

Good morning CPC, it is so good to be with you. On the topic of quarantine, the other day I came across this article in Forbes entitled, "Use your self-quarantine to become a "coronapreneur." The premise was now that we are all in self-quarantine, we have copious amounts of time. Don't waste it...start a business, write that book, and maybe the most interesting suggestion was that with movie theaters shutting down and television studios on hold, you have the opportunity to become your own director!

Now, if I'm honest, I have had moments of creativity sparks, but becoming a director? My sense of accomplishment is fulfilled when I direct my kids to actually get dressed for the day! Or maybe you have a four-year-old who is also trying to learn the alphabet and has thus listened to "Chicka Chicka Boom Boom" for the tenth consecutive time, and you survived!

But what I've noticed in myself and I believe in others as well, is that there is this creeping sense of guilt every day in quarantine for not accomplishing enough, for not writing the NY Times bestseller. I joke about it, but I believe there is a deep sense of anxiety surrounding how we spend this unique time. Sometimes we look around and feel the weight of the absurd expectations of ourselves in quarantine.

Anyone else feels a bit guilty for not writing a NY Times bestseller, or learned to play Beethoven's 9th symphony on piano. Or gosh, I haven't even learned a third language yet, what am I doing?! And so there can be this creeping sense of guilt or shame about how you do not measure up to some sort of constructed expectation. And it can be crippling.

Throughout this series, we've been able to focus on particular experiences and emotions, and part of the beauty of the Psalms is that they provide us with language for that which we cannot express. But what the Psalms also do is allow us to pray our actual emotions...not pray about our emotions, but rather we pray our emotions before and with God and allow the Holy Spirit to help us process our emotions.

So turn to Psalm 130. Throughout this series, we've looked at lament, trust, and praise. This morning, we get to a Psalm that will take us to a paradox of two particular emotions - guilt/shame and hope.

Guilt - a sense of failure, liability, and unworthiness.

One of the ways this COVID-19 crisis is hitting so many of us is that our very lives have been flipped upside-down. And in the

midst of it all, everything is being amplified. Our sense of worth, insecurities, our impatience, everything has been amplified. And all the while, we have extra time to reflect and sit with ourselves. And for me, it has naturally led to more times of self-reflection and introspection.

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;

Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive

to my cry for mercy.

If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,

Lord, who could stand?

But with you there is forgiveness,

so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,

and in his word I put my hope.

I wait for the Lord

more than watchmen wait for the morning,

more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Israel, put your hope in the Lord,

for with the Lord is unfailing love

and with him is full redemption.

He himself will redeem Israel

from all their sins. Psalm 130

The cry from the depths - The Problem of Guilt and Shame

"Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord" (Ps. 130:1). The imagery drawn right from the start is vivid. It is a poetic image likened to being submerged beneath the chaos of water. In the ancient imaginary of the world, the "depths" often spoke of the sea, which was a picture of uncontrollable chaos. The psalmist is comparing their own situation to that of sinking. Early writers on this Psalm associates the "depths" to that of despair. Despair is and was viewed as a significant threat because it strips the individual of hope and trust in God.

This concept of sinking out of the depths, this is a familiar theme for the Psalms. Looking at the various ways that other Psalms have referenced this will help to fill out the picture of what this looks like. Consider Psalm 69.

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God. Psalm 69:1-3

Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters. Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up, or the pit close its mouth over me. Psalm 69:14-15

The psalmist is speaking about how it feels; he is speaking psychologically about how it feels. And the feeling is that of sinking into a pit, maybe akin to sinking in quicksand. The more he fights it, the more that he kicks his feet, the more he sinks into the pit. There is no direct link to a particular event at this moment, but it leads us to believe that the psalmist is helping the reader to understand the very feeling of what he or she is going through.

They are sinking, unsure, going down, and everything one does isn't working. They are at the bottom of a pit with zero calm. And the more they kick and fight it, the more they sink. And what is most evident in all instances of this concept of sinking into the depths is that self-help is no solution. There is a need for something beyond themselves to pull them out of this sinking into the depths.

The Descent into Guilt and The Way Forward

The question that surfaces at this point is, what is causing this source of despair within the psalmist. And the answer comes in verse 2 and verse 3. *"Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?" (vv. 2-3).*

Now, think about this for a second. If you were sinking for no reason, or if it was merely sinking based on circumstances, then you would cry out for help, not mercy. But here, the psalmist cries out for mercy. And then in verse 3, this is confirmed for its dealing with guilt as the psalmist cries, *"I can't stand, because of the record of my sin."* The nature of the psalmist trouble is the sinking further into guilt and shame. It is an overwhelming and all-consuming sense of failure and unworthiness. The psalmist is wrestling with the reality that he cannot measure up to the standard set before him. The weight of it is a sense of drowning.

Guilt and shame in a postmodern era ask, "Is this relevant anymore?" Guilt is an interesting topic to consider in our culture. The construction of our culture has shifted in the last 100 years or so toward a postmodern culture. And the aim of postmodernism has been toward deconstructing all stories of ultimate truth. As a by-product, there has been an attempt to eradicate guilt from our cultural consciousness. The very concept of a post-truth era poses all sorts of troubles. I want to suggest that you will sink

into the depths of guilt and shame if all truth is centralized and diminished to the individual,

You can see this in the turn of our culture toward honor and shame. The default moral imagination is reduced down to what feels right for you, as long as you don't hurt others, which is merely a thin veneer of expressive individualism as a central ethic. The upshot of this is that no one should be allowed to send you on a guilt trip, no one should make you feel bad for how you live, and only you decide what is right and wrong.

Now, I want to be careful here and make sure to listen closely to how I lay this out over the next few minutes because this is a nuanced argument about the necessary role of guilt in our culture. Obviously, there are good and bad forms of guilt. But the dissolution of all forms of guilt is a crisis in the making. Guilt and shame are produced from the failure (or perceived failure) to accomplish something or be something once envisioned. In many ways, these need to be disaggregated in their meaning, but I don't have the time to do so entirely here. In guilt, we've fallen short of the rules. In shame, we've fallen short of the vision of what we thought life should or could be.

For decades we have been doing everything we can to remove all moral constraints, and yet we still feel an overwhelming sense of sinking into the depths. Thinking we don't live up to what we should be; we get drawn into the trap of comparison. Shame persists, even with we have attempted to strip our culture of all rules and thus guilt.

So what has happened now is that a postmodern world has stripped us of our sense of guilt, but it has not dealt with the feeling of shame. We all have moments in which we have sunk into the depths of shame. We have eliminated the idea of guilt, but we still have a gnawing sense of something being wrong with us.

But now we have no tools to handle the shame that persists. And we are left simply striving and striving on our own accord to overcome the deep sense of shame, but do so without any means of atonement. This is where Jesus comes in. All of it culminates in a sort of striving after that which is impossible. A "chasing after the wind" as Solomon would say it. It lends itself to perpetual disappointment and, ultimately, a cycle of shame.

So in spite of the fact that we can pacify the feelings of guilt through moral relativism, the sense of shame, the sense of unworthiness, you don't believe you are good enough, this sinking feeling persists. It won't go away. We've been trying to loosen the bonds of guilt and shame, but we are still sinking into the depths.

What do we do about it?

Once you are in the depths, with nothing to use to climb out of it, there's nothing that you can do on your own to get yourself out.

Someone running into the pit trying to save you will also succumb to the suffocation of the sinking pit. You need something from outside yourself.

What is needed, therefore, to find our way out of the depths is two-fold...a "record" or standard (v. 4) and a redeemer from beyond ourselves (v. 7-8). *"If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you, there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you"* (v. 3).

First, a standard or record of wrong.

"If you kept a record of sins." Notice that the psalmist is not contesting that there is a record of sins. There is, in fact, a record of sin. It is that the record is not kept that the psalmist is praising.

Now, the first implication is that there is, in fact, an objective standard of sin, which grinds against our postmodern sensibilities. The concept of objective wrong grades against us because we have been ingrained with the concept of what sociologist Robert Bellah calls "American Expressive Individualism." We have eliminated any sense of objective right or wrong, and with all of the elimination of objectivity, we still can't get rid of the sense that we are falling short. So we run after whatever we think will fill us, and we sink further and further into the depths with no perspective on how to climb out.

Because what the psalmist has held to is there is a reality of sin to which one can measure guilt. If you can't measure guilt or shame against a standard, then there is no hope because there is no way forward. To bear the weight of condemnation and guilt without any objective reality to understand its indictment is hopeless, it is futile.

Even with all of our efforts in a postmodern world, we ultimately do cling to the necessity of guilt. Without an objective standard of right and wrong, we don't know how to deal with the guilt and shame we experience. This is the importance of understanding scripture, of leaning into the scriptures as the means through which we begin to understand our world.

Unless you have some way of deciding if the guilt and shame you experience is right (and not from some externally driven force), then you have no way to deal with it, which is why an attempt at a post-truth world will only lead to moral ruin.

The standard of objective sin enables you to either resist or confess your guilt. An example is you feel the deep guilt and shame about your inability to live up to the standards of motherhood. Is that a sin against God? No! Resist that shame. Throw that away. It is a false shame that is enslaving you. Move on. Or you feel deep guilt over cheating on your taxes. Is that an objective affront to God? Yes! Confess that and move on. The Word of God provides what is and isn't an affront of God. When you have an objective way of understanding right from wrong, you have a knowledge of how to deal with the shame we all experience.

What is most difficult for our postmodern ears to hear is that there is, in fact, an objective understanding of the world, but listen, this is good news. Because it enables us to understand a means of change and a means of atonement for our brokenness and our experience of shame. Without it, we are left to our own abilities to live up to an unknown standard.

But remember, I said that there are two things that are needed if we are to find our way out of the spiraling trap of guilt. Look at the second half of verse 3, *"Lord, who could stand?"* If there is only the law, if there is only the objective standard with nothing else, there is no way we can stand under its weight. But look at verse 4 and verses 7-8. *"But with you, there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you"* (v. 4). *"Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins"* (vv. 7-8). The psalmist is now directing the community of faith to put their hope in God. The psalmist recognizes that it is only from God that he has hope of being removed from out of the depths.

Second, a redeemer

The question must be asked, why does the psalmist tell us to put our hope in God? Who else are we to put our hope in? Tim Keller describes hope as "that which is the basis of your future." So the question before all of us is, "How do you deal with our sense of shame? This sense that we ought to be someone or something?"

My guess is that your default setting, like my own, is to believe in a future and better version of yourself. "One day, once I get that degree, or the job, or that promotion, or (fill in the blank), then I will satiate my unquenchable desire. And so we put our hope in that, that once I accomplish this or that, I will overcome this feeling of insignificance. We do this by choosing all sorts of different things, career, family, parenting, etc. If we just live up to some level of accomplishment, then we will remove the feeling of insignificance.

All of us are trying to overcome this inherent sense of shame that we are insignificant. And so we seek all sorts of things to fill this void, but once we begin to spiral down into the depths of shame, we have to stop and realize that we need a redeemer. But we already have a redeemer, and his name is Jesus.

Because here is the rub. If your hope is in your family, career, or whatever it may be for you, when the inevitable sense of insignificance swells up within you, you are confronted with the fact that your hope is not allowing for you to overcome this sense. You need a new hope. You need a new basis for your future. What have I looked to as my redemption instead of the Lord? We have to say to ourselves; he will come. He will be my redeemer. "...for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins" (vv. 7-8).

This pairing of both the love of God with the redemption of ourselves is where we must place our hope. Because of God's

unfailing love, this means that he knows us fully. He sees us through and through and continues to love. And until we come to the recognition of God's understanding of us in our entirety and the face that he still gives himself for us, we will always seek to find other means of redemption.

The Process

The last thing that must be noticed is in verses 5-6.

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

It will take time for this kind of shift in hope, this kind of shift in where we place our "functional hope." And so we wait. We move slowly, day by day, uprooting the allegiances we have placed in things and pursuits other than God, and we wait.

But we do not wait in vain. We wait both with hope in God's promises. "*In his Word, I put my hope,*" And we wait expectantly. "more than watchmen wait for the morning." Because here is the thing. God has promised redemption in the same way that the morning always rises. It may be difficult, and the night may seem long. But there is certainty in the coming morning. There is certainty in the sun rising. And there is certainty in God doing what he said he would do. Our hope in God overcomes our guilt and shame. May we come to recognize the frailty of our position in "the depths."

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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