

# When Questions Remain

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Preacher: Cedric Moss

[ 0 : 00 ] For this morning, for our remaining time, I want us to open God's word and I want us to open God's word.

And the truth is that although we are diverse in many ways this morning, one thing that we all have in common is that we have questions to which we don't have answers.

And for most of us, the questions are big questions. They're not the run-of-the-mill questions. They are big questions. They're God questions. They're questions that we rightly only ask the Lord.

And when we consider the nature of these questions, most of them are why questions. They're not what questions or who questions or when questions.

And of course, sometimes it is when, when we ask of the Lord, when is this going to end, for example. But most of them are why questions and they're weighty questions.

[ 1 : 31 ] They're weighty questions like, why do you allow suffering? And why do you allow evil? And why is it that the wicked seem to prosper when the wicked, when the righteous seem to suffer?

But I think for most of us this morning, the questions aren't general like that, that press on our minds. They're more personal. And perhaps it is, why am I suffering?

Why did my marriage break down? Why have you not healed me?

Or why didn't you heal my mother or my father or another loved one who passed away? Maybe it's related to work.

Why can't I find a job? Or am I always depressed? Why aren't you answering my prayer? And the list goes on.

[ 2 : 45 ] As important as these questions are, brothers and sisters, the truth is the Lord doesn't promise that he will give us answers. He doesn't promise that he will give us answers in this life, not even in the life to come.

And so we as a people have to learn how to live with unanswered questions. We have to learn to live with sometimes what is mystery.

things on the top shelf that we just can't reach. But the good news is that even though we don't get those answers, the Lord has given us perspective.

He has given us his word, and he has given us the means by which we can learn to live with unanswered questions. And this morning, we come to one of those places in God's word that does just that, Psalm 131.

And as you have heard, if you've been a part of this sermon series for any of the sermons, we are in a sermon series that we're calling the Psalms of Ascent.

[ 4 : 01 ] And these are 15 Psalms from Psalms 120 to 134. And these are the Psalms that the children of Israel would have sung as they made their annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem to worship the Lord.

And these Psalms are very insightful because they help us to see the kinds of things they thought about. And what we see in Psalm 131 is that they pondered things they didn't understand and tried to gain perspective concerning it.

I was thinking this morning that if there's ever a time that the unanswered questions tend to come to the front of our minds, I believe is when we're gathering to worship. It's when God is right in front of us.

It's when God is in view and we are contemplating, gathering, that the God kinds of questions come in front of our minds. And this seems to have been the case for the children of Israel.

Although this Psalm was written by David himself, what is clear is that this Psalm was of such relevance to all the people of God that it found its way in this songbook of 15 songs that they would sing as they made their pilgrimages to Jerusalem.

[ 5 : 22 ] You will notice that it is one of the shortest Psalms. In all of the Psalms, it's one of the shortest in the Psalms of a sense.

There are only three verses in it. And there are two other Psalms that we are coming to in a few weeks, but also have three verses. Although this Psalm is of few words, brothers and sisters, it is of immense perspective for us.

And I pray this morning that the Lord will help us to hear it. Because if we could hear it, we will learn to live with unanswered questions.

So please turn in your Bible to Psalm 131 if you have not yet done so. And please follow along as I read. Psalm 131.

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.

[ 6 : 36 ] But I have calmed and quieted my soul. Like a weaned child with its mother. Like a weaned child is my soul within me.

O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Let's pray. Father, we bow our hearts this morning to you.

The one who knows all things. But who in his sovereign wisdom has not disclosed all things. Lord, you have called us to walk by faith.

And part of walking by faith is we walk when we don't have answers. To many things in life in general. And in our lives in particular.

Lord, we ask this morning that you would speak to us from your word. Would you help us, Lord, in the midst of the many unanswered questions of life and our own life.

[ 7 : 48 ] Lord, we ask this morning that we would live at peace with ourselves and with you. Lord, we ask this morning. Because we have learned what the psalmist has clearly learned.

Lord, work in our hearts today. I especially pray for those who are occupied this morning with questions. I pray for those who perhaps just the title of the sermon has awakened questions in their hearts.

Lord, care for each one, I pray. As a good shepherd, would you walk among the flock and bring individual and particular care to each one.

Lord, we ask that you would do this in Jesus' name. Amen. And so how do we live with unanswered questions? Or to make it more personal, how are you to live with unanswered questions?

How should you respond to unanswered questions in your life? Well, this morning as we consider Psalm 131, I want us to consider three ways that we can and should respond to the unanswered questions that loam large in our minds in any given situation that we don't understand but we have to live with.

[ 9 : 27 ] First, we should respond with a humble heart. That's what David does in verse 1 of this psalm.

Notice what he says again. These words of David are a statement of humility before God.

And in this statement, David gives us three descriptions of pride. The first is a heart that is lifted up. The second is eyes that are raised too high.

And the third is occupying oneself with things that are too marvelous and too great to understand. Those are three different expressions of pride.

What he's saying is, Oh Lord, I am not proud. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. And so another way that we can understand what David is saying is to see that being occupied with questions that by their very nature can only be answered by God is an expression of pride.

[ 10 : 52 ] And David is not saying that we should not question the Lord. I think anyone who has read scripture, in the Psalms in particular, you would see that God's people questioned regularly.

They asked him the why and the when and the how questions. So David is not saying don't question God.

What he's saying is we should not be occupied with our questions before the Lord. We should not occupy ourselves with things that are too marvelous, too great for us to understand.

Now this obviously does not go to students. That you, when you don't understand your schoolwork, you quote Psalm 131 and say it's too marvelous. It's too great.

I don't understand what that is. And I'm not going to occupy myself with that. That doesn't work. You need to apply yourself when that math problem is hard.

[ 12 : 03 ] You need to apply yourself when that scientific concept is difficult to grasp. And don't quote Psalm 131. But it's okay, brothers and sisters, to bring our questions to the Lord.

It's okay to pour our hearts out before him. But what we don't want to do is to become preoccupied with our questions.

We want to guard our hearts against being proud. We want to humble ourselves before the Lord. David, the psalmist, came to that place where he was able to pen this psalm and say, Lord, my heart isn't lifted up.

I'm not so proud. And friends, we must do as well. And so I asked you this morning, in the face of your unanswered questions, in the face of things that you don't understand, how are you responding?

What is your pattern? What is your way in how you respond to the things that escape you in giving you answers? And I think we need to recognize that it is before the Lord that we respond.

[ 13 : 30 ] It is before the all-seeing and the all-knowing God that we respond. Because all of life is lived before him. Do you place them before the Lord and trust him?

Trust him to answer in his way and in his time? Or do you occupy yourself with them? And do all manner of things to try to wring God's arm to answer us.

I pray that we, however weak or feeble, are growing to be like David and resting and trusting and saying, God, my heart is not lifted up.

My eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things too marvelous for me to understand.

Now, I think a legitimate question would be, how do I know whether I am doing that? How do I know whether I am being preoccupied with the questions that I want answers to, with the things I don't understand?

[ 14 : 47 ] Well, let's consider the second way that we should understand, that we should respond to things we don't understand, because I think it would help us to see whether we are proud and occupying ourselves with these things.

So the second way that we see in Psalm 131, that we should respond to unanswered questions, is we should respond with a quiet trust. Not just with a humble heart, but also with a quiet trust.

Look again what David says in verse 2. Notice that David begins with this conjunction, but, and I think it's important for us to connect it, to really get the full sense of what he's saying.

So let's look at verse 1 again. 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.

Now verse 2. But, I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with this mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

[ 16 : 08 ] One of the first things that should really strike us, and I pray you see this, and I pray that you embrace it, and it is the honesty of David. It's the kind of honesty that we see in the Psalms.

David honestly discloses that he was not always calm and quiet. He wasn't always calm and quiet about these things that are too great and too marvelous to understand, and that's obvious because David says that he has quieted and calmed his soul.

It means it wasn't always that way. He could have simply said, I am like a weaned child. I am like a weaned child with my mother.

Had he said that, all we would know is that's the way he was, but we would not have seen his process. But that's not what he says. What he says is, but I have calmed and quieted my soul.

In other words, my soul wasn't calm. My soul wasn't quieted. I did occupy myself with these things. These were important things for me to understand, but now I have calmed and I have quieted my soul.

[ 17 : 22 ] And so this morning, if your soul is raging and if your soul is noisy, that's okay. It's a part of the human condition, but we don't want to stay there.

We want to get to the place where we can have the calm and we can have the quiet of trusting in the Lord the way David did, away from getting the answers.

I think one of the things that we sometimes confuse is whether we really have peace with the Lord. We have God's peace ruling in our hearts. God's peace ruling in our hearts is not real peace if whatever had you unsettled has just been resolved for you.

You have the answers that you wanted. You understand the things you didn't understand and so now you have peace. Well, that's a circumstantial peace. The peace and the quiet that God wants

us to come to is peace and quiet in the midst of the unanswered questions, in the midst of still not understanding particular things.

[ 18 : 38 ] peace and peace. And that is where we want to seek to end up. To communicate this process that he had come through in this place to which he had come, David uses a figure of speech called simile.

And see, students, this is one of the good things about coming to church. You get to rehearse and remember some of these things you're learning for BJC's that are coming up in a couple of months for some of you.

A simile, I should just ask one of the students to just tell me what a simile is this morning. But a simile is when we say that a thing or a person is like something else.

It's like this. It's similar to this. And so the simile that David uses is that he is like a weaned child with his mother. And obviously when David wrote this he was not a child.

He was a grown man. But he says, I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with his mother. Like a weaned child is my soul within me.

[ 19 : 55 ] David uses this picture of a weaned child to communicate to us this quiet trust that he had come to in the Lord. Now weaning, most of us know, is the process by which a child, a young baby, is taken off of milk and he is introduced to solid food.

And I think most mothers who would have had more than one child will attest that the process is different for children. For some it's longer and others it's shorter. For some it's harder than others. But I think in general what we know about babies who are breastfed is that when they want to be fed it doesn't matter what their mother is doing.

It doesn't matter where their mother is. She could be driving. She could be in the bus. She could be in the bank. It doesn't matter. They want to be fed. And they will cry their heads off until they are fed.

That's the way an unreinable child behaves. The only thing that's important to them in that moment is they want to be nursed. The unreinable child on the other hand has come through all of that.

[ 21 : 16 ] The unreinable child has come to appreciate that his mother, her mother is not going to starve them but they're going to be fed and so they learn to wait a little patiently for food.

And I began to reflect on this some and I think one of the most wonderful sights is to see a child, a young child who is on solid food now wants to eat.

Food isn't ready yet and you see that kind of look on their faces but they're not screaming their heads off. They eagerly anticipate that they're going to eat but they're trusting.

They believe they are going to be fed and they patiently wait until they are fed. David says, that's the way I became. I was like the screaming child wanting to know the answers to these questions, wanting to understand these things that are going on in my life and around me but I have quieted my soul.

I have calmed myself like a weaned child with its mother. But it's easy to miss a very important part that David mentions.

[ 22 : 34 ] He doesn't say that he quieted himself like a weaned child. He says he did it like a weaned child with its mother. And so the weaned child is not, the picture is not a child by him or herself and the mother is out to work or something and they don't know when she's coming, if she's hitting traffic or whatever else.

But no, the mother's already home. The mother's already there. The mother is present with the child. And that even brings a greater trust. That brings a greater trust that in my desire for food, the one who can give me food is right here with me.

And I think the picture that the psalmist is trying to communicate to us is how the nearness of God in the midst of our questions, the nearness of God in the midst of the things we don't understand makes a huge difference.

Because we would say, I don't know but God is near. I don't have the answers but God is near. The nearness of God is our good. The nearness of God is our joy.

And in truth, when God is near, the questions don't matter as much. They still matter. We still would want to know them but they just don't matter as much because God is enough.

[ 24 : 03 ] God is enough. And so the picture the psalmist is communicating here is this whole idea that in the midst of our questions and the things we don't understand, we are to be near to the Lord.

The same way the child grows to trust his or her mother is the same way we grow to trust the Lord by being near to the Lord.

I think you know that even the best analogy breaks down. Even this wonderful analogy that the psalmist gives us breaks down.

You see, because a child at some point really does eventually grow up and become independent and really doesn't need its mother like that. But friends, not so with us.

we will always need to be near to the Lord because we will always have those questions. We will always have those situations that we don't understand. And so for us, it is an ongoing process.

[ 25 : 15 ] And we don't do it perfectly. I think we can all testify to the rollercoaster that we experience at times in trusting and not trusting.

Sometimes in the same day in the morning we can find ourselves like the weaned child trusting the Lord in the midst of all the questions in the midst of the things we don't understand.

Then by the afternoon we find ourselves asking why and when and if and how and sometimes it's even closer than that.

Sometimes it's in the moment. One moment we are in this direction the other moment we're in another direction. And so the analogy breaks down in that way.

And one of the things that we need to learn in the Christian life and I say this because this is what I this is what I call practical theology just just learning how to walk with the Lord.

[ 26 : 27 ] How do we walk with the Lord in an ongoing way when this is our lot? That there are going to be questions we have we have no answers to. There are going to be situations in our lives that we just don't understand.

And that is our lot in an ongoing way until we leave this earth. How do we learn to walk with the Lord in an ongoing way when that is our reality?

I think we learn to do it by becoming absolutely convinced that God is absolutely sovereign and he is absolutely good.

And we have to hold both of those. It's not holding one or the other. We have to believe both in his sovereignty and in his goodness. Believe in his sovereignty that nothing happens nothing happens outside of his sovereign will in life in general and in our lives in particular.

And in everything God is at work for the good of those who love him and who are called according to his purpose. And we have to believe both. You see you can believe that God is absolutely sovereign but then you can doubt his goodness.

[ 27 : 46 ] I can doubt his goodness. Or we can believe that he is good but we wonder about his sovereignty.

We wonder about whether someone is taking advantage of us or whether there's something that's going on in our lives that really somehow is out of the scope of his sovereign ordination.

brothers and sisters we learn to walk with the Lord in the midst of unanswered questions in the midst of mystery in the midst of things we don't understand by trusting his absolute sovereignty and trusting his absolute goodness.

This past week we studied the attributes of God God and God is absolutely good.

He cannot do anything but good and he's promised that he would do that for his people and he's absolutely sovereign and so we need to by God's grace lay hold of those and if you struggle with any aspect of that this morning if you struggle to believe that every single thing in your life has been and is and will be under the absolute sovereign control of the Lord cry out to him this morning and say God I believe help me help my unbelief.

[ 29 : 17 ] Or if you doubt his goodness this morning likewise cry out to the Lord and say God help me to believe that you are absolutely good and are working for good in my life because I love you and I'm called according to your purpose.

and so I ask you this morning in the face of your unanswered questions in the face of the things you don't understand is your soul calm and quiet? Do you have that quiet trust in the presence of the Lord knowing that he is near he's the all-knowing he's the all-seeing all-sovereign and all-together good God?

Is that your lot this morning? I pray it is and I pray to whatever degree it is not God will use this message this morning to bring us to that place of quiet trust.

We don't do it perfectly but we do it sufficiently and I pray that God brings us all to that place to one degree or another.

So in the face of questions that remain unanswered we need to respond with a humble heart, we need to respond with acquired trust in third. Finally and briefly we need to respond with a steadfast hope.

[ 30 : 43 ] Notice in verse 3 that David transitions from a personal prayer to God to a general exhortation to all of God's people. David is testifying in verse 3.

David is vouching for God in verse 3. And look at what he says again, O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.

He's trustworthy. Hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. David is calling the people of God to do what he has learned to do.

He is calling the people of God to recognize that God is worthy of putting our hope and we can anchor our hope in him. And we can be anchored in the midst of all the winds that will blow when we don't have answers to our questions, when we are tempted to be disquieted in the midst of it all. And anyone who changes or anyone who does not know everything is not worthy of us anchoring our hope in. But God doesn't change.

[ 32 : 06 ] And God knows all things. And so he is indeed worthy of our enduring and steadfast hope.

You know, one of the realities about life is that we tend to be preoccupied with questions that really at the end of the day don't matter. For most of us this morning, if we were to die, the questions we have would really all fall away.

And the questions we have are really, they're not essential questions in the main because there's only one essential question. There's only one essential question in all of life.

life. It's the essential question we find the Philippian jailer asking Paul and Silas in Acts 16, verse 30.

And the question he asked was, what must I do to be saved? And friends, this is not trite this morning. I'm saying to you that this is the only essential question in all of life.

[ 33 : 24 ] This is the only question that really matters at the end of the day in all of life and for the life to come. What must I do to be saved?

Those of you who put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ by the grace of God, you have answered this question. You've addressed this question. You know this question.

You've come to grips with this question. You've seen it face to face. You have settled it. And you settled it the moment you came to saving faith in Jesus Christ. But if you're here this morning or you're watching my live stream and you have not yet trusted in Jesus for your salvation, then this question remains unanswered for you.

this all important question, what must I do to be saved? Don't allow it to be crowded out by all the other things that can preoccupy you this morning. And since this is the most important question, the answer to it is the most important information.

The most important information is that Jesus Christ is the only way that people can be saved.

[ 34 : 47 ] The answer that Paul gave to the Philippian jailer was believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your house. And that's not just information, that's good news, brothers and sisters.

That's good news, friends. That's good news. There was good news for the Philippian jailer who was burdened with sin and guilt. and that good news is the news I share with you this morning if you have not yet answered this question.

This good news that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. That Jesus came and lived a perfect life that none of us could live but that all of us need to have in our account before a holy God.

And Jesus went to the cross as a substitute for sinners. He died in their place so that all those who put their trust in him would be saved.

Jesus came and he did what the scripture said he would do that he would give his life as a ransom for many. And because of that, sinners can be reconciled to God.

[ 36 : 03 ] And so I urge you this morning in the midst of whatever you're dealing with, whatever you're facing, recognize that getting the answers to it is not near as important as responding to this particular question.

What must I do to be saved? And that is that you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that you do that.

And if you do that, I believe that you would find that the questions that you have in general, that you can put them in a better perspective because you have answered the most important question, which is to come to know Jesus Christ, home to know his salvation.

Would you pray with me? Father, we thank you this morning that in the midst of life's unanswered questions and things that are beyond our understanding, we are able to know a peace that only comes from you.

We are able to humble ourselves, we are able to trust in you, we are able to hope in you. Oh Lord, I thank you for those of us who are able to do that even though questions remain.

[ 37 : 45 ] And oh Father, I pray for those who may be distracted by life's questions and have not answered the most important question.

Would you work by your spirit in this moment and would you cause each person who do not know you to believe the gospel and to trust in Jesus and to know him in the pardon of their sins.

Lord, would you do the work that only you can do right now. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Let's stand for our closing song.