

January 3, 2021

“Out of the Depths”  
Psalm 130

FCF: The question of forgiveness

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) God has provided the cure for our guilt and shame.  
(magnet) And it is through His forgiveness.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

The start of a new year is an opportunity to look back. The pundits have put together the lists - stories in the world of sports, entertainment, technology, politics, and COVID-19. All of which is interesting but little of which is enlightening. It's mostly information without wisdom.

What we need is an audit for last year. That is, an examination of our personal decisions and choices. We need to ask questions. “How did that go? What impact did it have on others?” The prompting of such questions often brings regret. Which raises the question of forgiveness.

Where we blew it, can we be forgiven? Most especially, can we be forgiven by God?

**SCRIPTURE READING:** Psalm 130**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Let's consider our approach to guilt and shame. There are two camps here. The relativist explicitly denies that such things are real. There is no standard to be violated so feelings of guilt and shame are just that - simply feelings to be processed and put away. That's the relativist.

The religious person does not explicitly deny these things. He does it functionally. Such a person is unwilling to admit guilt or shame because that is too threatening to own. Too much is at stake. Their standing before God depends upon merits so they can't consider falling short.

The Bible makes clear both the relativist and religious person are wrong. We all struggle with guilt, with feeling bad about what we've done. We all struggle with shame, with feeling bad about who we are. Both are real. And deep down we know this. Perhaps you've heard the story told of Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes. He was bored and so, wanting to have a little fun, he sent a note to six or so of his “respectable” friends with the same message to each one, “All is discovered; flee at once.” As the story goes, two or three of them left the country immediately. One was never heard from again. Our guilt and our shame are real.

The good news we discover in Psalm 130 is that there is a way out. God has provided the cure for our guilt and our shame. And it is through His forgiveness. There are three things we learn about this forgiveness in our text. First, the real need. Second, the sole means. And third, the right response. The need, the means, and the response. This is the lifeline thrown our way.

**I. THE REAL NEED**

First, the real need of forgiveness. The key here are the “depths” this cry comes from.

*A) His Distress*

## 1. Danger

This is a cry of great distress. These are the depths of the ocean, an image of chaos and danger.

2. Desperate

There is no pretending. The psalmist is overwhelmed. And desperate (**READ Psalm 130:1-2**).

*B) The Cause*

1. His sin

What is the cause of such a cry? (**READ Psalm 130:3**) He is weighed down by his iniquities, his sin, his spurning of God's commands in some way, and the guilt that he carries because of this.

2. God's holiness

He is aware of this, owning it. And he knows that he on a head-on collision with God's holiness. The justice of the Lord is a perfect justice. He is owed love and service. He has been denied what He is owed. And in His courtroom, the psalmist has no defense. Nor do any one of us.

Whatever else we may feel, we need to face this. That's where forgiveness starts.

*Application:*

We need to face this. We need to resist the pull to distract ourselves from the reality of this collision. And there are so many ways we are pulled - social media, news feeds, vacations, hobbies, games. So many ways. Just a little more sleep, sex, booze, or pills. Anything to numb and to distract ourselves, to hide from what we need to see, to know, to own, and to confess.

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**II. THE SOLE MEANS**

Which brings us to the sole means of this forgiveness - God's mercy, His great kindness.

*A) God's Forgiveness*

1. A debt incurred

(**READ Psalm 130:1-4**) How is this mercy seen? First, in God's forgiveness. A debt has been incurred. Jesus uses this image in His parables. God is owed but denied our trust and obedience.

2. A debt absorbed

So a debt has been incurred. And that debt, in His mercy, is then absorbed. It is cancelled. We no longer have to pay. But it is still costly. The cancelling of this debt is expensive to the king.

*B) God's Redemption*

So how can it be written off? (**READ Psalm 130:7-8**) This mercy also brings redemption.

1. A ransom paid

That involves a ransom, a price paid that the prisoner, the slave, might be set free. And it was paid through the life and death of Jesus, our Redeemer. In Him there is "plenteous redemption".

2. A love steadfast

There is a ransom paid through a love steadfast. It is all born of the Lord's heart for us, His dear people. Which is why we are to hope in the Lord. For His steadfast love moves Him to redeem.

Forgiveness is possible. But only and exclusively by the sole means of God's mercy.

*Application:*

This invitation is real. Just as real as our sin, yours and mine. This forgiveness is ours to embrace and take into our lives. But is not something for which we can work, labor, and strive. That's not how it comes. It's like when you get the news from the guy at the gas station on that crazy road trip, "Sorry, friend. You can't get there from here." This comes by God's mercy.

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### III. THE RIGHT RESPONSE

Which brings us to the third point. What is the right response to such mercy? (**READ Psalm 130:3-4**) The fear of the Lord - not terror but a deep reverence, honor, and adoration. Something has to be weightiest in our lives, to be central. And that needs to be the Lord himself.

#### A) *Looking to God*

How is this to be worked out and applied? In two ways. First, in looking to God.

##### 1. Patiently

(**READ Psalm 130:5-6**) Watchmen wait. They wait with yearning for the new day to come.

##### 2. Expectantly

They wait with patience and expectancy. They long for it and are assured of its coming.

#### B) *Speaking of God*

So we respond by looking to God. And also speaking of Him (**READ Psalm 130:7-8**).

##### 1. The experience

The psalmist has experienced the mercy of God and is daily relying upon that mercy in his life.

##### 2. The overflow

And from that experience, he then calls out to those around him to lay hold of it themselves. He cannot do otherwise. The mercy of God has so gripped his heart that it overflows from his lips.

Looking and speaking - that's how the fear of God flows from the forgiveness of God.

#### *Application:*

What are we seeing here? This is truly a relational dynamic, the psalmist reflecting upon and responding to the Lord's work, this mercy in his life. Christianity is not a primitive religion in which we perform this ritual or carry out this task to appease our god and put him in our debt to then give us what we are due. Sadly, many of us act that way. But, no, Christianity is not a primitive religion. It is deeply personal. It is relational. We engage with the Lord and His care.

For He has provided the cure for our guilt and shame. And it is through His forgiveness.

### CONCLUSION:

Several commentators note that Psalm 130 reads like a climb. We start out in the depths. Then comes the rope and an ascent. It's a rescue story. Think of the Christmas movies that stand the test of time. That rules out the Hallmark Channel. Think of *It's a Wonderful Life* - the people of Bedford Falls come together to save poor George Bailey. Or *Home Alone* - Old Man Marley arriving just as the Wet Bandits have caught young Kevin. Or even *Die Hard* - John McClane's

struggle to rescue the hostages from a group of terrorists on Christmas Eve. What makes these stories work? The dramatic build up of the great need, a dire situation, and the help that comes.

They are stories of a climb. Of course, the rescue really only comes because of who holds the other end of the rope. Think about it. Psalm 130 is such a story, a story of our rescue.

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