

Reading the Mind of Today's Man
Psalm 130:1-8

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Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Ps. 130:1-2a

Today I am asking you to find the materials for a Father's Day sermon in Psalm 130. And let the title for the sermon be "Reading the Mind of Today's Man."

Psalm 130 is the eleventh of fifteen psalms in a row that are called "songs of ascent." These fifteen songs of ascent had a special use among the people of the Old Testament. Families and communities would sing these songs as they traveled from wherever they lived up to Jerusalem, the Holy City, for one of the religious festivals. Here, then, in Psalm 130, is the prayer of a man traveling with his family.

We can use Psalm 130 this Father's Day to help us read the mind of the man who is traveling with his family today. The man now in view obviously is not making his way to Jerusalem for a religious festival and he is not necessarily on a special vacation trip. He is instead someone who is making his way through life along with those who are around him. He is going to work and coming home. He is going to work and coming home. He is doing what his job requires and he is trying to do what he enjoys. Work and family, labor and love, job and hobby, effort and recreation, exertion and relaxation – this is his life. Through it all he is influenced and affected by what is happening in the world and he wants to make the best of it for himself and those closest to him. The stanzas of Psalm 130 help us get inside the mind of this man of today.

Today's man is crying out of the depths of experience.

That is the psalm's first stanza:

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my supplications!

That word *cry* may lead to some embarrassment for men today. North American culture is not kind to men who cry. Wasn't it Richard Nixon who said, "Never let them see you cry"? Even so, the strongest of men are men of tears because life gets them down.

The man of the psalm had reason to cry. He was in the depths. That word *depths* would have brought to the mind of everyone who spoke the language of the Old Testament the deep, chaotic, and boundless waters that prevailed at Creation before God brought order out of the

chaos.¹ His life, in other words, was in complete turmoil, utter disarray. Eugene Peterson translates it in *The Message* to say that the bottom had fallen out of this man's life.²

We have no way of knowing who this anonymous ancient Hebrew was who composed this poem and prayed through tears, but I think I saw him interviewed on television the other night. A journalist was out on the street interviewing people at one of the protests in one of the cities. She talked with an African American man I judged to be in his early 30s. She asked him why he was participating in the protest. He answered her through a torrent of tears and said he was there because he wanted a better life for his children, the kind of life in which they would not have to live in the same fear and under the same threat of racist hatred that he has had to face his whole life. He was a man crying out of the depths all for the sake of his children.

Now none of us are in those depths, but still we know the lows that hit and make it so that it feels as though the bottom has dropped out of life. They occur when the boss calls you into office and says that the company is downsizing, meaning you either have no work, less work, or twice as much work. They come when the doctor enters the room and her face is more serious than you had hoped and her voice more somber. They come when your son or daughter looks up at you and you know you have disappointed them in a way that cannot be undone. The man of today knows what it is like to cry from the depths.

Our tears are best when they are tears unto God. Why not be like this psalmist and cry unto God when you cry from the depths. The prayer need not be finely formed. God will hear and know all that you mean and feel, and God will attend you right then and there, no matter how deep the depths may be.

Today's man is carrying a load of guilt in his soul.

That is the psalm's second stanza, especially its opening lines:

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

We have been watching news clips of statues being taken down. Across the American south there are statues being removed of Confederate generals and soldiers who rebelled against the United States. Over in England there are some who are finding fault with Winston Churchill and a statue of him was defaced in London. Back in the States statues of Christopher Columbus have been getting the same treatment. A statue of Columbus was beheaded in Boston, one was toppled in St. Paul, and another in Richmond was pulled down and thrown into a lake.

The honest man watches those news clips and whispers to himself, "There but for the grace of God go I." Those were all flawed men, flawed even in their time. Today's man may not have the same flaws but he knows he has some flaw – perhaps several.

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

¹ William R. Taylor, "Exegesis of Psalms 1-71, 93, 95-96, 100, 120-138, 140-15," *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IV, ed. by George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1955), p. 679.

² Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, second edition (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2000), p. 135.

Not I. Not you. Were there statues of us, they would deserve to be toppled.

The honest man is rather like King David of old. His statue – that famous one by Michelangelo – stands somewhere over in Italy. No one has taken it down. David himself might say, “Topple it!” If indeed he was the one who wrote Psalm 51 he cries, “My sin is ever before me.” (Ps. 51:3)

William Barclay was a fabulous New Testament scholar from Scotland. There was a time a generation ago when the bookshelves of every pastor in the English speaking world carried his very practical and insightful New Testament studies. He won wide acclaim and was in high demand. A biography about him stands in my library and that biography shows a picture of him, smiling, and receiving an award for his contributions to scripture study.³ His autobiography also stands in my library. His autobiography does not include that picture of his high honor. His autobiography – what he wrote about himself says – “As I come near the end of my days, the one thing that haunts me more than anything else is that I have been so unsatisfactory a husband and father.”⁴

If the Lord should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

The man of today carries a load of guilt in his soul. Thankfully there is something to do about it. The psalmist trusted the mercy of God and found forgiveness. Your statue isn't perfect, but it need not come down. It can stand steadied by the wonderful grace of our wonderful God.

Today's man is keeping his eye on the future.

That is the psalm's third stanza:

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

All people watch for the morning, I suppose. All dream of a better future. All set certain goals to try to make them happen. Robert Caro writes of a young Lyndon Johnson, just 17- or 18-years-old, working one summer on a road crew in Texas. It is hard work. The crew is building a gravel road almost exclusively by hand in the Texas heat. One lunch break Johnson said to his co-workers, “I'm going to be President of the United States one day.”⁵ He was watching for the morning, dreaming of a finer future. All of us need a bit of that in our lives if we are going to make it through.

But the man of faith – and not just men, of course, but this is Father's Day, so the man of faith – does more than watch for the morning to see what it will bring. The man of faith watches for God in heightened anticipation of what God will do.

³ Clive L. Rawlins, *William Barclay* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 678.

⁴ William Barclay, *A Spiritual Autobiography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 16.

⁵ Robert A. Caro, *The Passage of Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, Vol. IV (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), p. 3.

The psalmist's language speaks of waiting for the Lord and links waiting to hope. Someone who has studied this text with care reminds us that waiting of this kind is not doing nothing. Neither is it making plans for God to complete and then waiting for our cups to fill rather like we stand waiting at a coffee dispenser after we have made our selection. No, this student said, waiting for God – hoping – “means going about our assigned tasks, confident that God will provide the meaning and the conclusions.”⁶ It means – in my way of saying it – trusting that God is not some theory or idea or concept, but a living Person who can be an active agent in our lives and in our world. It means trusting that God will show up in some good and gracious way at a good and gracious time. It means that God will break in upon our perplexities with light and guidance and love and strength and all that we need to keep on keeping on.

The man of faith keeps his eye on that future when God will make himself known as a Friend to life. Why not trust that the good, gracious, and powerful God is in your future. Set your hope on him. Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength and rise up with wings like eagles (Is. 40:31).

Today's man is ready to share what he has discovered about life.

That is the fourth and last stanza of our psalm:

O Israel, hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

Testifying to what one has discovered as one has moved along in life bears the name – at least in the church – evangelism. In one classic definition of what evangelism means it has been called “one beggar telling another beggar where to get food” (D. T. Niles).⁷

Lots of people are eager to share the food they have discovered, but often enough those readily shared truths are pretty empty of nutritional value. For example, think of the Tom T. Hall song – intended to be comical, I think – in which he tells of asking an old cowboy the mysteries of life. If you know the song then you remember the old cowboy answered with persistence and said the key to life is

Faster horses, younger women,
older whiskey, and more money.⁸

When the man of faith testifies about the truths he has found, his answer is deeper and more gripping. He doesn't pretend to know everything perfectly, but he knows deeply.

⁶ Eugene Peterson, p. 144.

⁷ George E. Sweazey, *Effective Evangelism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), p. 54.

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https://www.google.com/search?source=hp&ei=a9voXsvCB8bWtAao9Iu4Cg&q=tom+t+hall+faster+horses&oq=tom+t+hall+fa&gs_lcp=CgZwc3ktYWIQARgAMgIIADICCAAYAggAMgIIADICCAAYAggAMgIIADICCAAYAggAOgUIABCxAzofCAAQgwFOsglYljFgukVoAHAAeACAAbkBiAHbCpIBBDEwLjOYAOCgAOQgAQdnd3Mtd2l6&scient=psy-ab

Our psalmist said it this way:

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

William Barclay, whom I quoted earlier, said it this way. He knew he was a statue worth toppling because he had been such a poor husband and father. But after owning up to that he added this:

“I do not know how [my wife] has put up with me for forty years. All I know is that I have been cared for and protected for all my days with a care and protection which no man could deserve, and for which no thanks are adequate⁹

What is that but the experience of the forgiveness? What is that but what the psalmist called God’s steadfast love and redeeming power?

The man of faith is ready to testify to what he has discovered to be true, and his testimony is filled with the love and power of God.

Today’s man cries from the depth of experience, carries a load of guilt, looks with hope to the future, and, when he is a man of faith, he testifies that all his sins and struggles find their answer and help in the wonderful and redeeming love of God.

Why don’t you strive to be that man and discover that truth. The same Lord is ready to bless you as God blessed the psalmist of old.

⁹ William Barclay, p. 17.