

Have Mercy on Me – Experiencing the Renewal of Forgiveness

Thomas Robinson, *Journeys Toward God in the Psalms* 3, August 31, 2014

Psalm 130 From deep brokenness the Psalmist longs for God's pardon.

A Song of Ascents.

I am far below chaotic seas; can you hear me!

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD (*Yahweh*)!

² O Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

Our wrongs knock us down, but You bring forgiveness.

³ If you, O LORD (*Yahweh*), should mark iniquities,

O Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.

I'm in the darkness, waiting for You, the Dawn.

⁵ I wait for the LORD (*Yahweh*), my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

God's people must trust God's faithful Love to deliver.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD (*Yahweh*)!

For with the LORD (*Yahweh*) there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.

⁸ And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

Psalm 51 Aware of sin, the Psalmist prays for God's work of transformation.

*To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet
went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.*

God's nature is the only hope for my brokenness.

¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!

When I see myself, I know I have no claim on God.

³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.

⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.

⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

I need God's powerful work in my life for renewal.

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins,

and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

I will respond with full gratitude from my heart.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God,
you will not despise.

May Jerusalem be rebuilt and the Temple restored.

¹⁸ Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
build up the walls of Jerusalem;

¹⁹ then will you delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Exodus 34:6-7 God reveals Himself to Moses on Mt. Sinai

⁶ The LORD (*Yahweh*) passed before him (Moses) and proclaimed, “The LORD (*Yahweh*), the LORD (*Yahweh*), a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, ...”

Overwhelmed by the Enemy Within

In the Psalms the first element of a relationship with God is authenticity. More that correctness or proper theology. The psalmists bring their struggles to God. Thus the many lament psalms. Psalm 1 states how things should be, but the following songs reflect how broken things can be.

Most laments speak of external troubles, sickness, enemies, etc., crying out for help. But some focus on the enemy within, my own sin, the way I destroy my own life; the way a community can ruin its life and hopes. As Israel reflected on its history, as seen in scripture, they saw clearly the disasters they had brought on themselves by rejecting God’s instruction (Torah). The exile brought to clarity the prophets’ call for repentance and the need for forgiveness (e.g., Dan 9).

The Psalms focus that awareness personally. Troubles can come from outside, but often I honestly know that my own anger, willfulness, selfishness, destructive behavior, greed, sexual betrayal, envy, power hunger, etc., lies at the core of my brokenness. Or I may need help realizing it.

A group of seven psalms have been called “The Penitential Psalms” (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143).

These became important in Christian devotion from the 6th cent till today. (See also 25 & 39.)

Often used during Lent, these seemed more to fit Christian reflection than the laments.

Honest Self-Awareness and Need for God

As songs for worship, the psalms of penitence are usually generic in describing sins, so that anyone can apply them personally. But they are very vivid in describing the impact of sin.

Transgressions can be seen as individual mistakes, easily reversed. But the Psalmist knows the overwhelming impact of sin. “*Out of the depths...*” “*I was born in iniquity...*” “*My bones wasted away...*” “*My sides are filled with burning...*” In later times Paul spoke of the enslavement of sin. It’s far more than a few mistakes I can easily reverse with resolution. I need deliverance!

In Ps 130, a song of Ascent (going up to worship), the Psalmist fees he’s crying out to distant heaven from the depths of the sea. His own wrongs overwhelm him like uncountable waves. He knows that his hope cannot be in the self that got him in the depths, but only in the character and faithfulness of God who revealed himself as merciful and forgiving (to Moses, Ex 34).

The psalm focuses (like Ps 38 and 143) on the time of realization of need. I can’t do it myself.

I wait; I hope. I am in darkness. I wait for God like the dawn. That realization is fundamental.

But then the psalmist looks at the whole process and calls all God’s people to follow in hope.

Life-Changing Renewal

Ps 51 looks more explicitly at the way God’s forgiveness is a wholesale renewal of life. The added description before the psalm calls us to remember the story of David and Bathsheba. Many of these psalms highlight David’s story: the irony of one so blessed by God, so entangled by sin.

But the psalm also shows a long history, from David, to prophets, to rebuilding destroyed Zion.

The Psalmist asks for the painful, joyful work of real transformation. God purges and washes.

He gives new experiences of joy and healing. He creates a new heart/spirit (whole inner being).

Out of the forgiveness comes not just a clean slate but a new person full of gratitude and praise.