
¹ Out of the depths I cry to You, O LORD!² O Lord, hear my voice!
Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!
Psalm 130:1-2

"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy...." (Psalm 130)... "God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent." (Psalm 22:1-2).

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt as though when you prayed God put you on hold? Have you ever felt alone and abandoned by God?

Occasionally, someone will say, "I'm a Christian; I'm not supposed to be depressed." But we know that isn't true. Even as a pastor I am not immune to my moods going up and down. Sometimes people may say that if you truly loved the Lord, you shouldn't feel that way. "There is no depression in the Bible," some have said. But we are reminded that Moses begged God to kill him. Jesus began to be sorrowful and was in agony before His arrest. He wept before He raised Lazarus. We should remember that Job cursed God and asked to die. If you think that being depressed or melancholy is non-Christian, I must say to you that if you are a human being, if you have blood in your veins and skin on your bones, your moods will go up and down.

The trouble occurs as we go through life and all of a sudden we are surprised by depression. We think no one has ever had this, and we are all alone fighting our way out of the fog. It's like a fog moving in. And there are all sorts of reasons we may feel like this.

Have you ever been there? Of course you have. Whatever the crisis may be... the death of a loved one, financial difficulty, the loss of a close, personal relationship, job insecurity or joblessness... Think of some of the worst things that can happen, and chances are each of them are represented by someone in this room this morning.

One of the 'favourite' Psalms of Martin Luther is Psalm 130. We have a paraphrase hymn of this Psalm (interestingly, as LHS 310 – but with a tune that is very difficult to sing. But note the version by 'Indelible Grace', music by Christopher Miner).

¹ Out of the depths I cry to You, O LORD! ² O Lord, hear my voice!
Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

The psalmist says he cries out from the "depths." This is reference to the depths of the sea. To the ancients the sea symbolised chaos. The psalmist employs this metaphor to suggest that he is engulfed in a chaotic calamity.

Psalm 130 is a fitting psalm to accompany the story of David's struggle with his son, Absalom. One can only imagine the anguish and grief of David as he finds himself both confronted by the forces of his son's army, and still bearing deep love for him. David's cry over his dead son (2 Sam 18:33) truly comes from 'the depths' (Ps 130:1).

³ If You, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

Verses 3-4 point us to the Saviour's pardon: "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared."

The psalmist is aware that his sin has created a deep chasm between him and God, and longs for the Lord to turn His ear toward him and show mercy. This deep and heartfelt cry for help contrasts with a heart calloused toward sin. This cry knows God is the only hope.

The point is simply this: Those who can see that they are in deep distress and actually cry out to God with hope that God will hear are those who have experienced God's forgiveness. Those who have been forgiven by God have every basis to cry out, "Father in heaven, hear me!" What a glorious privilege this is! It was only because he had been forgiven, justified and reconciled to God that the psalmist cried to God for help, knowing that God would hear him in his distress.

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

Crying from the depths can feel like your insides are turning outward and your entire being groans audibly for the Lord to show favour and grace in your distress. Instead of remaining in despair by dwelling on personal failures, the psalmist looks upward.

The psalmist was a person who was amazed by grace. In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), the word here translated "forgiveness" is translated by the same word used in Romans 3 for "propitiation." The term "propitiation" speaks of God deflecting His wrath from us by placing it on His Son.

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.

In the original Hebrew, the words wait and hope overlap meaning, and are often times synonymous (and the parallelism in verse 5 confirms this). The last four verses of this psalm mention hoping or waiting five times, proving it to be a major theme of the psalm's second half.

Hoping in the Lord rests on Who He is and what He has done—in this case, on forgiving. Hope flows from the fount of knowing and fearing the One who is both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

Hope in God calls us to forsake all of other hopes: hope in our performance, hope in our abilities, hope in our families and friends, hope in future prospects for a good life, hope in what we do for God.

We wait for the Lord and hope in His Word because His Word confirms His character to us. The promises of His Word reveal that we can (and must!) hope in Him. This hope will start to dawn for us as a watchman awaits the sunrise, seeing a glimmer of light at the break of dawn and increasing more and more each moment he waits.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD!

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

⁸ And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Psalms 120-134 are called, Psalms of Ascents. They are given this name, we are told, because these were psalms that were sung by Jewish pilgrims as they made their way up to Jerusalem. Because Jerusalem was on Mount Zion, one always travelled up to Jerusalem. The pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem sang these songs as they went up to the city for the great Jewish festivals. As such, these songs not only were for worship as they walked, but also they prepared their hearts for worship. As pilgrims ascended to the holy city for the Jewish festivals, they would sing these psalms.

But perhaps it is also appropriate to refer to these psalms as Psalms of Ascent in a metaphorical manner. It is interesting that the general feel of these psalms begins with the writer in a place of despair, but as the psalm progresses the writer looks to the grace of God and ascends from his place of despair to a place of hope.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever come to a point of absolute hopelessness, in which it appears that the waves and the billows of life are just overtaking you? Have you experienced a time of severe distress? If you have been there—if you are there—there is hope in this psalm!

As long as we live in a sin-cursed world, we will find ourselves at time in great pain. The broken world in which we live ensures that we will experience pain. It matters not where you are in the world, or even what stage of life you are in, pain is a reality in our sin-cursed world. Life is painful. How will we get through that?

The psalmist shows us how to respond when we find ourselves in “the depths”: “I have cried to You, O LORD.”

The Christian message is a message of hope. Is there hope for the hurting? Yes! Is there hope for the helpless? Yes! Is there hope for the sinner? Yes, yes, a thousand times, yes! Those who wait on the Lord wait in hope. Life is full of waiting, but God will never disappoint you. With the Lord is unfailing love and with the Lord is full redemption. As sure as the morning is coming, He will rescue you. But as we look at the cross of Jesus – where Jesus Himself cried

out for God to help (and expressed a word about 'God-forsakenness') – we also know that God's answer to our prayers is sometimes far deeper, far more profound, and far more meaningful and life-giving. There may be a dark night of sorrow, and a valley of the shadow of death. But as Christ travelled through death to give the gift of eternal life, so there is hope and forgiveness even for the darkest soul.

When you cry out to Christ for mercy, He hears and he answers. He has never turned anyone away yet. You may be sunk under a load of sin, you may be calling to Him from out of the depths, but God is full of love and mercy. He hears your voice and is attentive to your prayer. No matter how bad your situation, no matter how deep the pit, God's love is deeper still and he will rescue you from out of the depths. Those who wait on the Lord wait in hope. Amen.