

You Can be Forgiven!

INTRO

I'd like to start with a question, and you don't have to raise your hand if you don't want to.

How many of you have been stopped by the police for breaking the speed limit?

If you've been stopped, I wonder what you said to the policeman when he walked up to your window. Japanese are probably a bit more polite than Americans are, but people react and speak in all kinds of ways in this kind of situation. Some are penitent and others aren't. Imagine that someone is pulled over for speeding by a policeman, who comes to the side window. The policeman says, "You were breaking the speed limit. May I see your license, please?" Here are some things it would be best not to say in response. "Sorry, I can't reach my license. Would you hold my beer for me?" "I was just trying to keep up with traffic. There were lots of others who were going much faster than I was." "I think you're being too strict, officer. I was only going 40km over the limit."

The scenario I just described depicts, in a way, how some people view their sins against God and others. They tend to treat their sins as unimportant, put the blame on others, or say that God is being too strict about sin. Or they compare themselves to others. They do this hoping, or expecting, that God will overlook the punishment they deserve for breaking His moral and spiritual laws. For those of you here this morning or watching online who have not yet repented of your sins and asked Jesus to forgive you, I urge you not to think this way. You have no idea if you will even have tomorrow. And once your life ends, there is no chance to repent, and no chance to do it over again.

No chance to receive forgiveness through Jesus' sacrifice for your sins or for eternal life with Him.

This is why Jesus came and bore the punishment we deserve in our place on the cross.

He shed His blood to provide forgiveness for anyone who will humbly come to Him in faith for it.

If you aren't yet a Christian, please seriously consider your need for forgiveness, and talk to me or a trusted Christian friend if you have questions. The psalm we are looking at today is a prayer for forgiveness. It's a psalm that gives great hope and peace to those who know they are sinners and want to live holy lives. If you have your Bible with you, please open to Psalm 130.

1 Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD. 2 Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. (NASB) 3 If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O LORD, who could stand? 4 But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. 5 I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope. 6 My soul waits for the Lord more than the watchmen for the morning; indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning. 7 O Israel, hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is lovingkindness, and with Him is abundant redemption. 8 And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

The psalm divides easily into four main parts:

the psalmist's desperate cry to the Lord,

his assurance of the Lord's forgiveness,
a declaration of hope in the Lord,
and the psalmist's exhortation for all to hope in the Lord.

I. A CRY FROM THE DEPTHS

A. "LORD, HEAR MY VOICE!"

The first thing we notice is the psalmist's emotional earnestness as he cries out to the Lord. He says that he is crying out from the depths. The Hebrew word used here was used to refer poetically to a pit of despair, to a place or feeling similar to Sheol, the abode of the dead. So, the psalmist may have been saying that he was in a deep pit of despair, depression, and maybe even self-loathing over his sins. He didn't want to sin and he felt terrible that he did. Two times in verse 2 he asks the Lord to listen to his cry for help. The Hebrew implies that this is a cry for mercy from God.

Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

Clearly he is in distress over his sins. This isn't the prayer of someone who is just coming to the Lord for forgiveness for the first time. It was written by someone who was trying to live a holy life that would please the Lord, but he had sinned anyway. And the fact that he had sinned grieved him deeply. Have you ever felt this way? Maybe every Christian here could've written verses 1 and 2 ... many times. And some of us might be able to write them right now! There is a good aspect and bad aspect to such feelings, I think. On the one hand, if we never feel bad because of our sins, if we are able to sin and not be affected by it, we are either not a Christian, or we are but we don't understand how serious our sins are in the eyes of our holy Creator. Maybe those of us who fall into this category need to pray that we do feel as the psalmist did when we sin. This would help us to never take the Lord's grace and forgiveness for granted. So, in a way, it's a good thing to feel remorse over our sins. But what isn't good is for Christians to despair over our sins, or to feel that God has cut us off or rejected us because we still struggle with sin. We will struggle with sin to some degree until the day we die — it's part of being human. And it's why Psalm 130 is such a comfort to those who desire to live godly lives.

II. ASSURANCE OF THE LORD'S FORGIVENESS

A. THE LORD KNOWS ALL OUR SINS

The psalmist asks a very important question in verse 3.

If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

The Hebrew word translated here as “mark” can mean “to take note of, to watch, to keep”, as in “to keep a record of.” A related truth is that no one can sin without the Lord knowing it. Hebrews 4:13 makes this very clear.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

So we see that the Lord does “mark iniquities” and keep a record of people’s sins. This is made clear in Revelation 20:12 where those who did not trust in Jesus are judged for their deeds, which are recorded in heaven. The apostle John says that the great and the small will be judged according to the life they have lived ... according to their sins.

B. “BUT THERE IS FORGIVENESS WITH YOU”

So, then, what did the psalmist mean in verse 3 when he implied that God does not keep a record of our iniquities? He was declaring that if we are trusting in our Creator, He has wiped our sin record clean. The psalmist’s words here refer to a wonderful truth that is only true for Christians —the same truth God Himself declared through the prophet Isaiah.

“I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions, for My own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”

This knowledge is what made it possible for the psalmist to boldly declare in verse 4,

“But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.”

Yes, he knows he is guilty of many sins against the Lord, but he has this assurance:

There is forgiveness with the Lord! He will not condemn us for the sins He has forgiven, which is what He meant in Isaiah 43 when He said He would “remember our sins no more.” This is the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. The psalmist’s cry for mercy and forgiveness receives a willing response from God because of His great mercy. Eight times in this short psalm, he speaks the name of the Lord —Yahweh — the God who is, who exists eternally and is with us at all times. God is the constant reality. He is the unchanging One whom we can trust completely for our salvation, our forgiveness and our eternity.

C. “THAT YOU MAY BE FEARED”

And how will grateful, repentant sinners respond when the Lord forgives their sins?

The psalmist says in verse 4 that we will fear the Lord.

In this context, the Hebrew word means “to fear, to reverence, to honor, to be awed, to worship.” When we understand how sinful we truly are, when we realize that our sin was and is so terrible that something as dreadful and awful as the cross of Christ was needed to deal with it, our natural

response to God’s free gift of forgiveness and salvation will naturally be a sense of reverent fear and honor. The realization that we are forgiven should also fill us with joy. David knew the joy of being forgiven for terrible sin, and he wrote this in Psalm 32.

How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity.

Indeed, if we are Christians, our sin is covered by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. And when we join the awareness of our sinfulness, the burden that makes us cry out of the depths, our recognition of God’s infinite mercy, and our faith in Jesus Christ, we can cry out with David, “How blessed I am to have my sins forgiven and to know my sins are not imputed to me!”

Have you done this?

Are you experiencing the joy of knowing your sins are forgiven?

III. A DECLARATION OF HOPE IN THE LORD

The psalmist then focuses in verses 5 and 6 on waiting on the Lord with certain hope.

5) I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope. 6) My soul waits for the Lord more than the watchmen for the morning; indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning.

A. “IN HIS WORD DO I HOPE”

Three times the psalmist says that he waits for the Lord. What is he waiting for specifically? There’s no way to know for sure, but maybe he’s waiting for the Lord to come and touch his heart—to make His loving and forgiving Presence felt in his heavy heart. Maybe he is waiting for the Lord to come and lift him up out of the depths of depression and despair that he mentioned in verse 1. We don’t know. But we do know this—while He is waiting, he is putting his hope in God’s Word. We can only guess what portion of God’s Word he is referring to, but we know that it was something from the Torah, the first 5 books of the Old Testament. Maybe it was this wonderful passage from Exodus 34:6-7, where God Himself describes what He is like.

6 “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands [of generations], forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”

The psalmist knew that this is the God to whom he was praying. This is the God in whom he was putting his hope for forgiveness. Of course, we live after the cross and we have the New Testament promises of forgiveness, too. One promise we can place our hope in because of the cross of Jesus Christ is this wonderful promise from 1 John 1:9.

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

B. “MORE THAN THE WATCHMEN FOR THE MORNING”

In verse 6 of Psalm 130, we see just how intently he was hoping and waiting. Two times he mentions the watchmen who stood guard on the walls of Jerusalem looking for enemies who might attack at night waiting for the morning. Watchmen stood on top of the city wall exposed to any enemies that got close enough to shoot them with an arrow. It was stressful, tiring and frightening, and morning couldn't come too soon for most of them, I'm sure. But these watchmen knew that morning would surely come and they were eagerly waiting for the sun to lighten the early morning sky. So, to the psalmist, it wasn't a question of whether or not the Lord would forgive him, remove his guilt, and lift him out of despair. The psalmist was waiting with full assurance that the Lord would forgive him, just as a watchman knows that the sun will rise. If you are burdened with guilt over your sins, don't despair. Humbly cry out to our merciful and gracious God in faith, and He will answer you.

IV. HOPING IN THE LORD

The psalm ends with an exhortation for the people of God to hope in the Lord.

7 O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. 8 And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. Why can we hope in the Lord? Because with the Lord, there is steadfast love and abundant redemption. Here we again see, as we see in many of the psalms, the Hebrew word *chesed*, which refers to God's steadfast, loyal, covenant love toward His people. For those of you who are Japanese, I recommend that you keep this in mind when reading the psalms — when you read the word *megumi* in Psalms, remember that this word actually means “God's steadfast, loyal, covenant love” and not “grace”.

CONCLUSION

What a loving and merciful Creator we have! He put this psalm in His Word so His children, and those who want to become His children, won't despair excessively over their sins. Yes, our sins are terrible, and Satan tries to use them against us to make us feel like a failure as a Christian.

He knows that if we lose assurance of our salvation, we become easy targets for demonic lies. Our assurance can't be based on our feelings — it has to be based on the fact that we are holy in God's sight if we are trusting in Jesus Christ. As Christians, it is vital that we understand and believe that we are justified in God's sight with the righteousness of Christ ... not because we live perfect lives, but because we have put our faith in Christ. No matter how strong our faith or how committed we are to the Lord, we will never become sinless. If you grieve when you sin, and you ask the Lord for forgiveness, but it seems like someone is whispering in your ear, “You're a failure, a disgrace to Jesus, and you'll never please Him,” or “You're not worthy to be God's child or deserving of His mercy and forgiveness,” ...

respond in this way:

“I know I'm not deserving of God's love, mercy and forgiveness, but that doesn't matter.

If He were to mark iniquities, I could never stand in His presence, but with Him there is grace and forgiveness! With Him there is steadfast love and abundant redemption! My hope is in Him, and I know I'm righteous in His sight by faith in Jesus Christ. So, no, I'm not worthy ... but I am forgiven and redeemed !”

Praise God!

Do you ever feel like the psalmist did? How do you handle such feelings?
Are you struggling with guilt now because of some sin in your life? If so, trust in Jesus Christ and the promises of His Word, and ask Him to forgive you and cleanse you.

So, let's take a moment now to reflect on these questions.

[REFLECTION TIME]

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Let's pray.

Merciful Heavenly Father, thank You that You want to forgive us and have us be Your children. Thank You for Your steadfast love and grace. Thank You that we can experience the blessing of living as those who have been forgiven. Please help each one here and watching online to experience that blessing as they trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. We pray this in the name of our merciful and faithful Lord, Jesus Christ. May your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.