

Turning on the Light: Finding Hope in the Depths of Despair

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. My name again is Drew Arrington, and I count it a great privilege to be with you this morning and a great honor to preach God's holy and inspired word.

Last week, Matthew helped us to see that Jesus, the faithful king, both comforts us and challenges us. And one of the ways that Jesus challenges us is by leading his people into and through uncomfortable situations.

But, you know, Christians don't have a monopoly on difficult and challenging situations in uncomfortable times. And as a result, there is plenty of contemporary advice on how one could and should deal with such times.

In a film, I know I said film, so you purists out there of J.K. Rowling, I understand it's not in the books, okay? But in the film, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, the wise wizard Albus Dumbledore is standing before students at the opening session of Hogwarts, much like I am with you.

And he's telling them about some faculty changes that have occurred over the summer break. He's enlightening them to the fact that the coming school year will be a bit more challenging for the presence of some outsiders around them that will make things seem to be darker than they actually are.

[1 : 46] And when he does this, he ends with a prophetic proclamation that provides guidance to Potter and his pals.

And this is what he says. Happiness can be found even in the darkest of times. If one only remembers to turn the light on.

Now, it will not strike you as odd that our reading this morning will offer much better hope than the words offered to the Hogwarts students.

So if you find yourselves like these fictional students on the precipice of an uncomfortable situation, if you find yourself like this psalm, if you find yourself like this psalm is for you.

Or, if you are younger in life and you have yet to experience times of deep darkness and the depths of despair, this psalm is for you.

[2 : 50] And finally, if you are here this morning and you are peering through relentless darkness in search of some faint flicker of light, then my dear friend, this psalm is most definitely for you.

With that in mind, I would ask that we pray for the reading and preaching of God's word before turning our attention to Psalm 130. So with that, please join me in prayer.

Oh, gracious Heavenly Father, we indeed are needy and broken people this morning. Our minds are dull and darkened by the presence of sin.

Our hearts are distracted by a multitude of affections. And so we ask that you might grant us an extraordinary measure of your Holy Spirit. That his power and presence might enlighten our minds and warm our hearts to the truth of your scripture.

God, may this morning that we might not only know more about you, but God, that we might come to love you with more tenacity.

[4 : 17] God, we ask this, that it might glorify your name, that it might honor Christ, and that it might be for the good of your church.

Amen. Well, Psalm 130. If you'll turn in your Bibles or direct your device, it starts with the caption of a psalm of ascent.

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 pleas for mercy.

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? O Lord, you're in a voice for mercy. O Lord, my soul is forgiven. But with you, there is forgiveness that you may be feared. I wait for the Lord. My soul waits, and in his word I hope. My soul waits for the Lord. More than watchmen for the morning.

[5 : 25] more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption.

And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. This concludes today's reading of God's word, which is holy, inspired, and infallible.

Well, this morning we're going to consider the four stanzas, the four couplets, if you will, of this poem in groupings of two. So we're going to first examine the cry of despair to a gracious God, which we see in the first four verses.

And then we will turn our attention to the response of a faithful God in the final four verses. And with that in mind, let's turn our attention to the cry of the psalmist.

One of the questions that comes to my mind as I'm first reading this is, why is the psalmist crying out in despair? What has plunged this psalmist in to the depths and the darkness of despair?

[6 : 55] And the answer is, we don't know. He's silent. And a lot of people really don't even know who wrote this.

Some attribute it to David. Most attribute it to somebody unknown. So here we have an unknown psalmist, an unknown follower of God, in the depths of despair, and we don't know why he's there. But you know, that's not a problem for us. It's not a problem for us because we have the entirety of Scripture that helps us to understand why the psalmist is in the midst of despair and why we find ourselves in the depths and darkness of despair.

And I want to point to three examples that highlight three reasons why we find ourselves and why perhaps the psalmist finds himself in this situation.

First, we see in Exodus 3 that the Hebrews were enslaved in Egypt. And it gives us a hint that sometimes we are in the depths of despair because of the sins of others, because of the oppression that sin brings into life through the actions of other human beings.

[8 : 15] In the life of Jesus Christ, we see him in despair in the Garden of Gethsemane. And the main reason is because he is looking forward to the cross and the pain of death.

And so in that, we see that sometimes we suffer because of natural sin. The fact that our bodies are not the way they were designed to be prior to sin, but that they decay and eventually die.

And so we suffer not only the natural sin of our bodies decaying, but we suffer the natural sin of many natural calamities. And then we see in the life of Jonah, which is where most of us go when we think about the reason for suffering, and that is our own personal sin and rebellion against the holy God.

He says, you know, Jonah decided to run from the calling that God had given him, and instead of pursuing God, went the exact opposite direction, ended up in a storm, and then in the belly of a whale.

Talk about the depths of despair. And we don't know, again, what the author was suffering through, but I have a great hunch and understanding that you probably are pretty intimately aware of what you are suffering with this morning.

[9 : 52] You are probably pretty well acquainted with what type of sin has plunged you into the depths and darkness of despair.

Perhaps it's a marriage that started out with great promise and now is flooded with faults and accusations and a lack of love and appreciation.

Perhaps it's the death of a dear family member. Maybe it's a medical diagnosis that has thrown you and your family for a loop.

Maybe it's a baby. Or maybe you're looking at the life of a now-grown child who has turned his or her back on the faith.

Well, one thing we know, we don't know what the despair is here, but we do know that when in distress and people cry out, we know that not all cries are equal.

[11 : 09] It was not too long ago that some of us may have seen and heard of the horrible act of violence that occurred in Memphis in which five officers brutally beat a young man.

And it's not my point here to talk about the injustice of that, although from all accounts it was very unjust. But really, it's the focus here on the fact that in the midst of despair and darkness, this young

man cried out.

He cried out for his mom. And his mom didn't hear, even though she was just literally yards away. But it's not just the attack in Memphis.

We see in ancient Israel a desperate cry in the midst of dark times when the prophets of Baal challenged to cry out to their God to alleviate the drought.

They cry out. They dance around. They yell. They cut themselves. But Baal did not hear. Oh, but in stark contrast are the words of Matthew Henry commenting on this psalm when he says, But in the greatest depths, it is our privilege that we may cry unto a God and be heard.

[12:55] More importantly than Matthew Henry's words are the examples of Scripture that I pointed us to earlier. is that in Hebrews, the Hebrews who were enslaved in Egypt, says that in Exodus 3, God, speaking with Moses, says, Moses, I have seen the affliction of my people, and I have heard their cry.

Jesus crying to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. He says, Oh, what great assurance this is for mothers and fathers who send their children out of their homes into a world where we know they will be assaulted in various different forms, whether mentally or emotionally or in their education. And to know that when they cry out, even though we may not hear them, we serve a God who does hear them.

Oh, but we serve not only a gracious God who hears us, we serve a gracious God who forgives us. And when we cry out in the depths of despair, when it is even our own sin that plunges us there, we cry out knowing that along with Jonah, that God's steadfast love remains with us, and his forgiveness reaches even into those depths.

The psalmist, in verses 3 through 4, tells us as much when he says that God's forgiveness, he says, But with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared.

[15:28] Forgiveness brings hope. But as the psalmist says here, it also alerts us to fear.

And that raises a very good question that I hope isn't a bunny trail, but really needs to be addressed. So why would forgiveness evoke fear?

Let's put it this way. If it weren't for sin, we wouldn't need forgiveness. And so the very fact that God forgives sin highlights the seriousness of that very sin.

And the psalmist would understand that so well, being there in the temple and watching the sacrifices come in, the animals being led up to the altar, the hands being laid on, transferring the sin of the individual or the sin of the community onto that animal, and then having that animal slaughtered in their presence and then burned on the altar.

However, the author would very much see the link between sin and death. Oh, but we have something that is far greater than the sacrifice of a lamb or a ram on an altar.

[17:04] We have the very life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that points to us not only the seriousness of our sin, but also the sure and certain confidence that we have forgiveness through our Savior Jesus Christ.

Even when it's our own sin that plunges us into the depths and darkness of despair.

So when in those depths, remember that relief does not come by remembering where to turn on the light. Rather, we find hope in a gracious God who hears our cries and forgives our sins.

But it's just not the psalmist's cry that we see. We see the response of a faithful God. And one of the best stories that I've seen about a response to being in the depths of despair and the freedom that awaits is recorded by a Reverend Tuck in a commentary.

And he writes the following. In the year 1830, on the night preceding the 1st of August, the day slaves in the British West Indies were to come into possession of the freedom promised them, many of them, we are told, never went to bed at all.

[18:41] Thousands upon thousands of them assembled in their places of worship, engaging in devotional duties and singing praises to God, waiting for the first streak of the light of the morning of the day on which they were to be made free.

Some of their number were sent to the hills from which they might obtain the first view of the coming day. And by a signal, communicate to their brethren down in the valley the very first moment of the breaking dawn.

Now this is the same posture of the psalmist here when he says that he is waiting more than the watchman. He says, my soul waits for the Lord more than watchman for the morning.

More than watchman for the morning. He has this posture of hopeful waiting and trusting for the dawning of the light to come that he might have rest and relief.

Notice, this is not something that we can generate. It's not something we can turn on. It's not something that comes from a government proclamation, a regulatory reform, or a politician's promise.

[20 : 09] No, this is hopeful, waiting, and trusting in a gracious and faithful God. But here, the psalmist thinks more than a rescue is what's in store.

It's more than just alleviation of a temporary, temporal problem. No, the psalmist anticipates much more.

He awaits plentiful redemption. Plentiful redemption from a God of steadfast love.

I think one of the best ways to illustrate this is through the life of a man who actually worked to enslave the same people that we referred earlier in 1830 who were waiting on that herald to say, the day has arrived, we're free.

And that person is John Newton who was a slaver along a ship in various forms and capacities from crew all the way up to being a captain.

[21 : 26] And multiple times throughout his career, he would cry out to God for some sort of deliverance and God would answer him. And then he would go on continuing in his sin.

So we see it's not just a rescue from depths of despair that God has at, but as in the life of John Newton who became a pastor and then one of the most ardent abolitionists in England, we know that God is looking for plentiful redemption.

But it's not just an earthly redemption that we look forward to. It is that eternal redemption when God comes back in the form of Jesus Christ at the end of history and frees us, redeems us from all our iniquities.

So the slaves in the British Americas, they were, had sent their peers up on the ridge to catch the morning light and then signal back down that day has arrived.

And I want you to know that we have a more powerful herald than those individuals. Because we have a herald that points us not just to our freedom in this world but to a plentiful redemption that awaits us in the next and that person is none other than Jesus Christ.

[23 : 13] He is the first fruits of the resurrection. He is the one who has conquered death, stands on the other side of death and despair, and he looks back and he says, I am here and the light is coming.

So when you find yourself in the midst of the darkness and the depths of despair that you will encounter in this life and the horizon just seems to be below and lower than you want it to be and the sun isn't peeking over the crest, know that Jesus Christ is there seated at the right hand of God the Father interceding and pleading on your behalf and he is communicating to you through the Holy Spirit saying, hang on, the light is coming.

The light that will deliver you not only from this circumstance that you find yourself in, but it will redeem you from all the effects of sin.

and corruption. So hang on. The herald tells you the light is coming.

It's not a light that we have to somehow turn on. No, it is more than that. It is the steadfast love of the faithful Father.

[24 : 51] The plentiful redemption purchased by the Son and the presence of the Holy Spirit reminding us of both those realities. peace. Well, we conclude our time together this morning with the promise that in the depths and darkness of despair, we have a better hope than mere happiness and a light that is surer than our ability to turn it on.

So when you find yourselves in the depths of despair, cry out to a gracious God who hears and forgives. when the light of dawn refuses to break through the darkness of despair, cling to the faithful God who showers you with steadfast love and plentiful redemption.

In the words of Charles Simeon, if we looked inward, we shall find nothing but discouragement. But if with David we look to God, we may find abundant encouragement in his attributes, in his works and in his words.

He is faithful. His presence will penetrate the darkness. His grace will illuminate the depths and his strength will carry you through the despair and bring you all the way home.

Amen. Let us pray. Gracious God, you are indeed the God who offers plenteous redemption. God, would you please encourage us and remind us this morning through the power and presence of

your Holy Spirit of the sure and certain realities that even though we may find ourselves in the depths of despair, surrounded by darkness, the light of your presence is on its way.
[26 : 47] And the dawning of eternity will bring a day in which the light will never end. we ask all this in Christ's name. Amen.