lies. The apostle Paul in Romans 3 says it this way, None is righteous, no, not one. No one understands, no one seeks for God.

All have turned aside together. They have become worthless. No one does good, not even one.

If you are a Christian and believe in the scriptures as the word of God, you cannot say that humanity is mostly good. This book does not back you up. This honesty about our desperate condition is the first step to hope.

Because the first step toward healing is acknowledging that you're sick. The first step toward rescue from drowning is recognizing that you're drowning. And so if you don't believe you have a problem, you'll never ask for mercy.

You'll only justify and normalize and redefine the thing that is killing you. And this is exactly what our culture does. Our culture normalizes iniquity.

Say, well, I'm only human. You know, nobody's perfect. Everyone's a sinner.

And what this creates is a world that does not treat the truth as a diagnosis, but as an excuse to persist in iniquity. Others will go further. They redefine iniquity.

What God calls destructive, they'll just call being authentic. Just being authentically me. Make no apologies for who I am.

Just being authentic. Just living my truth. What God calls detestable, the world has embraced as good.

And what scripture condemns is celebrated in the streets. And this isn't new. The prophet Isaiah, 700 years before Christ, said it this way.

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil. Who put darkness for light and light for darkness. Who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

What the culture today wants to call progress, the scriptures call iniquity. And the psalmist refuses to do these moral gymnastics. He calls it what it is.

He calls himself guilty. And he brings that guilt to the only one who has the authority, both to condemn him for it and to save him from it. And so the entire psalm turns on this one word, this one beautiful word that is such a beautiful word throughout the scriptures, time and time again.

The whole psalm turns on the word but. But with you, there is forgiveness. That you may be feared.

He says, if God were to count every sin, there is not a single person on the planet who could stand the audit. But God forgives sinners. Behind this psalm is an ancient scene from the book of Exodus.

If you have a Bible, please open it to Exodus chapter 34. If you don't have a Bible, I want to encourage you to bring your Bibles on Sundays to church. If you don't have a Bible, I want to invite you to stop by the connect table outside on your way out.

We would love to give you a Bible so that we as the people of God can be in the word of God day in and day out. Exodus 34 verses 5 through 7. Moses has just asked God to see his glory. And so we pick it up in verse 5. The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there.

And proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord, or literally Yahweh, Yahweh. A God merciful and gracious.

Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Keeping steadfast love for thousands. Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

But by no means clear the guilty. Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children. And the children's children to the third and fourth generation.

See this declaration of God's identity stands behind as a backdrop. Behind this psalm. He is merciful and gracious.

He's slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness to his people. He forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin. But he is holy and will not turn a blind eye to our guilt.

And so this psalm and our lives live inside this tension. And here's something crucial that we have to know. You will only be honest about your sin if you are honest about God.

Because if God is merely permissive, there's no reason to acknowledge your sin. There's no reason to confess. There's no reason to change.

If God just turns a blind eye to all of our immorality and sin, then there's no reason to recognize it yourself. If God is harsh and unforgiving, then it's not safe to recognize it. It's not safe to acknowledge your sin.

It's not safe to confess it. But only a God who is just and merciful invites honesty about the desperation that we are in. Because it's only when we see God truly for who he is that we see the depth of our iniquity.

And it's only when we see God for who he is that we know that we can run to him for mercy. And this is why the psalmist says that God, that he is the one who should be feared. Okay, fear of the Lord.

Countless amounts of ink have been spilt trying to explain away why the word fear doesn't mean fear. Listen, if someone were to ask you today, before today, hey, why should we fear the Lord? How many of you would have responded as the psalmist? Because with the Lord, there is forgiveness. Why should we fear the Lord? Because he forgives.

I've been asked that question countless times. I've never once answered, we should fear the Lord because there is forgiveness. But check this out.

This is beautiful. Consider, what was the psalmist's fear at the beginning of the text? This is desperation. He was drowning in sin and iniquity, fear for the corruption in his life and the corruption in the world.

That was his focus. And then right here, smack in the middle, his fear shifts to God. And he recognizes that the greatest power in this world is not darkness.

It's not despair. It's not sin. The greatest power in this world is God.

And so our desire to please God is a greater concern than the circumstances displeasing us. And our fear of our circumstances shifts because God is greater than our circumstances. There's a picture of this in the gospels.

Do you remember when the disciples were on the boat and it's being tossed to and fro in the storm? And then they cry out to Jesus and they're like, Jesus, don't you even care that we're perishing? And Jesus comes out and he's like, be silent, be still. And then the storm obeys and the wind and the waves and the sea, they stop. Did the disciples jump up and down and celebrate their rescue? No, they hit the deck in fear.

They fell on their faces because they were in the presence of someone whose word was more powerful than nature. They recognized that they were in the presence of someone greater than the storm. And the psalmist, by crying out for deliverance, recognizes that the one who hears his prayer is greater than his sin.

And so he and he alone deserves our reverence, our respect, recognizing that he is both judge and the justifier through Christ, that he is the one. Some of you fear the Lord because you're afraid that if you step out of line, God's going to smite you. But that's not what's happening here.

When we step out of line, we know that our sin won't have the last word because there is someone greater than our sin. The judge who is merciful, God forgives sin. And so in the fear of the Lord, we have hope.

And notice the shift in the psalmist from here on out in the rest of the psalm. Without any change in his circumstance, I challenge you to read it again. Deliverance never comes to the psalmist in this text.

There's no report of how God reached down and pulled him out and set his foot on a firm foundation. Some psalms do record the deliverance that comes, not this one. Without any change in circumstance, without any visible deliverance, he says, I wait for the Lord.

My soul waits and in his word, I hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than the watchman for the morning. More than the watchman for the morning.

He does not arrive at hope when his situation improves. He arrives at hope when he trusts that he is heard by God. He cries out, he's heard.

And so now he waits for God to respond. You recognize that faith to cry out to God, know that you're heard, not know how he's going to answer, but know that however he answers is good and right and just. Knowing that he is merciful and gracious, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

That faith to cry out to God and just say, I've been heard. Now I wait for the Lord. The peace that comes from that, he compares it to the watchman waiting for the morning.

A watchman stood his post at night and when there was no light to defend against enemy threats that would be coming out of the darkness and the watchman did not know what time the sun would rise, but he knew that it would rise. And so he would strain his eyes toward the horizon, waiting for the light. And the psalmist says, that's me now waiting for God.

I'm waiting for my deliverance. I don't know when it will come, but it will come. And see, biblical hope is not wishful thinking.

It's confident expectation rooted in God's faithfulness. God has always been faithful to his promises. He is never going to be unfaithful to you.

You are not going to be the first person God breaks a promise to. Brothers and sisters, this is the tension of the advent season. It's like that sunrise.

Darkness still occupies our world, but the light has come and is coming. And so we wait in hope. And the psalmist stands in that tension, the tension between his circumstances and God's promises.

He's still waiting through his desperate condition, the iniquity in the world and the iniquity in himself. And yet he's confident that the rescue is coming. A rescue that's promised by God in his word.

All of God's people, they knew God's promises to them. And God had promised deliverance from the darkness and from sin and evil all the way back in Genesis 3, verse 15, after sin corrupted the goodness of God's creation. God promised to send a deliverer born of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent.

And so the whole story of the Bible from beginning to end is God's people waiting for that deliverer, waiting for the snake crusher, waiting for the one who would rid this world of sin and death once and for all. And there's many times when it appears that someone might fit that description, but everyone fails. No one does good, not one.

And so God's people continued to wait. And when they least expected it, and in a way that they least expected, the deliverer came, not in power, not in triumph, but as a child, wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. John tells us why this matters in John chapter 1. As the psalmist hopes in God's word, John says, in the beginning was the word.

And the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. And down in verse 14, and the word who was with God and was God became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. See,

the psalmist had hope because of God's promises in God's word. But we have hope because all of God's promises are fulfilled in Christ, in God's incarnate word.

Born as a human being, born to the Virgin Mary, born in desperation and poverty and political oppression, born to live a life apart from iniquity. He was in every way morally sufficient and exceedingly righteous and good and yet born to suffer the torment of human depravity. Born to experience life as we do in every way, yet without sin.

As the hymn says, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth. In other words, born to save. The only way, the only way to hope is to be able to look into the manger and see the face of God and the child wrapped in swaddling cloths.

We have hope because the God who judges and the God who forgives is the God who came. We have hope because the judge entered a world that deserved his judgment and granted mercy to those who believe. We have hope because the one who counts iniquity allowed our iniquity, your iniquity, to be counted against himself.

We have hope because the child in the manger is the God who hung on the cross. This is why our hope is no longer fragile. It's not based in circumstances.

It's not based in what God might do. It's rooted and grounded in the fact that God has come in the flesh. Jesus Christ, the light of the world, has stepped into our darkness and delivered us from death by dying on the cross and raising from the dead.

And hope is alive because Jesus is alive. And he's promised to come again to drive out the darkness once and for all to make all things new. You can get excited about that.

That's gospel right there. And so the psalmist ends by calling others to hope. He says, oh Israel, hope in the Lord for with the Lord there is steadfast love and with him is plentiful redemption and he will redeem Israel from all his sins.

Still no deliverance. Still a watchman. And yet the watchman becomes a witness.

He bears witness. He gives testimony. His focus is shifted from off of his failures and onto God's faithfulness.

And this is enough to fill him with hope. Likewise, those who trust in Christ are not only filled with hope, but we become purveyors of this hope. We become reflections of this hope.

We become people who overflow with hope. And so I want to close with this. I'm not a great photographer, but on my early morning walks, I can't help myself when I see the sun rising above the salt marsh.

I do have a photo. Darkness and light coexisting. But there's something more here.

The colors of the sky reflecting on the water, making this like beautiful symmetry. Between the

heavens above and the earth beneath. And lately I've been reflecting on this as Advent is this recognition of God coming and coming again.

Standing in the tension between darkness and light, between sorrow and joy. And it's been reminding me lately of what we ask for in the Lord's Prayer. Every time we say the Lord's Prayer, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And it reminds me of the beauty and the glory of God reflecting off of the earth. And this is what the church is supposed to be like. This is what the church is supposed to be like as those who are witnesses of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.

We reflect to the world what he is like. And the church is supposed to be this place, not just a geographical place, but a people when we gather together in one place that heaven and earth come together. Because we are the body of Christ, the place where heaven and earth came together.

The Son of God, the Son of Man, one Savior. And as Christ is with us and present among us, we like Moses who came down from the mountain of the Lord and his face shone, we shine the invisible presence of God made visible. And the way that we do that, one of the ways that we do that is in worship.

Even while in darkness, even while in desperation, even while experiencing the tension and the iniquity of our own lives and in the world. Even if we've not experienced yet the answer to our prayers, the deliverance that we desire when we worship, we anticipate the day that we will see Jesus face to face when Christ will make all things new. When those who have trusted in him will never experience darkness or despair again.

We don't know when he will come, but we know that he is coming. And worship trains our eyes to look toward the horizon expectantly. Not in wishful thinking, but in confident assurance that the one who has come is coming again.

We train our eyes to look at the horizon knowing that God is more faithful than a sunrise. And as we live as those kinds of advent people, the presence of God is reflected in the people of God to a world that is desperate for hope. And so as we close in prayer and in worship, let's be that kind of advent people.

Amen. Amen. Father, I recognize that there are people here today who are in desperate situations.

Lord, an inescapable life-altering reality that they cannot escape. And maybe they have looked for hope in all kinds of places. And Lord, today you invite them to cast their cares upon you.

The God who is greater than our circumstances. The God whose grace is greater than our sin. Lord, your power is greater than our brokenness.

And so Lord, I pray that by your spirit, you would bring comfort. That you would bring peace. But Lord, that you would also shift our eyes from only seeing the darkness and give us a glimpse of hope.

Jesus, we believe who you are and what you have done. That you have set us free by your blood. That you've raised from the dead and are coming again.

And in this life, we may have to endure for a little while. But come Lord Jesus. And I pray that as we worship, you would fill this place with your presence.

Lord, as we worship, that we would approach you expectant. That we will experience you in this place. Lord, we love you.

And I ask that you would continue to have your way among us as we worship together. In Jesus' name, amen.