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Title: WHEN GOD FORGIVES

Text: Psalm 130

Today we'll talk about the incredible gift of forgiveness – God's forgiveness – that incredible gift is available to us. Our text today is Psalm 130. This passage tells us much about forgiveness – OUR need for forgiveness, AND... God's EXTRAVAGANT forgiveness. I don't know who wrote this psalm. Many assume that David wrote it, in that, he did pen most of them. Perhaps it was while David was being targeted by Saul, OR... It's been suggested that it was written after his sin with Bathsheba. Some have assumed that it may have been written by Hezekiah or Ezra and others. We're not sure. All we know is that whoever wrote this psalm, they were much like you and me – in need of God's mercy and asking His forgiveness. The author understood what it meant to be in distress or in a low place.

So, let's work our way through today's text. The psalmist begins by saying... ¹*"Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; ²Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy."*

"Out of the depths..." There is probably no better description in all of Scripture for the inevitable outcome of our sinful choices. They always lead us INTO THE DEPTHS. I have never, ever heard anyone say, "You know, my life really started to come together the moment I began to do what I know is wrong." As in "I embezzled from my company, I abandoned my family, I started drinking to excess...and it all worked out according to my plan." I haven't heard that because that isn't how it works. Sin choices ALWAYS lead to the pit. *"The wages of sin is death,"* and... That's the best sin can ever do. That's what it delivers. So, it makes perfect sense that this psalmist – in dire need of mercy – begins this psalm from OUT OF THE DEPTHS. Often when we have come through a time of difficulty and have found ourselves crying from out of the depths, we were there for one reason. Often, there was one person and one person only to blame. WE WERE THAT PERSON. Often, we find ourselves in difficult circumstances due to our own doing. Not always. Sometimes our difficulties come at the hands of others, BUT... For the most part, there is one key person to blame when one finds himself in the pit or low places. It works this way for everyone. It is OUR sin that leads OUR lives into disarray. Coming to grips with this reality is the beginning of moving to higher ground. There's an old joke about a children's teacher who asked the class, "Kids, what must you do before you can be forgiven of sin?" One of the students raised his hand and said, "Well, first, you have to sin." Technically that's true, but it's not the answer the teacher was looking for. The FIRST step in forgiveness is to ACKNOWLEDGE your sin. You agree with God about the nature of your actions. The Greek word "confess" – *homologeō* – means literally, to say the same thing. Forgiveness begins when WE say about our sin what GOD says about our sin, AND... What does He say about our sin? He says that's it's destructive. And... It's wrong. It separates you from Him, and it separates you from others. And... It must be abandoned. This is why the book of Proverbs says... *"Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy"* (Proverbs 28:13, ESV). That is what the psalmist has done. He cried from out of the depths. He has asked God for His mercy. And... He is waiting for His word. In these verses he talks about the characteristics of God's forgiveness, and that's what I want us to look at today. If you have ever cried from out of the depths, "God please forgive me," ... then the words of this psalm will bring you comfort. These words take us from the depths of despair and help us find our way back to solid ground.

There are three things I want you to see about God's forgiveness – three things that are almost too good to be true. But they ARE true.

1. When God Forgives, HE KEEPS NO PERMANENT RECORD. I don't know how it is for students today, but when I was growing up, we heard all about the PERMANENT RECORD. And... That phrase – this will go on your permanent record – was never intended to be good news. At least, not as I remember it. Which is why, today, deep within the historical archives of the hallowed halls of the Berkeley County Educational System, there

might be found a manila folder – perhaps a thick one – with your name on it or my name on it, containing a listing of all the misdeeds of our childhood years. Each time we ran down the hallway, or stuffed gum into the water fountain or under our seat or scuffled on the playground – it’s all there. Most, I assume, know about the permanent record – today I guess Twitter serves that purpose – and we quite naturally assume that GOD keeps such a record on each of us – that He has an ongoing list of every sin we’ve ever committed. Except HE DOESN’T, AND... He goes out of His way to let us know. Listen to what the psalmist said... *“If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?”* (v. 3). I like how he says, *“O Lord”* twice in this one sentence, to underline just how dreadful it would be if God kept such a record. That’s because he understands that if God did keep such a record, then NONE OF US COULD STAND. For this reason, God emphasizes again and again throughout Scripture that WHEN HE FORGIVES, HE FORGETS. The prophet Micah said... *“You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea”* (Micah 7:19). And in the book of Isaiah, God has said... *“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more”* (Isaiah 43:25). Listen to what God is saying: There is no permanent record. When you’re forgiven, the slate is clean. God doesn’t use permanent markers, BUT... He DOES use permanent ERASERS! Now, here’s what I’ve noticed. When we recognize OUR sin for what it is and begin to take it as seriously as it should be taken, we sometimes struggle with the ability to forgive OURSELVES. IF we have confessed it, GOD has forgiven us, but the memory of the sin still haunts us. The accuser continues to remind us at every opportunity the shame of our past: This is who you are, AND... This is what you did, AND... We find ourselves HANGING ON TO the things that God LET GO OF a long time ago. At this point, WE need to make it a point to choose to FORGET that which GOD has already FORGOTTEN. There is no PERMANENT record. 1 John 1:9 – *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* YOU are forgiven. No one cleans like Jesus! Here’s the second characteristic of God’s forgiveness.

2. When God Forgives, A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP IS RESTORED. The psalmist continues... *“But with you THERE IS FORGIVENESS, so that we can, with reverence, serve you”* (v. 4). The NIV tweaked the phrase in this verse to clarify the meaning of the original Hebrew phrase. Most translations say something along the lines of, *“with you there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared.”* The NIV clarified it because some folks get a little tripped up when the Bible talks about the fear of God – because... They think it means the same thing as being afraid of God in the same sense that we’re afraid of bad people or bad news or a bad turn of events. That’s NOT the kind of fear that this phrase fear-of-God is referring to. The fear of God in the Bible refers to an attitude of reverence. It’s an overwhelming understanding of God’s awe-inspiring greatness. It’s an overwhelming realization that leads us to the point of full surrender to Him. That’s the fear of God. And so, the NIV uses the phrase, *“so that we can, with reverence, serve you.”* The psalmist is talking about the RELATIONSHIP GETTING BACK ON TRACK, back where things should be, that God is in HIS RIGHTFUL PLACE in our lives, and we are serving Him in reverence. Forgiveness restores the balance and restores the relationship. When the prodigal son came home and said to his father, “I am no longer worthy to be called your son,” he had this idea that things would never be the same again. There’s nothing in the parable that suggested that the son thought that things would be as they were. The son thought he had done irreparable damage. He just hoped he could get a job working in the fields. BUT... WHAT DID THE FATHER DO? He called for a CELEBRATION – a RING for his son’s finger, the BEST ROBE for his son to wear, a FATTED CALF for a feast, AND... He said, *“This son of mine was dead and is alive again”* (Luke 15:24). Dead to ALIVE – that’s quite the restoration! You may think, because of your sin, that you have been DEMOTED to second class status in God’s kingdom forever...but it doesn’t have to be if you’ll confess and forsake your sin. Our God is the GOD OF RESTORATION. You don’t have to spend the rest of your life bearing the “mark of Cain” or wearing the “Scarlet Letter.” God forgives, and God restores a right relationship, so that your life can be back where it SHOULD BE: serving Him in a spirit of reverence. Last week, we looked at Peter. Peter was one of the disciples. The one who pledged to NEVER deny Jesus. *“Though they take my life, I’ll not deny you.”* What did he do in short order? He not only denied Him once, but 3 times, and... On the third time, he threw in a few curse words. Then in Mark 16, Jesus called for

the disciples AND PETER. Why? Jesus' heart is to restore. Jesus knew Peter's potential and continued to see worth in him. When God forgives, HE RESTORES THE RELATIONSHIP. Here's the third characteristic I want you to see.

3. When God Forgives, THERE IS FULL REDEMPTION. *"O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption"* (v. 7). The King James Version puts it this way... *"With him is plenteous redemption."* Meaning there was more than enough. And the next verse says... *"He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins"* (v. 8). The Hebrew word that is translated redemption or redeemed was a legal term that originally referred to a transfer of ownership, usually by method of payment. It can also mean RANSOM. And... It can also mean RESCUE. In Exodus we see that God's people were trapped as slaves in Egypt. They were unable to free themselves, so God took action to bring about their RESCUE. He intervened on their behalf and led them to freedom. In Deuteronomy the Lord said to His people... *"Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God REDEEMED YOU"* (Deuteronomy 15:15). I went to Larry Hickey's funeral yesterday (former D-Cap & former District Superintendent of the Potomac District). I'll likely mess up some details. Larry was the son of an alcoholic mother. As I remember it, he got in some trouble as a 5-year-old. As he told it, he was in a gang of 5-year-olds who were arrested for breaking windows. The police arrested them. No handcuffs. Larry wasn't afraid of the cops. He was afraid of Big Mary, his babysitter. He knew she would give him a big whooping! His grandmother from Atlanta came and took him to live with her. She made Larry go to church against his will. (Good grandmother!) At 8 years old he had a visitation from the Lord. A man was at the foot of his bed. Larry's son told the story that the man grabbed his dad's big toe and said, "You are mine" and left. Larry ran to his grandmother's room and told her that a man was in his room, grabbed his foot and said, "You are mine." His grandmother headed to his room and opened the door. She then turned to Larry and said, "Don't worry about it. That was Jesus." Shortly thereafter, he went to the altar and gave his heart to the Lord. Larry was never the same after that. His grandmother had rescued him at 5, AND... Jesus rescued him at 8. As a 19-year-old Bible College student, Larry got word that his mother was dying with terminal cancer throughout her body. He borrowed money and came home to Atlanta. His mom had been cut open. They hadn't even sewn her back up. They had used some clamps to hold the skin together, thinking that she would soon die, and this would make an autopsy easier. He was determined that his grandma's prayers were going to be answered. Believing God for the salvation of his mother, he led his mother to the Lord. Then he laid his hands on his mom and prayed, "Heal my mom in Jesus' name." Some people began collecting money for her funeral which did not make Larry happy at all. HIS MOM WAS HEALED! She lived to be 87 years old. She became a witness for Jesus. Larry said that she scared a lot of people into heaven. Jesus rescued Larry and Jesus rescued his mother. Last week we looked at Mary Magdalene who was among the first to arrive at the empty tomb. She was a prostitute. She had been possessed by 7 demons, BUT... In Luke 8 she kneels at the feet of Jesus and receives her healing. Jesus rescued Mary Magdalene. How about the thief on the cross? How does he fit into your theology? No keeper of the Sabbath or the law, no baptism, no communion, no confirmation, no speaking in tongues, no missions' trips, no volunteerism, no financial gifts or tithe, no church clothes, no church membership... He couldn't even bend his knees to pray! But he said, "Remember me." And Jesus rescued him! Jesus said, "Today you will be with me in paradise!" Jesus said that to a no-good thief on the cross! He rescued him! That's what redemption is. It's a rescue. Psalm 107, a narrative about the redeemed of the Lord, says... *"Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent out his word and healed them; he RESCUED THEM FROM THE GRAVE"* (Psalm 107:19-20). How did the Lord rescue them from the grave? Because *"the wages of sin is death..."* That's what redemption is. And... This is what I want you to understand about forgiveness. God does not just wipe the slate clean and toss your sins into the sea and then LEAVE YOU WHERE YOU ARE. His forgiveness COMES WITH REDEMPTION. It includes a RESCUE. He pulls us OUT OF THE PIT. We cry out to him FROM THE DEPTHS, BUT He doesn't LEAVE US THERE. He delivers us from our sin and LEADS US INTO VICTORY. That's why JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS. His death on Calvary DELIVERS US from a life of bondage. Paul wrote... *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he LAVISHED on*

us" (Ephesians 1:7-8). Your redemption means that the TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP IS COMPLETE. YOU have been BOUGHT with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). YOU now belong to HIM. YOU are HIS TREASURE. AND... When you find yourself deep in the depths, crying out to God – even if it was your own foolishness and rebellion that got you there – I want you to remember that God loves you far too much to leave you there. He is ready to RESCUE and RESTORE and REDEEM your life for His glory.

4. A FINAL APPLICATION. Now, if you've been paying attention, there were three points. It may sound like I'm almost done. However, I'm not about to wrap things up. I'm about to RAMP THINGS UP! All that I said before – that was my introduction. Now comes the sermon. In 1954, *This Week Magazine* – with 11 million readers – asked a handful of high-profile pastors and theologians a compelling question: "If, as a result of some cataclysmic event, it were possible to retain just one passage from the Bible – what would your choice be?" One of the most respected and influential theologians of the 20th century, Reinhold Niebuhr, chose the following verse: "*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*" (Ephesians 4:32). This one verse says it all. It's the high point of the Christian ethic – FORGIVING LOVE. And... It's based on God's finished work – THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST. God takes forgiveness seriously. He doesn't merely give lip service to the idea. He's fully invested in the forgiveness of His people – fully invested in YOUR forgiveness – to the extent that He sent HIS SON to die on the cross for YOUR sins. He takes forgiveness seriously, and He expects THE SAME FROM US. When He forgives, HE FORGIVES COMPLETELY. He forgives FOREVER. And... WE are to do the same. When we pray together the Lord's prayer, what do we say? "*Forgive us our trespasses as WE FORGIVE those who have trespassed against us*" (Matthew 6:12). The option doesn't exist that we can receive forgiveness AND withhold it at the same time. We're to forgive just as God in Christ has forgiven us. How do we do that? How do we forgive as we have been forgiven? Using Psalm 130 as a guide, here's how. **A. When you forgive, you DO AWAY WITH THE PERMANENT RECORD.** You surrender your right to keep bringing it up. You surrender your right to keep throwing it in their face. Do you want to forgive like you've been forgiven? Delete the permanent record. **B. When you forgive, MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO RESTORE THE RELATIONSHIP.** We don't relegate those whom we have forgiven to second class status. Like the Prodigal's father, we bring out the ring and the robe and the fatted calf. Every relationship cannot be restored, but you make sure that you never stand in the way of a restored relationship. **C. When you forgive, DO YOUR BEST TO MAKE IT ALL ABOUT REDEMPTION.** Sometimes forgiveness includes a rescue on our part. We don't merely say, "I'll forgive you and I will leave you where you are." Sometimes forgiveness calls on us to say: "I'll forgive you, and I'll do everything I can to help you find victory in Jesus. God's forgiveness is almost too good to be true. But... It IS true, and... nearly all of us know that firsthand because we've experienced it. The same mercy He LAVISHED on us we are to LAVISH on others. The same plenteous redemption that we have been given, we have been called on to share. Just as God in Christ has forgiven you and me, LET US FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER.