

Psalms 131

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Date: 08 October 2017

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[0 : 00] Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 131. Psalm 131, you'll find that on page 519. Psalm 131, it's a song of ascents of David.

! This is quite short. We're going to read through it twice. I'm going to read it through once, and then we're all going to read it together a second time. So do have that open ready to read that out together.

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 marvellous for me.

But I have calmed and quietened my soul like a weaned child with its mother. Like a weaned child is my soul within me.

O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Let's read it all together. O Lord, my heart is not lifted up. My eyes are not raised too high.

[1 : 18] I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me. But I have calmed and quietened my soul like a weaned child with its mother.

Like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father, would the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts as we come to your word be pleasing in your sight. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

In Jesus' name, Amen. I wonder how you felt as we read this psalm together. As you read it out, as I read it out.

I wonder how you felt you interacted with the content of this psalm. Maybe you think, yeah, this is just how I feel. This is exactly where I am.

[2 : 24] This just took the words right out of my mouth. Maybe you read it and felt, this just feels so far from where I am. It's almost alien to me.

I can sort of remember feeling like this one day. It's back in the past, but this just feels like a million miles away. Maybe it's foreign to you and you've never felt like this.

Maybe this is just completely new and weird to you. Maybe you think, that's new to me and just weird and I don't want that.

That's just strange. Well, if this is not the song that you would sing, or the song that you feel you can sing, even if you want to, what is the song that you can sing this morning?

What song are you singing this morning? Perhaps you'll identify more easily with the version that author and counsellor David Powlison has written. He's written the anti-psalm for this.

[3 : 24] So you can see what it's like to not sing this song. Here's the anti-psalm. Self. My heart is proud.

I'm absorbed in myself. And my eyes are haughty. I look down on other people. And I chase after things too great and too difficult for me.

So, of course, I'm noisy and restless inside. It comes naturally. Like a hungry infant fussing on his mother's lap. Like a hungry infant, I'm restless with my demands and worries.

I scatter my hopes onto anything and everybody all the time. Maybe that's easier to identify with. But it's hardly the song you'd want to sing, is it?

Well, the great thing about the psalms is they're so rich and they're diverse. And in the way they deal with our hearts. They engage our hearts in very different ways.

[4 : 32] Sometimes the psalms capture exactly how we feel. And they give us the words to express those feelings. But sometimes they're models.

They're model songs to train our hearts. Sometimes we need to sing the psalms, not because this is exactly how we feel. But sometimes it's as a way of teaching and training our hearts on how to sing

these songs.

We need to teach these songs to our hearts. We need to tell our hearts, this is the song that should come out of you naturally. So in that sense, they're ideal for giving our souls a bit of a health check. We can compare where we are with what the psalm says. And see how we can maybe teach our hearts to sing this song. So how can you get from wherever you are now, however you react to this psalm, to learning to sing this song?

Well, where do you start when you're normally learning a piece of music? Maybe you remember from, you know, had piano lessons, anything like that. The thing that your teacher would always drill you on.

[5 : 44] You always start by looking at the key signature and the time signature. And any kind of markings of the tempo, how fast it should go. You have to look at the kind of really boring detail to start with.

So sort of the introductory detail. And there are some details here that we need to look at first to understand. What kind of song this is. And so we need to think actually about the context of this psalm.

It might sound strange to you, thinking about the context of a psalm. It's just a load of songs, isn't it? But actually, they are well crafted, not just as poems, but the way they're brought together.

And so this is one of a collection of songs. So you'll see at the top there it says, A Song of Ascents of David. And if you look on the page, it's surrounded by lots of other songs of ascent.

And there are actually 15 of them. They start back on Psalm 120. And then they end on 134. There are 15 songs of ascent in a collection together.

[6 : 46] And there are five sets of three songs. That's what the songs of ascent are. There are five sets of three. And you're following a journey throughout the 15 songs.

So you start off back at the tents of Kedar in Psalm 120. Where somebody lives there. And he's facing the prospect of going up to Jerusalem for one of the feasts.

That's what the ascent was about. Because everybody coming up to Jerusalem for one of the religious feasts that would have happened during the year. Maybe three or four times a year you would have gone up to Jerusalem to gather with God's people for one of these feasts.

And so in Psalm 121 they're getting ready for the journey. They're looking up to the hills. It's quite dangerous. It's daunting. They're not quite sure how they're going to make it through this journey once more.

And they say, I lift my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. And at the end of that first trio of songs, I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.

[7 : 57] We sang that psalm earlier on. How pleased and blessed was I to hear the people cry. Let's go to the house of God. That's where it starts. And so then you follow the journey.

And on their pilgrimage, these are the songs to sing on your way. It all has that CD that you have. Or that tape that you'd always put in when we'd go on a long journey.

This is it. This is the songs you sing on that journey. And so if you can do your maths. Psalm 131 is number 12. It's track number 12 on the album.

And so it's just before the final set of three. It's the last one in set four. And so it comes just before the final three. And the final three, you've made it. You're at the feast. These are the songs that celebrate this feast.

They are songs of worship. They celebrate what it's like to be in community together. They're worshipping God together. So this is the last song before you get into those worship songs.

[8 : 58] This is the song that you sing before all of that. Just to prepare yourself for that. That's the context of the song. So once you've looked at all the time signature and the key signature and all that kind of nonsense.

Then you can start learning the song. And one of the best ways to learn to sing a song. Is to listen to what each part sings. Or what each part plays. You listen to each different voice.

And so that's what will help us to understand this song. Is to listen to each of the different singers as they sing this song. So it's good to know your own part. It's good to know other people's part as well.

So we're going to think through the different people who have sung this throughout time and space. Not because the meaning of the psalm has changed for different people. That's not how the Bible

works.

The meaning stays the same. But you get a different sense. You get a different perspective on that meaning as you listen to different people sing it. So it's a bit like that at a wedding.

[10:00] The promises you hear, you always hear them twice. So for example, next week Fernando and Edith will be getting married in Spain. They left yesterday. And the people at the wedding will hear the sentence, I, Fernando, take you, Edith.

But the first person to say it won't be Fernando, will it? They'll be Paul. Telling Fernando what to say. That's what it will be. They'll hear the same sentence twice. And the sentence means exactly the same both times.

But the first time, you're sort of getting ready to hear Fernando say it. And then you actually hear him say it. The first time you get excited, this is about to happen. You get a sense of, you appreciate the sense of what's going to be said.

And then you hear it. But the meaning doesn't change. You just understand it better because you heard it twice. So looking at these different singers will enrich our understanding of this psalm. So the first thing that we look at is David's people, Old Testament Israel. They are the Old Testament church. And for Israel, for the Old Testament church, this was a song for settling in.

[11:16] Song for settling in. As I explained, this is the song that comes at the end of the journey. Before you get into the fun of the feast.

Just as the feast begins. So these people would have been, well, very mixed feelings as they got to the end of their journeys. Lots of people would have made the treacherous journey up to Jerusalem. People were nervous about the journey to start with. Looking up to the hills, wondering how am I going to get through this. And even though they knew that their help was in the Lord, who made heaven and earth, it doesn't mean they necessarily had a really easy journey up.

God had seen them through. It doesn't mean it was a really easy trip. So maybe some have had injuries on the way. Maybe some people have had run-ins with thieves and dangerous people on the road.

Families would have been bickering and getting on each other's nerves after all that time. Maybe some families had to leave some family members and some friends behind. Who just couldn't make the trip this time for whatever reason.

[12:23] Maybe some would have preferred to have stayed at home. They're quite busy. They've got quite a bit of work to do, frankly. They would have rather not to come this time. But they've come. And they're not all that happy about it.

Others, they had a great trip. They had just the best time. They all got on swimmingly. And they made a great time. They just got there in top speed.

And they just go on and on at you about how he managed to outsmart his sat-nav. And he found a shortcut that the sat-nav didn't know about. And he just keeps going on about it. And so there's one guy.

He's just so chuffed with how he got there. Others just had not a particularly remarkable journey either way. They just plodded up. And now they're just focused on needing to get everything ready for the feast.

They've got lots of stuff to do. And so they're quite preoccupied with all kinds of things. And so they need this song to help them settle in. So that's what this song is for.

[13:22] It's a song to settle in. And so they start in verse 1. Oh Lord, my heart is not lifted up. And so the proud people who had a great journey need to humble themselves and calm down.

My eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me. That word marvellous could be because it's difficult as well.

So any difficult things that happened on the journey that they just don't know why did it happen to me, they learn here not to occupy themselves with those questions, not to be preoccupied with the difficult questions of why did this happen, why did that happen.

No, they don't ask those questions. That is beyond them. That is above their pay grade. They're not trying to figure out why everything went wrong. What do they need rather?

They need to calm and quieten their soul like a weaned child. Verse 2. That is what this song wants to train them to do as they prepare for worship.

[14:26] So children, did you know that you can help us, help us grown-ups, in understanding how to prepare for worship? You can. Children can help us get ready for worship.

And to explain how, I'm going to tell you, I told you in Sunday school that this story was coming, so here it is. I'm going to tell you the story of Tommy's terrible Tuesday. Tommy and the terrible Tuesday.

It was going to be an exciting Tuesday. Tommy was really looking forward to Tuesday because it was the day they went on holiday. And he was really excited to go on holiday with Mummy and Daddy.

So their bags were already packed on Monday night. They were ready. All they had to do was just get up, get washed, get dressed, get breakfast, and then just get out.

And he was really excited. So then Tuesday came. Mummy had made breakfast ready. But when she calls Tommy, Tommy was busy playing with Alfred Bear.

[15:28] He was distracted. And so he didn't really notice that Mummy was calling him, or he wasn't really listening. And so by the time he came to the table, his Cheerios were just mush.

They were really soggy. But there wasn't time to make anything else. So he had to just eat mushy Cheerios. And there's nothing he hated more than soggy Cheerios in the morning.

But he had to deal with it. Because we needed to get in the car to get to their holiday cottage on time. So they get in the car. And they make good progress.

They're doing really well. By lunchtime, they're pretty much halfway there. Which is great. And so they stop by to get some lunch on some picnic tables by the road.

And he realises that he's left Alfred Bear back at home. And it's too far to go back to get him.

[16:24] It's too late. Alfred Bear is at home, alone. And Tommy is without Alfred Bear all week. That's just rubbish, isn't it? And then it's lunchtime.

And mum doesn't know why she does this. But she digs out some broccoli and Brussels sprout sandwiches. Who on earth makes broccoli and Brussels sprout sandwiches?

He didn't get it. She's never made them before. She and daddy have never eaten them before. And all of a sudden, the only thing available to eat is broccoli and Brussels sprout sandwiches.

He doesn't get it. What's going on? But it was the only thing available for lunch. And so he has to eat broccoli and Brussels sprout sandwiches.

It's not going well, is it? This is a pretty terrible Tuesday. Well, about mid-afternoon, they took a break. There's a playground. Brilliant. So they go to the playground.

[17:28] And the kids are already all in the middle of a game. And they don't really want anyone else to join in. So they just won't let him play with them. And that's just too much, isn't it? That's the last straw.

It's been a terrible Tuesday. And so just as he turns to his mummy, his eyes fill with tears. And he trips and grazes his knee. What a terrible Tuesday.

But that evening, after dinner, managed to get a little bit of that broccoli taste out of his mouth, but not quite all of it.

Dad put on a fire in this great big fireplace. Mummy sat in this great big comfy chair. She got this great big warm blanket. Scooped Tommy up in her arms.

And that was that. That was the end of Tuesday. And that was enough. Alfred the bear was still at home. And would be for the rest of the week.

[18:31] Tommy was going to have to face a week without Tommy. And he could still kind of taste that broccoli and Brussels sprouts in the back of his mouth. And his knee still really hurt.

But Tommy was in his mother's arms. And none of that mattered. He was happy. That is what David is getting at.

In verse 2. That is what he wants us to learn to be like. As we prepare for worship. So for the Old Testament church for Israel.

This was a song for settling in. It helped them get ready for worship. So what about us? The New Testament church. The church in the New Covenant age. This is a song for Saturday nights.

So while Israel did have the Sabbath of course. Their focus of when they gathered to worship. All together as a church. Was at these few religious feasts. Every year.

[19:32] So they would only be a few times a year. For us in the New Testament. It is so much better. Our feast is every single Sunday. It is not just those occasional things.

You know Christmas and Easter. That is. They celebrate things in the Bible. But the Bible does not tell us to celebrate those things. Specifically on specific days of the year. What we do have is.

A day every single week. That we can gather to worship God. That is our great privilege. Is our feast day. Is every single Lord's day.

We don't travel to Jerusalem. But every week is a pilgrimage. With every Sunday. A break. A rest. On the way. We march on.

Every day. And nightly pitch our moving tent. A day's march near our home. This is the great blessing of the New Covenant ages. That we meet every week. So just as this song helps the Old Testament church.

[20 : 34] To settle in once they rise at Jerusalem. This is a great song to help us prepare for the Lord's day. This is how David wants us. To be ready for worship each week.

It's not how we naturally feel. But this is why the psalm is here. To train us. To be ready each week. To worship God. So this is a great song. For Saturday nights.

Thirdly. For Jesus. Yes Jesus sang this song. And so for Jesus. This is a song of cosmic Submission.

The psalms are songs that Jesus sang too. In Psalm 22. Verse 22. It says. I will tell of your name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation.

I will sing your praise. Jesus is the brother who sings these songs. With us. Which is an amazing lesson.

[21 : 33] But Jesus is God. How could God possibly speak. Of his heart being raised. Too high. Or things too great.

And marvelous. Or difficult for him. Surely if anyone. Sort of deserves to have. A heart that's lifted high. And eyes raised high.

It's God himself. It's Jesus. Surely he deserves. To say. Yes. I will have. A high heart. And high eyes. But this is the wonder.

Of the incarnation. Is that he learns to come down. And say these words. And genuinely mean them. He added to himself.

A human nature. So he literally became a child. In his mother's arms. So while as God.

[22 : 30] Of course. He knows all things. And always has. And always will. But as man. He had to learn. He had to grow. In wisdom. And understanding.

And then of course. He had to face. The greatest. And most difficult. Thing. Ever faced. By any man. Ever.

And yet. He didn't try to outsmart. The plan. He didn't try and think. I know. I'll find another way. But he prays. Not your will. But.

Not. Not my will. But yours. He humbled himself. He submitted. To that plan. He didn't try and. Divise a way out of it. He didn't try and.

Raise his heart too high. Or his eyes too high. He calmed. And quietened. His soul. Like a weaned child. With his mother. And he did that for us.

[23 : 26] He didn't have to do that. But he did that. For us. So that he could sing this. With us. Reminds me of that. Great. Carol.

I think it's. Possibly the greatest. Not the greatest carol. The greatest English carol. Whilst carols. Are just in another league. All together. But they are about 12 verses long.

And give you a whole history of the Bible. In 12 verses. But in English carols. I think. Thou who was rich. I think. In our modern praise version. It's Lord you were rich. Thou who was rich.

Be on all splendor. All for love's sake. Became as poor. Poor. And second verse. Thou who was God. Beyond all praising. All for love's sake.

Became as man. Stooping so low. But sinners raising heavenward. By thine eternal plan. So he came down.

[24 : 23] To raise us up with him. He became this child. He became a child. With his mother. And at all points. Was humble. Like a child.

Submitting to his father's will. And it is precisely because he did that. We can then go on to verse 3. O Israel. Hope in the Lord.

From this time forth. And forevermore. For the Old Testament church. For the Old Testament church. It was a song for settling in. For the New Testament church. It's a song for Saturday nights.

That we can use every Saturday night. For Jesus. This was a song of cosmic submission. And because it was a song of cosmic submission. For Jesus. For anyone.

This can be a song of salvation. For anyone. This can be. A song of salvation. This great. And difficult matter.

[25 : 20] That Jesus faced. Was the suffering. The wrath. That is beyond our understanding. But is precisely what we deserve. And because he faced it for us.

We can hope in God. We can hope in God. Because he faced this for us. We can put our trust. In him. Not scatter our hopes.

In all that surrounds us. But just hope in him. Trust in Jesus Christ. Trust in God. So. How do we prepare. For worship.

How can we learn to sing this song. When we look at the difference in us. Look at all that Jesus died for us. Coming to be one of us. To sing this song with us.

And look at the hope. That Jesus. Offers you here. Islam doesn't offer you this hope. I don't think you can even be sure.

[26 : 18] That the God of Islam. Wants to listen to you sing this song. Let alone. Sing it with you. Buddhism is more than happy. For you to come. And quiet in your soul.

But it's ultimately to sort of turn that volume switch. Not just all the way down. But just then that click off. Buddhism wants to quiet in your soul. Out of existence. Atheism.

I think very very loudly. Offers you nothing whatsoever. Agnosticism. Just puts you in that anti-psalm. That's the only song it can offer you.

Sing that anti-psalm. Every day of your life. Roman Catholic Church would have you constantly striving. And crying out. Working to earn any hope at all.

But through the lips of David. The Holy Spirit tells us. To hope in the Lord. The covenant God of Israel. Hope in him from this time forth.

[27 : 18] Not. Start hoping in him tomorrow. Not. Start hoping in him. When you're a little bit older. And feel you understand things better. Hope in him now. Hope in him from this time.

And forever more. Hope in him. Hope in him. And you can hope in him forever. Because this is a hope that will see you through forever. It will see you through eternity.

And that is a hope that is surely. Worth coming together about. Week by week by week. And singing about. However the journey has been every week. However difficult it's been.

However. However much temptation it might give us to be proud. Whatever the week has been. This is the reason to come and humble ourselves. To quieten our souls.

Either from pride or from complaining. And to hope in the Lord. From this time forth. And forever more. This is the great privilege we have.

[28 : 19] Is coming to know. This God of hope. So hope. In God. Let's pray.