

# Psalm 131

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 03 January 2021

Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0:00] Let me ask you to open up your word to Psalm 131. Psalm 131. Let me lead us in a prayer for the hearing of God's word.

Father God, as we open up your word this morning, we recognize that we need your help to hear from it. And Father, we need to hear from you this morning. So Lord, we ask that you would work mightily by your spirit as I speak from your word and as your people hear it.

And receive it. Father, help it to change us from one degree of glory to another. And we pray this in Christ's name and for his sake. Amen. All right.

Psalm 131. Before I read it, beloved, let me remind you that this is God's word to us written for his glory and our good. We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

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.

[1:08] 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.

There is much unknown about the date or occasion of the writing of this psalm. We do know, however, that David is its author and that he was a man of ambition.

He was a king, a husband, a soldier, an administrator, and a poet. David was a busy man. He stabilized and built up a kingdom and he was troubled at every turn.

He had ambition and a lot on his plate. But despite all of that, all that was going on in his life, in this world, this psalm gives us a glimpse into the soul of a man who is at rest.

David was a man who had learned the secret of having a calm and quieted soul. Are you at rest this morning?

[2:19] Is your soul calmed and quieted within you today? Or do you find yourself in a state of stress or anxiety or worry?

Is your soul, rather than being calm and quiet, rather noisy? What is the source of this noise?

Our lives are full of many challenges. Our souls are encroached upon at every turn by some trouble. This past year, we have felt the need to become epidemiologists, economists, political theorists, and sociologists.

We are unsure of what will come next, which tends toward a noisiness in our souls. I have felt this, despite all my encouragement to you over these past months.

Many things can be blamed for us not being at rest, for our uncalmed and unquieted souls, for the noisiness that is within us, for our lack of peace.

[3:30] But the blame does not lie without, but David tells us, rather, that it lies within. In his closing comments to the Thessalonian church, Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 3, verse 16, Paul prays that God would provide peace, calmed and quieted souls at all times in every way.

No matter the circumstances, no matter what is happening around you, inner calm and quiet is possible. So let's consider this matter together with three questions and the answers that David provides for us by the inspiration of God.

And let us recognize that we have some work ahead of us. All of us have noisy souls at one time or another, and we may have experienced this in greater measure at the close of this year and the beginning of this coming year.

Charles Spurgeon said in a commentary on Psalm 131, Psalm 131 is one of the shortest psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn.

Let us be about that work this morning by asking the following three questions. Number one, why do we lack inner calm and quiet?

[5:07] Number two, how do we have inner calm and quiet? And number three, who is the source of inner calm and quiet?

So question one, why do we lack inner calm and quiet? Let's not forget that we are looking into a moment of David's life in which he is at rest.

In his writing, he is presently at rest. But if we take the positive statements of verse one and consider them in the negative, we can understand that the lack of inner calm and quiet comes from pride.

Here's Psalm 131 in verse one in the negative, in the opposite, right? David's at rest. Let's hear what it would say if he was not at rest.

God, I feel proud. I am looking to and desiring things that are beyond your intentions for me. I am occupied with matters outside of my control.

[6:12] When read this way, we can see that David's statements in verse one are against these ideas. He is not these things. But if he were, he would not have inner calm and quiet.

If his life was characterized by pride in these ways, his soul would be in turmoil and it would be noisy. A life of self-exaltation and self-reliance and self-governance is not a life at rest because it takes on roles that are not ours to own.

They are too big for us. And we should entrust our identity and our provision and our direction to the one who can handle such matters. We must know our place if we are to have inner calm and quiet.

David addresses this peace-robbing pride in this psalm in all of its insidious forms and combats it at the levels of feeling, at appearing, and at acting.

At the beginning of verse one, we see in his feeling he addresses it. Oh, Lord, my heart is not lifted up. The phrase my heart here meaning his inner being, his very core of who he is, his thoughts, his desires, his emotions.

[7:36] He did not think or feel too much of himself. A lack of inner calm and quiet can come from considering ourselves greater than we really are because deep down we know our shortcomings and putting on a show to protect others' perception of us is absolutely exhausting.

We know deep down that we are not God. We know that we cannot know everything. And yet, we feel the pressure to act as if we can.

I think it's a great scheme of the devil to take what many people call the fear of missing out.

Everybody wanted to know which color the dress was online.

You had to know or else you couldn't talk to other people about what was going on. All the things that go around on social media. And he's turned that into matters that are serious. We all feel the pressure to know exactly what we ought to think about any given thing.

This past year has been full of opinions, hasn't it? How do we know? How should we navigate? It becomes this pressure to be able to answer all of the questions.

[8:52] And frankly, we can't. We just can't. I came across this quote by Eugene Peterson earlier this week.

And it's specifically about preachers, but I hope you hear it in the application to all of us. He said, we are most of us Augustinians in our pulpits. High view of the sovereignty of God in all things.

We preach the sovereignty of our Lord, the primacy of grace, the glory of God. But the minute we leave our pulpits, we become Pelagians. Pelagius argued for work salvation.

Augustine and him had a great debate over this. In our committee meetings and planning sessions, in our obsessive attempts to meet the expectations of people, in our anxiety to please, in our hurry to cover all the bases, we practice a theology that puts moral effort as the primary element in pleasing God.

And we have all been doing this this year. Saying on the one hand, our Lord is sovereign over all things, but acting as if we matter so much.

[10:04] We've done this in so very many ways. Recognize your feeling at the core of who you are, that there are things outside of your control.

David also addresses this as it comes to appearance. He says, my eyes are not raised too high. This phrase is a reference to his countenance, to how he looks on the outside.

If he were to look to the way he looks or to the things that make him look good, then he would not have inner calm and quiet. Contentment, true soul-satisfying contentment, never comes from without.

Has nothing to do with the way we appear. Has everything to do with who our God is to us. And also, he says, in his acting, he says, I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

Did David act? Of course he did. But he was not a listless man, but he did not act outside of his ordered purpose and sphere of control.

[11:16] The more I grow in maturity in Christ, the more I realize how very small my sphere of control really is. Has God granted to me responsibilities? Absolutely.

Are there things I must do as a husband and a father and a pastor? Of course, right? There's too many things. I have so much to do, but I can't control any of it.

My sphere is around my very feet. It's around my own attitude as I tackle the things that God has laid before me. A person who is always at work trying to control matters that they cannot control will not be at rest.

You could do nothing about some things. We trouble ourselves with stuff that ought not trouble us. So pride, you see, robs us of inner calm and quiet.

Not understanding and enjoying our place in the cosmos makes our souls noisy. John Calvin, I put this on your bulletin today.

[12:25] In Heart of Flame, speaking of this text, said, Those who, like David, submit themselves to God, keeping in their own sphere, moderate in their desires, will enjoy a life of tranquility and assurance.

Doesn't that sound nice? Tranquility and assurance. This brings us to the second of our questions, which is, How do we have inner calm and quiet?

We do not feel or appear or act in pride. We do not think too much of ourselves and respond accordingly.

David says, Oh 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.

This is the way we humble ourselves. I am but a man created by a creator who reigns over all things.

[13:30] Paul writes to the Roman believers in the first part of Romans chapter 12 and verse 2, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

As we think on the truth, we will feel the truth, be motivated by the truth, and act according to the truth.

Too many of us are being disciplined by our culture. Too many of us are spending way too much time on social media.

Social media is an expression of the reality, but it is not the reality. There is a lot of stuff that happens online that doesn't happen person to person, face to face, and so much of it does not accord with the truth.

The average college student spends two and a half hours a day on social media. I'd like for you to stop and think for a moment. How much time do you think you spend a day on social media, being disciplined by the culture?

[14:38] There's helpful things out there. I'm not saying that there's not some reason to be on social media. There's helpful stuff. There's helpful people, resources that are good for us. How much time do you spend taking in garbage, things that don't make you humble, things that don't quiet your soul, but rather work you up into a frenzy?

Turn on talk radio. You will find a channel that will upset you as you drive in your car. How much of that are you allowing to discipline you? What if instead you spent just a little bit of that time in God's word?

Let God speak to your soul. I've done this math for you before, and I wouldn't expect that anybody would do this. I think it'd be unreasonable for anybody to do this, but if you took that time instead, two and a half hours a day, five days a week, 50 weeks out of the year, so I'm giving you some time

to still be on social media, but if you instead read the Bible, average reading speed, instead, do you know how many times in a year you could read the scripture?

Eight and a half times. Eight and a half times. John Piper famously said that the one thing that Facebook will accomplish for us at the end of all things is to show that we had time to pray, and I would say, and read our Bibles.

What are you being disciplined by? I will tell you, it is a stressful thing to be a pastor in our age, knowing that the sheep go out and spend countless hours being disciplined by the culture, and I've got roughly a half an hour to preach a sermon on a Sunday morning.

[16:23] How could I possibly? The truth is I can't. It's not possible to speak to every fear you may have, every anxiety that comes up, everything that disquiets your soul.

It's not possible. Sermons are important. They're not enough to be in the scripture all the time. In order to be at peace, we must think rightly.

We must be transformed by the renewal of our minds, be able to take in the stuff that's going on around us and think biblically about it.

David recognizes his place. That's what he expresses in this psalm. He knows his place. He combats pride and puts on humility through careful consideration of what God would have him be concerned with and what God would not have him be concerned with.

Let me show you another text that speaks to this. I want you to keep yourself marked in Psalm 131. Turn with me to Philippians chapter 4. I'm going to begin reading in verse 4.

[17:52] Singing strains my voice more than I realized. Beginning in verse 4. Paul writes, Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice.

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. Pause for a second. Has reasonableness defined the Christian church in America this past year?

I hope it's defined ours. I'm not so sure. Has it defined the American church as we can observe it, right? On social media?

Gosh, no. No, it has not. Paul goes on to say, the last part of verse 5, The Lord is at hand. We are to reason, to know the truth and rightly express the truth that God is near.

We have his very presence because of the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. Verse 6. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

[19:07] This is written by Paul who is presently, when he's writing this letter, in a Roman prison. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. This is the life that we are meant to live in a trying time.

And beloved, this is not trying compared to the times of trial that the church has experienced throughout the history of the church. I would say to you this morning, for a practical application, read the scripture.

Read more and more of the scripture. Get a higher view of God and his sovereignty and his control of the world. As a second application, read a little bit of church history. Understand just a little what the church has endured throughout the ages and what much of the church endures today.

[20:24] This is light and momentary affliction compared to the light and momentary affliction of the church throughout time and space. All of the uncertainty, all of the challenge is really rather minor in comparison to what we see the church suffering.

And all of this ought to give us a greater confidence in who our God is. This God of peace who will be with us. This God who is at hand, who is with us and who grants to us calmed and quieted souls. Look again at the result of David believing in the truth. Back in Psalm 131, verse 2, he says, But I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

David uses a simile here to express the degree of his calm and quiet. John Piper, speaking of this text, says, This weaned child is a picture of contentment.

The unweaned child is frantically rooting around and craves milk for his stomach. The weaned child is simply enjoying the way it feels to be in the lap of his mother.

[21:48] He is satisfied. And it is not about his stomach. It's about his heart. Piper's just saying the child is just happy to be held. It's not looking for anything from the mom except to be with the mom.

Piper goes on to say, This is a picture of David's restfulness, contentment, satisfaction, joy, peace, and the secure, loving presence of God.

End quote. David renounces self-exaltation and self-reliance and self-governance and trusts God with his identity and his provision and his direction.

Which brings us to the final verse of this short psalm and our final question. Who is the source of inner calm and quiet? I know that I've answered the question.

I hope you've answered it in your own mind already. David says in verse 3, O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.

[22:51] David, having experienced the inner calm and quiet that comes from God, calls the people of God to also hope in him. Here in David's appeal, a call to you.

He calls Israel by name and if you have believed in Christ, he calls to you and he calls you to hope in the Lord. Psalm 131 is paired with Psalm 130, which is most likely also written by David and expresses trust in God's mercy.

It is aimed at helping those who have trusted in Christ to see themselves as forgiven people, granted the right to enter God's presence because of his mercy. mercy.

It finds its author in a state of restlessness but looking to God for rest. Let's read it, the eight verses, beginning in verse 1.

out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy.

[24:02] If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared. I wait for the Lord.

My soul waits and in his word I hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord.

For with the Lord there is steadfast love and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. So in times of trouble, when our souls are not calmed and are not quieted, we can look to the God of our salvation and hope in him.

We can be humbled by his great mercy toward us. We can trust God with our identity and our provision and our direction. We can know that God is for us because we are his people and because we have peace with him.

that tumult that existed before we were in Christ no longer exists and therefore we can be calmed and quieted.

[25:14] Recall the words of Jesus from Matthew chapter 11 that I read previously beginning in verse 28. Jesus says, Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

So are you at rest this morning? Is your soul calmed and quieted within you today or do you find yourself in a state of stress or anxiety or worry?

Is your soul noisy this morning? We, I think, have some work to do in this area. Some meditation to do on these good promises of God to us.

Taking up and reading his word and understanding that he is a God that we can hope in from this time forth and forevermore. We ought to be an unshakable people and immovable people because we have a confidence in such a great God.

[26:28] So I hope that you can join with me in saying, 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.

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 together. Let's pray together.