

Message Summary

Psalms 130-131 model how to cry to the Lord, not false saviors (idols), out of the depths. The “depths” is an ocean metaphor, describing the twofold darkness of sin and troubles that our fallen world will inevitably bring. Pss. 130-131 are part of the “Psalms of Ascent,” written for Israelites traveling to worship in Jerusalem. It is no coincidence that these Psalms of desperate cry from one’s own inadequacy fall towards the end. The closer worshippers near the Temple, the more they sense their own unworthiness.

The Psalmist’s cry, though desperate (vv.1-2), is not a last-minute plea to a last resort God. It is later in the Psalms compilation, and later in the Psalms of Ascent. God is not a last resort, but a first pursuit. Prayer, more than anything else, reveals who we are as people and who we turn to as savior. It is not handwork, but heartwork. This is why Jesus reserves some of His harshest criticism for hypocrites who prayed in order to impress others rather than honor God. This turns the blood-bought privilege of approaching the throne of grace into a trite religious game. Rather, Jesus teaches, go into your closet, shut the door, and pray in secret. Prayer, then, is an expression of our integrity as whole Christians seeking to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Regardless of how gifted, productive, or zealous we may be, we are what we are before God on our knees and nothing more.

The desperate cry is complemented by the Psalmist’s confidence in the Lord’s forgiveness (vv. 3-4). The Psalmist knew that God would accept their offerings and extend forgiveness in Jerusalem. The Scriptures and Israelites both looked forward with great anticipation to the day when the Savior would be revealed, who would journey toward Jerusalem as their great sacrifice. Jesus descended to the depths on our behalf, and was raised up so that He can even now make intercession on our behalf.

This confidence fuels the Psalmist’s waiting for the Lord (vv. 5-6). He pressed on in the discipline of prayer, even when he did not feel its delight. The Bible is full of such admonitions: “be constant in prayer” (Rm. 12:12), “pray without ceasing” (1 Thes. 5:17), and “go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret” (Mt. 6:6). But the reward of secret, steadfast prayer is well worth its price. This steadfastness in prayer is accompanied by an admonition to others to also trust in the Lord (vv. 7-8). There is a special type of leading, guiding, and direction by the Holy Spirit that comes when we give ourselves to prayer, even as it did for Jesus (Mk. 1:35-39). If Jesus and Paul were not above prayer, certainly we are not either.

The desperation has taught David childlike humility in the presence of God (Ps. 131:1-3). No longer does he come to God just wanting things from God. Like a weaned child to his mother, David comes to God wanting God himself. This is the sort of prayer God delights to answer, as offering the fullness of ourselves in prayer leads to receiving the fullness of God.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

- 1) If God already knows what we need before we ask, and will accomplish His mission, why then do we still need to pray?
- 2) Why would drawing near to Jerusalem suddenly spark the Psalmist’s awareness of the depths of his sin?
- 3) Why is Christ so concerned with hypocrisy in prayer? How is prayer a matter of integrity for the Christian?

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to examine what the sermon and its text mean, to apply the Word to your life, and to guide how you pray. Please note that you don't have to use all of the questions. These are just options (along with the digging deeper section) to help you frame the family/small group discussion.

- 1) When you find yourself in the depths, do you cry out to God or something else? If something else, what else are you tempted to cry out to?
- 2) When praying, do you really believe God hears and will answer? Do you pray expectantly?
- 3) Do you view God as a last resort, a "God of the gaps"? Or is God your first and utmost, regardless of your external circumstances?
- 4) Are you frustrated by prayer because you subtly believe, like Huck Finn, that "there ain't nothing in it"?
- 5) Do you have the discipline to pray intentionally and wait patiently for the Lord to answer? Or are your prayers only sporadic and in the moment?
- 6) Does your prayer closet drive you to invite others to also trust in the Lord?
- 7) In prayer, do you primarily seek things from God or seek God Himself? Have you calmed and quieted your soul like a weaned child with its mother?
- 8) There is a place for disciplined, closet prayer and constant, free, Spirit-led prayer. Do you tend towards one to the neglect of the other?

Prayer

- Pray for Our Church:
 - Thank God that Christ also walked toward Jerusalem, sank to the depths on our behalf, and was raised to even now offer intercession for us.
 - Pray that God would give greater quality and quantity of prayer to our church body. Pray that He would use this prayer to give us greater intimacy with God, and that we would want God more than any earthly goods.
- Pray for Our Community:
 - Pray that God would give us faithful prayer for our neighbors, and that this prayer would drive us to proclaim the gospel faithfully and invite others to trust in the Lord with us.
 - Pray for the offering for NAMB. Pray that God would use NAMB to equip many local churches for kingdom faithfulness, and plant more that will be able to reach the nations in our own communities.
- Pray for Our World:
 - Pray for Jeff and Misti Fairchild in their journey to the mission field. Pray for effective language acquisition, practical engagement with ministry as they learn, wisdom, strong community, and continued spiritual strengthening and encouragement. Pray also for physical safety amidst the volatile political environment.