



GROWING UP IN GOD
A JOURNEY THROUGH THE PSALMS OF ASCENT

Session 12 December 2011

Psalm 131 TNIV

A song of ascents.
Of David.

¹ *My heart is not proud, LORD,
my eyes are not haughty;*

*I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me.*

² *But I have calmed myself
and quieted my ambitions.*

*I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.*

³ *Israel, put your hope in the LORD
both now and forevermore.*

If you are still with me, as we approach the summit of our climb we find that all those things upon which we relied so heavily have been knocked away from under us, leaving us clinging to God Himself...humility – a knocking away of the props – God has to do this with us if we are really to be of any use – remember Jacob – wrestling, weakened, limping...we are so apt to rely upon our own strengths, to think that we know best...to forge our own destiny...make our own way and our own decisions. Self made man – perish the thought.

Surely there is no other way of walking through this life than with a limp, which demonstrates our total reliance upon God and Him alone...a lesson which the psalmist has learned -

'I have calmed and quieted myself' David says – my soul is at rest in the hands of its Creator and Father, I've stopped fighting, I've laid down all I wanted, all my selfish ambitions and yes, I know what I am like, *'I am like a weaned child'* – not a baby – a child...

'Except you become as little children you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven...' Mark 10:15

Little children...trust...and trust in its most developed state, leads to total dependency – utter dependence upon that One Master.

Trust is not something you do, it is a way of 'being'...it is the primary way of a child and must become the primary way for the children of God.

So there comes the time in our ascent and our Christian experience, if we really want Him, where God will render you powerless – He will stop you relying on your own strength – it is a necessary, if painful season, where we discover who we thought we were, we are not, and out of that, find who we truly are...totally dependent children...looking up trustingly at our Father -

'All my hopes ambitions wishes round my feet in ashes lay'¹

There's a word for this – the world hates it, it is – humility.

That's a real counter-culture word – the world sees humility and meekness as weakness...actually it is submitted strength.

Not many of us reach this stage of humility and meekness; we turn back long before this, resting at a staging post which is more comfortable; retaining just enough self-sufficiency to keep control, to make our own decisions and choose our own destiny; *'after all'* we say *'God gave us free will'* – and we are ready to defend our stance to the hilt because this place doesn't challenge us too deeply - sadly we don't realise what we are forfeiting...

It is said that anything worth having will cost...here's the price tag – all of You, none of me...The sinking down into nothingness - which is a prerequisite for Him to be all in all...He **must** increase, I **must** decrease...

Aahhh so easy to say, so difficult to attain –

Psalm 57:7 NKJV

'My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;'

Fixed, immovable, steadfast. I've made my decision God; I'm coming after you no matter what it costs...

There's no breakthrough without follow through.

Climbing is fun when you start, the conviviality of companionship, the jockeying for position, fun and laughter...then before you know it some have dropped away because the going got a little steep, then steeper still and we lose a few more; then impossible...a sheer face, one foothold at a time, total concentration, breathing laboured, focussed, fixed, steadfast – you and Him - alone.

Not many reach the heights...

Do you remember what we said at the very beginning?

“We have looked at that mountain and longed to scale it – but sometimes even before we have reached the first level we find that we have neither the resources nor the resolve to complete the climb. We have suffered losses; maybe we just did not count the cost before embarking on the climb...

Life with God is not a destination, it is a journey, so we must train ourselves to pay attention to His presence in at all times and in everything.

*A question we need to ask ourselves at this point then is - do we really **want** to walk with God?*

*Do we **want** to follow His plan for our life as it unfolds on the stage of history?*

Are we willing to give Him our dreams and allow Him to show us what His dream for us is?

Do we want to make this climb?

Do we desire a heart which is set on pilgrimage?

God will not love you any the less whatever you choose, but choose you must because there is a cost involved...

The path up the mountain will separate you from other people; it is a place where you and He walk alone together, it is a place where only His voice is heard; it is the path of unknowing...it is the path of misunderstanding – others will not understand where you are going – it is the path of the closed mouth and the open heart...apprenticed to our Master, Jesus, we learn our ‘trade’ as we go, in communion and community with Him, the Father and the Holy Spirit. We describe ourselves as disciples...but we are pilgrims, people who spend our lives going somewhere, going with God to God, and whose pathway is the Way, Himself, Jesus Christ.

To follow Him, to walk with Him on the high places requires rigorous concentration and discipline. It requires passion, daily sacrifice and service. It requires that He be your focus, your lodestar, your intention, your goal, your all sufficiency...

...there are no short cuts; the climb is arduous at times, but our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ, through the indwelling Holy Spirit. (1 John 1:3)...

And everything we do is for an audience of One...”

‘Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage...’

Have you ever found yourself in the place of asking ‘How did I get here? What did I ask for that has brought me into this strait place?’

*If you decided on pilgrimage; **really** set your heart on it; there’s your answer, here’s why everyone around you seems to have disappeared; why you have lost lifetime companions, friends; why people*

just aren't on the same page; don't see things the way you do...**your** heart is steadfast **set** on pilgrimage into the heart of the Most High.

There's a cost to pay – part of which is that the fig leaves have got to go...

Fig leaves ?

Fig leaves are what we cover ourselves with, what we want the world to believe about us, who we are - our identities – one of my personal fig leaves recently was that I wanted to be like Graham Cooke...

OK I'll pause for you to laugh at this point... ☺

You see, I admire Graham enormously, and I am eternally grateful to him; he was instrumental in starting me on this journey into the heart of God which started over 20 years ago - so it grew in me that **his** walk with God was what **I** wanted – I wanted that 'throne room' lifestyle...so without realising it, I was modelling myself on him...I adorned myself with a fig leaf...

Came the day, of course, when Father gently began to prise it off... *'I don't want another Graham, Beryl, I want you to be you...lay it down Beryl, lay it down – **and then** I can show you who you really are...'*

What happened next was that He began to bring me into **my** truest identity; He is still doing this and I am enjoying the journey immensely. I like who I am becoming; I no longer want to be a 'bit blown off' Graham much as I love and honour him; I desire to be all that the Father wants for **me**...and most importantly – I want the nature of His Son to be manifest in and through me...I no longer want to be a carbon copy of someone else.

No loss to me, only gain.

It is when we start looking at things as loss when God asks us for something we are actually in danger of missing the path, missing the highest of the high calling...we haven't lost our salvation, can't do that, it is eternally secure, but in sitting down to count the cost of the next step we are evaluating what it will mean – what our families will think, what people will think, how we will be misunderstood, what it will do to our reputation – we're counting the cost...and most often we find the price too high for us.

'Though the way seemed straight and narrow, all I claimed was swept away...'⁴⁹

Luke 12:49 – 50 NASB

Christ Divides Men

⁴⁹ *"I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!"*

Position, possessions, power, ambition, recognition, aaah recognition, reputation...poof!

All gone...

*'Then, Gods fire upon the altar of my heart was set aflame...I will never cease to praise Him, glory, glory to His Name.'*¹

He's still dividing men.

Mothers from daughters.

Mother-in-law from daughter in law.

Believers from believers...

You from me...

Choices.

All about choices – we are defined spiritually by them.

They determine where we end up.

No breakthrough without follow through...

So the psalmist reaches the place where he says God has dealt with the pride of life in his heart – ambition, reputation, the lot; we aren't told how long this process took. He was prepared for kingship by his years on the run from King Saul who sought to kill him; he suffered the loss of all things, friends, family, before his ascent to the throne – David knew what he was talking about, he had experienced the depths and the heights, he had experienced victory and defeat, he knew hardship, loss, deprivation, he even stooped to murder to get what he wanted...

But he had been found to be a man after God's own heart - funny that, a murderer and an adulterer and God describes him as being after His own heart...

God had so got a hold on the man that he was totally captivated, his heart steadfast, his aim was to be with God and dwell where He was and no price was too high to pay – in another place he pours out his soul's longings – one thing he says, just one thing, give me this and I will be satisfied -

Psalm 27:4 NASB

*⁴ One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD
And to meditate in His temple.'*
One thing, one thing...

Not riches, not honour, not fame, not recognition, not vengeance, not the throne of Israel - one thing...and it is something no other eye can behold, just him and His God; gaze steadfast - Jesus the centre of his attention, his total focus, the reason he lives.

'When all is stripped away and I simply come...'

That is a steadfast heart speaking.

There is a man, who will reach the summit nothing daunting, focussed, fixed, knows what he's after, and he is going to get it – he wants to behold God, to gaze upon His beauty – forever; he's worked out the cost, he's paid the price – to live there, in the Secret Place of God's own heart -

*⁵ For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle;
In the secret place of His tent He will hide me;
He will lift me up on a rock.*

*⁶ And now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me,
And I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.'*

'He is no fool who gives that which he cannot keep for that which he cannot lose...' so wrote Jim Elliot, the night before he died at the hands of the Auca's Indians whom he had come to save...

The way up is down.

Loss is gain in God's Kingdom.

The way to be elevated above our enemies round about is down, the path of humility, the sinking of the soul before God in humility and trust.

'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him...' **Job 13:15**

There's no other way beloved, there's no other way – down before up - everything on the altar and if He takes it, He takes it, He gave it in the first place -

Job 1:20 -21 NKJV

²⁰ Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. ²¹ And he said:

*" Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked shall I return there.
The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;
Blessed be the name of the LORD."*

Now there's a correct response, right there – Job worshipped...and then there's Peter in the New Testament with another lesson –

1 Peter 5:6 NASB

⁶Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time'

Here speaks another man who knows experientially – Peter - *'everyone else may deny you Lord, but I won't'...*

'Aah Peter, you do not yet know yourself, just let me show you...then you will be of use to Me - before the cock crows twice you will deny Me three times...'

Luke 22:62 NASB

⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly.

Peter hit rock bottom – no lower to go – so he went back to fishing...humbled – he hadn't known himself... *'everyone else may deny you Lord, but I won't'*. But he did and was devastated by himself and wept bitterly – ever been found out like that, *'everyone else may, but I won't'* then the test comes – it's just pride...and there's a remedy – He always has a remedy because He knows what He is getting when He gets us...and He wants us just the same...

'Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling...' Jude 24.

The big fisherman is restored by Jesus when they meet on the beach for breakfast – where else would you wait for a fisherman – and Jesus asks him some questions because He has a future and a hope for Peter -

John 21:15 – 23 The Message

Do You Love Me?

¹⁵After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Master, you know I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶He then asked a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Master, you know I love you." Jesus said, "Shepherd my sheep." ¹⁷⁻¹⁹Then he said it a third time: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, "Do you love me?" so he answered, "Master, you know everything there is to know. You've got to know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. I'm telling you the very truth now: When you were young you dressed yourself and went wherever you wished, but when you get old you'll have to stretch out your hands while someone else dresses you and takes you where you don't want to go." He said this to hint at the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. And then he commanded, "Follow me."

'Follow Me,' wherever I choose to lead you, 'Follow Me,' and you can be sure I will lead you where you don't want to go, 'Follow Me,' it is where I need to go.

'Love has a hem to her garment, it trails to the very dust, it can reach the stains of the streets and lanes and because it can, it must...'

Humility – leads to perfect death to self. The giving up of all and becoming perfect nothingness before God – if you really want to be like Jesus, and do the things He did, your Personal Trainer will help you and you will say of a truth with the psalmist –

*¹ My heart is not proud, LORD,
my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me.
² But I have calmed myself
and quieted my ambitions.
I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.*

No breakthrough without follow through...no exaltation without humbling...

Steadfast loyalty to that One Master – one thing I have desired, **that** will I seek...Him...

Looking neither to the left or the right – following - hard after – others may, you cannot.

Others can pull strings and push to get themselves recognised and accepted you cannot...He will keep you in glorious obscurity - just following in the Master's footsteps a servant to all –

Philippians 2:1 – 11 NIV

Imitating Christ's Humility

¹If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'

Be imitators of God dear friends, so that He may exalt you in due time.

Here we are then, stripped of all our pretensions; like a weaned child at its mother's breast, held close, safe, delivered from the brute beast of pride, walking in humility with our God.

If you feel bold enough you may wish to join me in a prayer -

'Father, I ask that you remove from me every form and manner of pride however, it manifests itself in my life and deliver me totally from myself that I may live only for You.

In Jesus name.

Amen.'

You can be sure He will answer that one.

Beryl

¹'When I saw the cleansing fountain' *Mrs M J Harris*

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