

# From the Depths

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please be seated. And just for a few moments, we're going to look back at the psalm on page 518 if you've got the Bible, and it's part of our theme of summer psalms, or just individually looking at no particular order, no particular choices that we're making.

We're just looking at some of the different psalms from the Old Testament. Now scanning around this evening, I'm hoping that there wasn't probably not that many here this evening.

In fact, I can maybe count in one or two hands who were in church the last time I preached from the psalm, which is good, I'm glad. But the last time I preached from the psalm, I called it, Singing the Blues.

And that was a good title. And this evening we called it From the Depths, because it's the same theme that comes through. And the great thing about this psalm, or psalms like this, are they experiential.

They speak into our personal experience. They help us to verbalize and understand and quantify the battles and the struggles of faith and their soul songs.

[ 1 : 19 ] That's what they are. And that's really great. We need more of that in our lives. We need more soul singing and more understanding of the expressions that sometimes we might be fearful of verbalizing, or I don't think it's legitimate for us to do so before God.

And the psalms are great for that, because they allow our doubts and our unspoken fears and our failures that very much if you're a Christian, mark your Christian life.

Then it certainly marked my Christian life. And it allows us to take these experiences and it reminds us of what we're to do with them as we take them to the living God and express them and speak His own truth back to Himself and to us.

And that's why I think it's very important that we continue to understand psalms and sing them and use them, because praise must also embrace our tears.

They must embrace the sadness that we go through in life. I think the singing of hymns and spiritual songs for us provide a balance sometimes.

[ 2 : 42 ] But what they don't do or seldom do, or maybe are doing a little bit more now than they certainly didn't used to, is they found a lot of hymns find it difficult to express deep failure and deep doubt and deep sin.

And the psalms are great for that. And we can often be slow in expressing pain, the soul can sometimes be missing from our praise.

We think praise always needs to be happy, but praise can be incredibly painfully tearful and repentant. And you see that soul, you see that soul in African American music, gospel, rhythm and jazz.

And often the greatest songs often express not happy experiences, but suffering and loss and guilt and failure.

We see a lot in traditional Scottish songs, Massacre of Glencoe. Loch Lomond will dance round the dance floor at a wedding and sing Loch Lomond.

[ 3 : 58 ] It's not a happy song. It's a song of sorrow and loss and unrequited love. And there's tremendous pathos in song in these ways.

And it's important for us to express in song and learn from the psalms how to express our own guilt and our own failure and our own need of Christ.

It's as much worship as exaltation and praise and it binds us together. I've said this often here, nothing original, but you know how powerful singing can be at a funeral.

Sometimes the most powerful sense of emotion and unity and togetherness will be a time of great sorrow if you can actually manage to sing through the emotion of the event.

There's amazing power and amazing healing actually in that. And these psalms are great. They're Monday morning psalms.

[ 5 : 07 ] They're psalms for the life that we go into week to week. They speak into our suffering and particularly here the psalms speaks into a sense of guilt and sin.

And repentance, often too rare I think in our spiritual experience. We may be underestimate the value and the significance and the healing from a life of repentance constantly coming back.

With His light, as His light shines and His truth shines, you know, could you read that passage that we read in Colossians without a sense of inadequacy and repentance?

At the lack of love and compassion and forgiveness that we often show in our lives and we call out to the living God who receives our pleas and forgives us.

But this is, as it says, it's a...well, it doesn't...it says it's a song of a sense, but it's generally regarded also as one of the seven penitential psalms, one of the psalms that particularly express individual sense of need, forgiveness and repentance.

[ 6 : 23 ] And it's very important. It's regarded as a psalm that reaches into the very core, the very foundation of our faith and our relationship with God. If you look at a psalm like this, if I look at a psalm like this and we can't empathize with the spiritual expressions that come in, if we can't see and associate with them, then we should question our relationship, what our relationship with God is like and why there isn't this element in it and maybe it will cause us to again consider where we are with God and what He looks for in our relationship with Him.

But as it says in its own introduction, it is also one of the songs of a sense. So it's one...we looked at these psalms before, psalms for the journey, psalms that would be sung by the people of Israel as they went up to one of the three festivals of the year in Jerusalem on their journeys.

They would sing. It's a great thing to sing on a journey. You remember it in the car, all the kids in the back singing, wheels of the bus. And we sing and we sing on a journey. It passes the time and they use these songs to learn more about their God, learn more about the history of their God and the history of their people as they went up to celebrate, as they went up to festival.

But it's different from the other songs of a sense. It's intensely personal. Most of the other songs are very corporate, very collegiate, but this is an intensely personal psalm which is great because it reminds us that even in the Old Testament there was this real personal element to a relationship with God.

It wasn't simply a corporate faith of a people, but there was this intensely personal reality as part of the Old Testament worship.

[ 8 : 29 ] And as they near Jerusalem and as they worship together, there was this reminder of their own personal responsibility before the living God, of their own need for Him, their own need for forgiveness and grace and mercy.

And we don't know the experience behind this psalm when it was written, and that's kind of good because it gives a generic value for people of faith through the centuries.

But it does reflect an intense personal relationship between the individual believer and his living God.

It's tremendous at that level. It's like there's... Okay, there are a journey. There's lots of people around them, but as they read this or think this or sing this psalm, it's like there's nobody else in the world.

It's you and your God. And that's how it needs to be often in our lives, doesn't matter where we are, who we are, it's between you.

[ 9 : 41 ] You need to eyeball to eyeball with the living God, the reality of that relationship which I'm so out of the way of preaching twice on a Sunday that you'll find I'll be repeating what I said this morning, and they'll be overlaps because I'm failed and fallen.

But interestingly, there's also the great fusion of truth that I didn't realize I would be doing the verse tomorrow, and I didn't plan to... for it to dovetail with this psalm this evening.

But it's very similar to what we were talking about this morning in terms of that individual, personal, silent relationship with God where we spend time in this company.

Christ is here bearing His soul, and aren't we grateful for that? Aren't we grateful for the real testament greats and the new testament greats who actually bore their soul and who expressed guilt often David?

Aren't we grateful for David and grateful for Paul for the way that they exposed their souls, this intensely personal reality before the kingdom and the world of believers right through the centuries for our benefit that God, the Spirit, allowed that to be the case.

[ 11 : 05 ] And the psalmist here bears His soul, and it's a privilege for us to read that because it matters. It matters because we're giving access into the individual holy of holies in that relationship with God that should reflect our own individual walk with the living God.

And so we find here that the psalmist says, 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 plea, please, for mercy.

That's all that matters to the psalmist, that God hears them. Hear me, O Lord, be attentive. Listen. God, I need you to listen to hear what is going on.

I'm not interested in the other people on the journey. I'm not interested in the other people around me. It's that famous, it's that famous inscription of David to God that, against you, you only have a sinned.

And it's that recognition that it is to God that we are accountable and it's to God that we speak. And so the best church relationship won't do it for you. The best book that you read won't do it for you.

[ 12 : 15 ] It's the spiritual disciplines of you and I being in God's presence, praying out our soul to Him and God Himself, hearing our voice and us pleading that this God hears us.

There's a boldness, there's a desperation, there's an absolute living reality about what He's saying. And He's saying, O Lord, hear my voice.

Hear the voice of my pleas. You know, that's a very powerful thing. He's desperately longing for God's attention. Lord, can you sense the tone that I'm speaking to you with, the inflection, the intonation behind the pleas?

Can you hear my voice? You know, our voice expresses so much of the seriousness or the depth of what we're saying and He wants God to hear His voice, the cry.

And the cry behind the cry, it's great. So legitimizing for us an encouraging vulnerability and soul expression and doing it individually but as part of the community, saying this is how we should be as a community, as individuals before God and we should recognize that that is part of who we are in our corporate faith.

[ 13 : 34 ] Similarly we have this relationship with soul expression, it's the reality of vulnerability. God is no real time for stolicism and for the stiff upper lip and for the constant sense of, yeah, everything's okay with me, I'm going fine.

He wants and He encourages throughout His Word that great sense of vulnerability, that great sense of openness before Him. And that should be part of, that should be reflected in the believing community.

So it's this great intensely personal cry to the living God which should mark our own relationship with God, should be intensely personal.

Should be things you will say with God and to God that nobody else in the universe would hear you have that relationship with Him because He knows everything. He understands that He knows exactly where we're coming from.

It's heart-rending this particular Psalm, out of the depths I cry to you Lord. This is someone who's often said that here the depths for the Jewish believer was a place of real, the depths of water.

[ 14 : 47 ] It was a place of danger and separation and chaos and fear, a bad place. And He's really using it as an illustration of a place of spiritual darkness and foreboding.

Now we know that life can plunge us into many depths, whether it be illness, maybe somewhere facing that this evening or poverty or depression. But this is distinctly spiritual.

This is about the condition of the Samist's heart. I don't think it's about an outward circumstance or a physical ailment or anything like that.

It's more about someone who's come to recognise their position before the living God, their sinners, before the living God. If you, O Lord, should mark iniquity, O Lord, who could stand?

And that's a very important part of the life of faith that we're encouraged to have. Is to deal with the depths of our own heart and to recognise how unworthy we are before the living God, how far short we fall of His glory.

[ 16 : 00 ] And that's very important. I'll come to that in a minute. Because if we are faced with guilt or faithlessness, we open God's Word and maybe you read Colossians this evening and you thought, or some other part of Scripture.

And you acknowledge, I'm very far from the living God. I'm very far from His standards. I'm very far from His love. And I don't love other people even minutely like He calls me to.

And if there's that sense of guilt and faithlessness, we can run from that. We can smother it. We can simply close our Bibles and say, wow, I'm as good as the next person.

And if that's how we respond to the conviction that God's Word brings into our hearts, we'll never know His healing, His closeness and growth. We'll never know that transformation we were speaking about this morning, because it all involves that.

It involves the intensity of a personal relationship with a God who's transforming and renewing us. It's about recognizing we're redeemed and forgiven forensically that we stand innocent before the living God, as far as our guilt is concerned, but that He is doing a transformative work within us.

[17:19] And He calls us to a life of repentance. It's unpopular and it's not mentioned enough today, but it's a great way to live that He calls us to, C.S. Lewis puts it very well, paradoxically, not paradoxically, he puts it well, but he puts the reality of this well, which is a paradox.

When a man is getting better, when a person is getting better, he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less.

That's a great... That didn't be a clear trajectory. Many times in my life when I'm getting worse and I simply don't understand my badness and I understand it less and less.

But there are other times when I'm more aware of his light shining into the darkness and the cleansing and the renewal and the transformation that he brings.

That is paradoxical, but it's a beautiful paradox. Deep places beget deep devotion. Spurgeon cites James Vaughan and I'm sorry, I don't actually know who James Vaughan is, but I'm sure he was a good man if Spurgeon's quoting him.

[18:43] But he says, everyone who prays, everyone prays sorry, but very few cry and he speaks about this verse, but those who do cry to God, the majority would say, I owe it to the debts, I learned it there.

And that's a great truth for us that there speaks people who get it. I think legalists and moralists who fail, they just run away.

They run away because their God is too small to forgive them. Their God is harsh and demanding. They've never understood grace. But even if you've done something that overwhelms you with guilt and despair, as you cry out to the Lord for mercy, you will come from that and say, I owe it to these debts.

I see the breadth and the height and the length and the depth of His grace and His mercy because it's subsumed, it's overcome my guilt and it's redeemed and forgiven me.

And that is a wonderful experience to know the mercy of God. So it's a heart-rending cry that we have here in the Psalm, and it's also the kind of clashing and embracing of two worlds that are, they don't often clash today in our experience.

[20:08] First is unquestionable guilt, and the second is unimaginable redemption. These two beautiful things come together, and it's the embracing of two worlds in many ways.

Unquestionable guilt, if you, oh Lord, should mark iniquity, who can stand? It's this reality that if God was to keep watch over the wrong things we do and say, we would have absolutely no opportunity of standing.

There's unquestionable guilt, there's no hope. As we come to God's Word, as we see how He reveals Himself, the depth of His love, the depth of His commitment to us, the depth of His character, His otherness, His purity, His justice, His generosity, and our accountability we see and we understand our own ugliness spiritually, the darkness of our motives and of our heart, the selfishness and the lovelessness of Him and the lovelessness of one another.

And it's searching, and it's unseen. We can be the nicest people, and we can comparatively be better than most people.

But this is, as we compare ourselves to the character of a pure, infinite, holy, perfectly just, perfectly loving God.

[21:39] I can't even put them into words, and I don't know, none of us know the purity and glory of His perfection.

But we do sense times when we recognize our own guilt before the Holy God, the judge of all the earth, before Him we will stand, and it evokes a weighty cry.

And I think that weighty cry is missing from a lot of our Christian living, that cry of who can stand? Who can stand before this God? I think often we think, meh, I can probably stand. I can probably walk before Him. I'm not so bad.

And we don't truly appreciate that it took the sovereign, infinite, triune God to become flesh, to enter the womb of Mary, to live for thirty years in perfection, and to be nailed to a brutal cross in the face of a wrath of hell.

[ 22 : 48 ] The only way that we could be redeemed, it took that much? He didn't just write a check? He didn't just wave His fingers on His hand from heaven? See, it's okay, you're forgiven.

It took this Holy God to walk in this ugly world and to die and to no resurrection. So there's unquestionable guilt that's spoken of here.

Who can stand before Him? But then there's this great truth of forgiveness. But with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared or worshiped. It's an unimaginable mercy of God.

That's the great beauty of the gospel. It's the great recognition that we have that Jesus Christ takes the price and He offers us His mercy, offers us a return to relationship with Him.

As we saw this morning, it doesn't just affect our lives here, but it affects our eternal destination and the future provision that He's made for us. And that's the reality of enjoying and experiencing mercy, which transforms how you speak to your colleagues tomorrow.

[ 23 : 56 ] It's going to transform how you speak or think about when your car breaks down on the A9. It's going to transform when you get news about terminal illness.

It's going to transform when you let someone you love down badly and cheat on them. It's going to transform how you respond and how you deal with that because of recipients of mercy.

Recipients of mercy. And that transforms how we deal not only with life, but with one another. As we say, to the children. So only as we understand them, what should we have been forgiven?

Do we look at people in a different light? If you're looking down on people, if you can't be bothered with people, if you judge people, it's because we don't understand our own hearts.

That's why when we're taking the place of God and we take that place of judgment, it's because we've never understood our own hearts. And the new reality for us as we experience that mercy is the willingness to wait on the Lord.

[ 25 : 00 ] Five times, He goes on to say, and speak to His own soul. It's a great thing to do. If you're not listening to broadcasts and if you're in silence, you're allowed to speak to your own soul.

That's a great thing to do. If you weren't here this morning, you don't know what I'm talking about. But take that time of silence and speak to your own soul. It's great. The Psalms are always speaking to themselves.

Speak to your own soul, speak into it and encourage your soul to wait on the Lord in that obedient relationship because it speaks about this picture of the more than the watchman, wait for morning. And it's repeated for emphasis, a recognition that there's darkness. We go through darkness. The darkness of the night can be a rotten time. If you can't sleep at night, for whatever reason, the morning can sometimes feel a long way away.

And the night can seem very long, but the morning comes. And there's that same picture here that we're to have that perspective and recognize that the morning with the light of the morning brings a different picture onto what we've been thinking and considering during the night.

[ 26 : 11 ] And we're to trust God through these times and to obediently wait on Him. And then as we conclude, the Psalms takes that personal experience.

And as it were, snaps out of that personal walk where it's only Him and God on the journey. And He looks round and says, oh, Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is steadfast love and with Him is plenteous redemption.

He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. And there's that movement from personal relationship and personal redemption and forgiveness that is shared with the covenant communities back on the road.

And we're called to take our individual Christian lives and never to simply glory in that, but to take our testimony and to share it and to pass that on to others around us.

And to say, this is what God has done for me. You too can hope in Him. So we pass through one another and we share our spiritual experiences with one another.

[ 27 : 26 ] You say, look the Lord, He can be trusted. You know that? He's taken me through the darkness of the night and you can trust Him as well. Morning will come. I hope.

When I went into ministry 35, I think I've said this recently, 35 or 36 years ago, I met an old, no, no, sorry, that's a different story. I was in that, I'd been in the ministry for quite a long time and I went for advice to an older pastor over some difficulties that I was going through.

And I said, Derek always remember, he said, it will pass. It will pass, the difficulties will pass. It's a very simple piece of advice. It's not very profound, but there are many times that I've remembered that.

In the difficulties and darkness, it's like waiting for the Lord for the morning to come. He says, it will pass. It will pass. And we remember that because of His steadfast love, His covenant love, His hessed love, which is sealed at the cross.

And when He says, look, you have my word, it's etched in my blood. I can't do any more for you. You're doubting my love. You're doubting my forgiveness.

[ 28 : 39 ] I've given you my Son. I can't do any more. It's sealed. It's a settled reason and will of the Trinity that you know forgiveness.

And that that has been paid for, paid in full. Remember that, paid in full. You don't need to keep jumping back and jumping through hoops for the living God. He says, paid in full.

That is why we trust in His mercy. And we know and can be assured of His forgiveness. Not with you, there is forgiveness and in verse 8, He goes on to say again, He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

That's a great message. It's a message that people that are not Christians need to hear. More than anything, and they need to hear it because it's real to us.

It's not just a kind of theoretical theological reality for us. But because we have undergone and gone through as Christians the same journey as the Sammists here.

[ 29 : 43 ] That we can say that with confidence as we share it with others. That in, you will meet people this week. I'm guaranteed you'll meet people this week who are in despair, who are full of guilt, who are empty, who are lost, looking for belonging.

Don't know what to do with life. Don't know how to deal with the mistakes they've made. Don't understand the sense of guilt. And we need to tap into that.

But we will only ever be able to do that if it's real to us. And if we've known that and experienced ourselves. And so that is my prayer for myself and for you that we are people who begin to live out the experience of the Samm for ourselves and learn from it.

And pray that God will apply it to our own hearts and that we go back again and again to His Word, which is the only place where we can compare ourselves with Him and where our conviction and our repentance will come from.

Let's pray. Father God, help us to go to You and to go to Your Word. We know that when the Bible is closed that we fail to see ourselves as You see us.

[ 30 : 58 ] And we skip around in the shallows of life and lose out much of the blessing and live with a weak and crumbling faith so often.

So give us the courage Lord to allow the light of Your Word to shine into the deepest corners, the darkest corners of our hearts to expose the motives that are so often self-centered and loveless for God and full of disordered love for ourselves and proud and so many impure motives that Lord we allow Your Word to take, it expose and for Your amazing mercy to forgive.

And as we know that we know cleansing and healing and wholeness and there's much more room for the Holy Spirit in such a heart. So enable us to be believers that mirror the personal testimony of the psalmist in Psalm 130 increasingly and go before us and speak into our hearts for Jesus' sake. Amen.