

January 17, 2021

“Calmed and Quieted”
Psalm 131

FCF: The unrest around us flows from the unrest within us.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The LORD is with us.

(magnet) We need to hear and hold to that.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Even as we head into this week’s inauguration, our nation is still reeling from the recent assault on the Capitol. I don’t need to say more on that except that it’s worth knowing this nation has a history of civil unrest. Here’s [a list from the 1700’s](#) - Pennsylvania Mutiny (1783), Shays’ Rebellion (1786), Paper Money Riot (1786), Doctors Mob Riot (1788), Whiskey Rebellion (1791-1794), and Fries Rebellion (1799-1800). How do such things start? There is always a mix of factors, external and internal. Which is true not only in the history books but in what happens on the playground, in the kitchen, or in traffic - the external and internal factors of our conflicts.

Put another way, there is unrest around and within. And the unrest around us flows from the unrest within us. Tracing it back, it always begins with unrest within us. What’s the answer?

SCRIPTURE READING: [Psalm 131](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

The effects of COVID-19 are wide and deep, including the world of sports. Think about it. The record books will need to place an asterisk by every championship title won over the last few months. There have been so many variables outside the control of the coaches and players - COVID tests, quarantines, and the illness itself - all incredibly disruptive for practices and the outcome of games. The presence or absence of one key coach or player makes a big difference.

The presence of the Lord making a tremendous difference is the theme of our text. Here we have the assurance of His presence and the impact of that assurance. He is with us - the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Lord of Hosts, God of Jacob, Chief Cornerstone, Horn of Salvation, the Resurrection and the Life, the Alpha and the Omega. Did Jesus not say to His disciples, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”? Oh, that we might take this in! The Lord is with us. We need to hear and hold to that.

What would that mean? What would it mean to hear and hold to this assurance? We have to start by considering three things. Each one comes out in our text. First, we see a deep restlessness. Second, in contrast to that, a sweet contentment. And then, third, a greater hope.

I. A DEEP RESTLESSNESS

First, a deep restlessness. This is beyond mere searching. It’s an earnest inner yearning.

A) Insistence

We see it in this insistence, not with the weaned child but the one still nursing and not yet weaned. It’s implied here and each is set in stark contrast to the other. What do we learn in this?

1. We know our needs

The child still nursing is an image of the person who thinks themselves to know their needs, insistently saying to their mother, “I know what and how I am to be fed!” Which is absurd.

2. We cry out for them

But thinking ourselves to know our needs, we then cry out insistently for them. We demand what we deem to be indispensable. It’s a mark of immaturity. And the tantrums thrown prove it.

B) Arrogance

So there’s this certainty and insistence. And it’s rooted in a terrible arrogance.

1. Self-exaltation

(**READ Psalm 131:1a**) The heart lifted up and the eyes raised high are marks of pride. They point to an over-inflated view of ourselves. It is what we could call a foolish self-exaltation.

2. Self-direction

And such self-exaltation leads to self-direction (**READ Psalm 131:1b**). That which occupies us are our concerns, what we pursue, the things we give ourselves to. It’s based here on ourselves.

This nursing child points to a deep restlessness, an insistence bound up in our pride.

Illustration:

You’ve heard “pride comes before the fall.” That’s a theme in ancient literature as well as ancient history. Think of what the Bible tells us of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, who erected a gold statue of himself and required his subjects to bow down to it, and who, as he assessed his accomplishments and might said (**READ Daniel 4:29–30**). Immediately after this boast, we read Nebuchadnezzar was stricken with insanity and his kingdom was taken from him.

Application:

The sensible question to ask here would be, “Is that me?” Am I caught in an insistence rooted in my arrogance? Do I approach the Lord as the nursing child to his mother, saying, “I know what I need. Now give it to me!” Is that me? And how could I know? Good questions.

We can start by examining the emotions around our disappointments. The pay raise does not come. The deal falls through. That person has rejected us. Your candidate lost. How angry, how sad, are you? What then do you assume you need? What do you insist you must have?

That is this restlessness. But the Lord is with us. We need to hear and hold to that.

II. A SWEET CONTENTMENT

Which brings us to this sweet contentment pictured (**READ Psalm 131:2**). David sings of two very different children here. And the roots of this position go down as deep as the other.

A) Dependence

1. Not on the provision

This image is one of dependence. But not in the way you might think. Something has happened here. The child is no longer dependent on what the mother gives, no longer on just the provision.

2. But on the Provider

This child looks to the provider, to his mother. It's a major shift in the relationship. The eyes are lifted up - not in insistence but in dependence to the LORD, like we read in Psalms 121 and 123.

B) Humility

And, again, this new dependence has its own deep roots. Here it's in a heartfelt humility.

1. An image of peace

It's an image of peace. This is one who has been calmed and quieted. Before there was much motion and disturbance. But that has given way. A yielding has come. And so too has a peace.

2. The ability to trust

The child is resting, trusting, leaning into his mother. The smaller is looking to the greater.

This sweet contentment is rooted down deep in a dependent humility.

Illustration:

This is the thing Jesus was driving at when He called that child to Him ([READ Matthew 18:1-4](#)). Jesus is looking for a yielding trust, a humble dependence in how we look to Him.

Application:

Which brings us to this question. "Would those who know me describe me this way?"

What makes this hard for us? Why do we struggle to trust in the Lord's care? It could be the severity of our present circumstances. Perhaps things are just so hard and the noise so loud it's all we can see and hear. But it could have to do with our past, the pain of wounds inflicted somewhere else by someone else that makes for a real barrier to trust anyone. Even Jesus. That can be terribly real. But we can talk to Him about this. He knows. He's there. Even in that.

We can come to Him like this child. He is with us. We need to hear and hold to that.

III. A GREATER HOPE

But, still, how is this possible? A greater hope, an expulsive hope ([READ Psalm 131:3](#)).

A) Perspective

David has gained a perspective here that compels this urging towards the people.

1. Looking back

And that perspective may well have come as he looked back over his own life. D. A. Carson in volume 2 of his exceptional devotional guide, *For the Love of God*, says this ([READ quote](#)):

One cannot finally prove the point, but I suspect this psalm is easier to understand if it springs from the end of David's life, after he has been humbled by such matters as Bathsheba and Uriah, and by the revolt led by his son Absalom. Humbled, less quick to imagine he alone understands, slower to take umbrage, and more impressed by the wise providence of God, David (one imagines) now quietly writes (Psalm 131:1).

That may well be the case. That scenario makes more sense than this coming earlier in his life.

2. The voice of experience

David is quite likely speaking with the voice of experience. He knows all too well the many places we might be persuaded to place our hope. He knows how attractive, how seemingly sensible but ultimately deceptive, how alluring and ensnaring these other hopes can be.

B) Admonition

And so he speaks out and gives this admonishment, this urging from his heart.

1. Be stayed upon the LORD

“Be stayed upon the LORD. Look to the God of the eternal covenant, the One whose affection and promises are set upon you. Look to Him, stay in Him, through all things and in all times.”

2. The place of rest

“For He is your place of rest. There is no other. There is no other.” David’s hard earned perspective and experience brings forth this imperative and admonition (**READ Psalm 131:3**).

For the LORD is our great hope. All others are but lesser pretenders.

Application:

There is, of course, an exclusivity in this imperative. We are to look to the LORD in all things, in all areas of our lives. And only Him. There’s a clear and obvious exclusivity to this.

What would that mean for us? I wish someone had told me this in high school. Having that romantic relationship will not be enough. It looks good but cannot save. That person cannot save you. Think with me. Two drowning people cast about on the waves cannot reach the shore.

We must not put our trust in that great romance. Nor in great heroes. Each year, there are more stories of scandal and terrible failure. And last year was no exception. When will we learn? We cannot put our hope in mortal human beings. They cannot bear under that weight.

We must be wary of putting our trust in great heroes. Or in politics. Government cannot save. Our political theories, wherever they may lie on the spectrum, cannot save. “America” and whatever you think that is supposed to mean cannot save. The problem is simply too deep.

We need and have a greater hope. The Lord is with us. We need to hear and hold to that.

CONCLUSION:

We really need to stress this point. He is with us. There is nothing outside or inside this relationship that can rupture it. We have an impregnable promise that nothing can come between the Lord and His people. Nothing can separate us. His name is Immanuel - “God with us.”

How can we know that? What will pass that “3:00 AM Test” when you’re lying awake, unsettled and unable to sleep because of the doubts and fears that persistently plague you? These words of David hold because of the finished work of the Son of David, Jesus the Christ. We can trust this ancient king of old because the ancient King of eternity endured a cosmic separation - hell itself, the full judgment for sin - in our behalf so that we never would. He experienced the absence of God so that we might forever experience His presence. That’s how we can know.

He forever bears the scars that we might forever know it’s true. Remember Psalm 129? He is the Lord with the furrowed back. He bears the scars in His hands, held out for us to see.

O, my friends, take that in. The Lord is with us. We need to hear and hold to that.

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