

# **Sermon: wait for the Lord**

## **Psalm 130**

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Two years ago, Professor Michael King from University College London published his research among 8000 people from mostly European countries about clinical depression. He found that in these countries, about 10% of the people suffer from serious forms of depression. Research statistics for the USA show a same percentage.

About the same percentage of people suffer from other anxiety disorders. Meaning that at any give time, 1 in 5 people feel really very down. Today it is your neighbor, next year it may be you. or today.

An American study, published in 2013 in the Journal of Primary Prevention, found that anxiety rates among clergy were 13.5 percent, and more than 7 percent of clergy experienced both depression and anxiety. This was based on research among 1700 Methodist pastors. Stress was the main cause.

The normal life of any person is marked by ups and downs. The christian life is not very different. Sometimes we know very well why we are up or down, and at there times, why do we feel so low? It is not always easy to say. It just happens. And we must take it seriously. If this is your situation, do not hesitate to seek professional advise.

The Psalm we read this morning is written by someone who was feeling particularly low. How did he deal with his misery?

### **1. Crying out of our depths**

In what sort of circumstances was the writer of the Psalm? We do not know. But even though we really do not know, it is useful for us to speculate a bit, to bring this depressed man somewhat closer to us. What could make him express so much despair?

The Psalm is often used at funerals and maybe the writer cried over the loss of a family member. Maybe he was deeply upset because of his children having problems. Maybe he felt very lonely. Maybe the harvest season was not good for him - his work was not going well. He was a person like us.

I assume he was depressed - something that might also happen to us. The writer of the Psalm says that he cried to God 'out of the depths'.

Out of the depths literally means, out of the abyss. The person is deep down. He experienced his personal circumstances as utterly bad, as he felt as if he had fallen into a deep dark pit.

Such a situation can easily silence a person. Despair because of the circumstances of our life, it can choke us and make us physically immobile and mentally unable think and speak.

Nowadays we would tell him, seek professional help. But circumstances, however dark, must also not close the mouth of God's people from crying to God. Above the roar of the waves of misery, our cry is heard by God.

Prayer is never more real than when it rises out of the worst of places. When we pray to God, do we speak from the heights of our pride, or out of the depths of a humble and contrite heart? Humility is the foundation of prayer. And especially when we feel very low, humility comes easy.

We are beggars before God, and the truth is, prayer is never more real than when it rises out of our mouth when we are in the worst of places.

Leonard Cohen, the old Canadian poet and singer, has an interesting line in his song Suzanne:

And Jesus was a sailor  
when he walked upon the water  
and he spent a long time watching  
from his lonely wooden tower  
and when he knew for certain  
only drowning men could see him  
he said, All men will be sailors then  
until the sea shall free them...

Is this true, that we only truly see Jesus, and cry to God, when we are drowning and we cry from the deep, 'Lord, I need you'?

Is there something liberating even in our worst of times, in our hardest circumstances, because exactly those direct us to seek our help with God? Because only drowning men can see him?

There is something to it, I think. I would suggest that mature faith only grows in the manure of life. Feeling down is bad, but if we can turn our eyes up to God, at least we grow some flowers in that manure.

This is not to suggest that the abyss you are maybe in, is not truly painful. But our worst experiences can be a trampoline on which we go deep down, but if we are down and we cry to God - we meet with him there - and that has value in itself. And that intimacy with God is uplifting.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!  
O Lord, hear my voice!

Lord, hear my voice, this is all we ask. Nothing less can make us content. And if the Lord hears, we can leave it to his superior wisdom how he will answer. He may not even change our circumstances at all.

If our Lord were to make an absolute promise to answer all our requests and give us what we ask, it might be more of a curse than a blessing. For it would place the responsibility of the management of our lives on ourselves only, and put us in an anxious position.

There is great comfort in knowing that God knows best and that He holds our lives in his hands. Surely some of what happens to us is really hard to comprehend, but be comforted with the thought that without being at that point of drowning, we might not seek God.

And we are comforted that God is merciful. We may not understand all that happens to us and to those we love, but God is utterly utterly only good.

## **2. Mercy and forgiveness with God**

He certainly does not let bad things happen to us because of our sins. What happens in your life is not because God teases you or because he punishes you because you are not perfect.

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,  
O Lord, who could stand?  
But with you there is forgiveness  
that you may be feared.

If God would treat us in accordance with our sins, no-one would live at all. But God forgives our sins, because of his mercy! The depths, the abyss that we sometimes experience is not because God is angry at us; your sins are forgiven, God is merciful.

Our Lord delights to forgive, because his nature is love and mercy. That is why God has provided a sacrifice for sin, once and for all. What our Lord Jesus did for us, his life and death and resurrection, has forever related you to God our Father in an embrace of love. Never think that he brings you in trouble to punish you.

But does God maybe bring us into difficult situations so that we seek him? Like a stick to beat us closer to him? This seems so unlike the character of the good God as we know him through Jesus Christ.

We can't understand how God rules; it is impossible to separate our own actions, the will of God, the tricks of the devil, the evil deeds of other people.

We live in a world that is still in the grip of the fall of humankind in Paradise; we know that a new day is dawning, but we also know that we still live in this in-between-time. On the one hand we suffer the misery of mankind, but we also already experience something of the coming liberation.

And to live in this in-between-time can be painful at times. And we often do not understand much of it.

### **3. Wait for the Lord**

But hope in the Lord keeps us going. The writer of the Psalm cries from the depths, and at the same time he hopes and he waits.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;  
my soul waits for the Lord  
more than watchmen for the morning,  
more than watchmen for the morning.

The watchman knows that a new day is dawning. And we share the same hope. It is really this hope that gives us the stamina to continue; it is this hope that ensures that when we fall into a deep pit, the bottom of that abyss is for us like the trampoline.

We get hurt in our life, and we fall, but we get up again because we wait for God and because we know that the future is good.

God waits for us at the end of the road. And Jesus walks beside us. And the Holy Spirit gives us power for the walking.

And beside the road we have the encouragement of many who have walked the road with Christ before us and who have made it to the end.

We wait for the Lord; this is not a passive waiting, but our soul is in it. We look forward to the fulfillment of all God's promises. We eagerly await that time.

But we also wait for our Lord to help us today; to be with us in our abyss, and maybe to help us to get us out of it, not just one day, when he makes all things well, but even in our days. He promised us that he is with us - in all circumstances - and he promised that if we pray, he listens.

But we often have to wait; this goes very much against the grain of my character. I know what I want and I want it now. And if we are in trouble, or depressed, we desire for God to act. Now.

But waiting can be so beneficial for us. Not that I like it, but... It tries our faith; it teaches us patience; it makes us stronger; it trains us to obey our Lord in all circumstances; it endears us to the solution on our problems, when that moment finally comes.

The watchmen who guard the city on the city-walls, or the guards in the field keeping the flock of sheep safe, they know that after a few hours of hard work, the morning dawns; then they have done their job. It may take long, the waiting may be painful, but the knowledge that surely there will be an end to all suffering, is a great encouragement. Even though for those watchmen, they still have to suffer in the darkness.

The praying person in the Psalm begins at a very low point; he needs God to take action to save him from his misery. And even though he is still waiting for God - he

knows that God is merciful and forgiving and that he will surely come to act on his behalf.

And he is so fully assured that the merciful God will eventually help him, that he also calls on all the people of God to trust in God.

O Israel, hope in the Lord!  
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,  
and with him is plentiful redemption.  
And he will redeem Israel  
from all his iniquities.

## **Conclusion**

His personal faith and hope and experience is now preached to all - to the people of God - and that includes us.

Never think, people of God, that when you are in hard circumstances, that when you experience the abyss, that this is because God punishes you for something you have done wrong.

For your sins, Jesus has been punished quite enough. God has redeemed you from your sins. He loves you, otherwise he would not have done that.

We often just do not know why our circumstances are as they are, or why we experience this abyss. This is life, that's what it is.

But we also know that if we are at a very low point, if we need God to be with us he is there. He is there. So wait for him, hope for him.

And so you can rest assured in his steadfast love. Go to him with your problems and misery. Pray to God. And do this with hope and with expectation that He will be with you. And He wants the best for you. That he guaranteed by sending his son to our world. To be with us in this mess.

**Amen**