

The Childlikeness of True Faith

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I had told Pastor Ty that I was going to preach on a vignette from the Gospels about Barabbas and I intended to do that, but this morning when Ted was doing the call to worship, he read Psalm 131 and I thought, "I wish I were preaching on that," and I decided and it's only the second time in my entire life I've ever done this, decided while I was sitting there to scrap Barabbas and go with Psalm 131. So I want to do that. If you want to hear what I have to say about Barabbas, I think there's a recording of a sermon I did on that passage online somewhere. You can Google it and find it.

But Psalm 131, and let's look at that. It's just three verses. It's a brilliant Psalm by David. It's one of a series of 15 consecutive Psalms all of them labeled "A Song of Ascents," and these 15 Psalms constitute, they are all grouped together too, so it constitutes a book of short choruses within the larger Psalter. These are verses that probably were sung by pilgrims on the uphill journey to Jerusalem. Three times each year pilgrims from all over Israel would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts and they would come for Passover, they would come for the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, they would come for the Feast of Tabernacles. Those were called the pilgrim feasts and when everyone who was able would come to these feasts and so the journey to Jerusalem, no matter where you were coming from it was an uphill, hard, steep, day-long climb to get to Jerusalem. Jericho, for example, is a town less than 16 miles as the crow flies from the temple in Jerusalem. It would be the same distance from here to I don't know where. I don't know the geography here, but 16 miles, you could run it if you were a conditioned runner. But Jericho is 1,200 feet below sea level and the Temple Mount is 2,450 feet above sea level, and so the journey from Jericho to Jerusalem was a long, steep, uphill climb, more than a kilometer's rise in elevation, and pilgrims coming from Galilee, for example, which is where Jesus would normally be coming from, they would have at least a two or three day journey from their starting point to the temple, and the last leg of that journey took them on that steep road from Jericho to Jerusalem called the Jericho Road. It's where the Good Samaritan event took place. And along the way on this sort of winding, uphill road, in order to pass the time and prepare their hearts for worship, they would sing these 15 Psalms. If you sang one Psalm every half-hour on the road from Jericho, these 15 Psalms would fit that journey perfectly.

Three of the four last Psalms in the Psalter in the collection of 15, three of them have only three verses each. Psalm 131 is the first of the really short choruses. Three verses.

It's a simple chorus with a very simple theme. My theory is that all of these 15 Psalms, they are all fairly short and my theory is they were specifically grouped together because these were Psalms that were easy for children to memorize and sing, there would be children in the group and all of that, and this Psalm in particular is like a children's song. It has a very simple theme. See if you can recognize the theme when I read it again. You heard it earlier this morning, I'm going to read it one more time, and here's a hint: this Psalm echoes something Jesus taught. So here it is, Psalm 131,

1 A Song of Ascents. Of David. 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 marvelous for me. 2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. 3 O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore.

The theme of that Psalm is the childlikeness of true faith. That also, of course, is the theme of Matthew 18. In fact, let me read you the first few verses of Matthew 18 and you'll see what I mean.

1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them 3 and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Then Matthew 18 and 19 goes on that long section to expound on the childlikeness of the believer, and that child whom Jesus placed in the midst of the disciples was supposed to be symbolic of all of us as believers, all believers, not just those who are literally still children but everyone who truly believes in Christ is a child of God and we are supposed to be childlike in spirit. Just two verses later in Matthew 18:6, Jesus refers to all believers with this phrase, he calls them "these little ones who believe in me," and the point Jesus is making here is that true saving faith, real belief in him, is inherently childlike. Authentic believers have an implicit trust in God exactly like the absolute trust of an infant who looks to his father and mother for every need. That's how we look to God and, in fact, still in Matthew, a chapter later, chapter 19 of Matthew, verse 13, you read this,

13 Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, 14 but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." 15 And he laid his hands on them and went away.

Now that, of course, shows a couple of things. It shows God's special care for infants and little children, and when Jesus says, "to such belongs the kingdom of heaven," I am convinced that he is speaking both broadly and literally. That text is, for me, one of several clues I see that undergirds my belief that infants who die in infancy are graciously received by Christ in heaven. It's true that children are born fallen, babies inherit the same sinful nature that you and I have, I learned that very early as a father. They look so sweet

and so innocent as newborns, but you just wait. You won't have to teach them to lie or to be self-centered or to throw tantrums, it's in their nature and they are just like every one of Adam's natural offspring. They are fallen and guilty and self-willed and enslaved to sin and they have no merit any more than you or I. That is the doctrine of original sin. We inherited a sinful nature from our ancestors all the way back to Adam, which means you and I did not become sinners because we sin, we sin because it's in our nature to do that and that's true of children and even my precious grandchildren. I know. I've seen it and yet Scripture tells us repeatedly that God is especially merciful toward little ones, and so I believe that if they die, they go straight to heaven not because they somehow deserve it, not because they are guiltless, but they are received into heaven because God is abundantly gracious towards little children. You have that text in Jonah 4:11, for example, the last verse in the book of Jonah which speaks of God's special care for little ones who are too young to know their right hand from their left, and in 2 Samuel 12:23, David states his expectation that he's going to see his son, his infant son again on the other side of the grave. His infant son died and David said, "I'll go to him."

Scripture is full of indications, hints mostly, not direct statements but indications that God shows a particular grace to children who die in infancy, and here in Matthew 19, Jesus blesses little children and he states emphatically that the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as those, and it's appropriate, I think, to take that in a literal sense but we also need to interpret it as broadly as Jesus does. He isn't speaking only of little children when he says that; those words, "to such belongs the kingdom of heaven," apply to everyone who's faith in Christ has that childlike quality of implicit trust. And Mark 10 is Mark's account of that same incident where the disciples tried to rebuke people for bringing their children to Jesus. They saw it as a distraction but Jesus said, "No, let the little children come to me. Heaven belongs to such as these." And then Mark adds this extra detail that shows how broadly this whole promise applies. I want to read to you Mark's account from Mark 10:13 through 16. Mark writes,

13 And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. [And then Mark adds this, Jesus says] 15 Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." 16 And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

In other words, Christ pronounced a formal blessing on the children who were brought to him, who in Matthew's words were brought so that he might lay his hands on them and pray, but he also makes another explicit call for all of us, for all believers, to trust him with faith that is as pure and childlike as the trust of these children have for their parents. By the way, this incident took place in Galilee among people who were accustomed to making those annual journeys to Jerusalem for the feast days. They knew these songs. They had known these Psalms and sung them since childhood and no doubt most of the people in the audience that day could sing Psalm 131 from memory. So the idea of

childlike faith would not or should not have been new to them because that is precisely what Psalm 131 describes.

It's a song about the childlikeness of true faith and if you're not back at the Psalm, turn back there and let's look at it. Notice, this is a Psalm from the pen of David. We're told that in the inscription and it's worth saying the inscriptions that you read at the beginning of the Psalms, these are part of the inspired text. They all exist in the very earliest Hebrew manuscripts, and not every Psalm has an inscription, of course, but those that do will often tell us the author or the circumstances under which the Psalm was written or sometimes both. Psalm 3 is the first Psalm with an inscription and it gives us both the author and the circumstances under which the Psalm is written. Psalm 3 is a sad Psalm. It's a prayer from a man in trouble and the inscription tells us of Psalm 3, that it's "A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son." So you have to read that Psalm when you do in its historical context, and although notice it's only the third Psalm, it pertains to one of the later periods in David's life and his reign as king, which tells us the Psalms are not, nobody attempted to arrange these chronologically. And around the early part of the nineteenth century, a certain class of critical scholars began to question the authenticity of those inscriptions for no other reason than that they sound like annotations from the hand of someone other than the author of the Psalm, they thought, but the truth is all the manuscript evidence we have indicates that those inscriptions belong to the inspired text. The inscriptions are found, as I said, in the earliest Hebrew manuscripts and in Hebrew unlike what you find in your English Bibles, in the Hebrew they are part of the text. They aren't marginal notes. They aren't comments written in smaller type. They are penned like the rest of the text and it is signatures like those identifying the author or other pertinent details, many who study ancient writings say signatures like that are common in ancient writings. You see it even in the New Testament times. You know, when you and I write a letter, we sign it at the end. The New Testament epistles identify the author at the start and that is part of the inspired record, and it's like that with the Psalms' inscriptions as well. It's a bit misleading to have them set as they are in our English Bibles in a different typeface, as if these were just marginal editor's notes, but they bear the same relation to the body of the text as Paul's personal words of greeting and introduction do really in all of his epistles, and only five of these 15 Psalms of Ascent include the author's name. Four of them are Psalms of David. One of them, Psalm 127, says it's a Solomonic Psalm, it's either a Psalm of Solomon, written by him, he did write Psalms, or it could mean it was dedicated to him. It's not really clear from the inscription of Psalm 127.

But this one, ours is very clear. This is the third of four Davidic Psalms in this collection of 15 and it fits perfectly with what we know about David. 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22 are both verses that famously refer to David as a man after the Lord's own heart. Psalm 131 is giving us in David's own words, perhaps the most simple succinct description of what it means to be a man after God's own heart. It's a heart that appreciates the beauty of humble, eager, compliant, childlike trust, and what this Psalm describes is in many ways, think about this, in many ways this is the polar opposite of every value that is venerated by the world and by our generation in particular. David takes a not-so-subtle poke at the popular brand of skeptical scholarship that has been

encroaching on the church at least since the dawn of modernism. I think it goes back even probably all the way to the time of Marcion in the first century. David clearly understands that the wisdom of this world is folly with God, and that the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile, and God appreciates the simple wisdom that can be grasped even by a child. And David is saying in this Psalm that he has no interest in winning the admiration of people who value things like power and wealth and wisdom and fame, and even though David has all of those things, he knows that God sees through all of the trappings of earthly prestige, that God sees all things even the hidden things of the heart, and David doesn't care what men think of him. Like the Apostle Paul who in Galatians 1:10 wrote, "Am I now seeking the approval of men, or of God?" Am I trying to please men because Paul says, "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ." That's a pretty powerful statement, isn't it? You can't try to please men and be a servant of Christ and that's what David is saying here. He doesn't care to be celebrated by other people as renowned or sophisticated, he wants to be seen by God as childlike, poor in spirit, repentant, meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, merciful and pure in heart. And that, by the way, is exactly how Jesus describes authentic faith in the Beatitudes. Those, in fact, are the Beatitudes and they paint for us a sweet and perfect portrait of what pure-hearted childlikeness looks like. David's Psalm here is shorter and simpler than the Beatitudes but it draws a similar picture.

Now because of the brevity of the content of this Psalm and since this was sung in group settings by families of fellow pilgrims, I would guess this probably was one of the very first Psalms many Hebrew children would learn during that long era when sacrifices were being offered every day at the temple mount and feasts were regularly being celebrated in Jerusalem, and as they went to the temple, they would sing the song, and I think it was specifically for the children. This sounds like a child's chorus, but it's a lesson for adults about some virtues that flatly contradict every tendency of our fallen nature. These are childlike qualities, by the way, and as childlike qualities, let's be honest, for us who are adults, these are harder to cultivate the older we get. Spurgeon said of this Psalm, he said this is one of the shortest Psalms to read but it's one of the longest to learn. It speaks of a young child but it contains the experience of a man in Christ, and here in three verses according to David, is what authentic faith looks like.

Look at it. It's not arrogant, verse 1. It's not unruly, the first part of verse 2. It's not driven by unhealthy or unwholesome appetites, the end of verse 2. It's settled and focused on the Lord, verse 3. And on eternal things from this time forth and forever more. There are three elements of childlike faith here that I want to sort of single out and examine closely with you this morning; three virtuous characteristics of true faith that David himself exemplifies for us through this prayer, like a newly weaned child who is satisfied just to rest in the arms of his mother: he is humble; he is hushed, and he is hungry.

So let's look at those features in this text. Verse 1, he is humble, and this by the way, is my favorite feature of this prayer. Verse 1,

1 ...my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

And thus David declares his humility and he does it, this is really hard, by the way. Try sometime to declare your humility and not make it sound like a boast. David accomplishes that here. It's not easy to do.

My best friend, a fellow pastor, he has pastored the same church for 45 years, Steve Krelloff, when I met him he was a Jewish kid out of Brooklyn who was just converted to Christ and he tells the same jokes over and over. I've known him for nearly 50 years and he's still telling the same jokes and one of my favorite of his jokes is he says that he is writing a book that he is titling, "Humility and how I attained it." Which he tells me, really he wants me to write the endorsement for that because he says I'm an expert in the subject. I think that's his backhanded way of scolding me or reminding me that I'm not exactly the paragon of gentle meekness. Then there's the famous preacher whose name I won't mention here, who wrote a book on humility and just a couple of years later, the leaders of his denomination disciplined him for being too arrogant.

Humility is the most evasive of virtues. It's easy to be proud of your humility and by the time you think you've mortified your self-righteous sense of self-importance, pride will rise from the dead to tell you how wonderfully meek and humble you are. But David isn't saying this with any kind of swagger. This is not a boastful claim. This is a thankful testimony from a man who deeply feels his personal indebtedness to divine grace. It's a statement that perfectly embodies what we know of David's character. He wasn't haughty. Although he was God's anointed choice as the messianic dynasty's first true king, his demeanor was never lofty. He didn't scheme or conspire to attain a greatness or power. The royal office was given to him by God and when Samuel first anointed him, no one including David himself, thought very highly of him.

Notice by the way, the thoroughness which which David repudiates pride. He hates it. He names three distinct symbols of human egotism and he disavows every one of them. First, a haughty heart. That's the hidden conceit of those people like the Pharisees in Luke 18:9 who trusted in themselves, Jesus said, that they were righteous and they treated others with contempt. That's a haughty heart. Then David mentions lofty eyes, which refers to an arrogant countenance. It's the opposite of that publican in Luke 18 who wouldn't even lift his eyes to heaven but beat his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." Then finally, third, he disclaims any hint of egotism in his mind or his motives or his ambition, "I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me," he says, and he uses a Hebrew verb, it's translated here "occupy myself." It literally means just to walk. In other words, true humility as David describes it here, will tame the heart, the eyes, and the feet. The heart, of course, is the seat of evil pride. Lofty eyes are where pride shows itself in its most visible form. And the feet are a metaphor for all of our actions. True humility ruled David's heart and it was reflected in his physical posture and it framed his thoughts and his ambitions and his activities. A humble heart was the defining character of David's unique character quality and that's why Scripture describes him as a man after God's own heart.

And I love how David himself describes his humility, "I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me." In the King James version, he says, "Neither do I exercise myself in great matters or in things too high for me." Or here's the New American Standard Bible, "Nor do I involve myself in great matters or in things too difficult for me." And let's be honest, that's an unusual attitude even among Christians. First of all, he freely admits that there are things too difficult for him. Second, he isn't wasting his time always trying to unscrew the inscrutable or explain the incomprehensible. The things that are plain and straightforward are enough for him to master, and those things are hard enough, right? He's devoted to what he knows is true, not the speculations and the lofty opinions of theorists and philosophers.

And I'll be honest with you, it's extraordinary today even to meet a seminary student with that kind of humble worldview. In fact, let me say this specifically because I'm around seminary students a lot and I think some of our graduates may even be here. I cannot tell you how many gifted young men I have observed over the years who have derailed spiritually because they were lured by the prestige of academic degrees or enthralled with theological novelties. You know, they want to be in on the latest philosophy or speculation, and in their eagerness to impress people with that, they forgot that they are supposed to be serving the Lord who himself tells us that he chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. He chose what is low and despised in the world and even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are so that no human being might boast in his presence.

I've recently corresponded by email with a young man who hasn't even started seminary yet but he's written a book on the ontology of the Godhead that he's hoping he can get published, and if not, he says he's going to publish it himself, and he thinks that every theologian in the history of Christianity has been wrong about the doctrine of the Trinity and his book is full of broad arguments and misunderstandings and simplistic reasoning and bad interpretations of Scripture, but he's absolutely unreachable and unteachable because he's in his early twenties and he is quite certain already that he is smarter and understands better than all the men in church history who have ever studied theology before him, and he's way over his head and he's sinking fast, but you'll never convince him of that. And he actually told me, he doesn't think that there's anything that's unfathomable or impenetrable in Scripture. He says he's never been stymied by any theological conundrum. Everything in the Bible, he says, is as plain as day to him. And I worry for his soul. And I know plenty of old guys who think like that too. According to them, nothing is too difficult for them. They always seem to want to make their mark and seal their reputation by tackling some arcane theological question and coming up with some outlandish doctrinal scheme that no one has ever thought about before, and that, frankly, is how cults get started.

But David, who was a man after God's own heart, despises that attitude and he, frankly, disclaims it here. There is no ambiguity about this. David, think about this, who was used of God to write some of the key biblical texts on the infinitude and unfathomable greatness of God, freely admits that there are things that are too difficult for him. He says the same thing, by the way, in Psalm 13. That's that great Psalm on the omniscience and

omnipresence of God, and in Psalm 139:6 which many of you will have memorized, that's where David says, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It's too high. I can't attain to it." In 2 Peter 3:16, the Apostle Peter writes, "There are some things in Scripture that are hard to understand which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction." Quite simply, there are mysteries and enigmas in Scripture and some of the hardest questions just aren't completely answered for us and we are forbidden, explicitly forbidden to inquire into matters that God has kept hidden, Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God." And childlike faith accepts that limitation. It's self-evident, really. There are things that are too difficult for us. We can't figure everything out and we ought to just admit that and anchor ourselves in the truths that we do understand. There are lots of them and we can just occupy our hearts and minds with the things that are clear.

By the way, it's not really humility to pretend that nothing is clear or certain on the other extreme. There is that extreme. I know people who say, "Well, I don't know anything for sure. I don't want to sound arrogant by being dogmatic about anything." That's the postmodern corruption of humility. Lots of people today have the false idea that everything we believe about God is simply a matter of personal opinion and nothing is really settled or certain and, therefore, they think to say that someone else's religion or worldview is wrong, that's inherently arrogant and we shouldn't be dogmatic about anything. That's not humility at all. In fact, that's spiritual suicide because it's a denial of the authority and the perspicuity of God's word.

That false notion of humility is not at all what David is describing here and, in fact, if you want to know what David means, just study the record of his life because the childlike attitude he describes in verse 1 of our Psalm is actually a virtue that colored his life and his character except in a couple of well-known but highly uncharacteristic incidents where David sinned in notorious ways. When he departed from this is when he sinned. In fact, it's ironic, isn't it, that David's greatest sins occurred because his greatest strengths failed him, and that's significant because actually you see that same phenomenon frequently in Scripture. Moses, for example, Numbers 12:3 says, "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all the people who were on the face of the earth," and yet Moses sinned away his opportunity to enter the Promised Land when he lost his temper in front of the whole nation. The meekest man on earth. David's most outstanding qualities were his purity of heart and his humility, but his two most notorious sins were the incident with Bathsheba compounded by a diabolical conspiracy to try to cover it up involving the murder of her husband, Uriah. An egregious sin. That was hardly the expression of pure-heartedness, right? David also sinned when his nation was at the peak of its prosperity by taking a census that was designed to publicize the numerical strength and prosperity of the country, which is precisely the kind of arrogance David condemns in this Psalm. So the things that were his greatest strengths were also the places where he failed. So take heed if you think you stand lest you fall.

But those were deviations, those were irregularities in the character of David. For most of his life and career, the humility he extols in this Psalm was the dominant feature of his character. His heart was not lifted up. His eyes were not raised too high. He did not

occupy himself with things that were too great and too marvelous. In fact, remember, David didn't seek the throne in the first place. From his early adolescence, he was willing to be a shepherd. He, in fact, he was called in from the fields while he was tending his father's flock in order to be anointed by Samuel, the prophet, to be king, and even then, David didn't take the throne for himself. He spent years, at least a decade or longer as a fugitive and a refugee living in hiding while Saul pursued him relentlessly trying to kill him, and although David had opportunities to end Saul's life, he refused to raise his hand against God's anointed. That's absolute humility and later in his career when his son, Absalom, tried to usurp the throne, David left Jerusalem rather than fight his own son for the throne, and you remember as he was going, Shimei, this worthless character, threw dirt on him and called him names and stuff and David bore it patiently. He rebuked those that wanted to punish Shimei. The humility that David extols in this verse was clearly reflected in his character and his life for most of his life except for those rare instances of failure and in fact, David's character makes a stark contrast to virtually every king we have any record of in the ancient Near East. Their besetting sins, the besetting sins of virtually every Near Eastern king were arrogance and pomposity, the same arrogance and pomposity that characterized the rulers of this world even to this present day, and I'm not going to name names but you have an idea of the kinds of people I'm talking about, most of our best-known politicians.

David repudiates all of that. Most men crave respectability and status, and especially men who have tasted power and prestige. They tend to seek it all the more. David was the polar opposite. His crowning virtue was humility. Even though he was the most eminent man in the nation, he was the king over God's chosen people and, therefore, he was the most favored man in the world, but he desired to be seen by God as childlike, and that's what made David truly noble.

This Psalm is reminiscent of that incident when David was returning the ark to Jerusalem, you remember, and Scripture says, 2 Samuel 6:14, "David danced before the LORD with all his might. And [he] was wearing a linen ephod." In other words, he removed the regal robes, the markings of the king, and put on a simple linen garment like the priests wore. He wasn't entering into the priestly office. Some people sometimes interpret it that way. That's not the idea. The idea was he shed his own royal robes and rather than being carried at the head of the procession with all the royal pomp you would expect of a king, he dressed so as to blend in with the priests and he traveled on foot with the procession, dancing and celebrating the return of the ark 100 years after it had been captured by the Philistines in the time of Eli. And the stress here, if you study that passage, the stress is on his joy and his exuberance. He quite simply didn't care what people thought of him.

He's totally overwhelmed with joy that the ark of the covenant was finally coming to Jerusalem but 2 Samuel 6:16 says, "As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, and she despised him in her heart." Her father, Saul, had been more concerned, infinitely more concerned with kingly dignity than that, and when David arrives home, she gives him an ear full. Verse 20, "And David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, 'How the

king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' female servants, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" And she makes it sound as if he was indecently exposed or something. All he had done was lay aside his kingly robes, which is exactly what Christ did for us, right? This is a man after God's own heart. Philippians 2:5 through 8, "though Christ was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, he further humbled himself by becoming obedient even to the point of death, and even death on a cross." And that was a scandal too, you know. The God of the universe and the rightful King of kings coming to earth in such a lowly fashion, but Proverbs 15:33, "humility comes before honor."

I love how David answered Michal, his wife. 2 Samuel 6:21-22, "It was before the LORD," he says, "who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as ruler over Israel, the people of the LORD; therefore I will celebrate before the LORD. I will be more lightly esteemed than this, and I will be humble in my own eyes." Franz Delitzsch, the great nineteenth century Lutheran Old Testament scholar, paraphrased those words of David to Michal this way, he said here's what David was really saying, "I esteem myself even less than I show it right now and I want to appear base in my own eyes. You think I look childish instead of kingly? Before God I am more of a little child than you would ever imagine." And that's the spirit of this Psalm. David understands the childlikeness of true faith. It's a holy self-abasement, a righteous humility. It's the very thing Jesus spoke of in Matthew 23:12 when he said, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Everything Scripture tells us about David affirms his testimony here. Even when he sins a horrific sin, we see his humility in the way he repents.

The biblical epitaph on David's life acknowledges his sin but Scripture records it specifically in a way that reminds us that presumptuous sins were not what characterized David's life. Listen to God's own summary of David's uprightness from 1 Kings 15:5, "David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." So David's character and his track record are such that he can actually say this about himself, declare his own meekness without forfeiting it. Even the way he speaks of humility is humble. He claims humility without a hint of pride and that's something only a truly humble man can do.

So that's the dominant characteristic of childlike faith, humility. The person who is truly childlike stands out, first of all, because he is humble. Second, according to our Psalm, he is hushed. Notice verse 2,

2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother

And again, the stress is on the child's implicit trust; a calm and quiet heart. This is describing a soul that is totally at rest. It's comparable to a sleeping child who is well fed,

with no fear, no disquiet, and because the child knows the mother is there to meet any need or avert any crisis, he just lies there in perfect peace. This is a beautiful picture. You know, this is not one of those three-year-olds that you sometimes get seated in front of you on a cross-country flight screaming and fidgety because they feel the motion of the plane and the changes in the cabin pressure and it's upsetting. But this is a weaned child, he says, one who has moved past the anxiety and uncertainty of the weaning process.

This child now knows that even when the mother says no to her child's pleading and complaining, every need will be met, and more than that, the parent knows better than the child how best to satisfy that gnawing hunger. This is a picture of a child who has learned to trust and be satisfied. Moms are the best at this, by the way. Grandfathers are terrible at it. My grandchildren ask me for candy, I give it to them. Their mom says, "No, you wait until you can eat something nourishing first and then you can have the candy." They care for their children in the same way God does for us. He knows what's best and so even his no is good for us.

This is an illustration of absolute dependence and unquestioning trust and that is the nature of authentic faith. The crying and complaining and fidgeting restlessness that are actually part of the weaning process, in this case David is saying that all belongs to the past. This is a child at rest in the tender loving kindness of parental arms, the picture of pure satisfaction. It's the same thing in the spiritual realm. The spiritual weaning process disengages our hearts from everything that is selfish, every appetite that is sinful, every fear that foments doubt or distrust, and it has a quieting effect on the soul. It fosters a sense of security. David often wrote about this. Psalm 27, for example, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Or Psalm 46, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah," which means, just stop and rest and think about it. Psalm 56, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?" That, by the way, is a common expression that's repeated in both the Old and the New Testaments. What can flesh do to me? Psalm 118, "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" Hebrews 13:6, "we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"

This is about security. It's one of my favorite theological terms of all time, security. I think the first theological dilemma I ever pondered almost as soon as I turned to Christ in saving faith, was the question, "Can I lose my salvation?" Which is to say, "Am I secure in Christ?" And to ask the question that way, "Am I secure in Christ?" to ask that is to reveal the absurdity of the question. Scripture places so much stress on the security of the believer that, frankly, I don't understand how any Bible-believing individual can hang on very long to the notion that it's possible to be lost again after Christ has saved you because, frankly, if you could sin in some way that would mean you forfeit your salvation, you would. You would. We are all too weak to stand on our own. Every one of us is prone to sin and powerless to keep ourselves, but Scripture says God is the one who

keeps us. 1 Peter 1:5, we are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." That's speaking of our ultimate glorification. God himself is the one who is keeping us safe eternally. He holds us in a manner that is comparable to a mother rocking a sleeping child, only with infinitely more strength and security. John 10:28, no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. And if you are truly saved, you are secure in Christ. In Paul's words, "I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." And if you just believe that promise, it should hush all of your fears. That same sense of security is exactly what causes David to say in verse 2 of our Psalm, "I have calmed and quieted my soul."

There is another implication in the word picture he uses here, the imagery of a weaned child means that growth is steadily taking place. This child is coming to maturity. In the words of 1 Peter 2:2, "Like newborn infants [we] long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into full and finished salvation." There comes a time when according to Hebrews 5, we graduate from the milk of God's word to the meat of it. The writer of Hebrews actually scolds his readers for demanding milk rather than solid food. Their spiritual appetites weren't developing properly. Hebrews 5:13, "for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature," and by solid food he simply means the deeper, more important spiritual truths.

He's still not talking about those impenetrable truths that are too high for us. He's just talking about spiritual maturity and that brings up the third characteristic of David's childlike faith. First, he's humble. Second, he's hushed. And now third, he's hungry. The image he draws for us is a weaned child peacefully asleep in the arms of his mother, you know, fully satisfied, wholly at rest, well past the fidgety restlessness that every child goes through when the mother finally starts to say no to every request for nursing. The child now knows the variety of flavors that are associated with more solid foods and he has learned that grown-up food actually satisfies longer. But trust me because we've had a few babies in our family go through this stage, a weaned child actually gains a bigger appetite. Solid food awakens a taste for more. Crying and panic at feeding time gradually recede into the past but the child doesn't stop eating and he doesn't stop getting hungry. In fact, for a couple of years you will continually have to remind the weaned child not to put everything they touch into their mouths, and that's true in the spiritual realm as well. The restful security that David describes here in the first part of verse 2, that feeling of pure satisfaction, that doesn't nullify the spiritual appetite and, in fact, the appetite grows. If your faith is truly childlike, you are going to stay spiritually hungry and you will never lose your appetite for the meat of the word.

And there's one more thing about this: even after weaning, a child, an infant, a young child is still totally dependent on mom for food. You can't give an 18-month-old a jar of baby food and expect him to feed himself. It doesn't happen that way. The absolute reliance of that child perfectly pictures the childlikeness of true faith even after the child is weaned and the Psalm closes in verse 3 with a short refrain that echoes the end of the previous Psalm, Psalm 130,

3 O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore.

It almost seems incongruent to the subject he's been talking about, but it's not. He's adding on to what he has just said about childlike faith. A call to faith. You know, the psalmist's testimony is brief and simple, just the first two verses, but now he turns to the congregation and he appeals to them to join him in making Yahweh the singular focus of their hope and their trust. "Trust in the Lord."

Now, let's look at this in light of the Gospel and consider why it is that all true faith is inherently childlike because the only legitimate response to the Gospel is humble, quiet, hungry faith. That's because the Gospel itself is by design a rebuke to human pride. The Gospel as set forth in Scripture rips every artificial covering off of our fleshly pride, that's why so much of what you hear that passes as Gospel presentations today isn't really Gospel at all. It's a false Gospel that exalts human pride. You know, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for you. Aren't you wonderful?" And nothing about sin. But that's not the Gospel. The Gospel tears the façade off of our pride and the starting point of the Gospel is the utter hopelessness of fallen humanity. It starts by telling us that we are condemned sinners and there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We are all like an unclean thing and all of our righteousnesses are like filthy rags. All we like sheep have gone astray." We are totally dependent on Christ to save us. We have no real righteousness of our own. In the words of Scripture, "Where is boasting?" It's excluded. "By grace you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing, it is the gift of God not as a result of works so that no one may boast." The Gospel is antithetical to human arrogance and that is why true faith has this quality of childlike humility. "God opposes the proud but he gives grace to the humble."

So let's apply this practically. For those of you who are believers, we need to cultivate this spirit of childlike humility. Don't give in to the arrogance of our self-centered culture, our own self-centered nature, but clothe yourself in humility. If you're not a believer, you may be a guest today or even a long-time attender of the church who has never truly humbled yourself in the sight of the Lord, remember that it was Jesus who said, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." Ponder that and ask God to open your heart to believe with true childlike faith.

Let's pray.

Father, we confess that we are too self-willed and sinful and we are too often like delinquent adolescents rather than obedient children. Increase our capacity for faith and may we, like David, cultivate that simple, humble, restful, sort of eager childlike trust in Christ and may that be the characteristic quality of our life and our character so that we honor the one who humbled himself for our sakes, our Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.