

“A Psong in the Dark” Psalm 130

If today’s Psalm was a “genre of music” it would have to be a country song - no question about it. And no matter whether you “like” or “dislike” country music, country music is familiar to us all for who of us here has not had the heartache of a boyfriend or girlfriend walking out on us, the pain of a dog dying, or the disappoint of our truck getting stuck in the mud – which also happen to be prominent themes in country music as well. So, on your playlist this summer you need at least one country song (whether you like the genre or not) and when reading a book this summer, read through the Book of Psalms, and in particular Psalm 130 because both country songs and Psalm 130 remind us all of those times past, time present or times yet to come when the “bottom falls out” (130:1 The Message) or the more raw, when in the “depths we cry to God”. (130:1 NIV)

The “bottom falling out” is reality for everyone – especially the Psalmists of old or at least they were more honest than we are to admit it. It’s easy to forget the “real” people and “actual” experiences of those who put pen to papyrus so long ago. Especially in some traditions (of which I am a part) who stress more the “God behind the words” than the other truth that in between God and the words were God-inspired men and women who penned these honest words from everyday events in their own lives but even more we know these people from other narratives. Now, although we cannot speak with 100% certainty about the author of Psalm 130, assumptions made by others or ourselves may not be too far removed. For example, many believe David as in shepherd David, as in anointed by Samuel David, as in David and Goliath David, as in King David ancestor of Jesus David is the author of not just Psalm 130 but many of the Psalms we read today in our Bible as we open it up around halfway. Now some of the Psalms are easier to give authorship over than others because of the clarity of experience and the signature at the beginning. Psalm 51, for example, notes David as author and the words spoken relate back to David’s confession after his fall from grace. Other Psalms, like Psalm 130 may be unsigned but the events (like Psalm 51) can also be attributed to David and give the story behind the song. This is the reason that some therefore make the connection between Psalm 130 and 2 Samuel 18. The story in 2 Samuel is the account of David’s third son Absalom. He is by no means a prominent character and is really only known for two tragic events. In 2 Samuel 13 we hear the horrific story of two of Absalom’s siblings: Amnon and Tamar. Amnon rapes Absalom’s full sister Tamar so Absalom kills his brother. The other story is found in 2 Samuel 18 where Absalom raises an army to overtake his father David. The two go to war but David gives implicit instructions not to hurt his son. And although the “slaughter was great” no harm came to Absalom – that is until Absalom became entangled in a tree by his long hair. Joab, one of David’s

General found Absalom, but instead of protecting David's son, as he was told to do, Joab thrust a spear deep into the heart of Absalom, killing him. David, of course is told, that his son is dead. David's reaction is no surprise, especially to those who have known great loss, especially the loss of a child. So David does what any of us would do – he did what Jesus did when Jesus experienced maybe the greatest human loss in his own life – that is the death of his friend Lazarus. Both David and Jesus “wept.” Now understand there is the shedding of a tear – or what happens when we watch a cute but emotional video on YouTube™. And then there are tears when we leave family after holidays and realize it may be another year until we see them again. And then there is “weeping – the result of what we do when “the bottom falls out” or in the “depths we cry to God.” This is the story behind the psong of Psalm 130.

The song is certainly psung in a minor key for minor keys are far more dissonant. And the melody is typically mournful. And the words hard to sing. In fact, many people aren't even willing to sing along – as if there is something wrong about singing such songs. Some might even be so bold to even suggest you shouldn't sing at all. But in the depths, sometimes there is nothing else we can do. I'm sure like me, you looked on with many emotions hearing about the 12 young Thai footballers and their coach trapped in the mountain. Seeing their faces deep in the ground and then the picture of how deep they actually were underground reminded me of the depth of despair I have known in my own life. Some tried to help – well-meaning friends attempted to give sage-like advice that to be honest, made things worse. “You shouldn't feel that way,” some said. “If only you had more faith, you would be able to handle this better,” others told me. “Something is wrong with us,” we think. “Maybe they are right”? “Maybe we have disappointed God”? And we no longer can even cry. Until we get our behavior under control, until we get our lives refocused, until we get our feelings in check we don't sing, we don't sing at all.

But the Psalmist sings. Now I know what you are thinking. He sings, but he sings a country song, a “woe is me” dirge but in actuality he does no such thing. Although the “bottom falls out,” although it is as dark as a cave deep underground and water rising around us the truth that we all need to grasp in the darkest of moments is the proximity of God. As Walter Bruggeman writes, “This psalm, is a miserable cry of a nobody from nowhere. (But) the cry penetrates the veil of heaven! It's heard and received. The cries from the depth are the voices to which Yahweh is particularly attuned”. So God comes near. When the Psalmist introduces “the record of wrongs” or “forgiveness” don't misunderstand – please don't misunderstand. This is not the cry of an individual who feels the predicament he is in was caused by him. In other words do not listen to the lies that may reverberate in your head that the depths that you are now in are a result of something you have done. Karma is

my neighbour's dog and not a punishment for something you have done. God is not trying to get you back or teach you a lesson. The mention of forgiveness is a reminder of who God is and what God is capable of doing. Forgiveness therefore, is something that can only be done by someone in close proximity – a reminder that God is near – even in the dark. When such a reality makes its way to us through the dark the result is obvious – at least to the Psalmist. He worships. But we're not talking about worship as what you may immediately think of. I mean, like a worship service here every Sunday morning at 10:30am. No, this worship involves two things: prayer and waiting. I saw a quote this week on a friend's blog from William Temple that may help, especially when it comes to the prior. Temple writes, "When I pray coincidences happen. When I don't they don't" When I pray God comes near, even in the dark. When I don't, God seems so far away. I pray and then I wait. I pray and I wait. And as I wait, like the Psalmist, "I wait for what God will say and do." Not wait to see if God will say something or do something but wait with expectation of what God will say and what God will do. But get ready because God shows up when we least expect him and in a manner that is not always comfortable. He did it once – when he came as a crying baby to two refugees in a nowhere town and He will do it again. Barbara Brown Taylor says it beautifully: "The king is not safe. The King is sovereign, which means that he is frightening because his subjects have no control over him. He does not ask their advice before he acts. He is no one's pet. His rescue of them may be as hair-tasing as what he is rescuing them from, but he is good, which means he can be trusted. If they will just press through their fear of him, he will save them. If they will just climb on his back as he tells them to and hang on for dear life, he will carry them home". And this is why the Psalmist has "hope" even in the dark. As someone has written, "Our God is a God who finishes what is started and, while uncontrollable, is deeply good. Somewhere in this mix of awe, fear, and trust our lives will be transformed. Forgiveness leads to liberation from life as it is presently organized. Our cries set new life in motion" or could I add, "a new song in motion".

They say when you play a country song backwards you know what happens – the boyfriend or girl friend comes home, your dog is saved by sure and certain death and your truck miraculously gets out of the mud. Now I'm not sure if that is true or not but I do know what happens when we psing in the dark: God comes near. I've been listening to a song, it was recently added to my own playlist this summer from Michael W Smith. Although not the words of Psalm 130 Smith quotes the words of Isaiah 61. Isaiah writes that when the spirit of heaviness comes, put on the garment of praise. This is how we fight our battles – our battles of grief and loss, disappointment and anger, fear and worry, depression and anxiety, sin and shame. Yes, this is how we fight our battles – this is our song in the dark.

“This is how we fight our battles. This is how we fight our battles.
It may look like I’m surrounded but I’m surrounded by you.
It may look like I’m surrounded but I’m surrounded by you”. –Elyssa Smith-