

## Psalm 130

### Slow down and wait

### Drowning

Who will fix me now? Dive in when I'm down, save me from myself, don't let me drown...

These words, part of a song called 'Drown' by Bring Me the Horizon, are an anthem for the drowning. Whilst drowning the singer cries out for help. It's an uplifting song, that's been downloaded over 125 million times (so it must resonate with some people), but sadly there is very little hope that help is on the way. There is no salvation on the way.

Have you ever felt like you were drowning? Perhaps you feel that way right now? Overwhelmed by bills, tasks, people, criticism, marriage problems, anxiety, or health battles?

If this is you, you could listen to Bring Me the Horizon for a reminder that there are other people who feel the way you do, or you could listen to another anthem for the drowning: Psalm 130. Psalm 130 has good news for us when we're drowning. It begins with these profound words:

*"Out of the depths have I called to you, O Lord:  
Lord, hear my voice;"* (Psalm 130:1)

There are heart cries in *this* song, but there's also expectation. As the writer sings, their song bursts with comfort and hope for others drowning too.

### Help me!

Now I've literally drowned a couple of times in my life and as a practical tip: if you are drowning, cry out: "Help me!"

This is exactly that the Psalmist does in the opening line. They cry out in v.2:

*“O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.”* (Psalm 130:1)

It's a call for God to hear. Psalm 130 is another Song of Ascents, sung by pilgrims heading up to worship at the temple in Jerusalem.

What are they drowning in? We don't know, which is a good thing because it opens this passage to our experience. When we feel like we're drowning, we're encouraged, to cry for help. One of the worst parts of drowning in water is that you want to scream but can't. And yet what do you do, you flail, push up, look to the horizon for help, and beckon for rescue.

It's the same for us when we're up a creek without a paddle. Worries and anxieties will choke us but we can't let those things stop us from calling for help. It's one of the hardest steps but admitting you're drowning in addiction, debt, problems, and pain is the first step towards getting the help you need. It seems obvious and natural, but when you're drowning nothing seems this way so remember to cry out: Help me!

## **Forgive me!**

Once you've called out for help the next step is to recognise you've got a problem. Psalm 130 says:

*“If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore, you are feared.”* (Psalm 130:3-4)

That's a strange line. If I were writing this Psalm I might say: With you there is forgiveness, therefore you are loved. But instead, fear is mentioned.

The 'fear of the Lord' is a phrase we see 21 times in the Bible (Old Testament and New) and it's always a positive thing.

This is why some modern translations use 'reverence' or 'worship', but I don't think these words capture the respect and honour God deserves. Sometimes preachers like me make too little of God. God isn't a cuddly servant, ready to fulfill my wildest dreams. No; our God is as Hebrews says:

“is a consuming fire” Hebrews 12:29. We love God but we fear Him at the same time.

In the Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S Lewis one of the lead characters – Susan – learns from the kind Mr. Beaver that Aslan (who is God in the novel) is a lion. Susan is afraid of meeting a lion, so she asks Mr. Beaver: “Is he safe?”. Mr Beaver replies: “Safe? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King.”

Friends when you’re drowning you’ve got to admit to yourself and to the world around you that you need help. “Help me!” is the cry of the Psalmist and he cries out to God who sees his sins, but he does so knowing that there is powerful forgiveness and grace with God. It’s disempowering, it’s frightening, but by God it's good.

That’s why we sing: ‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved.

### **Save me!**

The last thing Psalm 130 encourages us to do when we’re drowning is say: “Save me!”.

My son Micah is hooked on Surf Patrol: it’s a classic TV show about Australian lifesavers. So often swimmers get in trouble because they refuse to admit to themselves that they need rescuing. They swim beyond the flags, jump off dangerous cliffs, ignore closed beach signs, and when they get into trouble, they try to flail their way out of trouble.

Psalm 130 says:

*“O Israel, put your hope in the Lord , for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.”* Psalm 130:7–8

It’s amazing how this poem goes from a personal lament (out of the depths I cried to you), to a communal charge (O Israel, put your hope in the Lord) in just eight verses.

But that’s just it. No one is an island, and when we’re drowning, we can’t save ourselves. In our culture we idolise independence

and individuality. We'd rather go to Dr Google than to a real doctor, we'd rather use a GPS than stop and ask for directions, we'd rather work out our marriage problems, financial issues, or mental health battles on our own rather than reach out for a saviour.

Often this is why people don't seek help until it's too late. This is why the singer turns to Israel (the whole country) and says: *"put your hope in the Lord, for with him is unfailing love"*.

We resist the idea of a Saviour because we believe the lie that "I am the solution to all my problems". The thing about drowning though, is that it humbles us and helps us realise we're not in control of everything. We all need a saviour.

This is what Jonah learns. We all know the kids' story of Jonah and the whale, but Jonah refused to trust his Saviour. When God tells him to go up to preach and help save the Ninevites he goes down to Joppa on his way to Tarshish (wanting to get as far away from Ninevah as possible). He gets on a boat and goes down into the galley. God sends a storm, and when Jonah realises that he is the reason for the storm, he gets the sailors to throw him down into the sea. Jonah drowns down, down, to the bottom of the sea. It's only at the bottom where he meets his Saviour.

God sends an almighty fish that swallows Jonah, and he finds himself alive in its belly. It's there that Jonah goes through these steps crying out to God to hear and help him. He asks for God's forgiveness, and cries "save me". Jonah sings a song that is so like Psalm 130 it's uncanny:

*"When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.*

*"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them.*

*But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the LORD.'"*

(Jonah 2:7-9)

And this is where we need to realise that Psalm 130 isn't about tips for saving yourself from drowning. Sure, it starts with 'I' and

'me' language but it's not about us, instead it's about the LORD. He is the focus of this Psalm, not us.

Friends it's only when we slow down our lives, wait for the Lord, and realise that he is the only Saviour we truly need, that anything can change.

## **God saves!**

This is why this Psalm reminds us **that God saves!** Sure, sometimes we can work ourselves through tough situations, and others can help us with our problems, but only God is big enough to overcome our most powerful threats: *Satan, sin, and death!*

This is why the Psalmist (who remember at this time is still drowning in the depths) says:

*"God himself will redeem Israel from their sins"*

(Psalm 130:8)

Remember Psalm 130 is in the Old Testament, so Jesus hasn't come yet and died on the cross to make the one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

From the depths the scripture peers through the mire and sees God's hand reaching out to save. It's not yet close enough to grab onto but that's why we're told to wait.

## **God forgives**

V.6 is the key part of this Psalm because it uses repetition:

*"My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning."*

(Psalm 130:6)

Military watchmen must wait through the night on the lookout for the enemy. Most of the time nothing happens but if they doze off or let their guard down, they put their people at risk. The Chinese built the Great Wall of China to keep the Mongols out. It worked well until the Mongols bribed the watchmen to let them through.

A good watchman waits with vigilance, but they also wait in hope. The dawn meant that the dangers of night were over, that their shift was done, and that they could go home to family for breakfast and sleep.

As we pass through Lent we need to wait this way for the Lord. With expectation, knowing that his salvation is coming and that when it dawns, everything that's wrong with the world will be set right. So we pray: *"Your Kingdom come Lord, Your will be done!"*

***Lent is a time of waiting but it's not passive idle waiting. It's active, expectant, passionate waiting.***

We wait for Palm Sunday when we remember Jesus, hailed by waiting pilgrims as the Saviour. We wait through Maundy Thursday when we remember Jesus breaking bread with his friends and washing their feet, establishing a new way of love. We hold vigil through Thursday evening into Friday morning recalling the garden and how Jesus asked his disciples to watch and pray with him but instead they fell asleep. We wait through the horror of Good Friday remembering Jesus' beatings and crucifixion. We wait for the sun to rise on Easter Sunday and remember the empty tomb. We break our fast, our forgiveness is guaranteed, Christ has won!

## **God helps!**

And this is why friend, if you feel like you're drowning, remember that God helps. God hears you when you cry to him, he forgives you when you confess you've got a problem, and he saves you out of the depths and into eternal life.

This glorious Psalm has so much to show us about life, about drowning, but most importantly about God. God saves, God forgives, and God helps, that's why we celebrate Him and wait on Him today. Amen.