

Meditations of the Heart - Reflections on the Scriptures

Psalm 19:14 *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

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As we consider the 130th Psalm, I want to focus on verses 5-8. Today's Meditation contains, in one sense, a review of things I talked about this past Sunday and, in another sense, a focus on some additional things that may give us more insight on this Psalm.

Please note that this is a lengthy Meditation of the Heart but I would suggest that you address a portion of it (a verse or two) each day – as a type of devotional.

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Psalm 130:5-6 5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; 6 my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

Augustine equates verses 5 and 6 and the picture of the dawn of the morning with the most glorious (and unexpected) morning that the people of God have ever known – the first Easter morning, the morning of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

"The words mean this: that the Lord, through whom our sins have been remitted, arose from the dead at the morning watch, so that we may hope that what went before in the Lord will take place in us. For our sins have been already forgiven: but we have not yet risen again: if we have not risen again, not as yet hath that taken place in us which went before in our Head..."¹

Within society, there is a seemingly inexhaustible attempt to prolong life and postpone death. From a physical standpoint in terms of honoring the sanctity of human life, this is as it should be. But from a spiritual perspective, for the one who trusts in Christ and His resurrection, the hope of the resurrection brings a different perspective on death. There is a critical connection between the resurrection of Christ and the redemption that Christ has won for those who hope in Him.

I Corinthians 15:17-22 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

¹ Augustine, Exposition of the Psalms, Psalm 130 (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf108.ii.CXXX.html>)

The Rev. Paul Dugan astutely observes that Psalm 130:6 is the central part of a chiasm intended to artfully and poetically draw attention to the words of the last two verses (v. 7-8):

4But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

**5I wait for the LORD,
my soul waits, and in his word I hope;**

**6my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.**

7O Israel, hope in the LORD!

For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption.

8And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

The end of verse 7 (*For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption.*) points to the very reason for waiting on the LORD (a reference back to the beginning of verse 5 (I wait for the LORD)).

Meanwhile, verse 8 (*And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities*) points the reader back to the declaration of redemption in verse 4 (But with you there is forgiveness...).

For Prayerful Consideration

What frightens you about death? What hope do you have concerning death? How does the resurrection of Christ and the hope of the gospel affect your perspective on death and dying?

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It would seem that, to the 21st century evangelical Church in the west, death has become a lost art – literally. To Christians in medieval times, the art of dying was called *ars moriendi*. Martin Luther died in 1546. But he composed his *ars moriendi* 27 years earlier – in 1519, when he was 36 years old! At that time, and for the next four years at least, Luther’s life was in danger – because of the stand he made for the sake of the Gospel of Christ – so he had good reason to have death on his mind even at such a relatively young age.

Luther’s *ars moriendi* was based on Psalm 4 “*lying on one’s bed; searching one’s heart in silence before God; trusting in the grace of God; and thus in peace, lying down to sleep*”. James Houston points out that Luther’s hope was based entirely upon “the light of the Resurrection of Christ. The anticipation of this had been with him for most of his life.”²

For Prayerful Consideration

If you were to write an *ars moriendi* - a reason for the hope that you have in Christ in view of your impending and inevitable death – what would you say? As we enter into the Passion week, you may want to take the time to thoughtfully write out for yourself the hope that you have in the resurrection of Christ and the redemption He has won for you.

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² Houston, James, Lecture Notes: LECTURE 8 MARTIN LUTHER AND ERASMUS’ USE OF THE PSALMS, The Devotional Use of the Psalms in the History of the Christian Church, Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, Delivered on June 3, 2009.

8 And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

In focusing on the conclusion of this Psalm, Augustine alternates between focusing upon the original author of the Psalm (in a Jewish context) and the Church. This Psalm was written by one who is weighed down with their sins and yet that sinner's conclusion (in verse 8) is that "*the mercy of God is present to him*". Then, in his next sentence, Augustine immediately refers to the Church and the Savior and Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the Church: "*For this reason, He went before without sin, that He may blot out the sins of those that follow Him. [Therefore], trust not in yourselves, but trust from the morning watch (the hope of the resurrection).*"³

Calvin, like Augustine, also alternates between the concern of the contrite Psalmist and the concern of the Church: "*It is here said that he will redeem his Church, not from.... any disasters, but from sin; for until God pardons the sins of the men whom he afflicts, deliverance is not to be hoped for.*"

"Let us then learn in what way we are to expect deliverance from all calamities, or the order which it becomes us to observe in seeking it: Remission of sins always goes first, without which nothing will come to a favourable issue. [THEN, we] have no reason to be afraid of our being excluded from free access to... the lovingkindness and mercy of God... In innumerable passages where God promises to his people outward blessings, he always begins with a promise of the pardon of sin."⁴

Verse 8 lies at the heart of our preparation for Easter week. Unless we grasp the truth of verse 8, that God will redeem His people from all her iniquities, we can have no basis for hope that God will meet us in any other need that we have. But if it is true that God has met our greatest need (redemption from sin), then we can stand in the same assurance in which the Apostle Paul (a man who called himself 'the chief of sinners') stood:

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 8:31-39]

³ Augustine, Exposition of the Psalms, Psalm 130 (www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf108.ii.CXXX.html).

⁴ Calvin, John, Psalm 130

For Prayerful Consideration

What are the ways that you reluctantly fear coming before the Lord in prayer?

What are those areas in which the Lord seems silent, absent or distant from you?

How does an understanding of the Redeeming work of Christ in your life (as explained from the Scriptures) shine a different light upon your present circumstances and upon God's concern for you?

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