

The Psalms of Ascents

A Humble, Calmed and Quieted Soul

We thank the Lord that He gave us the Psalms of Ascents. In the previous message we shared about the experience in the depths. The depths that we shared yesterday are regarding all the troubles, difficulties, afflictions and persecutions that we go through. All these experiences in the depths cause us to realize that we are just sinners; we are fallen human beings. We are not reliable. If God's hands let us go, we have no idea where we will end up. So the Bible says that we must look to the Lord for mercy for our whole life. Without God's mercy we have no idea where we will end up. Sometimes we felt that we were pretty good, but under the Lord's light we realize that we are nothing. The only thing that we can do is to look for His mercy. I still remember that once Watchman Nee said that if it was not for God's mercy, he would not know where he would end up. Our brother Watchman Nee lived in the twentieth century. He was one of the great servants used by the Lord. One time someone was talking about Watchman Nee, criticizing him behind his back. A sister went and told Watchman Nee about that. How did he react? He said, "Sister, I am even worse than what they said." He said that because he knew himself. Those who know themselves wait upon the Lord and seek His word like the watchmen waiting for the dawn.

David's Experience in the Old Testament

Psalm 131 leads us to continue to press on to God, after we have passed through a deep experience of God in Psalm 130; this psalm conveys the feeling of humility. Humility is produced from the knowledge of the self. It is a manifestation of the breaking of the self. A man who has been broken in the presence of God knows that he is only a sinner. He will then live out humility. If there is humility in his living, we know that this person has been broken. When a person has gone through the depths in which all kinds of afflictions and situations came upon him, he will become someone like what is portrayed in Psalm 131. This psalm was written by David so we can see that he was such a person. He was a person filled with humility

and this psalm is focussed on humility. His heart was calm and quiet. This is a very important revelation in the Bible including in the New Testament. It talks about the condition of the heart of a person who follows the Lord. The teachings of the apostles, especially of the apostle Paul, and the pattern of the Lord Jesus all stress this. They all teach this kind of word. Many portions in the Bible, especially in the New Testament reveal the reality of the content of this psalm.

Psalm 131 reads, “LORD, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me. Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, Like a weaned child with his mother; Like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forever.” When we read such verses we can see that they were written by a spiritual person. He was a person who dwells in the Lord’s presence and lived out a certain virtue. When we talk about the church life, about the building of the church, this is a very important virtue. In Ephesians chapter 4, Paul talks about keeping the oneness of the Spirit. The first thing that he said is to be humble in all things, “with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (vv. 2-3). To keep the oneness of the Spirit, the most important virtue in the church life is humility. Whether you can receive grace or not depends on whether you are a humble person. There must be oneness for the church to be blessed. Oneness in humility is the secret for the church to gain the Lord’s blessing, both for the saints personally and for the church as a corporate entity. If we are humble people, God’s grace will definitely be with us. We are building up the church in the church life with all the other brothers and sisters. The most important thing for the whole church to be under God’s grace is the oneness. This is a very important teaching in the Bible.

The verses in Psalm 131 were written by David; he wrote most of the psalms. They are filled with revelation, filled with his experience with God. He lived in the Old Testament age, yet his experience is no different than our experience in the New Testament. The revelation in the New Testament comes out of the Old Testament. The apostles

wrote the New Testament continuing the thoughts and concepts contained in the Old Testament. We already mentioned in the previous message that God worked on David from his youth; God dealt with him in all kinds of situations. Many of the things that he went through seemed to be unpleasant. On one hand, he was despised by his own family. David was the eighth son in his family. His father and brothers looked down on him. When he was young, although already a warrior, he was asked by his father to stay in the wilderness to guard a few sheep. When Samuel came to anoint him, David was not even invited to be at his home to meet Samuel. After he was anointed by Samuel to be the king of Israel, he experienced many afflictions and persecution for 5 more years even though he defeated Goliath and gained some glory. Right after that, king Saul persecuted him seeking his life. He fled to the wilderness and hid in caves, going through all kinds of afflictions. God used all these situations to train him, to deal with him so that he would no longer do anything by himself.

In the end, David became a person who was humble before God. When Saul was seeking to kill him, God placed Saul's life in his hands twice. He did not dare to hurt Saul, God's anointed one, because he was a person who feared God. At that time David was already anointed to be the king and God had already given up on Saul, yet David said that he dared not touch the anointed one of God. He was waiting for God's hand. If Saul would one day meet his demise, it would have nothing to do with him (1 Sam. 24:6; 26:9-11).

Once David became the king, first king of Judah and then later the king of the entire nation of Israel, he moved the capitol from Hebron to Jerusalem. He received the revelation from God to know that Jerusalem was the place that God had selected to put His name. When David became king of the entire nation of Israel, the first thing that he did was to capture Jerusalem. At that time, Jerusalem did not belong to Israel so David waged war against the people who lived in Jerusalem. After that, he moved his capitol to Jerusalem. The second thing that he did was to move the ark of the covenant into the city of Jerusalem. He cared for God's heart. The ark had been captured while Samuel was still young when Eli was the high priest. Afterward the

ark was returned to Israel. Through the whole time of Samuel and king Saul, about 60 years, no one cared for the ark and no one cared for Moses' word that there would be a place that God had chosen for His name and for His people to come together (Deut. 12:5-7, 11, 18, 26-27). When David ascended to the throne to be the king of the nation of Israel, the first thing that he did was to care for the things concerning the ark. He wanted to bring the ark back to the tent that he prepared for it in Jerusalem. This is why God identified David as a man after His heart. We will describe this matter in detail in the next psalm. That psalm mentions that David became a humble person as he went through many dealings from God.

During David's entire life, except for one thing, everything that David did was pleasing to God. This is God's own testimony for David, but if you back and read 2 Samuel and 1 Kings, David failed twice. We don't know why God did not count the second time. When God counted David's failures, He only counted that one time, the first failure that is recorded in 2 Samuel chapter 11. It was a great sin; he took the wife of another man. Even today this is considered a great sin. He took Bathsheba and then tried to hide this matter. One day David was sleeping until late one afternoon while his army was away fighting a battle. He had become loose and was sleeping in his palace. He rose from his bed and began walking around the roof of his house and saw a woman taking a bath. Then he took the woman to himself. At that time he thought that this was nothing, but he did not realize that Bathsheba would get pregnant because of him. When David faced that situation the first thing he wanted to do was to cover up his sin. So he told the captain of his army to send the husband of the woman back to Jerusalem. This man, Uriah, was a great man in David's army, one of his mighty men. The reason that David wanted Uriah to come back was he wanted Uriah to go home to be with his wife so that it would not be suspicious if his wife got pregnant. This would cover up what he had done. However, Uriah was a very faithful soldier. He said that while the rest of the soldiers are fighting the battle he would not go home to eat and drink and lie with his wife. Uriah slept at the door of the king's house and refused to go home to be with his wife. What did David do? He did not go to Uriah to confess

his sin. He did not say, “I am sorry. I offended you.” Rather he wrote a secret letter and asked Uriah to take it to his general. The letter instructed that Uriah should be placed at the front of the battle so that he would be killed. It is hard to imagine, but when God withdrew His hand from David a little bit, he could do such an evil thing. After Uriah died, then David took Bathsheba to be his wife.

After all that, David still considered that what he had done was a small matter; he still had not yet concerning about what he had done. Then God sent the prophet, Nathan, to see David (2 Samuel 12). Nathan was wise and did not immediately rebuke David. He told David a story of two men in a city, a wealthy man and a poor man. The wealthy man had many cattle and sheep but the poor man only had one lamb. He cared for this lamb like a pet; it grew up with his children. They ate together and slept together with the lamb just as if it was one of his children. It was very dear to the poor man. One day a guest came to visit the wealthy man but he did not want to take any of his flock or herd to prepare something for his guest. Instead, he took the lamb from the poor man and slaughtered it to prepare a meal for his guest. What was David’s reaction to this story? He was very angry with the rich man and swore that the man who did this would be put to death. He would also need to repay the lamb fourfold because had done this thing and had no pity. Then Nathan took David’s words. You can say that Nathan was very wise; this is something that we need to learn. If you want to point out someone’s fault, you need to be very wise. On this occasion David committed a great sin, but we need to learn from Nathan. If he would have come to David and started to yell at him, perhaps David would have put him in prison. Nathan was filled with wisdom. When David said, “The man who has done this shall surely die!” then Nathan said to David, “You are the man!” Then Nathan told David how he was like the rich man. Verses 9-10 say, “Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house.” So David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ And Nathan said to David, ‘The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.

However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die” (vv. 13-14). After David heard this, he fasted for seven days; he was beseeching the Lord for the sake of this child. He lay on the ground but after seven days, the child died. Then David rose up, bathed, changed his clothes, worshipped the Lord, and began to eat. His servants asked him, “What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food” (v. 21). David answered, “While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’ But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me” (vv. 22-23). This is the portion that describes how David sinned and how God struck him.

After being struck by God, David repented. We can say that he learned the lesson and was humbled by this lesson. After he rose, David wrote Psalm 51 expressing his repentance. There is a small note that accompanies this psalm: “To the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bath-sheba.” This is a very famous psalm of repentance. This is a characteristic of David; after his sin was exposed, he turned and repented of his sin. It is very good to read this psalm again to touch David’s spirit and his humble heart before God. David descended into the depths because of his sin. He said, “Against You, You only, have I sinned.” He continued, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts.” He realized, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.” Again he declared, “A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise.” He surrendered both outwardly and inwardly. His spirit was a broken spirit. This kind of person will no longer stand up for himself. He has lost himself entirely in God.

There also was no peace in David’s house because of this failure. One of his sons, Absalom, rose up to rebel against David. The rebellion was very great so that David had to flee for his life from Jerusalem toward the east. There was a relative of Saul who met David and cursed him and threw stones at him while he was running for his life. David’s servants could not take it any more and said,

“Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!” (2 Sam. 16:9). But David said, “Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the Lord has ordered him. It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing this day” (vv. 11-12). Through all these things David learned to be a humble man. He was willing to take all these situations from the Lord.

The second great failure of David before God in his old age was in numbering the people of Israel (2 Sam. 24). This numbering was to satisfy the inner pride of David. In this matter he was stricken by God. When he was disciplined by God, David fell down in the presence of God and said, “Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father’s house.” The lesson we learn here is that David did not defend himself in the midst of his failure and during the process of being stricken. His attitude was humble even when God was disciplining and striking him.

David was a humble man before God; even so, the test which he met concerned his pride. Therefore we should always look to God. At no time can we rely on ourselves. We should not think that once we have learned a lesson and gained a virtue, everything will be fine with us. Once we depart from the Lord, immediately we will fail in this same thing. Here we must learn that we cannot let loose our entire life. We always need to depend on the Lord, seeking His mercy. None of us should consider that we have no problem. No matter how spiritual we are, we always will have problems within. We cannot rely on ourselves; we will fail immediately whenever we depart from the Lord.

We can consider the apostle Paul as the greatest among the apostles; he received the greatest and highest revelations and became a very mature brother. He speaks of the revelations and visions that he received in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. The visions were so high that he was raptured to the third heaven and also to Paradise in Hades. He even heard secret words that cannot be uttered by man. Everyone who has died including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Elijah and David. All the saints from the past generations are in Hades. Paul went to Hades and heard words that cannot be uttered by man. Thus, he knew

many mysteries that are hidden from us, but God would not let him write them down. Today on Earth there are many things that we still do not understand; we need to wait until that day. Everything of God that we need to know is written in the Bible. When Paul gained revelations in the third heaven and Paradise, he said, “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure” (v. 7). Even such a spiritual man as Paul who lived by the life of God, needed to be careful because the revelations he received were too great. This made an opportunity for him to become proud so God allowed the messenger of Satan to attack him with a thorn in his flesh. Paul prayed to God three times about this, hoping that God would remove the thorn. God’s response was that the thorn needed to remain but “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” The thorn remained with Paul. Whenever his pride may have risen up, the thorn was there to keep him down.

So Paul said that because of the danger of becoming proud, he rejoiced in his afflictions and persecutions. What an experience! God wants us to become humble people in His presence. What is it to be humble? To be humble is to be put into a lowly place. None of us wants to be in a lowly place. Everyone in society is trying to climb higher; people don’t like to be outdone by others. Rather, they want to step on top of others. We ourselves like to be noticed by others in the church life. Sometimes the young people are not happy that the leading brothers pick hymns instead of them, so they would quit exercising. Even if you would not utter things like this from your mouth, your heart is not at peace. There is always something simmering inside: so and so was chosen by the leading brothers; so and so was uplifted. It is so easy for us to be filled with these kinds of feelings. This is to exalt yourself, but the Bible tells us that we need to be humble.

The natural life of man causes everyone to be proud. No one is willing to stay in a low position. Why do people get angry? It is because of pride. When a person’s pride is hurt, the result is anger. True humility comes from the Lord, because the Lord Jesus is humility. The second chapter of Philippians reveals Christ Jesus to us,

“who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.” What is “humility?” Humility is to empty oneself. Christ Jesus was the glorious God, all sufficient, but He was willing to completely empty Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. This can be called “humility”.

A truly humble man does not need to endeavour to be humble, nor does he need to have any feeling or awareness of humility. Because he is full of Christ, he does not have his own feelings. A person who is without self is a truly humble person. Paul said that we need to have the same mind as Christ. When our heart is filled with Christ, then we are humble.

Humility is gained through the scars we suffer and the breaking of the self. It is something constituted in us. When our outer man is broken, the Spirit of Christ is constituted in us. We will then be able to understand humility. A person who receives grace in the presence of God learns a lesson of humility while being stricken by God. This process produces a heart of humility in him. Such a heart of humility is the heart of Christ Jesus.

From this we can see that humility is not a natural virtue that we possess. There is no such thing as true humility in our natural man. Who can humble himself? No one. Even a beggar is filled with pride if he is able to get more than another one. Pride is in everyone in different settings, in different levels, and in different spheres. Everyone is proud of something as he compares himself to other people. The beggars in China today use cell phones to scan others' phones to collect money; they have become high tech beggars. Some might take in more than some others who have a job. This becomes their pride. There is always something that makes us proud, something in which we think that we are better than others. This is what is in man. Then how can we be humble? Humility needs to be constituted into us. Pride is within but we need to be constituted by the Spirit to gain the real humility. Only such a person can be blessed by God and can build the church with other brothers and sisters.

When David talks about humility he does it in three aspects: your heart, your eyes, and your attitude. Your heart must not be proud;

your eyes must not be lofty; nor can you concern yourself with great things, things too profound for you. These things show whether you are truly humble. David wrote this psalm after being stricken by God, after experiencing the breaking of the self. This caused his heart not to be haughty. The most important thing for a person in the presence of God is that his heart is not haughty. People look at our appearance, but only God looks at our hearts. A humble person does not harbour pride in his heart. How do you prove that your heart is not proud? We observe outward things of others, yet God searches our hearts.

Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.” This shows us that the manifestation of our life, that is our living, is actually the outflow of our heart. The Lord said, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). Whatever fills your heart flows out from your mouth. David said, “My heart is not proud” so pride did not come out from him. Proverbs 16:18 says, “Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.” If today our heart is proud, destruction lies before us. If our heart is haughty, we will inevitably end up falling. Don’t blame others if you fall; we often blame others for stumbling us. It is true that we can be stumbled, but if your heart is filled with Christ, then no one can stumble you. Who can stumble you if you are a humble man who looks unto God, a man who waits on God, a man who dwells in the Spirit? In that case, no one can stumble you. You may be rebuked by the leading bothers but if you are humble, you will not be stumbled.

Only a humble person can be accepted by God. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5). Whenever our heart is proud, we will be rejected by God; whenever we are humble in the presence of God, we will be accepted by God and enjoy His grace. Never assume that you are better than anyone or higher than others. Whenever you take such a position, you are about to fall. That God opposes a proud person means that such a person is given up by God. Only those who are humble in God’s presence will be received by Him. We need God’s mercy. Never assume that your are higher than others or better than other Christians. Never assume that the church is better than other Christian organizations. In the past I heard brothers saying, “We are the storage house of Joseph. We need to

spread food to other Christians who are in famine.” In their opinion, all the other Christians are in famine; only we have the grain. After I heard such a word I knew that we were in a condition that God would oppose us. God opposes those who are proud. I still remember that about 10 years ago the brethren who were raised up by Darby had a conference in Chicago and announced that all the revelations in the Bible are opened to them. They believe that all the revelation from God has been opened to them. They have a certain kind of self approving pride, believing that they can give revelation to other children of God. This is like what the Lord spoke to the church in Laodicea. The Lord told the church in Laodicea that they were saying, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing” (Rev. 3:17). When a church or organization announces that they are rich saying things such as, “We are the storage house of Joseph” then the Lord is outside. Do you know what they meant by the storage house of Joseph? At his time, the whole land of Egypt was without food. They could get food only from Joseph. Saying such things is to already have fallen into the condition of Laodicea, thinking that they are wealthy and need nothing. The Lord told them that they “do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” If you want to be received by God, you must be humble.

Never consider that you have attained something or have something. Our Lord was equal with God, in God’s glory in heaven, yet He emptied Himself. He emptied all the things that He had, taking the form of a slave in order to come and save us (Phil. 2:5-7). Paul also testified, “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (3:13-14). This means that he forgot everything that he was before, everything that he gained before, and everything that he attained before. He would not allow anything to make him proud. He forgot all the things that were behind and stretched forward to the things before. What does that mean? It means that he wanted to be always fresh in his experience of Christ. He left everything that he had behind so that he would not be holding onto anything old. This means that he was humble person.

This is the same testimony that David gave us in Psalm 131. Even though there are only three verses in this psalm, the revelations in these verses are very precious. David said, “My heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty” (v. 1). The most deeply hidden things in a man’s heart, unknown to anyone else, are revealed through his eyes. We can suppress what is in our heart by forcing ourselves not to speak. Indeed, at times we can manage to tame our tongues in order not to speak. But our eyes, which are the window of our whole person, can reveal every condition of our heart. A person with a proud heart is the one with lofty eyes. In his eyes, he has no regard for anyone. Conversely, a person without a haughty heart does not have lofty eyes that can’t be hidden. Your eyes always expose the condition of your heart. Sometimes we say that someone’s eyes are lofty. Even when he walks he looks upward because he is proud because he attained to a certain level. Perhaps he has some wealth or something else that others don’t have. Then his eyes seem to be on top of his head. It is very difficult to hide things in one’s eyes; they expose a man’s inward condition. David said, “...nor my eyes lofty.” You cannot tell in his eyes all the high things that he attained. This is the condition of a humble person.

1:14:14