

Let Us Worship And Bow Down (III): Waiting For God

Bible Reading:

Psalm 130

Psalm 131

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Have you ever seen this symbol before?
Black and white - two intertwined shapes in one circle.
Asian philosophers refer to them as Ying and Yang.

Simplistically put - they represent the opposites that we so often encounter in life:
birth and death
peace and struggle
growth and decay
richness and poverty
summer and winter.

from one end of the spectrum to the other – opposites -- and all wrapped up in our one experience of life.

Mike Westra is going to read two poems from the Bible for us, ones that are, in some sense, opposites, growing out of very different corners of life experience. Psalm 130, the first poem, speaks of deep suffering.

Psalm 131, seems to reflect a life that is rather put together, at peace.
And yet - different though they are - there is something critical which holds them together;
a common truth that they share.

See if you can find that truth as Mike reads them:

PSALM 130 P.706
PSALM 131

Perhaps you noticed the sub-heading for these psalms:
“A song of Ascents.”

There’s a whole group of these songs, Psalms 120-134, used by ancient believers “on their way up” to worship God in the Temple. Hence: **ascents**.

Songs sung while on the road, traveling towards Jerusalem, climbing the hillsides which led to the city.

Songs of ascent – going **up** to meet God in the **up**building, **up**lifting, **up**ward oriented experience of worship with other believers in the Temple.

People going to worship in ancient times were no different than people who worship today – people like you and me.

They were people who experienced pain and failure.

They were people who had life chapters of quiet peace and wholeness.

The tears of Psalm 130, and the quiet smiles of Psalm 131 - all brought to worship, into the presence of God.

Both spinning madly around the lives of worshippers, ancient and contemporary.

Yanking them first in this direction
and then in that direction

Sometimes, perhaps, leaving them feeling as if they were being ripped in two. **Except** for the one thing that held their lives in equilibrium, kept them from falling apart or going under.

And that is the power and presence of God in their lives.

Their trips to the temple, their times of going up to regular worship, helped get that all back into perspective.

That's the theme I asked you to look for, the one which ties these two psalms together. The theme of:

"waiting on the Lord," as Psalm 130:5 puts it.

"hoping in the Lord," as Psalm 131:3 puts it.

To say that I'm "waiting on the Lord", a la Psalm 130, is another way of saying that I crave the presence of God, a presence where I can be –
refreshed instead of drained;
directed instead of confused.

Same idea is found in another Psalm, 22:10:

"I have relied on you since the day I was born, and You have always been my God. Do not stay away from me!"

Oh Yannick. Oh Christopher – may this be true in your lives!

May you grow to crave, seek, focus on, desire.....

.... wait for..... hope in.....

.....God.

Which is the essence of what worship is all about.

It is the centre of what drives us here each Sunday morning and evening.

God calls us together - His Holy Spirit is present, inviting us. Different actions, including those of Bible study, song, quiet moments, baptism – they become means though which God speaks to, touches and encourages us.

Feeds our faith. Deepens our trust.

Computer-wise, we'd say that worship is the weekly chance to hit the reset button. Clears the memory banks and restores us for another week.

Worship: God calls us and speaks to us. And then we have the chance to respond to Him, to reach out to Him.....

sometimes as desperate, needy people;

and sometimes as content and happy people.

Worshipping God in the dark moments -

It happens, doesn't it? We come trudging through these doors, hoping we can hold it together but not really sure about it;

feeling pretty beaten up by the week past.

When you feel like this, don't ever think that you're alone. Somewhere along the way we all experience it. We can relate to the words of Psalm 69.

Save me, O God!

The water is up to my neck;

I am sinking in deep mud, and there is no solid ground;

I am out in deep water, and the waves are about to drown me!

"9/11" - the World Trade Centre horror - sent that kind of chill clear across North America. But that's only one instance.

Dis-ease, struggle, has been growing in our society in the last generation.

In 1975, poodles were the most popular purebred dog in America, with 139,750 registered. There were only 952 registered Rottweilers, a fierce breed often used as a guard dog. By 1994, the poodle population had been cut in half to 61,775, while Rottweilers had increased 100 times to 102,596.

Do you think that tells you something about where people are at?

Or get this —

Membership in American Counselling Association has gone from 45,000 in 1967 to over 200,000 in the mid 90's.

“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.....”

When you're caught in storm season, there's nothing you can do, but call out and reach up ---- to God.

Often rude and sometimes crude comedian Richard Pryor was critically burned in an accident in 1980. Interviewed later by Jonny Carson, he insisted that when he was seriously ill, there wasn't much that gave him help - many of his life props had been kicked out from under him. He is quoted as saying: *“All that I could think of was to call on God. I didn't call the Bank of America once.”*
Peter Graystone, Ready Salted (Scripture Union, 1998),

....I cry to you, O Lord.....

But not just during the outside-induced storm; the outer social sense of chaos.

There's also the challenge of inner ruin. That's what v.3 & 4 are talking about – the times when we screw up our lives, mess up interactions with others and with creation itself. Not to mention the times when we blow it with God.

The Bible's word for those times is **sin**. You can sugar coat it or label it with another term if you prefer - but ultimately whatever we do that God didn't originally intend to happen here in Creation; whatever goes against His good plan and will.....that's sin.

It messes life up.

It hurts others.

It will, left unchecked, destroy our lives.

Here on earth.

And in eternity beyond.

We come to worship, every one of us, week after week, dragging a bundle of sin. Just like those ancient people. Dragging us down. Unravelling our lives.

Which is one of the reasons why worship is so important.

To have a formal, public, structured occasion and time where that stuff can be deliberately dealt with.

Where it is dealt with through the forgiveness, amazing and gracious forgiveness, that only God, Cosmic Creator, King and Judge can offer.

Ps 130:4: *But with you there is forgiveness.....”*

ever so costly - cross-costly
yet granted with certainty.

And, as certain as that forgiveness is granted - so certain is His presence, His care. Leaving the worshiper longing for God's presence to be the daylight that breaks the darkness of his present trouble:

My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Friends, may that reaching and longing be yours, too.

Reaching and longing for God, for the Son of God - Jesus Christ, whom we worship here this morning.

Jesus, the Son of God, whose name we uttered and into whose care we committed Yannick and Christopher.

Jesus said,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...." (Mt 11.28)

God the Son came to live in our weary and tired world;

He experienced the tension, hunger, loneliness, pain and frustration and temptation that drive us into the ground today.

He came to take the rap, the punishment for your sin and mine - for each and every time that we've blown it in life.

He came to carve a road through life all the way to an eternity of vigor and strength and joy and peace in the close and wonderful presence of God Himself; a road available for all who will answer His call: *Come to me!*

Psalms 130 says, *"Lord, with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared."*.....

Don't misread *fear*. It doesn't mean turn and run in terror. The ancient word means, *"an attitude of honour and respect."*

It means, taking God seriously, of primary importance in our lives.

Getting yourself up and out to worship is one of the very few places in our busy society where you can focus on and do that in any regular, deliberate sort of way.

Giving you solid ground from which to deal with the storms of life.

AND

with the good times. The other side of the coin.

That's Psalm 131 – The worshiper singing this song had a smile on his or her face. Life was going well.

They'd fall asleep when their head hit the pillow and not wake up till the alarm sounded. No tossing and turning because of stress and worry.

Can you visualize the image of this psalm? A weaned child & mom.

The translation out of Hebrew that we have here in the pew doesn't really do it full justice.

The original wording actually paints a picture of a small child quietly snuggled on mother's lap. I picture mom with an arm over the child, quietly stroking it's cheek. The two together - just sitting, resting.....

.....quiet.

.....safe.

No need to pretend about being big and strong.

No need to worry about having everything all figured out.
Mom will take care of that.

Again, to quote another psalm, the one we used in the opening song this morning, Psalm 46:
*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea....*

Giving us something to hold on to when the storms hit; light in our darkness.
Keeping us grounded and on track when the good times roll.
Hush, my child. I'll get you through.

I want to leave you with words of a prophet, Isaiah.
Years after these two worship poems were penned, God inspired him to say:
*Don't you know? Haven't you heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God; he created all the world.
He never grows tired or weary.
He is far greater than anyone can think or imagine.
He strengthens those who are weak and tired.
Even those who are young grow weak; young ones can fall exhausted.
But those who wait for the Lord, trusting for His help,
will find their strength renewed.
They will rise on wings like eagles;
They will run and not get weary;
They will walk and not grow weak.* (Isaiah 40:28-31)

Strength, safety, security
Rest
From the God of power and life.

The God who transforms:
Darkness into light.
Death into life.
Dead-ends into new opportunities.
Despair into thanksgiving.
Hell into eternal life.

The God who:
holds our lives.
holds the future.
has all power.
never grows weary.

Which is why one worshiper, who surrendered his life into the cradling arms of God, was able to write:
*"We are pressed on every side by troubles, but not crushed and broken.
We are perplexed because we don't know why things happen as they do but we don't give up and quit.
We are hunted down, but God never abandons us.
We get knocked down, but we get up again and keep going.
Though our bodies are dying, our inner strength in the Lord is growing each day.* (2 Corinthians 4)

These are words of someone who looks at the big, complex picture of life
with all its challenges and pains, victories and moments;
looks at them and says:

*"They're beyond me.
But not beyond the One who holds me.
I may not know what the future will bring.
But I know who holds my future."*

My prayer for Yannick and Christopher is that as they grow, that you as parents will keep their
attention pointed towards this Great God;
towards Jesus Christ.

That is my prayer for each and every child in this community.
Parents, point them to the One who can pull together all their life's experiences!

That is my prayer for each of you.

Some of you can tell dramatic stories of how God has picked up and held together pieces of
your life when it seemed as if things were irreparable.

But some of you here today haven't taken the step of faith – you haven't yet come to the point
of deliberately surrendering your life into the control and care of God.

I want to invite you to do that this morning. As we pray I'd invite you, in this setting of worship,
to close your eyes and imagine that you are climbing a hill, or going up a set of stairs. Ascending.
At the top of the stairs, picture Jesus.
He is calling you. Inviting you.
Wanting you with Him.
That you may settle into His forgiving, providing, renewing care.
Content.

Say "Yes" to Jesus.

For others of you, well, you've wandered; You've fallen out of the groove.
Worship of, devotion to, living with the God of Eternity hasn't been part of your life's picture — even
though at one time it was.

Or, perhaps it's there, but tucked away in a little corner.
Too much other stuff is cluttering the floor.
Take a moment today to clean house.
Put first things first.

If you're there, safe in the arms of Jesus,
take this next moment of silence to say a special "*thank you!*" for His light, His life, His care.

It is a moment of worship, today.
The distractions and busynesses out there will wait.
I'm going to ask for a moment when all eyes are closed, and heads bowed.
This is your moment — just you and God.

*Hope in me, my child, and find renewed strength.
Come rest and I will raise you up on my wings.*

*Let me carry you while I run for you.
Let me hold your hand and let's walk together.*