

Humility, Hope, and the Quiet Heart

Psalm 131

Introduction

Boxing story

Similarly, height in ancient Israel was everything. Not height as in stature, but height as in elevation. The more elevated one was above the surrounding landscape, the better position they were in. The air was fresher, there was a better chance of the breeze cooling the scorching desert, and an advancing enemy could be seen from far away, giving the city on the hill time to prepare for battle. Additionally, by the people of Israel and the people of the Ancient Near East at large, mountains or hills were considered to be more spiritual in nature. This is why altars to pagan gods were often set up in high places.

Understanding this, we can understand why Jerusalem, perched atop Mount Zion and higher than the surrounding terrain, was such a desirable place. Not only this but at the highest point in the city was the temple, where the real presence of God was pleased to dwell. From this location we get the title that begins this Psalm and the others surrounding it: “A Song of Ascents.” Scholars don’t know much about this title, but most agree that they were sung during the journey upward in elevation to the temple mount and the presence of God for the significant festivals on the Jewish calendar. Because it was the highest point in Jerusalem and Jerusalem was the highest city in the surrounding area, everyone had to climb or ascend to the presence of God.

So why does this matter? Well, I believe that this idea of climbing to worship in the presence of God with the people of God is actually a picture, and analogy of the reality the Christians live in now. Revelation chapter 21 says this: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” This is describing the glorious, eternal destination of the redeemed people of God, and what is it called? The New Jerusalem.

So, in this life, strengthened and carried and sustained by God, we are ascending in order to worship in the presence of God. However, our destination will be far grander and our congregation far larger and more beautiful, being made up of believers from every tribe, tongue, nation, and era. The ascent of the Israelites to the Temple is a mere shadow of our ascent to the New Jerusalem. For this reason, we have as much cause if not more to consider and pray and sing these Psalms. They give us direction on how we ought to do our climbing and encourage us as to the worthiness of this pursuit. They teach us right worship during this season of eager pursuit and expectation. I specifically chose Psalm 131 because it crams into a small package a weighty formula for our ascent. Here it is:

Because pride occupies and eventually destroys the heart, right worship flows from a humble, quiet heart and hopes eternally in the LORD.

In order to present this formula to us, David first gives us an example of what we should not do, then gives us an example of what we should do, and finally gives a concluding command.

1. We should not be proud.

At first glance, indeed at 5th and 10th and 20th glance for me, verses 1 and 2 seem to be disconnected. A pair of true but unremarkable statements. However, I don't think this is the case. I think that they are beautifully connected. So what we're going to do is explore and understand verse 1 and 2 individually, then we'll dive into the connection between the two.

Verse 1- O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

“My heart is not lifted up,” seems to be the primary statement here. The NASB translates this, “my heart is not proud.” We are familiar with the term proud, but the imagery provided by the ESV was quite helpful for me in understanding pride. Recall the importance of elevation in the ancient world, with all its strategic and symbolic value, and recall that often times pagan altars would be built on these high places. Then, atop these altars would be lifted up a graven image or statue that was to be worship and served. So what is a lifted up heart? What is pride? It is the enshrining of an idol. Pride is placing your own heart in a place of honor to be looked at, served, and ultimately worshiped. It is self-idolatry.

Oh how repulsive this is to God, who is the only worthy object of worship in the universe. Just think, not only are we so bold as think there is a more worthy pursuit than Him, we think that OUR HEART is that more worthy pursuit. We are disgusted and grieved at images of people praying in adorned temples to the Hindu gods, yet when we are proud, we are far worse than those who merely attend the temple of an idol. You may be saying, “Ben isn't that a bit dramatic?” NO! No it is not! We are far worse because we do it without company or assistance. We don't just come to a temple, we build an altar, decorate it, protect it with an attention-drawing temple, and carefully place our hearts in the place of honor.

Self-idolatry is no ordinary sin, it is the father of all sin. Self-idolatry is what expelled Satan and his demons from the glorious presence of God, self-idolatry is what Satan used to entice Adam and Eve in the garden, self-idolatry is what plunged this world into a cycle of pain and death, and self-idolatry is the root of the infinite array of sins we see in our world and in our own hearts. David was serious about the pride in his heart, and if we are serious about our ascent to the presence of God in the New Jerusalem, we must be as well.

“My eyes are not raised too high.” This is an extension of the idea that started verse 1, and speaks to the way we view the world. The one with a lifted heart will also have haughty eyes, seeing everyone as lesser than itself. When our heart is proud, our worldview is exceedingly self-centered and self-exalting. We begin to see things not as they actually are, but as our idolized heart would have them be: serving us. Let's move on now to the second verse and come back to the last lines of verse 1 in a moment.

Verse 2- But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me.

David provides the example of what it is that we should do on our ascent:

2. We should quiet our souls.

The image here is of a child who is no longer nursing but has been weaned. He is no longer nourished by the milk of his mother, but he is no less dependent on his mother to provide for his every need. In other words, he has the experience to know that his mother will provide for his every need, but he is not yet old enough to even consider looking for food or shelter or love elsewhere. He knows that with his mother is everything he needs. Rest, satisfaction, care. He does not need to search elsewhere for anything, only rest quietly in his mother's arms. This is David's soul within him as he draws near to the LORD for rest, satisfaction, and care. He does not bother to look elsewhere, because he has tasted and seen the sufficiency of the LORD, and it is beyond compare.

So what does this have to do with verse 1? What does the proud heart have to do with the quiet heart? I think our answer lays in the second half of verse 1.

I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

You see, when we are proud, we are occupied by tasks and ideas and ends that we are unable to attain. Things that are too great and too marvelous for us. The proud heart cannot help but be busy.

Now, we live in a busy culture. If you've ever sat down for coffee or breakfast with someone and to catch up and asked

them how life is, 9 times out of 10 the word busy will be in their answer. America is a busy place and Americans are busy people, and there is nothing inherently wrong with that. I would like to draw an important distinction, though, concerning business. There is a difference between a busy schedule and a busy heart. A busy schedule is the result of having much to do and a limited amount of time to do it. A busy heart is the result of pride. A busy schedule can be lived in unceasing communion with God, going from item to item in happy conversation with Jesus. A busy heart has no space for the God of the Bible. Why? Because a busy heart is its own God.

The busy heart is busy because it is proud. It has endless repairs to do on its self-exalting temple. It is dissatisfied with the fact that others are stopping in to worship it. The proud heart must never stop doing because it must be like a god. It must be self-sufficient. Must not be lacking in knowledge. It must have control of all things it sees. It must never be quiet and calm because in that quiet and calmness it will hear the Lord saying through the unfathomable majesty of his creation and the power of his Word, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. O proud heart, you will never be a sufficient object of your own worship." And this message is disgusting to the proud heart who has built a universe in which its own ways and thoughts are highest and best. It has presumed to think the thoughts of the Almighty and work with the power of the I AM. So, work it must and work it does. And, saddest of all, it lives believing the lie that this work is true pleasure and resting in the Lord is misery.

Friends, if you are spiritually weary this morning, your busy schedule may not be the problem. Your busy schedule

may be feeding into and flowing out of the problem: your own self-idolatry. Many will tell you to give your schedule a break, take some time off. But if pride is your problem it is not your schedule that needs a break, it is your heart. Your heart is longing to stop protecting its self-made temple and take the place of an utterly dependent child. Your heart is longing for the quiet calmness of humility. So how do find this rest? How do we grow in humility? Think about that while I make a necessary clarification that may be relevant.

The clearing of Pastor Ty's schedule and the sabbatical from his pastoral responsibilities is a separate issue than the one I'm talking about. Here's why. In being the senior pastor of this church, Ty is not giving of his schedule, he is giving of his life. He does not take on tasks, he takes on the weighty responsibility of caring for our souls and overseeing the ministry of the Word in our local body. In granting him sabbatical, we are not temporarily clearing his schedule to combat a busy heart, we are temporarily relieving his responsibility to feed and carry our busy hearts. We see in him the qualification and gifting to run this race well, so we are giving him a water break in order that he might do so. Ty is not a proud man. Ty is a humble man, much farther along the road of humility than I myself am. This sabbatical is not provision for pride, but for humanity.

Okay, back to our question: How do we grow in humility and therefore allow our hearts to enter rest? Andrew Murray has a little book called *Humility* that really changed my life this week, and he answers this question well. First, we have to want it. This seems simple, but Murray's wielding of Scripture shone a light on my soul week which made this first point exceedingly convicting. He pointed out that there are two steps in the pursuit of humility, and that most of us never proceed to the second. In the first step a man has a desire to be

humble, but flees all that would make him humble. Of this man Murray says,

“He prays for humility, at times very earnestly; but in his secret heart he prays more, if not in word, then in wish, to be kept from the very things that will make him humble. He is not yet so in love with humility as the beauty of the Lamb of God, and the joy of heaven, that he would sell all to procure it.”

When I read this I immediately thought: That's me. Friends, if I am not alone in this, my heart does not prize humility. It begrudgingly acknowledges it's merit, but I rarely see humility as the thing that makes Jesus Christ so supremely beautiful or that thing that makes heaven so joyous. But humility is in fact these things. Jesus has been so highly exalted because he was so perfectly humble. Philippians 2:5-9

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

Heaven will be so wonderfully joyous because we will finally stop looking for our own way and simply drink in the presence of Christ. In Revelation 21:6 Jesus looks out at the New Jerusalem from his throne and says, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. to the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.” We will not pretend to have something to offer him in that day. It will be the purest joy ever experienced to come

in our nothingness and drink. Humility is the beauty of Christ. Humility is the joy of heaven. Want it! Crave it! Pursue in such a way that you do not count the cost, for whatever the cost is it will be the bargain of a lifetime. Say along with Murray, **“Most gladly do I glory in weakness, I take pleasure in whatever makes me humble.”**

And what is it that makes us humble? The nature of humility demands that it be something outside of ourselves, for any effort to bootstrap humility is hardly humble. Once again, Murray says it well,

“Being occupied with self, even amid the deepest self-aborrence, can never free us from self. It is the revelation of God...that will make us humble... There will be no room for self in the soul that waits for, trusts, worships, and is filled with the presence of God the Creator as the all of the man in his nothingness, and God the redeemer as the all of the sinner in his sinfulness.”

We must see God. We must see his marvelous nature in creation. We must taste the beauty of his wonderous works toward his people. He must be our all. Self-made humility is acquired by work and is nothing but a pious disguise for self-idolatry. The blood-bought humility of Christ is acquired by the gracious presence of Jesus and is of infinite value. Humor me with one more quote from Murray,

“It is indeed blessed, the deep happiness of heaven, to be so free from self that whatever is said of us or done to us is lost and swallowed up, in the thought that Jesus is all.”

That is the calm and quiet rest of the weaned child that verse 2 calls us too. It is secure, it is sweet, it is the deep happiness of heaven to be freed from the need to keep and repair and improve the temple to our own heart and rather be swallowed up in the thought that Jesus is all.

3. We must hope in the Lord.

Verse 3- O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore.

Isaiah 57:13 When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you! The wind will carry them all off, a breath will take them away.

The hope of the self-idolatrous heart is itself. It will cry out and nobody will come to its rescue. But not the humble heart. With humble, quiet, Christ-captivated hearts, our worship is a confident, unashamed, and eternal song of hope in the LORD. What has the LORD done to earn this hope? There is a beautiful answer just above our passage in your Bible.

Psalms 130:7-8 “7 O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love (*hesed*), and with him is plentiful redemption. 8 And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Is there a more accurate description of the gospel in all the Old Testament? God has proven his supreme, steadfast, covenant love in himself shedding the sacrificial blood necessary for the new covenant. His redemption has proven to be plentiful extend beyond all cultural boundaries and redeeming sons and daughters from every people to form one new people, the body of Christ, the Israel of God. He has borne our iniquities on the cross and conquered them in the resurrection. What a sure hope we have, and what a great God we hope in.

This week, relentlessly desire the humbling revelation of God. Seek him in his word. Don't neglect the hand of God at

work in you, through you, and around you. Pull up the root of pride that is feeding your busy heart. Enjoy the calm, quiet heart that this humility allows. And, finally, worship in the secure hope that is the Lord.