

## Childlike Humility

Last week we were inspired seeing how David, in Psalm 27, was taken up with gazing on the Lord's beauty. Today we will notice a similar posture in Psalm 131 where David pictures himself in relation to God like a child quietly content close to his loving mother.

Whereas Psalm 27 alludes to feeling alone or abandoned at losing his father and mother, Psalm 131 pictures David, a powerful King, like a child at peace in his mother's arms. By using parent-child imagery both Psalms have a universal appeal resonating with people worldwide.

Let us read Psalm 131 (NLT)

Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I don't concern myself with matters too great or too awesome for me to grasp. Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother's milk. Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, put your hope in the Lord— now and always.

What a contrast! Israel's greatest King compares himself to a child, highlighting two childlike traits: humility and trust. Upon reaching adulthood most of us become self reliant and thus are prone to pride. Not only so, since adults are so self reliant we seldom need to trust others. But children tend to be more trusting.

Like David, Jesus observed that humility is a trait more often associated with children. We read in Matthew 18:1-4 how the disciples asked Jesus a question,

“Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” He answered them by inviting a child to join them and then said, “I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me.”

It is easy for adults to undervalue children or perhaps dismiss them as a nuisance like the disciples did on one occasion. Immediately, Christ rebuked his disciples. Notice he didn't just appeal to a sense of fair play as

to how we ought to regard children, he did far more. He elevated children by highlighting humility, a virtue which they exhibit more often than do adults.

It is perhaps not so easy to acknowledge that humility is a childhood trait especially in modern North America where there has risen a very different mindset about children than what prevailed in earlier times, notably the first century.

So let's look at two other Scriptures that give us a fuller understanding of why child-like humility pleases the Lord. Matthew records an interesting encounter between Jesus and some children in the Temple. We read in chapter 21:15-16, “*the teachers of religious law saw these wonderful miracles and heard even the children in the Temple shouting, ‘Praise God for the Son of David.’ But the leaders were indignant. They asked Jesus, ‘Do you hear what these children are saying?’ ‘Yes,’ Jesus replied. ‘Haven’t you ever read the Scriptures? For they say, “You have taught children and infants to give you praise.”*”

Reading of this fascinating incident featuring children who praised Jesus reminds me of the story of friend I'll call Farhad. One day he had an unusual encounter with a little child who came up the stairs leading to his apartment singing, “Hallelujah.” Farhad's wife came to the door curious to see who this was. She didn't understand what this expression meant but later learned, *Hallelujah* comes from the Psalms of David. It means, Praise the Lord. She noticed a small paper in the child's hand and asked, “What is this?” A simple conversation followed and she kept the paper containing some Scripture verses and read it some time later.

Many years later, Farhad explained how this simple witness was a turning point in his family's journey to Jesus. It is interesting to see how Christ's rebuke of the Jewish leaders connects with this story. If God can use a child to bring a Muslim family to faith, it is easy to understand why Jesus would strongly rebuke religious leaders who were angry that children were praising the son of David.

In due course, Farhad's family, who were observant Muslims became acquainted and friendly with their Christian neighbour. Eventually they accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Interestingly, this story

didn't happen in the west where Muslims are a minority. It happened in a nation where 99% of the population is Muslim. Any follower of Jesus in this country who dares to witness does so under the shadow of persecution. Sharing one's faith requires the voice of a humble trusting little child who didn't know enough to be afraid. How different this situation is compared to Christians living in the west, who are typically so timid.

In spite of the repressive climate of a Muslim country, the amazing thing was how God used the spontaneity of a boy. In actual fact, Farhad's neighbour had **not** instructed their child to do what he did. The boy simply expressed what was in his heart. Notice, the Lord used the child's praise to evoke the spiritual thirst of the unsaved neighbour! So often, we are prone, as adults, to underestimate the power of a child's testimony and their fearless spontaneity.

The next Scripture passage we will look at is Luke chapter 10 which tells how Jesus sent out 72 disciples as his witnesses. Upon hearing their reports, *"Jesus was filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit, and said, 'O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike. Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way.'"* (Luke 10:21)

Christ honours childlike trust coupled with humility. He gives thanks to God for not revealing these things to proud people who think they're wise but to those with childlike faith.

Humility is a topic Jesus was fond of. Another story about humility is recorded in Mark 10:42-45:

So Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Notice in these verses, Jesus did not speak of

childlike humility, instead he focused on humility as a virtue displayed by a **servant**.

The main thrust of Jesus' remarks relate to how his disciples should act humbly like true servants. The servant-like behaviour he expected from his disciples flows directly from the fact that Jesus himself became a servant, just as the prophets foretold.

Hundreds of years before Jesus came as the Messiah, the prophets foretold the Lord God would send his special "servant" (a Messianic title) who would be humiliated and then exalted. We see this in Isaiah 52:10,13-14:

The Lord has demonstrated his holy power before the eyes of all the nations. All the ends of the earth will see the victory of our God.

See, my servant will prosper; he will be highly exalted. But many were amazed when they saw him. His face was so disfigured he seemed hardly human, and from his appearance, one would scarcely know he was a man.

Chapter 53 continues with many inferences to the theme of ransom while simultaneously foretelling that the Messiah would die and be raised to life.

Isaiah declares the Messiah will endure the punishment for **our** sins and be pierced for **our** transgressions. Make no mistake: this punishment involves being cut off from the land of the living and pouring out his life unto death. (Isaiah 53:8,12) Clearly, this prophecy perfectly fits the way Christ described his mission, that is, laying down his life as a ransom for others.

Another Scripture explains that Jesus displayed the ultimate form of humility and servanthood by being willing to lay down his life. But of course, death wasn't the end. Jesus rose from the grave and was exalted to the highest position as we read in Philippians 2:5-11;

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's

death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Let us pause to summarize and reflect on what we have learned so far. We have been inspired by looking at two examples of humility, first, King David, and secondly, his descendant, the Messiah. We've seen how humility can be aptly illustrated by a child and also by a servant. Not only so, Jesus displays the ultimate form of humility and servanthood by willingly giving his life as our redeemer.

Let us take a few moments to think what an amazing privilege it is that we've been redeemed. Recently we saw Job's overwhelmed response, as he confidently testified, *"I know that my redeemer lives."* The psalmist also pondered the privilege of being redeemed and he exclaimed, *"Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out. Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies."* (Psalm 107:2, NLT)

Let's pause and reflect on these last couple weeks in terms of telling others how good God has been by redeeming us. Perhaps you didn't tell an unbeliever exactly how you became a Christian but maybe you had a meaningful experience shining the light of Jesus. I want each of you to take a minute or two right now to write a few thoughts telling the Lord what this experience meant. If you can't think of anything simply express your thoughts as a prayer. The purpose of writing these notes is to help you clarify your personal response to what God has shown you today. But if you're willing to share your experience as an encouragement to the rest of us, we'd love to hear it. Of course, you're most welcome to share them with me, later.

We also want to think about some simple and practical pointers for how we can share a reason for our hope starting with humility, a character quality that is admired around the world.

Humility is valued by so many cultures and religions, making it a suitable topic for engaging unbelievers in seasoned-with-salt conversations. If you should find

the courage to share Psalm 131 with an unbelieving friend, you might be in for a pleasant surprise. It can be a wonderful experience hearing them appreciate it. On the other hand, this Psalm might spark a person's curiosity. Either way, it opens a door.

I recently had an opportunity to share this Psalm with a shop keeper named Hussein who I had met many months earlier. He remembered me and we greeted each other warmly. Then he told me with a beaming smile how Allah had answered prayer. His wife gave birth recently to a baby girl. So I rejoiced with him at hearing this good news!

Later a thought crossed my mind, "Maybe this is an opportunity to give my friend a baby gift?" After discussing the idea with my wife, we decided I should buy a baby outfit and give it to Hussein. I included a small card with the gift on which I had written Psalm 131 in handwriting. I explained that this meditation was taken from Psalm (Zaburi) 131 by the prophet David (Daudi). (Note: In the Swahili language which Hussein speaks, the term Zaburi is how they refer to the Psalms of David. Also bear in mind, the Bible does acknowledge King David was a "prophet." Acts 2:30) God helped me to make the most of the opportunity – the birth of a child.

Undoubtedly one could imagine many different situations involving children that might lend themselves to forming new friendships and, even initiating faith conversations. In such circumstances, Psalm 131 can be useful to share, not just with nominal Christians but also people of other faiths, like Muslims, Hindus, etc.

I know an elderly man who walks his 4 year old grandchild to kindergarten everyday. One day, while talking with kids and parents who were waiting for the doors to open, he met a little boy from Syria with a warm personality. The boy took him by the hand and led him to meet his father whose name is Issa. The interesting thing is: the name Issa in Arabic means Jesus. "A little child shall lead them." What an opportunity and the outcome is still unfolding!

What's our "take-home" lesson today? How are we doing? Do I have childlike trust. Am I humble? Do I praise the Lord spontaneously like the children in the Temple? Even if this requires stepping out of my comfort zone am I

willing to be a bolder witness? And, lastly, let's not forget I cannot do this on my own. I'm a child of the King.

In closing let's sing, "Humble King" by Brenton Brown  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWyLWzf2Abg>

Oh, kneel me down again here at Your feet  
Show me how much You love humility  
Oh Spirit, be the star that leads me to  
The humble heart of love I see in You

'Cause You are the God of the broken  
The friend of the weak  
You wash the feet of the weary  
Embrace the ones in need

I want to be like You, Jesus  
To have this heart in me  
You are the God of the humble  
You are the humble King

Oh, kneel me down again here at Your feet  
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The friend of the weak  
You wash the feet of the weary  
Embrace the ones in need

I want to be like You, Jesus  
To have this heart in me  
You are the God of the humble  
You are the humble King

Beautiful God, wonderful Savior

I want to be like You, Jesus  
To have this heart in me  
I want to be like You, Jesus  
To have this heart in me

I want to be like You, Jesus  
To have this heart in me  
You are the God of the humble  
You are the humble King

## **Appendix: How relevant are these insights to Muslims?**

Some who read this online version of the above sermon may be surprised or even think it is unwarranted for me to use so many illustrative stories involving Muslims. Bear in mind, Muslims are all around us in Canada, having welcomed 50,000 refugees from the Middle East over the last couple years.

I realize some readers are either concerned about or have relationships with Muslims, so I'm appending a list of points from the message which have particular relevance to Muslims.

- 1) Children. Muslims are family orientated and tend to have more children than the typical Canadian family.
- 2) Humility. This virtue is acknowledged in Islam, and in some respects, Muslims emphasize it.
- 3) Many Muslims are impressed or curious to realize that the prophets, especially Daood and Issa, gave such remarkable teachings on this important subject of humility. So there is no reason for us to be timid or reluctant to discuss these matters with our Muslim friends.
- 4) Islam strongly emphasizes that the prophets (& humans generally) are God's servants (slaves) so this isn't a new or strange notion to them. So we aren't asking our friend to step out of his comfort zone to read how Christ taught his followers: if you want to be great in God's kingdom you must be "slave of all."
- 5) The divergence (and real challenge/offence) comes as we try clarifying that Jesus the Messiah-Redeemer (Al Masih in the Qur'an) is the Son of God. Furthermore, he died, in accordance with Scripture, as the spotless Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.

[http://answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/eid\\_passover.html](http://answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/eid_passover.html)