

# Satisfied

## Psalm 131

Chan Gailey, football coach at Georgia Tech tells of his time at Troy State, when they were playing for the Division II National Championship. The week before the big game, he was headed to the practice field when a secretary called him back to take a phone call. Somewhat irritated, Gailey told her to take a message until she informed him, “But it's *Sports Illustrated*.”

“I'll be right there,” he said. As he made his way to the phone, he began to think about the upcoming article. It would be great publicity for a small school like Troy State. As he got closer, he worried that a three-page article would not be sufficient to tell the whole story. He started thinking that he might be on the cover. “Should I pose or go with an action shot,” he wondered. His head was spinning with all of the possibilities.

When he picked up the phone and said hello, the person asked, “Is this Chan Gailey?”

“Yes, it is,” he replied confidently.

“This is *Sports Illustrated*, and we're calling to let you know that your subscription is running out. Are you interested in renewing?”

It's better, not to mention, less embarrassing to nurture personal humility than to be humbled. About Psalm 131, Charles Spurgeon wrote: “It is one of the shortest psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn. It speaks of a young child, but it contains the experience of a man in Christ.”

Martin Luther's assessment was similar: “It is one of the shortest of all psalms, but for me, its truth has taken the longest to learn.”

The psalmist paints a picture of perfect contentment in God. It is a declaration of humility in His presence and of utter dependency on His provision. This is not rhetoric about contentment and dependency on God that we exchange so as to encourage one another. This is a statement uttered to God Himself from a man who authentically and consistently has learned to be content in and utterly dependent on God. There are times when it appears that we are approaching that degree of maturity. We really do speak from the heart to God about the lowly estate in which we view ourselves.

But the heart is deceitful. At times, we fool ourselves as easily as we fool others. We emerge from our time with God into a world where strength, ambition, self-sufficiency and material aspirations are considered, without qualification, to be all-important. It's hard walk to through life unaffected by its value system. It is almost impossible to not be a little self-absorbed at times. Still, if two great believers from the past like Spurgeon and Luther can concede the difficulty of mastering this psalm and the frame of reference it describes, certainly we can do the same.

We like to be admired by others. We like to be praised. We like to be given credit. We like to be thanked. Psalm 131 is the song of a man who has surrendered his aspirations for greatness in the eyes of the world. Psalm 131 is the song of a soul that has discovered utter satisfaction in God.

### **I. The Satisfied Soul Accepts One's Place in the World (verse 1)**

<sup>1</sup>My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.

## **A. Our Composer Had No Delusions of Self-Grandeur**

Willard Scott of *"The Today Show"* remembers his radio days when he received his all-time favorite letter from a fan: "Dear Mr. Scott--I think you're the best disc jockey in Washington. You play the best music and have the nicest voice of anyone on the air. Please excuse the crayon--they won't let us have anything sharp in here." - *Down Home Stories*

We live in a land of opportunity, but some people get carried away with what all that can do for a person. Children are told that they can be anything they want to be if they work hard. I don't want to be thought of as the "Great Crusher of the Dreams of children," but the fact is, "It ain't so." There is more than hard work involved. There is a sober recognition of one's gifts. The lack of passion and hard work are not the only factors that keep every little boy who loves baseball from fulfilling his dream of playing in the majors. There is this little matter of skill, speed and quickness. We are told that if we want something badly enough we can achieve it. That is utter nonsense.

Christian, while you should want to make your life count, it only needs to count according to the gifts God has given you. In fact, it is on the basis of how you use those gifts that you will one day stand accountable before God. The psalmist knows his limitations, but more importantly, he has come to terms with them. He has given up his need to be thought of by others as brilliant, profound, gifted or successful. He simply wants to live in God's presence, glorifying God with the gifts His Creator has provided. If he is a preacher, a plumber or a lawyer, he has abandoned his aspirations of becoming the world's most acclaimed preacher, plumber or lawyer. His aspirations are only for God. He does not concern himself with matters that are over his head.

## **B. Pride Is the Greatest of All Barriers to God's Peace**

Willem A. Van Gemeren, in his commentary on *Psalms*, writes: "The proud person looks, compares, competes, and is never content. He plans and schemes in his heart as to how he can outdo and outperform." Such a life doesn't sound conducive to a soul that is perfectly satisfied.

C.S. Lewis, in his classic, *Mere Christianity*, speaks to the conflict between pride and peace:

"... the ultimate vice, the ultimate evil is pride ... it was through pride that the devil became the devil: pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind ... Pride always means enmity – it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God. In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that – and therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison – you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud, you cannot know God ..."

Your pride precludes any possibility of true inner peace, because it wages a battle with God over who is sufficient to direct your life and to supply your needs. Unfortunately, our society encourages pride. It's not always called pride. Sometimes, it called self-esteem. Even many churches teach people that they should feel good about who they are. After all, God made us the way we are.

The problem is that in and of ourselves, before God's work of recreation, there is not much in us about which to be happy. We are sinners, and it is the zenith of pride to think that a holy God does not mind. God sent His Son to remove sin's stain. When we stand under the grace of Jesus, we accept who we are, not out of silly pride, but rather, in wise humility. Self-esteem becomes a valid thing because we know that God created us for His glory. That gives us an objective measure for examining our lives and determining what needs to stay and what needs to go.

## II. The Satisfied Soul Acknowledges Complete Dependency on God (verse 2)

<sup>2</sup>But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

### A. We Find Peace Only When the Noise of Self Has Ceased

The desire for recognition and respect creates a tremendous noise within the soul that can distract even the best man from his sense of utter dependency on God. The world, currently Satan's domain, exploits this noise and appeals to man's notions that he can exalt himself through personal acquisitions or accomplishments. It was against this danger that John warned his readers:

<sup>15</sup>Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world

- 1 John 2:15,16

Marian Anderson was a brilliant African-American contralto who struggled out of a childhood of poverty in South Philadelphia, where she scrubbed steps and ran errands to earn a few pennies to help her mother. She sang joyfully in the church choir. "We don't take colored," they told her coldly at the music school where she inquired. But she built a career anyway, scraping up money for private lessons. Like many black artists in the days of segregation, she had to go to Europe to gain recognition. The show business promoter Sol Hurok heard her in Paris and decided to bring her back to this country, ignoring those who told him, "You won't be able to give her away."

Hurok recounted: "A few years ago a reporter interviewed Marian and asked her to name the greatest moment in her life. I was in her dressing room at the time and was curious to hear the answer ... There was the night Toscanini told her that hers was the finest voice of the century. There was the private concert she gave at the White House for the Roosevelts and the King and Queen of England. She had received the \$10,000 Bok Award as the person who had done the most for her home town, Philadelphia. To top it all, there was that Easter Sunday in Washington when she stood beneath the Lincoln statue and sang for a crowd of 75,000, which included Cabinet members, Supreme Court Justices, and most members of Congress. Which of those big moments did she choose? "None of them," said Hurok. "Miss Anderson told the reporter that the greatest moment of her life was the day she went home and told her mother she wouldn't have to take in washing anymore." - Alan Loy McGinnis

God created us in such a way that life's most profound joys are found in serving others. As long as the measure of a man is his worldly status, power or holdings, there will always be more of those things to acquire, and such a man will never find rest. On the other hand, for the man whose treasure is God, there is nothing greater to acquire. His soul can know satisfaction.

### B. Children Are Weaned *By* their Mothers, Not *From* Them

To grasp the psalmist's analogy, we must distinguish between an unweaned baby and a weaned child. With apologies to any of you toting babies this morning, cute though they may be, they are severely limited in their social aptitudes. Instinctively, and without the verbal skills to articulate gratitude, they expect mother to indulge their every need. In fact, at 2 a.m., their neediness can be mistaken for a nasty and demanding demeanor. We overlook it because they are little and unable to tell us what they want. Would we really want them to be able to talk right out of the womb, for they would still be helpless? Think how intolerable life might be if rather than hearing them howl, we had to listen to them bark orders. "Feed me! Change me! Hold Me! Burp me, woman!

A weaned child is still very much a child and dependent on his mother. But, there is enough maturity present for at least a bit of a mutual relationship. The weaned child no longer frets hysterically for his next meal. He trusts Mom. He is satisfied to be near Mom. He can call Mom. "Mommy." He's learned to say, "Thank you." The transition from unweaned to weaned is not easy. Sometimes, it seems like a battle. What is specifically demanded is not always delivered, but Mom always comes through.

This psalmist knows he is still utterly dependent on the Lord, but he has grown enough to be able to love God back for Who He is and not just for what He provides. There must have been times when he cried out hysterically to God. Perhaps, he had tried to find soul satisfaction in the world or in his own strength. When his pride was broken and the world had failed him, he fretted for God's forgiveness. Surely it was hard, when in his panic and confusion the answers he expected from God weren't forthcoming. But now, he finds rest in God. He is as helpless as ever, but the relationship has become less about need and provision, and more about love, trust and gratitude.

### **III. The Satisfied Soul Announces *Jehovah's* Sufficiency to Others (verse 3)**

<sup>3</sup>O Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and forevermore.

#### **A. This Psalm Is Attributed to David**

David was a man who could sin grievously. Had he not been a king some of his shenanigans might have cost him his life. But when the Lord rejected Saul as king of Israel, he told the prophet Samuel that he had another king in mind who was "a man after my own heart." All in all, David's life was consistently marked by trust in God and meekness in regard to the Lord's workings. Even after David was selected to be king, he never asserted himself toward the throne. He spent 17½ years waiting for God to put him there. Ten were spent running from Saul, who thought he could nullify the Lord's plans by killing David. Twice, David had opportunities to slay Saul while he was sleeping, but he refused to usurp *Jehovah's* providence in the matter.

Near the end of his reign, David's son Absalom tried to seize the kingdom. David left Jerusalem rather than let it become the site of a bloodbath. He waited in the desert until the Lord had taken care of Absalom. During that crisis, David was venturing from one town to another. A nutty kinsman of Saul began to curse David, throwing dirt and pebbles at him. David refused to let his officer kill the man. He could not be sure that the Lord had not appointed the man to curse him.

At the outset of his reign, David ruled over part of a divided kingdom. Once the nation was united under David, Jerusalem was conquered, and the Ark of the Covenant was moved there. Israel had a central seat for worship and government. David was so overjoyed that he forgot the decorum of being a king and danced before the Ark of the Covenant. His wife, Michal, a daughter of Saul was embarrassed at how her king was carrying on like a common fool.

<sup>21</sup>David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from your house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD's people Israel – I will celebrate before the LORD. <sup>22</sup>I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes ... – II Samuel 6:21,22

Those who don't take their worldly credentials too seriously make the most effective messengers of hope in God to others. David had nothing to lose. He was a shepherd before he was a king. David knew satisfaction in the Lord. It was only natural that he encouraged those over whom he ruled to do the same: "O Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and forevermore."

## **B. Sure and Solid Hope Is Born Only as Self-sufficiency Dies**

Former heavyweight boxer James (Quick) Tillis is a cowboy from Oklahoma who fought out of Chicago in the early 1980s. He recalled his first day in the Windy City after his arrival from Tulsa. "I got off the bus with two cardboard suitcases under my arms in downtown Chicago and stopped in front of the Sears Tower. I put my suitcases down, and I looked up at the Tower and I said to myself, 'I'm going to conquer Chicago.' When I looked down, the suitcases were gone."

When we cease yearning for the world, we are set free to truly place our hope in God. Jesus spoke clearly to the fact that man's trust has to either be seated in God or in the material world. Divided loyalties break down. But we try - oh how we try to live in two worlds. David's exhortation to his brothers is echoed centuries later in the New Testament to all Christians:

<sup>5</sup>Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." - Hebrews 13:5

Another excerpt from *Mere Christianity*:

"A car is made to run on petrol and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on himself. He himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."

What will it take to satisfy your ambitions? What aspirations are high enough? How many dollars is rich enough? Spurgeon warned: "Many through wishing to be great have failed to be good ..." In His fellowship, God shows you who you are and offers your soul real satisfaction.

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