

IS YOUR SOUL CALM AND QUIETED?

Psalm 131: 1-3 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Thirty-one years ago, a godly lady here at our church, a faithful member, she knew of a storm our church was going through. It was a mighty spiritual storm as our church faced a difficult church discipline situation that took us to the third and last step of Matthew 18: 15-18. She brought me an 8-track tape. Some of you remember those 8-tracks. The 8 track tape was entitled Psalms Alive by the Maranatha Singers. One song written by Tom Howard I listened to dozens of times as we went through those amazingly momentous and difficult days. I will never forget the kindness of God the Holy Spirit for sending that lady with the words of Psalm 131 in that 8-track tape. The song is simple and paraphrased from our text in Psalm 131. It goes like this. Verse 1--“My heart is not proud, O Lord, My head is bowed down, O Lord. I don’t concern myself with great and lofty speech, or matters far beyond the limits of my reach. Chorus--But I have stilled and quieted my soul, I have stilled and quieted my soul. O Lord, Verse 2-Like a little child, at its mother’s side, So my soul is fed and fully satisfied. O Israel, put your hope always in the Lord, O people, trust in Him both now and evermore. Chorus:

Sometimes we come to crises in our lives that are so momentous, and so dangerous, and so potentially tragic, that the best medicine in all the world is to take Psalm 131 and slowly chew on it, meditate on it, and sing it and pray it and cry it out to the Lord. This psalm is God’s spiritual tranquilizer in the rush of things, in the midst of the storm, in the face of hopelessness, and when we are facing the point of the devil’s spear. Today, I know some of you are going through some difficult days as you have been crying out to God for mercy. As the floodwaters are rising in your soul, as they have literally been rising down in Houston, Texas, this past week with over 20 inches of rain, what can we do? Psalm 131 tells us one of the first things we can do and that is to seek with God’s help to develop a humble heart like a weaned child. Turning to this psalm in our crises in life is a wonderful place to go. This psalm is doubtless teaching us much about how we grow in grace by learning the lessons of a weaned child resting on his mother’s breast. David’s weaning process seems likely to have been connected to the Lord denying him a situation of great prominence as he describes it in verse 1.

There are two well-known occasions when David was denied a place of prominence: the first such occasion of weaning was a time of long years of David running away from King Saul even though Samuel the prophet had already anointed him to become king. David was literally running for his life, and he had more than one opportunity to easily kill King Saul, but he refused to raise his hand against the Lord’s anointed. David could have reasoned that since God had rejected King Saul and had Samuel anoint him, he could help God out and kill Israel’s first

king. He refused to do it. What a weaning time that had to be. The second time of weaning was when David desired to build a great temple for God, but God would not give him permission to do so. Rather God told David his son, Solomon would be the king to have the temple built for the Lord. Whether these were the occasions for the writing of this psalm cannot be known for certain, those two occasions are suitable occasions because David responded to these denials with great humility. First, God denied David freedom to kill his own murderous enemy, king Saul who was trying to take David's life. Secondly, God denied David the joy and privilege to build a temple for His worship in Jerusalem. David's humble response to God denying him that joy of building the temple may be the occasion for this psalm.

Have you felt an urge to do a wonderful thing for the Lord that He has prevented you from doing? How have you responded? Have you desired a certain office, even for the glory of the Lord, but God has rather given that call to another person? How have you responded to that denial of that call to you, that refusal to grant you your desire to take another's place because you believe you could do a better job? This psalm tells the story of the weaning process from a proud heart to a humble heart that refuses to seek the position or place or prominence of another person. This psalm tells the story of how God worked in David's heart to melt it, mold it, and move it into total compliance with His will. David lets us know this is a humble heart story, then a humble soul story and finally a humble mind story. But the story begins first of all, in a humble heart as David's psalm first says, "O Lord, my heart is not lifted up." Psalm 131 is David's journey towards humility revisited and his story retold. David here is looking back and recalling how God prepared his heart not to run a spear through the back of his sleeping enemy, king Saul, and how God prepared his heart not to pitch a fit when his desire to build the temple was denied him and he wanted to build that temple so badly. These three verses of Psalm 131 suggest three word pictures of a humbled weaned heart, soul and mind when we are learning in the power of the Holy Spirit to live holy, godly lives. What are these three word pictures of a humble weaned heart, soul and mind?

A HUMBLE WEANED HEART HAS A CLEAR CONSCIENCE. (I.) Notice 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." Warren Wiersbe comments on this verse that the problem with too many people is that they have grown old without growing up." Has that happened to any of us? We as God's people may look like adults in our physical appearance, but once folk begin to speak to us and to really get to know us, do they find out the truth that we are immature and childish in our actions and reactions to one another? Pastor Larry has started a series of messages in I Corinthians 13. When he comes to the end of this mighty love chapter, he will read the words in verse 11, "When I was a child, I

spoke like as child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.” Do you have a clear conscience to say, “I have grown up spiritually and given up childish ways?” For those of us who are married, our spouse knows us through and through. Are we often selfish, impatient, irritable, resentful, rude, judgmental, attacking, prideful, holding grudges, pouting, seeking to control, and insisting on our own way? We may have a fully adult body, but not yet do we have a humble weaned heart with a clear conscience. None of us are perfect, but God expects us to grow up in Him into weaned children of His.

The New Testament speaks of a weaned, humble heart in II Peter 1: 5-9. Listen! Peter exhorts us like David, saying, “For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.” Peter is giving us the picture of a believer without a weaned heart. The writer in Hebrews 5: 12-14 continues the picture of a weaned heart, saying, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.” Are we demanding milk only? Verse 1 describe a humble weaned heart.

Within this first word picture of a humble weaned heart, David describes three more word pictures to illustrate what a humble weaned heart is. (1) **First of all, a humble weaned heart is not lifted up.** Notice v. 1. “My heart is not lifted up.” This is an amazing illustration of David’s clear conscience. He did not think of himself more highly than he ought to think. This is not normal for human beings to feel this way without being touched by God. Think of the promises made to David when he was anointed as king. Think of the killing of Goliath and all David did for God. Yet David realized he was the baby boy in his family, the eighth son—a nobody that God raised up and blessed amazingly. Can you with a clear conscience say, “My heart is not lifted up?” (2) **Second of all, a humble weaned heart does not have ambitious eyes.** Notice v. 1. “My eyes are not raised too high.” Wow! Is that true of you and me? David was not ambitious for a greater position than he had at the moment unless God made it happen. David refused to promote himself or make things happen for God since God was taking so long. As a shepherd, David was content to be with his sheep, care for them, and willing to lay his life on

the line, killing both a lion and a bear to protect his sheep. As a servant in Saul's palace, he was content to play music to calm Saul's nerves though he nearly lost his life doing it. We all know of David's big sin, and we all know the childishness of that act. Perhaps this psalm was written in David's early years as a king, probably before his sin of murder and adultery. Nevertheless, for those awful sins, David deeply repented and God forgave him. David's life in the main was an unambitious life, without eyes upon what God did not supply him. Ambition arises out of covetous, greedy eyes, wanting what God has given someone else. A humble weaned heart is satisfied with where God has put us—rather than always pushing for the top of the ladder—a humble weaned heart is not like Yertle the Turtle—trying to get higher by stepping upon other's backs. Only when God places us where He wants us and promotes us there are we secure.

Thirdly (3) a humble weaned heart is willing to accept things too hard for us to understand. Verse one reads, "I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me." I warn us all not to speak dogmatically about things we know little about. One of our five daughters used to say as she was growing up. "Don't say what you don't know that you don't mean." That's good advice. A good example of an un-weaned childish believer who is not humble is our sitting around as armchair quarterbacks who easily critique and criticize those in the thick of the battle for the Lord. Pointing out the errors of others behind their back is a sure sign we are still children spiritually, needing to be weaned. The deeper we grow into God's image, the less dogmatic we become on controversial issues. Reading one or two books and parroting those books doesn't make us weaned. It only proves we are beginning to explore the depth of one of God's mysteries. When you can walk away from a text you aren't totally sure of, God is weaning you. To leave that passage is a sign of spiritual wisdom, showing that we are maturing, and that we are confident the Lord will teach us the meaning of the passage in his own time—if not in this life, in eternity. Also, remember each of us are prone to prove we are un-weaned by judging Job's in our lives like Job's three friends did. God wasn't pleased with those three friends. When you don't have an instant pudding answer for all the providential things God allows, you are starting to mature and say, "I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me." It is a mark of childishness—still un-weaned, when we must always know the answer to every question. I confess to you that I do not understand many of the providential things God does or why He does them. I sometimes am baffled, but I know that when I cannot trace His hand, as Vance Havner once said, I can still trust His heart. Let's go on to this beautiful second word picture in verse 2:

A HUMBLE WEANED SOUL HAS A COMFORTING CALMNESS. (II.)

Notice 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.” I ask you, “Can you lean your head on God’s bosom and be honest before Him? Can you be comforted and calm to lean on Jesus and speak to the Lord about anything that troubled your soul? One pastor in Scotland said that he found it was common for children to be weaned on the long hard journey up, up, up to Jerusalem. Perhaps he is right. I have not found proof of that or denial of it. It is certainly possible it is true, and thus this psalm would have been sung as pilgrims observed the weaning process going on. For the Jews, the usual age for weaning children is a bit later than for us in America. In David’s day, that age was often between age four and five. Most of us have seen toddlers pitch a fit when their mom thinks it is time to take them from breast milk and start to feed them solid food. Usually for every child, it is a hard time, a time of trial, denial and in a word, “no fun” for mom or the child. David know this process, and apparently he was prevented by God from something he desired. Nevertheless, as a weaned child can lay on his mother’s bosom and sleep and rest without crying, David is saying that God had given him a quiet confidence to rest in the arms of the One who denied him the throne of Israel before his time or the One who denied him the privilege of building the temple. What do we do with God when He denies what we desire? What do we do with our parents when they deny us what we desire? It does honestly bring us initial disappointment.

Don’t think you are the first believer to balk at being weaned from Christianity 101 to go on to Christianity 202 or up to 909. Often when we are new believers, we are fresh, passionate, on fire, blazing red hot for God, and He answers some amazing prayers for us to teach us He loves us and that we can trust Him. But when God weans us is when we are told like Job to curse God and die because we are sick or because we have lost loved ones. Job was no babe with the Lord. He was a righteous man who said to his wife, “You speak as one of the foolish women. Shall we receive good from God and shall we not receive evil. In all this Job did not sin with his lips.” (Job 2: 10) Job went on to say in Job 23: 10, “But He knows the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

A humble weaned child resting against his mother is a quiet, comforted, calm soul within. Content just to be lying in the place he once nursed is enough. Paul had to accept his thorn in the flesh—no easy course in learning God’s strength is made perfect in weakness. Yet, the apostle Paul was like David. Paul saw himself as the chief of sinners in I Timothy 1: 15. Read David’s words about his confession of sin in Psalm 51. It is a psalm of leaning on the Lord for forgiveness and demanding nothing more. I see David content to just be near God—as Psalm 51: 11 has him praying to God, “Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me.” When we believe we are great sinners and we make no boasts about how great we are—God is beginning to wean us or He has weaned us. When

we are trusting in our accomplishments or our achievements, we are at best, far from understanding Christianity 101—and we are not weaned. Weaned believers know we deserve hell, but we know we are Christ’s bride, accepted in the beloved, and that weaned knowledge surges through our weaned souls. Does your humble weaned soul have a comforted calmness that rests in God and God alone? Thirdly,

A HUMBLE WEANED MIND HAS A CONFIDENT CERTAINTY. (III.)

Notice verse 3. “O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore.” A humble weaned mind begins to show great growth when we look beyond our own individual needs to pray for the local body we are a part of—God’s church. David here is surely weaned as He calls his whole nation to hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said of Psalm 131, “It is one of the shortest Psalms to read, but one of the longest psalms to learn. It speaks of a young child, but it contains the experience of a man in Christ.” In this political year, we need to pray for our church, and pray for our nation. Wild, angry rhetoric is flying all over today. Such words are not from humble weaned children of God. This may well be a year of painful weaning for all of us. We may not get what we want politically or nationally, for we are, as we speak, a nation undergoing God’s judgment. To live in such a nation at such a time as this calls for us to start learning to live without relying on our self-sufficiency or banking on our scheming to survive. A child being weaned weeps, cries, screams, but in the weaning process, finally calms down and accepts the inevitable. When the child calms down, that moment indicates a giant step toward maturity.

To accept God’s will in our losses as well as in our gains not only results in a comforting calmness, but it goes on to produce a confident certainty that our fellow believers need in these days when men’s hearts are failing them for fear. This last word picture is strong medicine. Toddlers being weaned do not realize that their mom’s decision to finally wean them is for their own good. Weaning helps a toddler start to open his eyes to the future. Wanting to keep things just as they are, often is the way of immaturity and tragedy. It has well been said that “fretting over losing a comfortable past can only forfeit the possibility of a challenging future. Fretting like a child not yet weaned---we ought to know from Psalm 37:1 is sinful. God calls us out of getting our own way to finding His way and His will is His road to new blessings and new opportunities. We can lead the way in our home and in our church by looking ahead with confident hope and certainty—that our future is as bright as the promises of God. This confident certainty means we are weaned from resting in what happens in our world—and the things of time, and proves we are beginning to see beyond today as God sees. It means we are relying on Him and His eternity. Psalm 131 is God’s medicine for 2016. God help us rest without fretting or pitching a fit, resting as a humble weaned child on Jesus’ bosom. Amen.