

Psalm 131 (Song of Ascents)

A Song for Troubled Hearts

- I wonder how you are feeling with yet another week of lockdown, albeit with some easing, and with so many questions remaining about how and when different aspects of normal life will be resumed? Did you find yourself feeling impossibly optimistic, ahead of the announcements about possible changes/easing of restrictions? How did you feel when the reality of what the next weeks and month look like hit home? Was it a crushing blow? Maybe the email about when church gatherings will be possible brought great disappointment and even distress? Maybe you feel generally restless, disappointed, frustrated and even angry? It's always easier waiting when there's a time-frame!

- However, it's not just outward circumstances like these that can trouble us. What goes on deep in our hearts can unsettle us too. This psalm of David is a real comfort on both counts.

- This psalm is another in the collection of psalms or songs that pilgrims ascending to worship at Jerusalem would have sung. It wasn't written for these occasions but would have been included in the collection to sing as God's people approached the temple. It would have been an appropriate song to prepare for drawing near to the Lord as it describes the peace and contentment we can find in Him.

- David is describing in this psalm how he has found peace of heart and mind in trusting the Lord. He has discovered the "secret" to contentment that Paul later describes in Philippians 4:12-13 "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through him who gives me strength".

- David endured many perplexing experiences throughout his life – great danger when being pursued by Saul, the sadness and distress in the rebellion and disloyalty of his own son Absalom, amongst other trials. But David has learned, like Paul, to rest in the Lord for all his needs and in all circumstances and find peace in doing that. We too can learn from David in our own situations.

A right attitude of heart

- What is in our hearts reveal who we *truly* are, what we truly think and feel. Before God, "who knows the heart" (Acts 15:8) we need to search ourselves honestly as David would have done to root out those attitudes and motives that cause discontent and dissatisfaction.

Question: *What sinful attitudes were now not a problem for David? V1a. And how was that reflected in his life? V1b ('concern myself with great matters' can be also translated*

as ‘march after great honours’). How does it affect his relationship with God and with others?

- How is God pleased with this attitude of heart? See James 4:6

God had granted kingship to David, in place of Saul. David had not looked for the throne (remember he had busy looking after his sheep when Samuel the prophet came to anoint him as king!). Twice David had resisted an open opportunity to kill Saul, deferring to his divine kingship until God himself appointed him to the throne in Saul's place.

- Question: David says in v2a that he has “stilled and quieted (my) soul”. What does this imply about how pride and selfish ambition unsettles our hearts?

- How is the image of a “weaned child”, no longer a fractious baby craving milk, in v2, picture how David feels? (Mums with small children may have to just imagine this idyllic picture!). How do the words “with its mother” add to the image?

- How has David has “stilled” his soul and found contentment in life and urges all God's people to do the same? see v3

- How does Psalm 130:7-8 describe how we can do this? How does Psalm 58:11 give further assurance of the full peace and contentment we find in God alone throughout our lives?

Time to search our hearts and and pray...

- How has this psalm encouraged you specifically? How has it challenged you?

To help us think it through...

- How have you found it hard to be content in or accept specific situations recently? How does this psalm help you to “still” your soul? Are there other Bible verses that help too?

- How have any recent changes to your usual activities, responsibilities or avenues of service for the Lord made what you can do feel unrewarding, insignificant/is going unrecognised? What can you learn from David in this psalm?

- Is there anything you have really struggled to understand, that has bewildered, confused or even distressed you over recent weeks? What can this psalm teach you and help you to do?

At many times in his life David lived in danger, facing opposition, betrayed, deserted by his fellow-men, frequently unacknowledged as God's anointed, yet was able to put his hope in the Lord and entrust his life to him. He was content to be near God and accept his Will for his life. How like our Lord he is! How much we can learn in this too!

We too can rest content in being near God – knowing that our heavenly father loves us and has reconciled us to himself through Christ. We can then trust him to provide us, as his precious children, with all we need to do his will , whatever and wherever that is right now – however apparently insignificant that might seem. There is peace and contentment when we accept and “make his will my home”, as the hymn puts it.

Putting our hope in God and being content in him is an ongoing commitment! We need to keep doing it “both now and forever more” because life keeps changing and presenting fresh challenges. But God keeps giving his grace. Paul learned that and proved he “can do everything through him who gives me strength” Philippians 4:3. Praise God that is still true for us today!