

Sermon for December 8, 2013 – Advent 2

Psalm 130 (NKJV)

Theme: My soul waits for the LORD

- 1) *In repentance*
- 2) *In hope*

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. 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 waits, And in His word I do hope. ⁶ My soul waits for the Lord More than those who watch for the morning-- Yes, more than those who watch for the morning. ⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is mercy, And with Him is abundant redemption. ⁸ And He shall redeem Israel From all his iniquities.

It's sad how the world prepares for Christmas - seeing it simply as a feel-good holiday. People greet each other by saying: "Happy Holidays," "Seasons Greetings," "I wish you the warmth of the season" . . . and some might even venture to say "Merry Christmas." On the radio you hear songs about love, peace, Santa and the joy of giving.

"Pastor, why does this make you sad?" you might ask. Because, sadly, almost everything the world does to prepare for Christmas is meaningless. Holiday lights, buying gifts, decorating our houses with holly and singing songs about bells, snow and Santa— these things are all outwardly beautiful, but inwardly empty of true meaning. Even truly Christian customs – like decorating a Christmas tree – have become meaningless because the world forgets why we do these things. (I mean how many people really see the Christmas tree as a reminder of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden, and consider how Jesus is our true tree of life?)

Now please understand me correctly. I am not advocating that we stop decorating and baking for Christmas, but rather that we don't forget to prepare our souls for the true meaning of this holiday. And how do we do that? By listening to the preaching of John the Baptist and repenting.

But in order to repent we have to do something painful. We have to take some time to meditate on God's Law (the Ten Commandments) and ask ourselves some very hard questions – the answers of which will not fill us with cheer, but will rather fill us with sadness, anguish and sorrow over our sinful condition.

"Now why would we want to do that at Christmas?" someone might ask. Because it is only when we truly realize how bad our situation is without Christ that we appreciate His coming into this world to be our Savior. The more we understand and confess our sinful condition, the sweeter and more joyous Christmas becomes – that God would send his Son into the world to save a sinner like me – like Me!

Our Psalm for this morning reflects a heart that has spent time meditating on God's Law and longs for the salvation God promised to send. Let us prepare for Christmas by meditating on this Psalm, under the theme: **My soul waits for the LORD** 1) *In repentance* and 2) *In hope*

Part One: In repentance

Our Psalm begins: *Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD*

From what depths do you cry out? What pit of sin plagues your heart? Is it a struggle with the abuse of alcohol? How about greed or lust? Do you find yourself easily lashing out at others in anger? How about

gossiping or holding a grudge? How many people have you passed by or ignored because you just didn't have the desire to talk to them, help them, or encourage them with Christ? How many times haven't you put something ahead of worshipping Christ? How often haven't you knowingly and willfully done something God told you not to do, or not done what God told you to do?

The Bible is clear: for doing any one of these things, we deserve God's everlasting punishment in hell. God is serious about this. Doesn't this fact make you want to cry out for mercy: "*Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications*"?

It is good and right to look to the LORD for mercy. Why? Because of the LORD's promises to be merciful to those who cry out to him in repentance and faith. The Scriptures say: *A broken and a contrite heart-- These, O God, You will not despise. (Psa 51:17 NKJV) I am merciful,' says the LORD; 'I will not remain angry forever. (Jer 3:12 NKJV)*

Our Psalm continues: *If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?*

Could you imagine for a moment how horrible it would be if the LORD were not merciful, if he did keep a record of our sins? Imagine how many sins would be counted against us – just in one day: The lustful thought we had over the good looking man or woman we saw on a TV commercial, the rage you felt towards a co-worker who hurt your feelings, the juicy gossip you participated in when you spoke poorly of a fellow Christian, coveting the things your friends have but you don't, being disrespectful when talking about our government . . . if God kept a record of all these sins and the many more we commit, how could we ever dream of standing before him – looking for mercy?

"But," the Psalmist says, *"there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared."* Praise the LORD for His forgiving love. Without it we would most certainly be lost! The heart and core of Christmas is a celebration of God's forgiving love. You see, God could not simply forget about our sins. God is just, therefore sin had to be paid for. So what did God do to forgive us? He sent His Son to take on human flesh and blood in order to save us. How? By perfectly keeping the law on our behalf, and by suffering the punishment our sins had earned.

Let me illustrate it in this way: Imagine you are a machinist who has been tasked with building a very expensive and fragile piece of equipment with another machinist. Unfortunately, you are all thumbs and break almost everything. The other machinist does a perfect job. Your boss comes into the room and sees the two objects – one perfect and the other broken. Before you have a chance to say anything, the other machinist says: "That broken one is mine. The good one is his." Your boss punishes your coworker for your shoddy work, but you get rewarded for his masterpiece.

This is how Jesus saved us. He claimed our sinful, horrible work as his own and was punished. He gave us his perfect keeping of the Law to be our own so that we might be rewarded. This is God's wonderful gift of forgiveness that He offers to all, but that is only received through repentance and faith.

When we take time to truly think about the punishment we deserve because of our sins, and the fact that God willingly sent Jesus to suffer it for us, Christmas becomes more than just good cookies, beautiful decorations and empty wishes. No wonder the angels sang about God's peace and good will towards men. Christmas is about God sending his Son to suffer and die for us. To truly prepare for Christmas, we need to cry out from the depths of our sins in repentance – trusting in God's merciful promise to forgive us. When we think about the lengths God went to in order to forgive us, we can't help but revere him. We can't help but long for His coming in hope.

Part Two: In hope

Our Psalm continues: *I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope.* The thought of the LORD's forgiveness and deliverance gave the Psalmist great hope. His life had become one of eager anticipation for what was to come. He looks forward to the LORD's coming. How? By looking into God's Word.

Brothers and sisters: The Bible tells you that your sins are forgiven in Christ. The Bible tells you to take heart – while living in this sin cursed world. Why? Because He is coming soon to deliver us from it. Don't these truths cause your soul to yearn within you for Christ's second coming? "Oh that the LORD would come quickly – as He promised!" And He will. The LORD keeps His promises, this is why we can trust His Word.

And when a Christian sets his hope on God's Word, he will find himself saying with the Psalmist: *My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning-- Yes, more than those who watch for the morning.*

Night has always been a time of terror – even more so in the ancient world than today. Thieves, robbers, murderers, rapists and bandits do most of their work at night. Imagine being a night time sentry – tasked with the duty to warn and protect. Every little shadow and bump causes you concern because you know that real danger is hiding in the shadows. Oh, how you would wish the day would come!

Our hope is also in the coming Day of the LORD. We are the Lord's watchmen on this sinful earth. There are so many dangers hidden in the shadows of this world – ready to attack our souls. The devil uses so many things to either tempt us into sin so that we forget God, or to cause us misery so that we doubt his love. These facts cause the Christian to long for the day of the LORD, to look forward to His deliverance with great anticipation.

And, since the LORD came on Christmas to be our Savior from sin, we can trust that He will come again at the end of time to deliver us from this evil earth, as our Psalm concludes:

O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is mercy, And with Him is abundant redemption. Yes, put your hope in the LORD whenever you feel despair over your sins or the sinfulness of this earth. The LORD has sent Jesus to forgive you. Christmas is the celebration of God's gift of overflowing forgiveness and salvation. Trust in the LORD and know that *He shall redeem Israel From all his iniquities.* He is coming again soon to deliver us from this sin cursed earth home to himself in heaven.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: My soul waits for the Lord in repentance and hope. My prayer is that yours does too. When our hearts eagerly wait for the Lord in repentance and faith, then we will certainly be prepared to celebrate both Christmas and Christ's next Advent to take us home to heaven. And so we pray: Oh come, oh come Immanuel and ransom captive Israel! Amen.