



Psalm 130 - Waiting for Divine Redemption

A Song of Ascents.

Introduction

Psalm 130 begins with a personal testimony of God's rescue from the depths of guilt and awareness of sin, and ascends step by step up to giving confidence to others in their trust in God. This is an individual lament, expressing penitence and trust in God's mercy. Because Psalm 130 is marked by an awareness of sin and a powerful assurance of forgiveness, tradition numbers it among the seven penitential psalms. Other psalms with prominent penitential themes are Psalms 6, 25, 32, 38, 51, and 143. The penitential element is geared toward helping worshippers to see themselves as forgiven people, whose only right to enter God's presence lies in his mercy.

Psalm 130:1-2 - O Lord, Hear My Cry for Mercy!

The psalm climbs from out of the depths of misery over sin, to confession of it (vv.3-4), to hope (vv.5-6) and assurance (vv.7-8). The tone is urgent, and the topic is the singer's pleas for mercy.

- 1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.
- 2 Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

Psalm 130:1-2

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Previously in the psalms there have been cries from the depths of the earth: <<*You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again*>> (Psalm 71:20), or the depths of the grave: <<*For great is*

your steadfast love towards me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol>> (Psalm 86:13). Once again, from a place of deep and overwhelming danger, the psalmist cries out to Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel: *<<I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit>>* (Lamentations 3:55).

Verse 3 of this psalm helps the reader understand the nature of these depths. There are depths of poverty, sorrow, confusion, and pain. Yet the depth that the psalmist cried from was the depth of the awareness and guilt of sin. Many have been spiritually drowned in these depths. Derek Kidner added, “Self-help is no answer to the depths of distress, however useful it may be in the shallows of self-pity.” Charles Spurgeon commented, “In this Psalm we hear of the pearl of redemption, verses 7 and 8: perhaps the sweet singer would never have found that precious thing had he not been cast into the depths. ‘Pearls lie deep.’”

Lord, hear my voice! Translators use the same word Lord to translate both the name Yahweh in the first line of Psalm 130, and Adonai in the second line. Each word is a title or name for the God of the Bible, the creator of heaven and earth. Here, the psalmist called out to Adonai, his master and ruler, asking him to hear his voice, knowing that for God to hear his people is to help his people: *<<Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he will hear my voice>>* (Psalm 55:17).

Psalm 130:3-4 - With You There Is Forgiveness.

The song acknowledges that if God should mark iniquities (as if he kept them in a record book), no one, not even the faithful who are singing this, could stand. And yet with the Lord there is forgiveness: this is what God promises his people who come to him in faith: *<<But they and our ancestors acted presumptuously and stiffened their necks and did not obey your commandments; they refused to obey, and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them; but they stiffened their necks and determined to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and you did not forsake them>>* (Nehemiah 9:16-17), *<<For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you>>* (Psalm 86:5), *<<Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits – who forgives all your iniquity>>* (Psalm 103:2-3a), and: *<<To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him>>* (Daniel 9:9), and this is why he may be feared, i.e. worshipped and served in loving reverence.

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! The plea to God is emphasised using repetition as a poetic tool. Spurgeon noted, “It is better for our prayer to be heard than answered. If the Lord were to make an absolute promise to answer all our requests it might be rather a curse than a blessing.”

Solomon made a similar petition to the Lord at the dedication of the temple: <<Now, O my God, let your eyes be open and your ears attentive to prayer from this place>> (2 Chronicles 6:40).

- ³ If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
- ⁴ But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

Psalm 130:3-4

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities. In asking for God to help, the psalmist also understood that he had no place to ask or be heard by God apart from his great forgiveness. Without this graciousness, no one could stand before Yahweh Adonai: <<O Lord, God of Israel, you are just, but we have escaped as a remnant, as is now the case. Here we are before you in our guilt, though no one can face you because of this>> (Ezra 9:15), and: <<Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and by him the rocks are broken in pieces>> (Nahum 1:6).

Kidner commented, “The confession of verse 3 throws light on the professions of righteousness found elsewhere in the Psalter, for it implies that such claims could never be absolute.”

But there is forgiveness with you. Years of previous relationship with God had taught the psalmist that there is, in fact, forgiveness with God. When people are confronted with their own sense of sin it can be hard to believe, but it is true: there is forgiveness with God through the Lord Jesus: <<Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’>> (Acts 2:38), <<and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you>> (Ephesians 4:32).

So that you may be revered. One of the great purposes of God’s great forgiveness is to build a sense of gratitude and reverence in those he forgives. His pardon should lead to purity and his forgiveness to an appropriate fear of displeasing the one who has been so gracious. Again, this reflects the heartfelt plea from Solomon during the temple dedication ceremony: <<then hear in heaven your dwelling-place, forgive, act, and render to all whose hearts you know – according to all their ways, for only you know what is in every human heart – so that they may fear you all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our ancestors>> (1 Kings 8:39-40).

Psalm 130:5-8 - I Earnestly Wait for the Lord to Hear Me.

The pious person now sings: <<*I wait for the Lord*>>, and: <<*in his word I hope*>>, probably specifically for the word of forgiveness connected with the sacrifices to be offered, for example: <<*He shall carry the bull outside the camp, and burn it as he burned the first bull; it is the sin-offering for the assembly*>> (Leviticus 4:21). This waiting proceeds to assurance, as each singer invites everyone else to hope in the Lord, with whom there is steadfast love and plentiful redemption. The Lord is the one who will redeem Israel from all their iniquities, i.e. deliver them from the penalties their iniquities deserve. The ideal Israel is a people where every single member readily acknowledges his or her dependence on God's mercy and grace. This applies equally to the ideal church.

- ⁵ I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
- ⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

Psalm 130:5-6

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits. Having made his cry from the depths to God (vv.1-2), the singer then determined to wait upon God and the rescue he would bring. Even as he faced his certain death by beheading, Paul had confidence in the Lord: <<*The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen*>> (2 Timothy 4:18).

In his word I hope. The waiting was not passive or inactive. The psalmist used the time to actively set his hope upon God's promises, revealed in his word: <<*Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word*>> (Psalm 119:74).

My soul waits for the Lord. Here, using the word Adonai, the psalmist again expressed his trust in Yahweh Adonai (the Lord, the Lord). Again, this phrasing uses both Yahweh, the name for the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and Adonai, the normal name for a master or lord.

More than those who watch for the morning. The poet used a vivid image to express his patient anticipation in waiting on God. The image is of a watchman in the darkness of the early morning, scanning the horizon for the first sign of the morning. The watchman does not doubt that morning will come, but only wonders when, and watches for it diligently. So it was for the singer who watched for God

and the help God promised to bring. This is reminiscent of the last words of David before his death: <<*The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land*>> (2 Samuel 23:3-4).

- 7 O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.
- 8 It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

Psalm 130:7-8

O Israel, hope in the Lord! With this verse the phrasing turns from the personal to the public. What the psalmist learned in waiting upon God and trusting in him from the depths is now put to use as he calls upon Israel to put their hope in Yahweh Adonai. The psalmist puts his faith and hope in the Lord himself, not in the mercy or redemption God would bring. He looked to the giver before the gift. Spurgeon commented, “Cease looking for the water, and look for the well. You will more readily see the Saviour than see salvation, for he is lifted up, even he who is God, and beside him there is none else. You will more easily fix your eye on Jesus than upon justification, sanctification, or any other separate blessing.”

For with the Lord there is steadfast love, i.e. mercy. What he learned in his personal life he can put to application for the whole nation. When God’s people humbly look to him, there is mercy and abundant redemption for both the individual and the community. David placed his trust in the Lord and not man when he had sinned: <<*Then David said to Gad, ‘I am in great distress; let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is very great; but let me not fall into human hands’*>> (1 Chronicles 21:13).

It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities. This is the confident conclusion to the psalm, trusting that God will indeed bring the redemption and rescue to either the individual or the nation overwhelmed in the depths of their sin: <<*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them*>> (Luke 1:68). What God has demonstrated in the private life, he will also perform for the community that cries out to him. Kidner concluded, “Nothing could be further from the shut-in gloom and uncertainty of ‘the depths’ than this. The singer is now liberated from himself to turn to his people and to hold out hopes that are far from tentative.”