

The Mercy of Forgiveness

Psalm 130

Augustine and Calvin considered this their favorite Psalm. Also, John Wesley heard this Psalm sung, and God used it to prepare his heart for conversion. Prior to this he was an unconverted missionary. This popular and powerful Psalm, sung by God's people as they ascended to Jerusalem, has two distinct sections. In the first half of this Psalm, the pilgrims sang to the LORD. In the second half, the pilgrims sang of the LORD.

As they sung to the LORD, they sang of their crying and their confidence. In the first two verses they expressed their cry to the LORD from out of the depths. The depths refer to a deep sea that represents their iniquities (v3,8). They were engulfed by their sin and guilt and cried out to God for mercy (v2). The fact that they cried reveals they were desperate. This desperation was due to their knowledge that they were in great danger because of their iniquities. They also mention their "pleas" for mercy. This pleading shows that they understood they could not save themselves but were dependent on the LORD to save them from their sins and great guilt.

In verses 3 and 4, the pilgrim continues to sing to the LORD about his or her confidence. The singer knew no one could stand if God counted one's sins and if we were made accountable for all our sins. Yet, he or she was also confident that with God there is forgiveness. This was the kind of mercy (v2) being sought, the mercy of forgiveness. The only hope sinful humans have is God, in mercy, granting pardon to us for our many sins. When a sinner is very desperate and completely dependent on the LORD's forgiveness for salvation, and that sinner receives an undeserved pardon from God, it causes him or her to fear God. Saved by sheer mercy, we begin to fear the LORD. When we are shown such mercy, we fear doing something that will grieve the one who has shown such love. We dread the thought of displeasing this forgiving God.

After singing to the LORD, this Psalm leads the pilgrim in singing about the LORD in its second half. In verses 5 and 6, there is singing about an expectation. This expectant hope is that the dark circumstances created by sin and guilt will one day come to an end. Believers wait for this with hope because of God's promise of such in his word. God not only forgives our sin but also promises to remove the sorrow and suffering that are the consequences of human sin. This will be fulfilled when Jesus, who calls himself the bright and morning star in Rev. 22:16, appears to bring in this new day. This waiting for the dawning of this new day found here, is also seen in 2 Peter 1:19, "And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

In the last two verses of this Psalm, there is an exhortation that is sung by the pilgrims to one another. The exhortation is to hope in the LORD. We need to be encouraged by one another, again and again, to trust in the LORD of steadfast love and plentiful redemption. He will redeem Israel, all of God's people, from all iniquities. Ultimately, those who cry to God for the mercy of forgiveness will experience the fullness of this plentiful redemption. They will be redeemed from all sin and sorrow, when this new day dawns. Jesus Christ is our redeemer. His death was the ransom paid for our redemption. The forgiveness and redemption of this Psalm is brought together in Colossians 1:14, and we are told they are in Jesus, "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."