

Songs of Ascent Pt. 4

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, August 2, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today. Whether you are here IN PERSON or watching via the LIVESTREAM, you are most WELCOME. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes. Let us turn to the Book of Psalms (cf. Psalm 130).

SETTING THE STAGE

FYI – This morning I want to bring our JOURNEY through the Songs of Ascent to its CONCLUSION. This has been a REWARDING series to share in recent weeks, and I can only PRAY that it has informed and impacted your walk with Christ. Thus said, and for the LAST time...

Q. What are the Songs of Ascent?

The Songs of Ascent are a special GROUPING of psalms within the broader Book of Psalms (cf. Psalms 120–134). As we have noted, the ancient Jews would use these psalms as traveling songs as they made PILGRIMAGE to Jerusalem for the annual feasts of Unleavened Bread, Weeks/Pentecost, and Tabernacles/Booths. Since the city is situated on a high hill (el. 2,700-ft), pilgrims would have to ASCEND or GO UP TO Jerusalem...

...Hence the name: SONGS of ASCENT.

NOTE 1 – The Songs of Ascent were SIGNIFICANT to the people of ISRAEL...

- a) They were used in PREPARATION for worship
- b) They were vital in promoting national SOLIDARITY
- c) They gave INSIGHT re. the nature/work of the LORD
- d) They were REVELATORY re. their place in/before Him

NOTE 2 – Being short and easy to memorize, they served ISRAEL well for generations. Now, millennia later, they continue to inform and impact BELIEVERS in EVERY age. Yes, we may be removed from the ancient Jews by time, space and culture, but the THEMES these psalms touch upon are timeless and timely! Thus, they are of BENEFIT for us as we JOURNEY through this life and make PILGRIMAGE unto our heavenly home.

NOTE 3 – I would like to spend the REMAINDER of our time looking at Psalms 130–134. It is NOT my intent to provide a thorough treatise of each work! Rather, I want to IDENTIFY and EXAMINE overarching PRINCIPLES that inform and impact our lives in Christ in 2020 and beyond!

LET'S DELVE IN...

PSALM 130

Psalm 130 (NIV)

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;

2 Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.

3 If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?

4 But with you there is forgiveness,
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

5 I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.

6 I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.

7 Israel, put your hope in the Lord,
for with the Lord is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.

8 He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.

FYI – The opening line(s) of EVERY psalm presents the dominant THEME that biblical authors seek to address. Thus said, Psalm 130 presents us with an urgent appeal—i.e., specifically an urgent APPEAL for MERCY (v. 1–2). There are several points worthy of consideration as we break this psalm down...

NOTE 1 – We can sense the DISTRESS of the author in his use of the phrase: “**Out of the depths** I cry to you, Lord” (Emphasis Mine). This is a figure of speech that suggests BOTH a deep cry from the innermost recesses of the human heart AND feeling swallowed up by insurmountable forces or circumstances.

Q. What is the author calling out to God for (which we have already noted)?

NOTE 2 – The author is appealing to God for MERCY (i.e., divine pardon that would bring about restoration and renewed blessing). It is worth noting that the author does NOT seem to be appealing for God to show him mercy (i.e., at the INDIVIDUAL level)—though this is an oft-repeated biblical topic. Rather, he seems to be calling out for mercy on a more NATIONAL/COLLECTIVE level (cf. emphasis on Israel in v. 7–8).

NOTE 3 – The exact circumstances are NOT specified, but it is likely that the nation was in distress because of divine punishment for her iniquities. This is a COMMON OT reality (i.e., Israel and the latter kingdoms of Israel and Judah often faced woe for their waywardness)...

KEY – This CAUSE the psalmist to call out for mercy!

Q. Upon what basis does this psalmist make his appeal?

A. The author rightly understands the forgiving nature of God...

Psalm 130:3–4

3 If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,
 Lord, who could stand?
 4 But with you there is forgiveness,
 so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

KEY – We do well to remember that God is a God who DELIGHTS in showing mercy (i.e., His NATURE)...

Isaiah 1:18

18 “Come now, let us settle the matter,”
 says the Lord.
 “Though your sins are like scarlet,
 they shall be as white as snow;
 though they are red as crimson,
 they shall be like wool.

NOTE 4 – And it is upon this biblical reality that the psalmist places his HOPE...

Psalm 130:5

5 I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,
 and in his word I put my hope.

NOTE 5 – This author has dedicated himself to WAIT upon the mercy of God. i.e., For the Lord to establish “NEW merciful and favorable dealings” with His people. This was an author who knew the NATURE of the Lord (v. 4), knew the WORD of the Lord (v. 5) and chose to believe for mercy with an unrelenting hope...

KEY – Consider the sense of ANTICIPATION this writer lived with...

Psalm 130:5–6

5 I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,
 and in his word I put my hope.
 6 I wait for the Lord
 more than watchmen wait for the morning,
 more than watchmen wait for the morning.

NOTE 6 – Ultimately, the inward convictions of the psalmist turn OUTWARD, as he invites Israel to respond...

Psalm 130:7–8 (Emphasis Mine)

7 **Israel**, put your hope in the Lord,
 for with the Lord is unfailing love
 and with him is full redemption.
 8 He himself will redeem **Israel**
 from all their sins.

Q. Applications in modern life and living in 2020?

A1. Much could be said at the individual level (i.e., knowledge of God’s nature and Word; living in hope, etc.).

A2. Ultimately, however, this could be the prayer of the righteous in any GENERATION or NATION in distress. Is our nation in distress right now due to her sinfulness and iniquity? I would say so! Let US pray for our nation—that the Lord might show forth mercy. Let us be a people of hope—rooted in the knowledge of His Word and nature—calling all men, women and children to trust in Him! Moreover...

Q. What are we anticipating (cf. the expectancy of the author)?

Q. What are we waiting for? Believing for? Looking for? Desiring above all else?

KEY – Some are looking for the election or re-election of a President or official. Some are waiting for a vaccine. Others are waiting for the NFL season. Still others are waiting for a sense of normalcy in the midst of abnormal times...

Q. But to what degree are we anticipating His mercy and a mighty move of God? Does this consume us?

PSALM 131

Psalm 131 (of David)

1 My heart is not proud, Lord,
 my eyes are not haughty;
 I do not concern myself with great matters
 or things too wonderful for me.
 2 But I have calmed and quieted myself,
 I am like a weaned child with its mother;
 like a weaned child I am content.
 3 Israel, put your hope in the Lord
 both now and forevermore.

FYI 1 – This psalm centers upon HUMILITY and finding ultimate CONTENTMENT in the Lord. In so many ways this psalm is a GEM in the Psalter. Though it is easy to overlook due to its length, it touches upon some of the most important themes we can contend with!

FYI 2 – This poetic work REMINDS me of the Book of Ecclesiastes in miniature. Compare/Contrast at your leisure!

NOTE 1 – David affirms that he had NOT walked in arrogance or in a spirit of pride (**v. 1a**). PRIDE (i.e., often called haughtiness) is a vast biblical topic! In short, pride is an inflated or exaggerated sense of self, resulting in an attitude of SUPERIORITY in relation to others and/or SELF-SUFFICIENCY apart from God. In many ways it is the FOUNT of all other sins, rooted in the belief that we know better than God and can live apart from Him.

NOTE 2 – Moreover, David’s primary concern was NOT the attainment of earthly acclaim, achievement or the unlocking of the secrets of the universe (**v. 1b**). He was not consumed or motivated by such things. Rather, he likens himself to a child that has been weaned (**v. 2**)...

Q. What is the meaning of this imagery?

A. A WEANED child learns contentment apart from that which it once deemed INDISPENSABLE (i.e., mother's milk). Similarly, David learned to find contentment apart from those things this world deems INDISPENSABLE and chases after (e.g., power, pleasure, prestige, knowledge, achievement, etc.). Weaned from this world, he learned to find ultimate FULFILLMENT/PEACE in the Lord.

KEY – The secret to true satisfaction was/is NOT in pride but HUMILITY before and dependence upon the Lord!

NOTE 3 – Having reached this conclusion, the psalm concludes with an INVITATION for all Israel (i.e., all the readership throughout time and space) to place their hope in the Lord. It was the desire of David for ALL to come to this place of hope, humility and rest!

Psalm 131:3 (Emphasis Mine)

3 Israel, put your hope in the Lord
both **now** and **forevermore**.

Q. What can we learn from this psalm in terms of application?

A. There is NOTHING wrong with earthly achievement or accolade IN THEIR PLACE. They can be GIFTS of God that are to be enjoyed! The DANGER in believing that we can live APART from God or that such earthly things can bring about TRUE happiness, fulfillment or peace. They CANNOT!

Q. How many times have we seen people who had it all take their lives?

KEY – Lasting peace and satisfaction is found in Him and Him ALONE. It is NOT through the fulfillment of self, but humble submission before God that we fulfill our highest calling—i.e., being rightly CONNECTED to the One we were made to know, serve and love forever!

QUOTE – “You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee” (Augustine).

No Jesus – No Peace

Know Jesus – Know Pea

James 4:6b–7

6 . . . “God opposes the proud
but shows favor to the humble.”

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God.

PSALM 132**Psalm 132**

- 1 Lord, remember David
and all his self-denial.
- 2 He swore an oath to the Lord,
he made a vow to the Mighty One of Jacob:
- 3 "I will not enter my house
or go to my bed,
- 4 I will allow no sleep to my eyes
or slumber to my eyelids,
- 5 till I find a place for the Lord,
a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob."
- 6 We heard it in Ephrathah,
we came upon it in the fields of Jaar:
- 7 "Let us go to his dwelling place,
let us worship at his footstool, saying,
- 8 'Arise, Lord, and come to your resting place,
you and the ark of your might.
- 9 May your priests be clothed with your righteousness;
may your faithful people sing for joy.'"
- 10 For the sake of your servant David,
do not reject your anointed one.
- 11 The Lord swore an oath to David,
a sure oath he will not revoke:
"One of your own descendants
I will place on your throne.
- 12 If your sons keep my covenant
and the statutes I teach them,
then their sons will sit
on your throne for ever and ever."
- 13 For the Lord has chosen Zion,
he has desired it for his dwelling, saying,
- 14 "This is my resting place for ever and ever;
here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it.
- 15 I will bless her with abundant provisions;
her poor I will satisfy with food.
- 16 I will clothe her priests with salvation,
and her faithful people will ever sing for joy.
- 17 "Here I will make a horn grow for David
and set up a lamp for my anointed one.
- 18 I will clothe his enemies with shame,
but his head will be adorned with a radiant crown."

Q. What is the dominant theme of this work?

A. Ultimately it is an APPEAL for God to bless DAVID and his house (i.e., DYNASTY).

FYI – The psalm—which is by far the LONGEST of the Songs of Ascent—can be broken down into TWO sections: **a)** verses 1–10 and **b)** verses 11–18. Let us touch upon each of these major divisions BRIEFLY, highlighting the overarching themes (i.e., without going too deep into the weeds herein).

1) Verses 1–10

The OPENING section (v. 1–10) centers upon DAVID and his WORK of bringing the Tabernacle to Jerusalem. This historical moment established Jerusalem as both the CIVIL and SPIRITUAL capital of ancient Israel (with effects that RIPPLE through time and eternity).

This emphasis upon DAVID and the establishment of JERUSALEM is SENSIBLE for those Jews journeying to the capital city for worship. Apart from the working of the Lord in and through David, such spiritual pilgrimages into the city (i.e., Tabernacle and latter Temple) would NOT have been possible. It makes sense why the ancient people of Israel would esteem David and call upon the Lord to bless him and his descendants!

2) Verses 11–18

This latter section focuses upon God’s PROMISE to fulfill his VOWS to David. It is beyond our time to fully discuss, but the Lord promised David an ETERNAL DYNASTY. i.e., His throne would be an EVERLASTING one! Once again, this is something that has RIPPLE effects throughout time and eternity. Feel free to cross-reference aspects of v. 11–18 w. 2 Samuel 7, etc.

Q. Applications? What can we derive from this emphasis upon David and Jerusalem (i.e., Zion)?

A1 – We do well to remember David and the promises God made to Him. These are NOT mere OT realities with no present or future bearing! Rather, it is through the house of David and the promises made to him that this earth shall be SAVED! Remember that God’s promise to David of an eternal dynasty finds ultimate FULFILLMENT through Christ, who shall rule and reign on the throne of David over the nations! When we pray for God to remember David (cf. v. 1), we are praying for His KINGDOM to come to this earth!

KEY – I long for the Coming/Return of this Davidic King or Messiah...

Isaiah 9:6–7a

6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.

He will reign on David’s throne
and over his kingdom,

establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.

A2 – We also do well to consider the emphasis Scripture places upon ZION. Even if we never pilgrimage to Jerusalem in this life, it will one day be the ETERNAL dwelling of the righteous. In your own time, read through John the Revelator’s description of the New Heavens, New Earth and New Jerusalem (cf. Rev. 21–22).

KEY – Until that day, even so come QUICKLY, Lord Jesus (cf. Rev. 22:20)!

PSALM 133

Psalm 133 (of David)

1 How good and pleasant it is
when God’s people live together in unity!

2 It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron’s beard,
down on the collar of his robe.

3 It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the Lord bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

FYI – This psalm touches upon the BLESSING of interpersonal HARMONY.

Keep in mind that this song would have been sung by untold millions of Jews through the centuries, as they descended upon/ascended up to Jerusalem. This song that CELEBRATES unity—i.e., familial, national and spiritual unity—must have done much to BOLSTER unity amongst the people of God!

KEY – Unity and harmony are good, life-giving things (**v. 1**)—worthy of celebration and pursuit in the Lord. WHY?

1) Preparation for Worship and Service (v. 2)

AARON—the high priest of Israel in the days of Moses—was anointed in preparation for worship and service before God. Unity prepares us to worship the Lord and serve Him effectively. HOW can the people of God effectively gather to worship and experience God if they are living in division, etc.? HOW can the people of God serve and represent Him to the nations if their “own houses” are out of order?

Matthew 5:23

23 “. . . if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

2) Refreshment in Life and Living (v. 3)

The dew of MOUNT HERMON (9,200-ft. peak) would refresh the nation and the vegetation thereof. In their arid climate, that dew was essential and life-giving. Unity and Harmony are LIFE-GIVING! Ever spend time in a divisive home, church, workplace, etc? Contrast that with an atmosphere of peace!

KEY – Ultimately unity is the WILL of the Lord. Jesus PRAYED for His people to know true unity (cf. John 17). Jesus COMMANDS it (Matt. 5:23). Jesus promises to REWARD it (cf. Matthew 5:9 – “Blessed are the peacemakers”).

Q. Do we really have any choice but to ardently pursue that which makes for peace? Remember...

Romans 12:9–21

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. 20 On the contrary:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

PSALM 134

Psalm 134

1 Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord
who minister by night in the house of the Lord.
2 Lift up your hands in the sanctuary
and praise the Lord.
3 May the Lord bless you from Zion,
he who is the Maker of heaven and earth.

FYI – We come at last to the FINAL Song of Ascent. We BEGAN our pilgrimage far from God (i.e., literally and figuratively in Psalm 120). Now, in these final psalms, we are in the house of the Lord and we have assembled to worship the Lord in His presence! This functions much like a musical CRESCENDO.

NOTE 1 – The opening verses picture the assembled worshippers exhorting the priests to faithfulness (**v. 1–2**).

NOTE 2 – In reply, the priests seem to bestow a final blessing as the Feast moves to a conclusion in Zion (**v. 3**).

KEY – I call you—my fellow priests and pilgrims—to PRAISE the Lord.

KEY – I call you to PURSUE Him diligently and obey Him in all faithfulness.

KEY – I call upon the Lord to BLESS you with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

CONCLUSIONS

KEY – Thank you for taking the time to join us today. Should those of you who have joined us online wish to give, please do so through the giving portal of our church WEBSITE (www.NewLifeBarre.org). For those who are present, you may place your donation in the OFFERING BOXES in this Sanctuary.

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you
and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.