

Psalm 130: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Psalm 130, a song of ascents. As John Goldingay notes, Psalm 130 is one of the seven traditional penitential psalms.

It presents the individual as an example to the community of Israel. It begins with a cry from the depths. There is, as Conrad Schaefer notes, an emphasis upon a vertical axis.

The psalmist is not merely depressed, he is engulfed in troubles and difficulties and trials, and he is calling for the Lord to lift him out of the abyss. The psalm has the form of a petition, followed by statements concerning the way that sinful human beings can relate to the Lord, addressed to the Lord himself by the psalmist, followed by a description of the psalmist's own posture towards the Lord, followed by an exhortation to Israel to adopt that same posture, a posture determined by confidence in the character of the Lord as the forgiving and redeeming God.

The psalm focuses upon the Lord's forgiveness. In calling for the Lord to be attentive to his trial and distress, the psalmist meditates upon how terrible it would be if God kept watch over our iniquities, constantly bringing them to his mind and acting in terms of them.

Yet the Lord's character is quite otherwise, he is a God of forgiveness, and in a noteworthy theological move, the psalmist claims that it is on account of the Lord's forgiveness that he is to be feared.

[2 : 02] Far from leading to presumption, God's forgiveness should lead us to honour him all the more. Confident in the Lord's forgiveness in this manner, the psalmist waits patiently and with assurance for the Lord to deliver him from out of his distress and his trials.

He describes the posture of his soul or his life towards the Lord. His soul is waiting for the Lord like watchmen waiting for the dawn of the day. The watchmen may be waiting for the opportunity to rest as their shift is over, or perhaps they are waiting for the terrors and the fears of the night to be passed.

Either way, the visitation of the Lord is compared to the break of dawn, to the first advent of light into a dark situation. The psalm concludes with an exhortation to Israel to adopt that same posture. The individual calling to the Lord from the depths of his own struggles on account of his sins calls to the Lord for mercy, and he gives his petition and the confidence that underlies it as an example to the whole of the community that is also suffering on account of its sins.

The Lord is one, as the forgiving God, that can be hoped in. He is steadfast in his love, faithful to his promises. He is mighty to redeem. He can deliver Israel from all of his iniquities.

[3 : 19] A question to consider. What are some of the ways in which meditating upon the fact that the Lord is the forgiving God can inspire us to his worship?