

“The Humble Servant”  
Psalm 131  
(Preached at Trinity, September 15, 2013)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We are still in the midst of the Psalms of Ascent - Psalms 120-134. They picture the ascent of pilgrims going up to Jerusalem for the three annual Jewish feasts. As we come to **Psalm 131** we find the humble, child-like faith of the pilgrim.  
**Psalm 131:1 KJV** - "LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty"  
Some think this is the heart of Israel returning from Babylon, humbled and trusting God. But this is designated as a Psalm of David, many years before the exile. David, like every child of God, understood how hard it is to humble ourselves before the throne of God.
2. There are few things more ugly and more uncharacteristic of a Christian than haughty pride, yet it is at the root of our greatest battles.  
The Bible teaches us that God is against the proud.
  - A. Pride puts us in great danger.  
**Proverbs 16:18 KJV** - "Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."
  - B. Pride tops the list of the seven things God sees as an abomination.  
**Proverbs 6:16-17 KJV** - "These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: <sup>17</sup> A proud look . . ."
3. This psalm speaks on the subject of humility. The renewed heart is a humble heart. The Christian life is a lowly life. But pride isn’t easily put to death.  
Spurgeon wrote of **Psalm 131** (Treasury of David) – “It is one of the shortest Psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn.”  
Pride is the most difficult of all vices to put to death.
  - A. All of us can attest to this. How hard it is for us to learn humility. In our flesh we continually want recognition. We seek to exalt ourselves. We struggle with envy which finds its strength in pride. We gossip, a sin that feeds off our pride.
  - B. We have to continually have our minds renewed in wisdom & humility  
**Romans 12:2-3 KJV** - "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. <sup>3</sup> For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of *himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly"
  - C. We know these things, but our pride continually haunts us  
It is the source of much strife
    1. It causes division and strife in the home
    2. It causes division and strife in the church - The issue of Christian liberty
4. Christian conversion changes our life. Ours is a life of humility  
**Psalm 131** describes this life of humility. I want us to examine it under three heads.
  - I. It is a life that resists conceit – **Verse 1a**
  - II. It is a life resolved to contentment – **Verse 1b**
  - III. It is a life that rests in control & confidence – **Verses 2-3**

I. It is a life that resists conceit – **Verse 1a**

The idea of lifting is given twice in this short segment

"my heart is not haughty"

"nor mine eyes lofty"

A. The problem with our sinful condition is the desire to exalt ourselves

1. We seek to elevate ourselves above others
  - a. We desire to be seen and heard
  - b. We desire power and authority. This is why it is so hard to submit to authority.
  - c. We desire fame and recognition and admiration
2. In our desire to lift ourselves we often trample on others in our selfishness
  - a. We can only rejoice in our own success
  - b. We cannot find joy when others are exalted
  - c. When a sports event takes place only one team can win  
We find it difficult to appreciate the joy the winning team is experiencing even if it is not our own.
  - d. Paul must have had this psalm in mind in **Romans 12**  
**Romans 12:15-16 KJV** - "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. <sup>16</sup> *Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.*"
3. Lofty eyes are those eyes that look down upon others with contempt.
  - a. It is a censorious spirit that is critical upon the actions of others
  - b. In our pride we believe our opinions are the best, our decisions are the wisest, our choices are the only right option.
4. The most dangerous aspect of this is haughtiness is seeking to exalt ourselves above God
  - a. All sin is seeking to dethrone God
  - b. Seeking our own glory is to rob God of His rightful glory  
**1 Corinthians 4:7 KJV** - "For who maketh thee to differ *from another?* and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received *it?*"

B. The Godly person resists this heart of pride

1. The opposite of this self-exaltation is a willingness to be humbled  
**Psalms 131:1 KJV** - "my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty"
2. We have to be willing to believe that the opinions of others may be just as valid. This isn't a statement of relativism. Truth is absolute. But opinions are usually just that—opinions.
3. We have to be willing to enter into the lives of others – to be concerned about them – to rejoice when they are exalted, to weep in their sorrow.
4. It demands taking our eyes off ourselves, to take the focus off ourselves—to be willing to ask how others are doing instead of talking only about ourselves—our family, our job, our school, our house, our problems.

**Philippians 2:3-4 KJV** - "*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.* <sup>4</sup> *Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*"

5. It demands seeking to meet the needs of others, even if it means making sacrifices ourselves. This is at the heart of genuine love.
6. Only then can we make the honest statement of the psalmist before God "LORD, my heart is not haughty"

## II. It is a life resolved to contentment – **Verse 1b**

"neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me."

### A. The proud man is ever seeking to advance himself

1. He is driven by self-advancement and personal achievement  
Self-promotion, Sinful ambition—"great things, high things"
2. In his desire to advance self he doesn't realize the God of the universe is opposing his every effort  
**James 4:6 NAS** - "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."
3. This also points to the one who injects himself into the affairs of others.  
Of the sinful foolish widows Paul writes:  
**1 Timothy 5:13 KJV** - "And withal they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not."
4. This sin is the ultimate desire to rise up above God and look down upon all else—to set our eyes upon lofty things and engage in great matters.  
It is hyper ambition. God resist such ambition.

### B. This is a hard lesson for us to grasp in our pride

1. On one hand we must be hard working. We must plan big. We must prepare big.
2. But we must guard against discontentment, against an unsettled spirit, against sinful ambition.
  - a. We must guard against the lust for self-promotion.
  - b. As Christians our only desire should be to promote Christ.  
**2 Corinthians 10:17 KJV** - "But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."  
**1 Corinthians 10:31 KJV** - "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."
3. James Montgomery Boice said that there is a great difference between aspiration and ambition. We should aspire to grow in Christ and achieve those things that bring Him glory. Ambition has an eye towards our own advancement and our own rise in position.
4. The great men in the Bible were those who waited upon God. They were those God exalted - Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David
  - a. Moses spent 40 years in Midian preparing for 40 years of ministry. He had to be humbled before he could be a great leader. God's work is often a lengthy work. Even when God sought to raise Moses up Moses humbled himself.

**Exodus 3:11 NAU** - "But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?"

Later it would be said of Moses that he was the most humble man upon the face of the earth.

**Numbers 12:3** - "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth."

- b. Joshua spent 40 years laboring under the leadership of Moses before he was raised up as Israel's leader.
  - c. Those who were proud and ambitious God first had to humble before they could be useful.  
Paul was humbled with blindness, with rejection even among the brethren, with his thorn in the flesh.
5. When Christ is at the center of all things He will promote you in His good timing.  
**1 Peter 5:6 KJV** - "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:"

### III. It is a life that rests in control & confidence – **Verses 2-3**

#### A. The humble life is a life of self-control

**Psalms 131:2 KJV** - "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself"

- 1. The word for "behaved" refers to an agreement with or conformity  
Here it describes self-control  
The KJV captures the idea by translating it "behaved"
- 2. "and quieted myself"
  - a. On one hand this demonstrates control over the tongue  
The life of humility is a life of meekness and silence  
**1 Peter 3:4 KJV** - "But *let it be* the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, *even the ornament* of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."
  - b. The unredeemed man's life is like a tempest. He is always speaking because he is continually seeking to establish and protect his throne. And he is never secure. The uncertainties of life keep him in a constant state of restlessness and insecurity.
- 3. In another sense the psalmist is speaking of silencing the cry of the flesh – "and quieted myself" - נַפְשׁוֹ - The word is most often translated "soul"  
Here it refers to the person or the flesh
  - a. The flesh cries loudly to be satisfied
  - b. The lost person is dominated by the lusts of the flesh  
**Ephesians 2:3 NAS** - "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."
- 4. The psalmist is declaring that he labors to silence the flesh

- B. The psalmist describes himself as being a weaned child  
**Psalm 131:2 KJV** - "as a child that is weaned"
1. In the day of the psalmist children were weaned much later than now.
    - a. Moses was nursed until early childhood  
 Samuel was in early childhood when brought to the temple to serve Eli.
    - b. Today a baby is introduced to solid food and quickly weaned off the mother's milk with little struggle. In ancient the child is much older and weaning was much more traumatic.
  2. Outside of Christ the flesh continually seeks to be nourished by the things of this world.  
 But we have been weaned from these lusts of the flesh. We have found a much greater source of nourishment.  
 Spurgeon quotes William Jay in *Treasury of David* - Weaned from what? Self sufficiency, self will, self seeking. From creatures and the things of the world—not as to their use, but as to any dependence upon them for his happiness and portion...Yet this experience is no easy attainment.”
  3. Our flesh still rises up to be fed.
    - a. The flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh
    - b. We have been weaned and are continuing to be weaned.
  4. Just like a weaned child who discovers things to eat much more satisfying than mother's milk, we have discovered nothing satisfies like Christ.  
**Psalm 107:9 KJV** - "For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness."
  5. Our appetite hasn't been taken away, only changed.  
 Human nature is filled with appetites. We grow tired, thirsty and hungry. We seek pleasure and fulfillment. The Christian still has appetites, but our chief appetite is for God.  
**Psalm 143:6 KJV** - "I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul *thirsteth* after thee, as a thirsty land."

#### Conclusion:

1. Remember, our life on this earth will always be a conflict of desires. We are continually mortifying the flesh.  
**Romans 8:13 KJV** - "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."  
**Colossians 3:5-8 KJV** - "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: <sup>6</sup> For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: <sup>7</sup> In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. <sup>8</sup> But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth."
2. This is a hard work. It isn't easy to deny the cries of the flesh. Our life is one of continually following hard after Christ. It is a continual weaning of the soul. But we discover more and more the source of our hope, our never failing confidence.  
**Psalm 131:3 KJV** - "Let Israel hope in the LORD from henceforth and for ever."