

## Psalm 130

*A song of ascents.*

<sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;

<sup>2</sup> Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive  
to my cry for mercy.

<sup>3</sup> If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,  
Lord, who could stand?

<sup>4</sup> But with you there is forgiveness,  
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

<sup>5</sup> I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.

<sup>6</sup> I wait for the Lord  
more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.

<sup>7</sup> Israel, put your hope in the Lord,  
for with the Lord is unfailing love  
and with him is full redemption.

<sup>8</sup> He himself will redeem Israel  
from all their sins.

## Jesus Accused by His Family and by Teachers of the Law

<sup>20</sup> Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. <sup>21</sup> When his family<sup>1b</sup> heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

<sup>22</sup> And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

<sup>23</sup> So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? <sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. <sup>27</sup> In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. <sup>28</sup> Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, <sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin."

<sup>30</sup> He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit."

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. <sup>32</sup> A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

<sup>33</sup> "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

<sup>34</sup> Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

When Psalm 130 crops up it brings to mind a film clip I made during Covid. Michael read the words, I found music and images and the Psalm seemed to suit what we were all going through. We shall play it during communion.

Psalm 130 is part of a set of Psalms known as the Psalms of Ascent sung by pilgrims as they make their way to Jerusalem.

It's also one of seven Psalms known as the penitential psalms, used by those coming to terms with the need to repent and turn away from destructive habits and lifestyles – turning from self-indulgence to Christ.

It holds a unique place, being in both sets of Psalms and it does have a simplicity and relevance as much today as when first written.

Who of us has not been through dark and difficult times?  
Who of us has not cried out to God for his help?

It's direct and it's honest.

If God kept a record of our sins...we could not stand.

But it also declares fundamental truths, that God forgives, has steadfast love and redemptive power.

This is a God in whom we can place our hope and we can wait and we can watch for what He will do.

The illustration of the watchman is particularly evocative. When you are going through dark and difficult times you are longing for the light to come, the night to end, hope to be fulfilled.

We live in the age of the instant. You send a text and then feel frustrated that it's not answered right away! Why not? We take medication and want to be instantly well – at least I do. We watch a new series on iplayer and can binge on the whole thing – we don't have to wait week by week.

Waiting can only be endured if hope is in a God of forgiveness, steadfast love and redemptive power.

As many of you know during Covid, Katherine got long covid and at her worst could just about get up and get downstairs. Throughout that time I was sustained by a scripture that I knew God had given me as a promise – it was Psalm 103

- 1.** Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
- 2** Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—
- 3** who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,
- 4** who redeems your life from the pit, and crowns you with love and compassion,
- 5** who satisfies your desires with good things, **so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.**

Katherine is currently taking part in a 24 hour swim relay and will complete 5 hours of swimming. I think our prayers have been fully answered, but I can remember the days of waiting and hoping and watching for improvement. There were some dark nights of the soul.

That situation resolved but there are members of the church family and our wider circle of friends and community who are going through tough times who are in the depths. We can and will stand with them watching and waiting and placing our hope in the Lord.

Well now! How does this Psalm fit in with today's Gospel?

Simple...Jesus was surrounded by people for whom this Psalm would have been utterly relevant. People crying out to God or maybe who were in the depths and needed something and were drawn to Jesus.

Gentiles, Jews, the poor, the mentally ill, the sick, working class, women, tax collectors, sexual outcasts. Psalm 130 is their Psalm.

So this story has Jesus at the centre and three other groups.

His family, the teachers of the Law, the crowd of misfits that crowd around Jesus in the house...so many he can't even get a meal.

This short passage is cleverly written and has a hidden structure we tend not to recognise when hearing it read. It's designed that way to focus on the central teaching.

A – the family

B – the accusation

C – the teaching

Return to B – the seriousness of the accusation

Return to A – the rather unsettling distancing from Jesus family.

Part C

The central teaching is that Jesus is not possessed by Satan and fighting Satan – that has no logic...and that Jesus has the power to bind the strong man (Satan) and plunder his house...i.e. set people free. This is his mission, preach good news, freedom for prisoners, sight to the blind, set the oppressed free. And time again we see Jesus has endless patience for those in need.

Part B – The teachers of the law are good people trying to uphold the law, trying to maintain a system, caught up in the institution. They illustrate a truism...

There's nothing an institution likes less than something it doesn't understand, can't control and hasn't authorised.

They are driven by fear...so driven they accuse Jesus of being possessed...and the unforgivable sin is denying the work of the Holy Spirit...or claiming the work of the Holy Spirit is from Satan.

Part A - But what's the part about his family?

Jesus family are good people and loving and concerned. They hear Jesus is out of his mind...they come to take him away, shelter him, prevent all this wildness and controversy.

And yet from very good motives, our family can be a distraction, or worse...from what they think is best, we are drawn away from God's purposes. Listen to this story from Nibs Stroupe.

I want to name one of my experiences as a demonstration of this process. I grew up in the Deep South in Arkansas on the Mississippi River Delta in the 1950s and 1960s, part of that generation of white Southerners who wrestled with the civil rights

movement. I was resistant to that movement because I had been taught white supremacy and the racism that undergirds it. I had accepted this ideology, and I had been taught it, not by mean and terrible people, but by loving and caring people such as my mother and my church leaders. They taught it to me, not because they were evil—quite the contrary, they were wonderful people in my life—but because they were captive to racism and had come to accept that racism was the way to find and maintain life.

As I came to hear other voices from God's Spirit—voices that told me that racism was not God's will—I began to be in internal conflict with my family and my community. It was a struggle and continues to be a struggle at some points.

His story may resonate with those who have gone against the family will! I think my Dad would have preferred me to be a Baptist Pastor than an Anglican Vicar - but my calling has led me away from a church institution that knew who was in – and everyone else was out...I prefer a theology that opens the door and lets everyone in...misfits.

*(It did occur to me that I just called the whole church misfits!!)*

But what are we, who are we?? We are people who know what it is to be in the depths crying out to God. We have been outsiders or told we no longer fit. We care more about grace and less about institution. We crowd the house to be nearer Jesus.

What is our challenge today? What shall we take away?

First, to put all our hope in our God who is forgiving, has steadfast love and redemptive power and to stand with those whose going through the depths. For yourself or for those in need – light a candle today – symbolise hope burning bright in the dark.

And we also look for what the Holy Spirit is doing so that we are not resistant or obstructive. This takes courage. It might mean the internal conflict with what we've always done...but we must look for the fruit of what God is doing and follow his lead.

Rev. Jon Hutchinson, 9 June 2024