

Text: Psalm 130
Theme: On Our Way Up!
Date: December 9, 2007 (Advent 2)

In the Name of Jesus, Friend of sinners, Dear Christian Friends,

The message of Psalm 130 has been especially comforting to me for many years because it helps me take my sins to the Lord and assures me of his complete and free forgiveness. What better comfort can there be? As we grow in our understanding of this particular Psalm we notice that it is among the "Psalm of Ascent." Some think that these kinds of Psalms were sung as people went up to Jerusalem, which was situated on a hill. In elevation the people went up. Some think these psalms were intended for the priests as they ascended the fifteen steps into the Lord's temple. And some think that these psalms were called songs of ascents because they lifted the spirit of God's people. While the specific understanding the psalms of ascent may not be answer this side of heaven, the message from our God found in this psalm of ascent certainly lifts the spirits of his people. This is a pick-me-up Psalm. It is an on-our-way up psalm. And so for that reason our sermon theme today is just that, **On Our Way Up!** The comfort of God's Word picks us 1) Up out of the depths of sin, it takes us 2) Up to the altar of God's forgiveness, and it leads us 3) Up the mountain of hope.

1. Up out of the depths of sin

OUT OF THE DEPTHS I CRY TO YOU, O LORD; O LORD, HEAR MY VOICE. LET YOUR EARS BE ATTENTIVE TO MY CRY FOR MERCY. IF YOU, O LORD, KEPT A RECORD OF SINS, O LORD, WHO COULD STAND? Sin brings our soul and our spirit down. It crushes us with guilt. It overwhelms us the threat of punishment. Maybe one of the easiest ways to see this is in our children. When a child has done something wrong, usually he cannot hide his guilt. He goes to his room and shuts the door. He walks about with a sad look on his face. He may even lose his appetite and not want to eat. But it's not just in our children that we see how sin brings us down. As adults, we've learned to hide those feelings from others and mask our emotions. We greet our family with the same cheery "*good morning*," even though we are anything but smiles in our heart. We put on an act and pretend the sun is shining, when it's really raining on the inside. This is not healthy for us. It would be better for us to find a friend and tell him (or her) our sin. It is better still when we go to our Friend in Heaven and pour out our troubled souls to him. That is what the Psalmist is teaching us to do in our text.

What kinds of sins can bring us down to the depths? Sometimes, it is a single sin. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then murdered her husband, Uriah, to cover up the sin, this is how he felt. "*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*" David even felt lousy physically as long as he kept silent and did not confess his sin. He literally felt it in his bones. Sin had put him in a hole so deep that he couldn't climb out. Maybe you've experienced that kind of guilt in your life. Maybe the wounds of that sin haven't yet healed. And maybe the wounds are very, very fresh. If so, I am glad you are here today, because God's Word in our psalm was written to lift you up from the depths of your sin and bringing you to see and know God's forgiveness for you.

Sometimes it is one big, whopper of a sin that puts us down into that pit. At other times, it may be a sin that has become a habit in our lives. We call them "pet" sins - but that is probably not a good name. Such a name makes it sound as if some sins are relatively harmless, when they are not. Pet sins tend to sap us of our spiritual strength. They bring us down a little farther each day, because those pet sins want to become our god. Maybe we should call them serpentine sins, because it feels like the devil has wrapped himself around us with them. Or maybe we should call prison sins, because these sins that we struggle with on a day to day basis can make us feel as if we've been locked behind bars and we can't escape.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS I CRY TO YOU, O LORD. O LORD, HEAR MY VOICE. It's not evident in English, but the names LORD and Lord are different in Hebrew. In this passage the name LORD (spelled with all caps) is that very special name from the Old Testament that emphasizes God's faithful love for sinners. When we are caught in one of those serpentine sins, we need to know that God has not abandoned us. We need to know that God's forgiveness is there for us today, and will be tomorrow again. We need to know that God is faithful. He never grows tired of lending us his ear and listening to our confessions! We need to know that because God is faithful to his promises, he will deliver us from this sin that has wrapped itself around our life.

Or maybe the psalmist is just talking about all those little sins that don't seem so terrible, but they just keep piling up. **IF YOU, O LORD, KEPT A RECORD OF SINS, O LORD, WHO COULD STAND?** How fast our sins count up each day! We get angry, and an angry word leaves our mouth {5th / 2nd}. We see our neighbor's new truck and wish we could afford that (9th). We think to ourselves, "*Yeah, if I cheated in business like he did, I could afford that truck!*" (7th). In the midst of our busy life we found no time for prayer. No Bible reading, either. (2nd/3rd). A new co-work sure knows how to dress (6th). What if God kept a record of all those sins we do without even thinking? Who could stand? I couldn't. Neither could you. Only God doesn't keep count, does he? He does just the opposite. He forgives us and remembers our sins no more. When we hear this words from the Psalmist we are on our way up. We're up out of the depths of sin and we're up on our way the altar of God's forgiveness.

2. Up to the altar of God's forgiveness

I can understand how there may be several reasons these psalms are called songs of ascent. The Israelites went up to Jerusalem to go to the temple, where in their sacred feasts and sacrifices they were reminded of God's forgiveness. When the priest went up the steps into

the temple, he went there to approach God on behalf of the people, and to bring their sins to God's altar for forgiveness. And isn't that, the promise of God's forgiveness, the only thing that can bring us up out of the depths of our sins?

The Psalmist writes: **BUT WITH YOU THERE IS FORGIVENESS; THEREFORE YOU ARE FEARED.** With the Lord there is forgiveness, not record keeping. We don't always do very well at forgiving each other. When we get into an argument with our spouse, we end up bringing out our big list. "Remember last week, when you came home from work, do you remember what you said?" Well, our spouse can't remember, but we can quote him, or her, verbatim. We know exactly what was said. We do a good job of holding onto our grudges and remembering the wrongs that people have done against us.

But this is not how God forgives us! He forgives us completely! He doesn't put them on a big pile and hold them over our head. He will not drag them up on the last day. The prophet Jeremiah quotes God, who says, "*I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*" God forgives us so completely, that he even puts our sins out of his mind. Then why does the Psalmist say, **THEREFORE YOU ARE FEARED?** We almost always think of fear in a negative way, but in the Hebrew it could be positive or negative. For example, what if a bride is crying on her wedding day? It's probably because she's so happy. But if her groom hasn't shown up, her tears are for a whole different reason. If God held out sins against us and did not forgive them, then we would fear him in a terrified sort of way. But when we realize that he forgives us completely, that he doesn't hold our terrible sins against us, that he doesn't let all our sins pile up on our record, we think, "Wow, what a wonderful God we have!" We hold him in great awe. We revere him. That's what it means to "fear him" in a positive way.

Dear friends, can you stand in awe of God's forgiveness for just a moment? I want you to think of that terrible sin you committed, the one you often think of when you are in the pit. Now I want you to think of the sin that you struggle with the most, that serpentine sin that has entwined itself into your life. Now I want you to think of all the hundreds of little sins that you commit every day. Can you hold them in your memory for a moment? Now forget them. Throw them away. Because that's what God has done with them in Christ. What an awesome God we have for the Psalmist writes: **BUT WITH YOU THERE IS FORGIVENESS; THEREFORE YOU ARE FEARED.** Our Psalmist leads us up a little further this morning.

3. Up the mountain of hope

I WAIT FOR THE LORD, MY SOUL WAITS, AND IN HIS WORD I PUT MY HOPE. MY SOUL WAITS FOR THE LORD MORE THAN WATCHMEN WAIT FOR THE MORNING, MORE THAN WATCHMEN WAIT FOR THE MORNING. O ISRAEL, PUT YOUR HOPE IN THE LORD, FOR WITH THE LORD IS UNFAILING LOVE AND WITH HIM IS FULL REDEMPTION. HE HIMSELF WILL REDEEM ISRAEL FROM ALL THEIR SINS. The psalmist uses the word "wait" four times. But this is not the kind of waiting that you do outside the dentist office when you have to have a cavity filled. It's not waiting for something that you hope won't come, but instead it's waiting for something that you hope will come. It's the kind of waiting children do when they see the presents under the tree and have to wait for Christmas before they can open them. The Psalmist says, **MORE THAN WATCHMEN WAIT FOR THE MORNING.** Imagine yourself in the ancient city of Jerusalem. There is a wall around the city, and the wall is thick enough so that watchmen can walk around the city without coming to the ground. The night was always the most dangerous times. During the day, the gates were kept open, and the enemy could be seen at a distance. But during the night, the enemy could approach unseen. So the watchmen stood guard carefully. They kept alert and awake. They kept their weapons at ready. And they waited for the morning, because with the coming of the day, they were safe.

MY SOUL WAITS FOR THE LORD MORE THAN WATCHMEN WAIT FOR THE MORNING. We are waiting for that day when Jesus will come again, and this fearful night of watching in this sinful world, this constant being on our guard, will be over. Won't that be wonderful? When Jesus comes, it will be so much more than just our bodies that will be renewed and restored. We will be renewed and restored from the inside out. That terrible sin we committed? It will never come up in our memory again to haunt us. That serpentine sin that is so deeply tangled in our life? That will be rooted out and gone and will never bother us again. And those little sins that pile up? They won't pile up anymore. That, dear friends, is what we hope for. That's what our souls are waiting for.

And all this is purely out of God's grace and mercy. **O ISRAEL, PUT YOUR HOPE IN THE LORD, FOR WITH THE LORD IS UNFAILING LOVE AND WITH HIM IS FULL REDEMPTION. HE HIMSELF WILL REDEEM ISRAEL FROM ALL THEIR SINS.** The Psalmist says that the Lord will accomplish this himself. God doesn't just give us a "chance" to be saved. God doesn't strike a bargain with us, and say, "I'll meet you half way. You do this, and then I will do this." God's covenant of grace with us is one sided. God himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. With him is full redemption. As I looked at these words, I couldn't help thinking of what Jesus said on the cross. "It is finished." There it is; the meaning of this verse. The Lord himself came to redeem us from our sins. He came to bring us full redemption, so that nothing would be left for us to do, or fail to do. Because if God had given me something to do for my salvation, I would surely fail, and then there could be no hope, no waiting in a good way for Jesus to come. But because it is all done, all finished, my soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Dear friends, I recommend that you memorize this Psalm for all those days when you feel like you are down in the depths of sins and need a lift. We've made that journey today, from the depths of sin, to the altar of God's forgiveness, to the mountain of hope. Don't be afraid to make that journey every day! Amen