

"How to Regret Like a Christian" Psalm 130

Introduction

- I can't believe the most popular movie in the country right now is *Snakes on a Plane*. I don't get it. Since people will watch anything, I've got an idea for a sequel. Instead of *Snakes on a Plane* I'm going to call it *Pig on a Plane*. And the difference between *Snakes on a Plane* and my movie is that my movie will be based on a true story. In 2000 a pig traveled on the six-hour US Airways flight from Philadelphia to Seattle, and he didn't ride coach.
- Somehow two passengers convinced the airline representative that their pig needed to fly with them as a quote unquote "therapeutic companion pet"—like a seeing-eye dog—so the pig was permitted to sit with them in the first-class cabin of the plane.
- Passengers described the 300-pound pig as "enormous, brown, angry, and honking." He was seated in three seats near the front of the plane, but the attendants reportedly had difficulty strapping him in: "It became restless after takeoff and sauntered through the cabin" during the flight. One passenger said, "He kept rubbing his nose on people's legs trying to get them to give him food and stroke him."
- Upon landing, things got worse. The article reports, "the pig panicked, running up and down through the economy class squealing." Many passengers, also screaming, stood on their seats to avoid the beast.
- When asked to comment on the story, US Airways spokesman said, "We can confirm that the pig traveled, and we can confirm that it will never happen again."
- At one time or another each of us has done something or said something that seemed right at the time, but later we said, "That will never happen again."¹
- I am quite certain that at some point each of us has loosed the 300 pound pig by something we've said or done. We've all made decisions, we've all said things, and we've done things that are deeply regrettable because all 300 pound pigs on the loose are nightmares. The incident might have happened years ago. It might have happened last week. But without exception, each of us can think of something we've unleashed in our lives that is too painful to forget. "You cannot look back across your past life without seeing things to regret."² Maybe you've even come here this morning with your 300 pound pig on a leash. And when I say the word "regret" that horrible deed that need not be named immediately pops into your mind.
- The difficult thing about 300 pound pigs is that you don't just snap your fingers and presto-chango make them disappear. Even old pigs, pigs purchased in one's youth,

¹ Linda M. Gehrs, assistant editor of PreachingToday.com; from Associated Press story, Chicago Sun Times (10-30-00), p.1-2.

² D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, p. 81.

are menacing. So through the course of time, humanity has developed a number of creative ways to handle the pig named "Regret." Some of us try to lock our pig in the closet thinking that if we ignore him he'll starve to death and disappear. That never works. Others figure there's no difference between one pig and a hundred pigs. And so life amounts to amassing a herd of regrettable pigs. But most of us, how ever many pigs we have, feel the need to atone for the fact that we have a pig. There's something deep inside of us that wants to make things right and we think that if we punish ourselves we can atone for living in the shadow of "Regret" the 300 pound pig.

Transition

If I were to summarize the passage we are going to look at this morning I would summarize it like this. Psalm 130 is like cutting that pig named "Regret" from its leash never to be bothered by it again. There is only one way to get rid of a 300 pound pig. It's the God of the Bible. God is the only one who can deal with the 300 pound pig named "Regret." The good news for us this morning is that...

Proposition

- **God promises to mercifully erase the regret of past sins**

Transition

This morning, we continue our series through the Psalms called *The Songs of Life*. The psalms teach us how to emote in ways that glorify God. And one of the emotions that often times runs amuck is regret. If you regret something from your past, even if the past means earlier this morning, this passage tells you what to do when you are torn up with regret. So far we've looked at how to **gripe** like a Christian. How to **doubt** like a Christian. How to take **revenge** like a Christian. And now regret. When you find yourself staring regret square in the face, Psalm 130 is where you should turn. These are the words you should read and soak up.

Background

- This psalm is one of seven penitential psalms (6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143) found in the book of psalms. Let me just make a distinction. There is a huge difference between penitence and the Catholic practice of penance. Don't confuse the two. Penance involves performance and punishment. Penance involves a priest, a confession box and some prayer—with or without sorrow for sin. There are a whole host of theological problems with the practice of penance. Most notably it is unscriptural. The Catholic practice of penance, I believe, "misunderstands the problem of sin following one's conversion. It detracts from Christ's atoning work on the cross. It promotes related errors such as purgatory, Masses, indulgences, and the invocation of saints. It creates legalism and it gives rise to the moral evils of the confessional."³ Penitence on the other hand, is another word for repentance. It not only involves a deep sorrow—a regret over sin—but a turning away from that sin toward God to lead a new life. It is not based upon performance. It is an attitude. A priest isn't needed. Only God. Because he's the only one who can forgive sin

³ *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 835.

anyway. Penance may alleviate and pacify regret and guilt but it will not eliminate it. Only God's grace can do that. And if we are penitent, as this psalm describes, God promises to erase the regret of past sins without requiring anything in exchange—other than trusting what he says about the matter. That's the only way to exorcise the pig of regret.

Transition

Let's take a look now at this psalm. There are four sections to this psalm each corresponding to a stage in dealing with regret. First you have the regret itself in vv.1-2. Followed by the penitent confession in vv.3-4. Then stage three, waiting on God in vv.5-6, concluding with God's answer in vv.7-8. Writer [Anne Lamott](#) had a friend who "mournfully told her one day that he'd lived his life like the Professor on *Gilligan's Island*. While he found time to fashion generators out of palm fronds, vaccines out of algae, he never got around to fixing that huge hole in the boat so he could go home."⁴ Are you ready to fix the hole in the boat so you can back home to God?

- Listen again to the psalmist's feelings of regret expressed in [verses 1-2](#). *Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; 2 O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.* The psalmist begins by describing himself as *in the deep*. He is in a "metaphoric sea of troubles."⁵ By his actions, by his poor decisions, by his sin he's alienated himself from God and confined himself to the deep. Sin has the distinction of driving us away from God. Regrettably, the psalmist has unleashed the pig. He's sinned greatly. He's guilty and in need of mercy. Self-help is no answer. Therapy is not going to do it.
 - Have you ever wondered why we regret things? Why do we have this emotion? Where does it come from? It's easier to understand regret when we can physically see the consequences of our actions. But why do we regret things that no one else sees or even knows about? We regret because, ultimately, by our sin we've offended a holy God. That's why all other cures or treatments for the ailment of regret are temporary. They deny the final diagnosis which keeps us from the cure. The diagnosis is that sin is an offense against God. Sin wrongs God. And therefore to find the cure we must turn to him. And that's what the psalmist does in these verses. He turns to the one and only place we should turn when we regret our actions. He turns to God. O Lord, I cry to you. O Lord, hear my voice. O Lord, listen to my cry for mercy.
- The amazing thing about God is that even though our regrettable deeds personally offend a holy God, God doesn't hold our sins against us. Listen to [verses 3-4](#) again. *If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? 4 But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.* In these two verses we see more clearly the reason the psalmist was in the depths. We see the reason for his regret. Sin. If ever there was a weightless word in our society it is the word sin. Why? Because God has become weightless. As [David Wells](#) has said, "God has become

⁴ Anne Lamott, "Sincere Meditations," [theoosze.com](#); submitted by Mike Kjergaard, Hampton, Virginia to [PreachingToday.com](#).

⁵ DBI, p. 200.

unimportant. He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable. He has lost his saliency for human life. He has become weightless. It is a condition we have assigned him after having nudged him out to the periphery of our secularized life. His truth is no longer welcome in our public discourse. The engine of modernity rumbles on, and he is but a speck in its path. What has been lost in all of this, of course, is God's angularity, the sharp edges that truth so often has and that he has preeminently."⁶ Because God is weightless the angularity, the sharpness of words like sin have become dulled. When we compare ourselves to ourselves words like sin become meaningless. Sin is what happens when you compare yourself to God. Compared to him all of us are deviants. All of us are perverted. All of us are distorted compared to God. And if God kept a tally of our regrettable deeds, none of us would be able to stand before him. But he doesn't. For some strange reason, the God of the Bible has promised to not keep a record of our sins. The testimony of the Bible, from beginning to end, is that He is merciful. Instead of punishment and penance, there is forgiveness for the penitent. Even though your sins are against him, he keeps no tally of them. *But with you there is forgiveness.* This is the hope for all who regret their past. No matter what you've said, no matter who you've offended, no matter what you've done—God forgives. He doesn't hold our regrets over our heads. He doesn't shame us into submission reminding us of what we've done. He doesn't expect us to grovel under his heavy hand. Instead he wants us to stand in awe of that which doesn't make sense—his giving forgiveness and mercy when punishment is deserved. *Therefore you are feared.* The proper response to God's forgiveness of your sins is reverence. Awe at what He has done for you.

- In spite of his regrettable deeds, the psalmist is absolutely confident that God's forgiveness is for him. Listen to the voice of hope in [verse 5-6](#). *I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. 6 My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.* How many times is the word wait mentioned? Five times. Five times in two verses the psalmist says he will wait and hope for God's answer to his situation. And he compares his waiting to watchmen waiting for the morning. I'm convinced, that picture of watchmen waiting has lost all significance. Close your eyes. Imagine yourself a guard on top of the wall of an ancient city. It's the middle of the night and your task is to spot the enemy. He could be anywhere. But you can't see him. Let me tick off the lack of light sources that are unavailable to you to help you in your job. Obviously there's no electricity. No flipping a switch to get instant daylight. No flashlights. No car lights. No faint orange glow of a city in the distance to cast a shadow on things. It's pitch black out. You can't see a thing for hours at a time and the enemy could be anywhere. Okay, open your eyes. How longingly, how expectantly does that watchman want morning to come? The hope of those who know that God forgives is that his forgiveness is as sure as the rising of the sun. It will come. God has promised forgiveness in his word and so the psalmist waits and hopes knowing that at any moment he will personally experience God's forgiveness and the accompanying release of regret.

⁶ David Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, p. 88-9, 114.

- Do you believe that God's forgiveness is for you? If this is what God says, if this is who he is, should any of us live with perpetual regret? The promise of God erasing the regret of our past sins is conditional upon us asking and trusting that what God says in his word is true. I am amazed at the Christians who forget they are forgiven through Christ. Listen to the advice of [Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones](#). "The essence of the Christian position is that you should remind yourself of what you are. Certainly there is the past with all its sins. But say to yourself: 'Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like me His praise should sing.' 'I am what I am'—whatever the past may have been. It is what I am that matters. What am I? I am forgiven; I am reconciled to God by the Blood of His son upon the Cross. I am a child of God. I am adopted into God's family, and I am an heir with Christ, a joint-heir with Him. I am going to glory. That is what matters, not what I was, not what I have been. I say, therefore, in the light of this: Never look back again; never waste your time in the present; never waste your energy; forget the past and rejoice in the fact that you are what you are by the grace of God, and that in the Divine alchemy of His marvelous grace you may yet have the greatest surprise of your life and existence. Praise God for the fact that you are what you are, and that you are in the Kingdom."⁷
- So, does it come? Does light dawn? Is there an answer? You bet. Look at [verses 7-8](#). *O 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.* The pig named regret has been set free. There is no more regret because God has spoken his answer. The answer is unfailing love and redemption. The psalmist has personally experienced freedom from his regret, forgiveness of sin, mercy upon mercy, plenteous redemption. God's loyal love, his unfailing loyal love is unparalleled. He has redeemed the situation. The psalmist started out in the depths and God has purchased his life from the pit.
- One of the great regrets of my life is that I set the hook too hard. When I was in high school my dad, my uncle and I entered the annual bass fishing tournament on Elk Lake in Kentucky. It was hot that day, really hot. And nobody was catching any fish. Toward the end of the tournament we pulled into the marina—too exhausted to fish. We had given up. But when we learned the lead total was a ridiculously low 2 lb fish we instantly perked up. I remember running back to the boat thinking one nice fish will win the tournament. So, with 30 minutes left we maneuvered our boat across the channel from the marina next to a drop off and we began working some deeper water. With 15 minutes left, I was jigging my Linder Fuzzy Grub in about 25 feet of water and wham. I was into, to that point, the largest bass of my life. For five minutes I fought this fish unable to bring him up to the surface while my uncle and dad cheered me on. We all knew I was going to win the tournament. It was just a matter of landing the fish before the tournament ended. And then it happened. After such a long fight, I didn't want the fish to throw the hook so I set the hook a second time. And as I set the hook again the fish made another run toward deeper water. My line snapped. To this

⁷ Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, p. 86 and 90.

day, I regret setting that hook a second time. But, as hard as I try, I cannot go back and redeem that situation.

Conclusion

- We can't undo the things we've done in the past. And sometimes the consequences of our actions stay with us the rest of our lives. But God is a God of redemption. *With Him is full redemption.* He restores the years that the locusts have eaten.⁸ He is more than able to make up for our past mistakes. And he's proven his commitment to us through Christ. *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*⁹ Through the blood of Christ, God promises to mercifully erase the regret of our past sins. Will you let him? Will you put your hope in the Lord? Cut the pig loose and tie it to the cross. Leave your regrets with Christ. Take what is freely offered. Stand in awe and worship the God who forgives. Let's pray.

⁸ Joel 2:25.

⁹ 1 Peter 1:18-19