

Psalm 131

A Song of Ascents, of David.

O Lord, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty;
Nor do I involve myself in great matters,
Or in things too difficult for me.

Surely I have composed and quieted my soul;
Like a weaned child rests against his mother,
My soul is like a weaned child within me.

O Israel, hope in the Lord
From this time forth and forever.



Central church of Christ

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www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z85tNy87sWc&list=PLr4wzHR7QBLC0h6miS7ZEOD2sfYcuts9x&index=46

Introduction

This will be a different kind of sermon for three reasons.

First, many sermons encourage and exhort you to action and rightly so. This sermon will encourage you in learning skills to be calm and learn how to rest in God. Not, of course, so you will fall asleep but in order to cope with living and all its gains and losses; to turn from its distractions through spiritual renewal to focus on our Lord and His direction for your life.

Second, this will be a sample of the Psalms course we are offering this fall. This will be a rich study as we read and discuss the 150 beautiful Psalms. There is no charge to members for the course. We hope to offer it online so you can take part here at the church building or at home. More details are available on the poster and in the lobby.

Third, in many sermons the application comes at the end. In this sermon the application is embedded all the way through this sermon as we go along. I give you one to two years to tell me if it was a good sermon and if its application works. The point of saying this is that we should take time to know the Psalm, memorize it, and apply it to our lives and apply our lives to the Psalm to truly know its benefits. In five years you may not remember this sermon but I hope you remember the Psalm and it continues to grow in your life and build your trust in God.

A Song

David calls Psalm 131 a song. There are many kinds of Psalms: royal, Torah (teaching), lament and thanksgiving for example. Psalm 131 is a Psalm of *trust*. Notice in verse 3 David encourages his fellow Israelites to “hope in the Lord.” Hope and trust are common themes in Psalms and in this collection of Psalms 120-134 called “Psalms of Ascent.” Psalm 125, verses one and two say:

Those who trust in the Lord
Are as Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved but abides forever.

2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
So the Lord surrounds His people
From this time forth and forever.

God is worthy of our trust. He created the awesome universe in which we live, He cared for Israel. He sent Jesus to save us and make us new. He gives us His Holy Spirit to teach and guide us. He restore our souls (Psalm 23:3). He renews our minds (Romans 12:1-2). We can trust Him today, tomorrow and always.

“A Song” is in keeping with the very nature of what a Psalm is. A psalm is a poem set to music. We can sing of our trust in God to restore our souls. James encourages us, “Is any among you cheerful, let him sing praises...” (James 5:). We can also sing of our laments and prayers to God too.

Of Ascents

Psalms 120-134 are one of fifteen Songs of Ascent. Of course ascending is about going up. There are three different possibilities for where these Psalms speak about Israel “going up.”

First, some suggest pilgrims and priests sang them as they went up the steps to God’s temple in Jerusalem. There are large steps on the south side of the temple mount that lead up to the Double and Triple Gates in the southern wall. Another possibility are the 15 steps inside the temple courtyards from the Court of Women into the Court of Israel as you go into the temple itself where God’s presence dwelt in a special way in the Holy of Holies.

A second possibility is that pilgrims sang these 15 psalms as they made their way to Jerusalem for the annual major feast days according to God’s commandments through Moses. To support this possibility the Psalms of Ascent contain several references to other places by name and geography from which people may have come to Jerusalem: Meschech, Kedar, mountains, captivity and Ephrathah.

A third possibility which has a lot of merit is that the Psalms of Ascent speak about ascending to a higher way of living. Coincidentally the 15 psalms come in 5 groups of 3 with related viewpoints about daily living: two groups of three relate to Israel’s relationships with her neighbours, one group focuses on the importance of family, and finally, the last three contain elements about God’s choice of Israel and their devotion and trust in Him.

The exact answer to this question is a mystery. The important thing is these psalms are very meaningful and wonderful to commit to memory. One benefit of not knowing their exact context is that they are freer to apply in wide application in our times and lives today.

Of David

Psalms 120-134 are psalms of David. Acts 13:22 speaks about God’s perception of David: “After He had removed him (Saul), He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, *‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.’*” The meaning of David’s name supports this beautiful thought about David being a man after God’s heart. David means “beloved.”

David served God in His time. Jesus fulfilled and received God’s promises to David as we read in Acts 13:33-27.

God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘You are My Son; today I have begotten You.’ As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’ Therefore He also says in another Psalm, ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.’ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; but He whom God raised did not undergo decay.

David is a *model of trust in God*. He served God in his time and we can in ours! He remained faithful to God in times of difficulty and disappointment. Clearly in Psalm 131 David has been through something in his life that makes him keep trusting God and singing about it.

O Lord

The two opening words say a lot. God is our Lord, our heavenly Father. His name here is “YHWH” (Yaweh). This name is related to the verb “to be.” He is the existing One, the One who exists from all eternity. The One with power to call the universe into being. He is our refuge, our stronghold and our fortress (Psalm 18 and 2 Samuel 22). His name YHWH is first in the original Hebrew text of this Psalm, not at the end of the first verse as in some translations. I recommend you memorize Psalm 131 from a translation that puts Him first. The focus is on Him not “my.” Another beautiful thing about His name in Hebrew is that there is no article “the.” His name is personal, intimately expressing who He is and our relationship with Him.

He is not only our personal God He is Lord of all the nations. For some psalmists and prophets God is a problem. This sounds like a funny thing to say. We may say their relationship and faithfulness to God creates difficulties for them in the ungodly world in which they live. The point is that God calls them to be different. This is often not easy. They often wonder why He takes so long to intervene against the other nations and this creates problems of reputation for them. They have a burden of faithfulness to God even when he *appears* to be absent but they know he really is present. They have the burden of being good examples in a bad world.

The key point is that God’s prophets and psalmists trust Him enough to ask tough questions. Why? How long? We can trust God enough to ask Him our tough questions. Ultimately, He is the only one we can trust as Proverbs 3:5-6 and John 14:1 says so well:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart
And do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will make your paths straight.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled
You believe in God, believe also in Me.”

LORD, just thinking of Him should help us put things in perspective. He is LORD of everything.

My heart is not proud...

My heart is not high. God is high. We are on earth. It is good to set our eyes on Him on high. Paul says Colossians 3:1, If you have been raised up with Christ set your mind on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God...”

It is hard to say honestly “my heart is not proud.” It is hard to do. But it is God given responsibility. “Humble yourselves” is not optional. It is a mandatory requirement.

Humility is the opposite of pride. Humility is possible. It takes work. If God says we can do it, we can. He made us and knows what we are capable of. Focus on God. Examine self (1 Corinthians 11). Have sober judgment (Romans 5). Work on thinking correctly by God's grace: For *through the grace given to me* I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; *but to think so as to have sound judgment*, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. God gives us faith and the ability to think with sound judgment about ourselves and to love and serve Him and others with humility and joy

Nor are my eyes haughty

My eyes are not "too high." Not proud, not blatantly disdainfully proud. I do not look down on others. If my eyes are high I would have to look down my nose at others. Jesus said "the eye is the lamp of the body." What we let in matters. How we look at others matters. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:16-17, "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

The key is training our eyes. What to look *at*? Good. What to look away from? Evil. Where to look? Up to God. Psalms of Ascent show us the proper focus for our eyes:

To You I lift up my eyes,
O You who are enthroned in the heavens! (Psalm 123:1)

Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master,
As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,
So our eyes look to the Lord our God,
Until He is gracious to us. (Psalm 123:1-2)

Nor do I walk after great matters

David does not walk after great matters, which is another way of saying "I do not involve myself in things far beyond me." In our world it is very easy to get wrapped up and preoccupied with great matters through: news, entertainment and spectator culture. It is easy to think we can solve world problems online from our living rooms.

Christians have a different focus. Paul wrote to Timothy, "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier" (2 Timothy 2:4). We walk with God without letting the "great things" of the world get between us and Him. This requires discipline. It takes practice.

Our goal is pleasing God. His matters are greatest of all! They are eternal and beautiful beyond anything in world. This is why Jesus could say to His parents when they found Him in the Temple: "Did you not know I had to be in the things (the matters) of My Father" (Luke 2:49) The key is to fill our minds with the great matters of God like Jesus.

Or in things too marvellous for me

Wonder workers were common in the ancient world and today. Their goal is to make people “marvel.” We can spend a lot of energy marvelling at or trying to achieve things of little lasting value or that are too difficult or impossible to achieve. It is important to discern what is worth our time eternally. God gives each of us talents and spiritual gifts.

With our trust in Him He will: help us use our gifts to His glory, take us places we never thought we could go, enable us to do things we never thought we could do, to grow up into Christ and live up to our potential in Him. He and His works are the most marvellous and wonderful.

Scripture is filled with revelation of *God’s* marvels. Jesus quoted Psalm 118 in Matthew 21:42, ““Did you never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, And it is marvellous in our eyes?’” Psalm 98:1 says,

O sing to the Lord a new song,
For He has done wonderful things,
His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him.”

In Psalm we read, “Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law.” John wrote in Revelation 15:3 that those victorious in Christ sang, ““Great and marvellous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!””

We will marvel at Jesus, as Paul says when “when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.”

Surely I have composed and quieted my soul;

God made us living souls: “the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). The soul is the eternal spiritual self, the non-material core of our being. It is “the seat and center of the inner human life.” From the deepest part of our beings, not only mental but deeply felt in our souls, come our emotions and passions. For Hebrews the soul, *the nephesh*, includes our inner and outer being.

Our souls are the ultimate treasure house of knowledge. Shortly after Psalm 131 in 139:14 David says,

I will give thanks to You,
for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Wonderful are Your works,
And my soul knows it very well.

God saves our souls. At death the eternal soul leaves body and returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

An important key here is that our souls are within our control. God gives us control over our souls. Our soul does things as we direct it In Psalm 103:1-2 David commands his soul:

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And all that is within me, bless His holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And forget none of His benefits;

Here in Psalm 131, David composed and calmed his soul. To compose is to bring together, create and arrange in order with a logical flow. To quiet or calm our soul here is to literally smooth it out so it is calm, at rest. When Jesus calmed the storm, it became calm. The Bible says literally is was a “great calm,” a “mega calm.”

David is doing self-talk. Self-talk is the essence of cognitive behaviour therapy. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is “the most widely used evidence-based practice for counselling and treating unhelpful patterns of thought, belief, attitude, behaviour, emotion and mental disorders.” It is one of the most widely accepted forms of counselling of workers in North America recognized and paid for by insurance companies.

Epictetus was a first-century slave living in New Testament times who became a well-known Stoic philosopher. He said the key to happiness is knowing what we have power over and what we don't. This is a matter of self-talk and self-control.

Your soul is something God gave your power over. God is ultimate founder of cognitive behaviour therapy thousands of years before the 1st and 21st centuries.

The easiest way to remember how cognitive behaviour therapy is to remember the first six letters of the alphabet: A, B, C, D, E and F. They stand for:

Activators (things that upset us like people running red lights)
Behaviours that are undesirable (we get really mad at people running red lights)
Consequences undesirable (my day is ruined)
Defeat Activators with healthy thinking (I know people shouldn't run red lights but do)
Effective action (decide and follow through by not getting upset and driving defensively)
Feeling better (able to drive and get places without ruining your day)

God taught cognitive behaviour first before anyone. Jeremiah is a good example. Jerusalem was in smouldering ruins around him. He turned his personal outlook around by changing his thinking. Watch the progression of this thinking in Lamentations 3:22-24.

Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness.
Surely my soul remembers
And is bowed down within me.
This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.
The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
For His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.
“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,
“Therefore I have hope in Him.”

The Activator was affliction. The undesirable Behaviour was wandering. The Consequences were wormwood and bitterness. He Defeated these with positive effective thinking:

This I recall to mind, therefore I have hope

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases...

His Effective action brought better feelings that come from realizing, "Therefore I have hope." He can live again and go on.

Cognitive behaviour therapy counters anxiety by replacing undesirable thoughts with healthy ones. *The best way to overcome anxious thoughts is to replace them with the thoughts of God:*

Memorize the word of God and replace anxious thoughts with His.

Memorize this Psalm.

It works any time of day or night.

Like a weaned child rests against his mother

Our life is connected to God as a mother and child here! GOD is the source of our physical and spiritual life as father and mother to child. A child has important connection to mother

for food, clothing, shelter and warmth. In this picture the child of the soul is now resting against its mother. The weaning is complete. The child grows into a new stage in the relationship with mother. The child will be dependent for many years but it will be maturing.

Understanding weaning is one key to the power of this Psalm. Infants need milk to grow and be healthy. Children that are breast fed are nourished by their mother's milk. Weaning is a gradual process where young children transition their diet from only milk to solid food. Children who have been weaned, however, are still dependent on their parents for many years.

A weaned child has been through a major change in their young life. The child is still dependent trusting mother will provide what is needed next, that is solid food. This is new and different but it is good.

This is how faith works: faith takes us to new unknown things that are better. Similar to weaning, we progress with God from the basics but we are still in a state of dependence upon His grace and provisions for living. We trust He will feed us the solid spiritual food we need. We trust He will see us through life's challenges. We trust Him to take care of the "great matters," "the things that are too marvellous for us." We focus on what He wants us to know and do. He leads us to maturity. We *walk* after HIM not the great things of world. We trust our heavenly Father to take us wherever He wants us to go with Him. We grow into a lasting mature relationship of dependence on God, trusting Him each step of His way. He is always our Father. We are always His children.

My soul is like a weaned child within me

David has composed and calmed his soul to the place where it has become like that weaned child. As a child has a maturing relationship with his parents, so we have a maturing relationship with our heavenly Father.

It is a place of trust and humility. Jesus said we need to become like children to enter the kingdom of heaven. We need to continually trust in our heavenly Father. Matthew 18:3, Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Mark 10:14 reads, “But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, ‘Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’” John wrote, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12). Peter exhorts us, “like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord” (1 Peter 2:2-3).

From Psalm 131 we learn that a mature believer realizes their ongoing dependence on God. We never get past the point of needing His grace. His grace works in us. We are always His children. We always have infinite room for growth.

Jesus is our ultimate example of how to live humbly as children of God. He is all powerful yet humble. He gives us this beautiful invitation,

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Paul wrote about Jesus’ inspirational humility in Philippians 2:8, “He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” In the title slide picture there is a beautiful peaceful scene on shore of Sea of Galilee at Magdala. On the back of the donkeys their short mane forms a cross. This is a reminder of Jesus’ humility and His royalty, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold your King is coming to you, *Gentle*, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden”” (Matthew 21:5 Zechariah 9:9).

Jesus rode this colt of a donkey into Jerusalem and did the most marvellous thing for us by humbling Himself and dying for our sins on the cross.

O Israel

In the final line of this beautiful Psalm we see David thinking beyond himself. He shares the trust and faith he has. He takes this message of trust and peace to others, to his fellow Israelites. God’s people are the apple of His eye, the focus of His attention as Zechariah 2:8 says, “for he who touches you, touches the apple of His eye.” God sees every sparrow. He sees you.

David shows we have work to do. He has rested, been restored, renewed for work. Now he wants to share the hope he has in God.

Hope in the Lord

David’s message is one of hope. We trust in God. We find salvation in Jesus Christ. As David said earlier in Psalm 20:7

Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

From this time forth and forever

We trust God “to forever.” Notice the ascent through this Psalm from our hearts in the present to hoping in God forever, to eternity. David changes our focus from “great matters” of this life to trusting God forever “and the things of our Father” (Luke 2:49). Through Christ’s humility, His death and resurrection, and our humble response we gain access to God’s kingdom and the view from heaven where God is. Paul gave us a glimpse of what God has in store for those who hope in Him and obey Him in Ephesians 2:4-7, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Jesus is our hope of salvation and eternal life. He died for our sins. We can become united with Him in His death and eternal life in baptism by immersion. We rise from the waters of baptism to walk in newness of life. If you are ready to obey Jesus, you are invited let your wishes be known so we can help you confess your faith in Jesus, be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins and begin your walk with God.

Let’s conclude by reading Psalm 131 together,

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O Lord, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty;
Nor do I walk after great matters,
Or in things too marvellous for me.

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