Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

It was a real blessing to hear Pieter VanderWel give his report about the church and mission work in Vanuatu on Wednesday evening. And it reminded me of another time that I heard a missionary report. It was many years ago at Pukekohe. One of the brothers there had been in PNG and he brought back a DVD about one missionary’s time amongst one of the highland tribes in PNG. This missionary spent the first two years learning their language and their ways, and only then did he begin to teach them. And the whole town would gather in the village ‘square’ and listen to him teach for a few hours each day. He started with Genesis 1 and went chapter by story by story to explain the gospel of Jesus Christ. Well, Genesis 22 is where God called Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. And he noticed that although the initial command of God to sacrifice Isaac shocked them all, they were very calm and relaxed, and even smiling, as he built up the tension of Abraham and Isaac travelling to the place of sacrifice and Isaac asking where the sacrifice was and Abraham lighting the fire and tying Isaac up and raising the knife. And he stopped there to ask them why they were calm and smiling, and even though they were only 22 chapters into the Bible, they were convinced that God would provide another sacrifice instead of Isaac. Isn’t that amazing! And that is exactly what happened. An angel appeared and said to Abraham, “*Do not lay your hand on the boy … And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son*.” So even though these PNG tribes-people were at the very beginning of their study of the Bible, they already understood what we find here in Lord’s Day 5, which is that **God will accept a sacrifice as a substitute for sinners**. And they knew this because of the story in Genesis that we referred to this morning – that moment when God killed animals and gave Adam and Eve the skin of the animals to cover them. That is why the PNG tribes-people were convinced that God would provide a substitute sacrifice for Isaac.

So as we begin the second and largest section of the Heidelberg Catechism, Man’s Deliverance, we begin with **a hint of hope**. Our sin and guilt has been clearly established in the first section of the Catechism, but now we see that there is the hope of salvation. And we want to see this from **Psalm 130**. So let’s read this Psalm.

Well, three points then as we consider how this glorious Psalm reveals the truth set before us in LD 5: Firstly, the **desperate** **Need** of the sinner, secondly, the **Delightful** **Hope** of the sinner, and thirdly, the **Devoted** **Attitude** of the forgiven sinner.

1. So we begin, in vv1-3, with the **Desperate Need** of the Sinner.
   1. The psalmist says, “*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord*.” And the word “**depths**” has in view the bottom of the sea. In Psalm 69, David uses the same image in more detail: “*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*.”
      1. On a trip to the US to visit family, we were invited to go for a boat ride on a lake. We all climbed aboard and I asked about life-jackets, but because this was Murica, the land of the free, we didn’t need to wear life-jackets ☺ Well, eventually the captain powered down and invited anyone who wanted to do dive in to the warm water and have a bit of a swim near the boat. So I did. And it was lovely. But the current drew the boat away from where I was and I tried to swim over but the gap between us kept getting bigger. So I asked the captain to restart the boat and come over and pick me up. But he could not start the boat. Well, I was starting to get really tired. I didn’t know how long I could stay afloat and I started to think that I might become one of those stories you read in the newspaper – man drowns in lake without a lifejacket. Thankfully though, the captain grabbed a life-jacket and dived in and swam over and I could put it on and I was fine. And eventually they got the boat started again and all was well. But I came close to drowning that day.
      2. Have you ever come close to drowning? It is terrifying.
   2. And **what is it that the PSalmist describes as like drowning in the depths?** What is our desperate need? Well, he makes this plain in v3, “*If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?*”
      1. You see, the Psalmist knew well what we have covered in Lord’s Days 1-4: God is holy so we must be holy to live with Him. God is a perfect God who demands perfect obedience from His creatures. But we, because of our inherited sinful human nature and our own personal sin cannot give to God this perfect obedience. Therefore, we are unholy, guilty sinners.
      2. Boys and girls, in the Lord’s Prayer, what did Jesus teach us to pray in relation to our sins? “*Forgive us our sins*.” And is this a prayer that we only need to pray once; job done? Sins forgiven? No, we need to pray it every day. Why? Because we sin every day! As A13 puts it: “We actually increase our guilt every day.”
   3. So I have to ask you today: Is this something you are acutely conscious of? When you read the words of this Psalm, are they *your* words? Do your sins pile up and trouble you?
      1. Think of the **Tax-collector** that Jesus spoke about in Luke 18. A Pharisee had prayed a loud and proud prayer that everyone could hear. But then Jesus described a tax-collector who, “*standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*'” He was weighed down by the burden of his sin. Do you know that sense of guilt and being weighed down? Do you know that in and of yourself you are a wretched, miserable, filthy, guilty sinner?
      2. Now, we will get to the solution, shortly. But the solution will only appeal to you if you know how desperately you need it! When you see a lifejacket sitting in a boat shelf, you won’t look at it longer than 2 seconds. But when you are moments away from drowning and someone brings you a lifejacket, you love that life jacket and you gladly cling to it and rejoice that it is wrapped around you! And for Jesus Christ to be beautiful to you must understand how lost and guilty you are without Him.
2. So let’s go on, then, from the **Desperate** **need** of the sinner, to the **Delightful** **hope** of the sinner in vv4-8.
   1. I am sure you have read stories or seen movies where the situation of a character gets desperate and hopeless, to the point that there seems no way out. But then there is this glimmer of hope. A way out appears out of nowhere! Well, v4 is like that. It is one of **the Glorious Gospel ‘Buts’** in the Bible. At several places in the Bible, we are given a description of our wickedness and guilt, which could be followed with a description of the punishment we deserve and will get. But instead we read the glorious gospel! Here in v4 it is: “***BUT*** *with you there is forgiveness*.” Though he deserved condemnation, the Psalmist knew that with God there is the hope of forgiveness!
   2. And what the psalmist makes *explicit* in v4 builds on what is *implicit* in vv1-3. After all this is the cry of the sinner “*to the Lord*.” It is not a cry out into the cosmos or a yell into the universe; it is a prayer to the Lord. The Psalmist knew where to turn in his desperate need, because with the Lord there is forgiveness.
      1. And he knew this in the same way that the PNG tribes-people that we spoke about at the beginning of the sermon knew it. Already in ch. 3 of the Bible, we learn that sin can be covered by **substitutionary sacrifice**.
         1. And boys and girls, a substitute is a replacement. In sport, you might start with 11 football players or seven netballers, but there are usually replacement players who come on to the field in place of an injured or tired player who leaves the field. And we call them substitutes.
         2. And so, the killing of animals to provide skins for Adam and Eve, and the provision of a Ram to take the place of Isaac, and the killing of a Passover lamb so that the firstborn didn’t have to die, and the sacrifices of Leviticus 1-7 and the substitute lambs of the Leviticus 16 that we are going to look at in our morning sermons teach us that salvation is possible by way of a substitute sacrifice.
   3. But as **Q/A 14** explains, “God will not punish another creature for man’s guilt. Besides, no mere creature can bear the weight of God’s eternal anger against sin and release others from it.” And so, as we saw this morning, all of those OT sacrifices did not actually remove sin and guilt; they pointed forward to and prepared God’s people for the sacrifice that would truly remove sin and guilt – the death of Jesus on the cross.
      1. **Isaiah 53:6** says, “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way*. *And the LORD has laid on Him [*meaning Jesus*] the iniquity of us all*.” Jesus is the substitute sacrifice for sinners.
      2. And this is made explicit in **2 Cor. 5:21**: “*For our sake [God] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*.”
   4. And even though he lived before the cross, the Psalmist looked in faith to Messiah. Look what he says in v5: “*I wait for the Lord*.” He wasn’t waiting for bulls and goats as sacrifices and offerings. He understood that they pointed him to a coming Messiah who would truly bring salvation. And this gets even more explicit in the second half of v5 as he says, “*And in His* ***Word*** *I put my hope*.” Who is the Word of God? Jesus. John 1:1: “*In the beginning was the word*.”
      1. And so, looking forward to Jesus, the Psalmist placed his hope in the Word, and in the unfailing love of the Lord. He knew, as v7-8 says that only God could provide *plentiful redemption*.” Only God could “*redeem Israel from all his iniquities*.” Only God, through the gift of Messiah; the one who is “truly human and truly righteous, yet more powerful than all creatures, that is … true God,” could provide a substitute sacrifice that could pay the debt of our sin.
      2. Do you know this? Do you trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins? Do you understand and believe that there is no other name under heaven by which we may be saved?
3. If you do, then you will surely have the **Devoted** **attitude** of the forgiven sinner that v4b speaks about; our third and last point.
   1. One of the common objections to the idea that’ we are saved by grace alone – that we contribute nothing to our salvation – is the idea that this will surely lead to lazy Christianity at best or what is called ‘**carnal Christianity**,’ which is the Christian who believes that he or she can behave however they like because they are always forgiven, at worst. It is the exact objection that the Apostle Paul dealt with when he asked and answered the question: “*Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*” in Romans 6. But do you remember Paul’s answer? “May it never be! God forbid! By no means! Certainly not!” And we see exactly the same idea set before us in Psalm 130 in terms of the devoted attitude of the forgiven sinner. For what is the first attitude word that we see in v4 after the Psalmist has rejoiced in his forgiveness? He says, “*That you may be* ***feared***.”
      1. Now, we typically associate fear with terror. And if terror is meant here then that wouldn’t seem to fit with the notion of being forgiven. Right? If you think back to the last time you forgave someone or were forgiven by someone, the next thing was probably a hand shake or a hug, and renewed relationship. Yes?
      2. But the fear in view here is not terror. In Charles Spurgeon’s sermon on this verse, He explains this fear as **love, worship, and service**.
         1. If you know that your sins are forgiven through Christ, you will **love** Christ! Yes? And what did Jesus say about those who love Him? “*If you love me you will keep my commandments.*” And you will love the Bible because it is God’s will for your life, and you will want to live in submission to His will. So to fear the Lord is to love Him.
         2. But to fear the Lord is also to **worship** Him. And this has two parts:
            1. First, **Romans 12:1** says, “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship*.” And so, for example, do you watch what your tongue says as an act of worship? No dirty jokes, no blasphemy, no disobedience, no hateful words, and instead only what is good for building others up, and praying and singing praises? And do you guard what your eyes look at as an act of worship? No pornography, no romance novels to distract you from the hard work of your own marriage, no hours and hours of Netflix or computer games, but no time for Bible reading…? Is your whole life spiritual worship?
            2. But what we are doing here is official or gathered Lord’s Day worship. So are you a member of a church who participates in worship services and Bible studies, not as little as possible but as much as possible? Do you love to gather together with your congregation to worship the Lord? This is how we show our thankfulness for forgiveness.
         3. But to fear the Lord is also to **serve** Him. On Judgment Day, according to Matthew 25, Jesus will say to all those on His right, “*Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we [do all these things]? And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'*” As a forgiven sinner, are you serving your Lord by serving others?

Brothers and sisters, young people, and boys and girls, Psalm 130 reveals our **desperate need** – we are guilty sinners. But it also sets before us the **Delightful** **Hope** of the Sinner – the forgiveness of sins by way of the substitute sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And finally it describes the **Devoted** **Attitude** of the forgiven sinner – the fear of the Lord – love, worship, and service. Praise God that in Christ there is forgiveness for sinners like us! Amen.