

Psalm 130

1. *Out of the depths have I cried to you, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice; let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.*
2. *If you, Lord, were to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who could stand?*
3. *But there is forgiveness with you, so that you shall be feared.*
4. *I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him; in his word is my hope.*
5. *My soul waits for the Lord, more than the night watch for the morning, more than the night watch for the morning.*
6. *O Israel, wait for the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy;*
7. *With him is plenteous redemption and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.*

My soul waits for the Lord.

In his word is my hope.

Psalm 130 is an individual lament. The psalmist acknowledges that his suffering is the result of his sin. He sees himself as almost submerged in the watery deep, a common Old Testament picture for death or deep distress. The psalmist calls on God for help.

Vv. 3 and 4 give ground for hope:

'But there is forgiveness with you, so that you shall be feared.

I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him; in his word is my hope.'

The psalmist knows himself to be a sinner, and realises that if God were to keep a record of our failing to do God's will, all would be guilty before him. But God doesn't keep a record of offenses; it is in his nature to forgive, and because of his forgiving love, he is to be feared, that is worshipped with reverence.

This is echoed in Psalm 103:

'The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great kindness.'

The last part states the attitude of true repentance. With the tense expectancy of watchmen on the wall of a besieged city, the psalmist waits for the assurance of forgiveness. The morning was the traditional time when the Lord revealed his salvation, as also seen in Psalm 59:

'Yet I will sing of your strength

and every morning praise your steadfast love.'

But like Isaiah, the psalmist recognises the sin of the whole people:

'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.' (Isaiah 6,5)

So, he calls on the people of Israel to join him in penitence and in confident hope of God's steadfast love and power.

Sometimes we have periods of distress and darkness, for example in bereavement or loneliness, in times of war or national disaster, when we can't see a way out. We may at such times cry out to God, pray more often than usual, not sure whether or not we shall receive an answer.

But there is reassurance, for example in Psalm 34:
'The Lord is close to those who are broken-hearted; and the crushed in spirit he saves.'

We may sometimes feel 'crushed in spirit', when we feel that we have been treated badly or when we are stuck with a problem, which we cannot solve. So, we ask for light, for a new beginning, for the morning to come after the darkness of night. But we have to wait, as the psalmist does, for the revelation of God's love.

I remember the day before my mother's funeral, when her body was brought into church, and we said Psalm 130:

'I wait for the Lord, my soul waits for him; in his word is my hope.'
It was very poignant, but it brought peace in a dark time.

Prayer

As watchmen look for the morning, so do we look for you, O Christ.
Come with the dawning of the day
and make yourself known to us in the breaking of the bread,
for you are our God for ever and ever.

Amen.

(Prayer at the Breaking of the Bread, Advent)