

“Like a Weaned Child”

Introduction: Given that Rama and I recently became grandparents of not just one, but two grandchildren, I imagine you’ve been wondering how long it would take before talk of babies would nose its way into a sermon or two. Well, this morning, as we explore for a bit Psalm 131, it begins!

This psalm gives us a deeply moving picture – that of a weaned child resting in its mothers arms – of the contentment, security, and peace that flow from a humble trust in God. Like Psalm 130, which we explored last week, this psalm is a part of the collection of what is called the psalms of ascent. There are fifteen such psalms, so named because they were sung and prayed as worshippers made their way to up Jerusalem on pilgrimage, and maybe also as they, upon arrival, made their way up the fifteen steps to the doors of the Temple.

What does it take to come to a place of humble trust? That, it seems to me, is what this pilgrim is seeking to be reminded of. It takes both a moving away, and a moving toward.

I. Moving Away

A. From what has this pilgrim moved away? In the first half of verse 1, it seems that he or she has moved away from the sins of pride and presumption. He has moved away from a proud heart, which thinks highly of oneself, and haughty eyes, which look down upon others. This recognition does not mean that having a position of authority or status in society is a bad thing. Nor does it mean that we can’t be proud of something we’ve accomplished, or a group of which we’re a part. It does cause us, however, to think about how we got there and what we are doing after having gotten there, wherever “there” might be. On what is our identity based? How are we thinking about ourselves and what we have accomplished? Are we giving God the glory? Are we using where we are and what we’ve done for the good of others?

B. From the second half of verse 1, the pilgrim continues her musings by declaring that she is not concerned with great matters or wonderful things. I don’t think that means she views learning in a negative light. Rather, the pairing of great matters and wonderful things is frequently found in the Bible to describe God’s creation of the world and deliverance of his people. What the pilgrim is saying is that she has come to a place where she is willing to let God be God, to live based on how God has ordered the world, to trust in what God had done rather than in her own accomplishments. She has come to a place where she acknowledges that God is the center of the universe, not her.

Seeing ourselves at the center of the world and having no need for God has been a problem for humanity since the beginning of time. “Go ahead, you can really be like God” the evil one tempted Adam and Eve (Ge. 3:4). That first human pair refused to question that deception and we’ve been making a mess of things ever since! The pilgrim shows us what it looks like to be self-aware, to not have an exaggerated view of our self that leads to self-delusion and deception.

Worth noting is that in the superscription of the psalm we read “of David.” As we look back on David’s life, we see places where he was wonderfully self-aware, refusing two opportunities to grab the kingship outside of God’s leading (1 Sam. 24 and 26), but then not being so self-aware that he grabbed Bathsheba, another man’s wife, for himself, eventually causing her husband’s death. The

battle to put God and God's ways in the center of our lives, to use power and control appropriately, to let go of our desire for approval and esteem, continues. This pilgrim helps us to recognize what we're fighting and needing to move away from, as we seek a place of humble trust, a place of contentment, security and peace.

## II. Moving Toward

A. But this pilgrim also knows that finding this place not only involves moving away, but also moving toward. It involves saying "yes" to all that God has for us in addition to saying "no" to what will harm or even just frustrate us. This is where the picture of the weaned child with its mother enters in.

Babies, I have observed, are born hungry! After birth they almost immediately latch on to their mother and begin nursing. Then they nap. And when they wake up, they often wake up "rooting," with their mouths frantically searching for their mother's milk. And if they don't get it quickly enough, or if dad, who has nothing of what they currently need, is holding the child, they become very fussy and irritated!

B. To be weaned, then, means to have moved past the stage of nursing and to now be able to rest contentedly in your mother's arms, calmly and quietly, with no other desire than to enjoy her presence. But you can't just will humble trust, you cannot just wiggle your nose and become content. How might we get to this satisfied place? The pilgrim declares: "I have calmed and quieted myself." How does he do that? We do that by feeding on the nourishment that God provides in his word, a nourishment that helps us understand who we are and who God is, a nourishment that leads to the ability to trust, and to trust humbly.

C. So often do the biblical writers use the image of eating when referring to God's word:

- "Taste and see that the Lord is good," the psalmist invites in Psalm 34.
- "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth," the psalmist observes in Psalm 119:130.
- "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll," God commands the prophet Ezekiel, and later his servant John, before preaching God's word to others (Ezek. 3:1; Rev. 10:9-10).
- "I am the bread of life," Jesus informs his disciples. "Whoever eats this bread will live forever." (Jn. 6:48-51).
- "I gave you milk, not solid food," Paul says to the Corinthians as he describes God's teachings to them (1Cor. 3:1).

And just before his death, Jesus didn't offer his followers various theories of the atonement to help them understand and remember what he was about to do; he gave them a meal through which they were to eat and drink their remembrance of him.

What we see is that the word of God has something nourishing, something life-giving to it, something so incredibly satisfying that if we feed regularly upon it, it will help us become content, not being fussy and rooting and restless, but resting in the God who his word reveals loves us beyond anything we could ask or imagine, and through whom our identity is found and secured.

### III. A Closing Exhortation

A. As the pilgrim concludes, just like we saw in the previous psalm with the individual who had experienced God's forgiveness encouraging his nation to do the same, so do we see this worshipper exhorting his nation to move toward a place of humble trust that he has found, finding his significance and security in God. Where might he be exhorting us?

B. As we think about the direction in which the psalm points, and read it from a Christian perspective, we see that it points toward the humble, trusting stance that Jesus both taught, recorded in Matthew 18 – that those who would be great must do so by becoming like a little child – and to the humble, trusting stance that Jesus lived out, as Paul describes it in Philippians 2 – he set aside his divine authority in order to become human, taking on the nature of a servant and humbling himself to the point of dying to bring us life.

C. Additionally, it might bring to mind the young ruler and his wealth, or Martha and her anxious toil, or Peter and his scorecard of forgiveness, each of whom was invited to let go of what was holding them back from a life of humble trust. Where might that invitation come to us?

- What might we need to let go of as we do battle with pride and presumption?

- Where do we need to let God be God?

- Where do we find ourselves being fussy, not enjoying a life more abundant with God?

- How could we go about nourishing ourselves so that we can rest less fussily and more contentedly and trustingly in his arms?