

Psalm 131

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[0 : 00] Please take out your copy of God's Word and turn with me to Psalm 131. We'll break today from our exposition of the book of Acts because it just didn't seem like the right Sunday to consider Acts chapter 24, which is Paul's trial before Felix.

I read it at the beginning of the week and went, nah, I don't think it's what I needed today. I don't think it's what you needed.

So we're going to look together at Psalm 131 in brief and in brief by design. It's my intention, although sometimes I intend and it doesn't work out that way, to be brief this morning.

Before I read Psalm 131, let me remind you, beloved, this is God's Word to us. It was written for His glory and for our good.

And as such, we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands. I begin in verse 1. Oh, Lord, my heart is not lifted up.

[1 : 14] 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. Oh, 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. Most scholars think that David was still in the courts of Saul in this time.

So we don't know exactly when. We don't know exactly the occasion as we do with many of the psalms. But we do know, however, that David is its author. And we do know that David was a man of great ambition.

He was a king, a husband, although unfaithful, a soldier, an administrator. He was a poet. David was a busy man.

[2 : 27] He stabilized and built a kingdom. He was troubled at every turn. He had constant enemies everywhere he went.

He had ambition and a lot on his plate. But despite all of that, all the things that were happening in his 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 peace. 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? What is the source of this noise if you find yourself in that place this morning?

Our lives are certainly full of many challenges at every turn.

[3 : 37] Our souls are encroached upon by some kind of trouble at all times. I believe as a church we are experiencing a time of stress.

I sense that there's just this general angst amongst us. If you don't know what angst is, it's the anticipation of doom. And I think that's because we've said many goodbyes in the last couple of months.

All good goodbyes, but great couples moving off to different places. Wonderful people headed to the mission field.

And today we're saying a rather significant goodbye to the faithful leadership of Wes and the service of his wife Liz. I don't think that we are at rest this morning.

We feel unsure of what will come. We're not at peace. I felt this. Despite all of my encouragement to you, I felt this way.

[4 : 41] In our lives, many things can be blamed for us not being at rest. It's very easy to say, but of course I feel this way. Look at what's happening to me.

But our uncalmed and unquieted souls, the lack of peace in our lives, David teaches us, the blame does not lie without, but the blame rather lies within.

In his closing comments to the Thessalonian church, Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 3.16, Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way.

The Lord be with you all. 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 peace 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.

[5 : 57] And let us recognize that we have some work ahead of us, right? And if you're not feeling the pain of the loss of the Sheldonians this morning, you may be a guest with us this morning and you have no idea who they even are to us.

All of us, followers of Jesus Christ, need to be working toward being perfected in this area of our lives. Like Charles Spurgeon said of this psalm, Psalm 131 is one of the shortest psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn.

So the questions for today are as follows. Number one, why do we lack peace? Why do we lack peace? Number two, how do we have peace?

How? How is it that we gain, that we have, obtain for ourselves peace? How do we have peace?

And number three, who is the source of peace?

Number one, why do we lack peace? Now let's not forget in Psalm 131 that we're looking into a moment of David's life in which he is at rest.

[7 : 13] It's a glimpse, right? It's a moment in time in which he's pinning this psalm to us and we're seeing him at rest. In his writing, he is presently at peace.

But if we take the positive statements of verse one and consider them in the negative, like we flip them on their head, we can understand that the lack of peace comes from pride.

The lack of peace comes from pride. Here's Psalm 131 verse one in the negative. This is my writing, so please know. This is not inspired. But I'm flipping my understanding of Psalm 131 verse one over on its head to say this.

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

Now when we're wed this way, we can see that David's statements in verse one are against these ideas, the things I just said. He is not these things, but if he were, he would not have peace.

[8 : 27] If his life was characterized by pride in these ways, his soul would be in turmoil and it would be noisy within. A life of self-exaltation and self-reliance and self-governance is not a life at peace because it takes on roles that are not ours to own.

They are too big for us.

At the level of appearing and at the level of acting. Look at the way in which he combats this type of indwelling pride. The level of feeling at the beginning of verse one.

Oh Lord, my heart is not lifted up. The phrase my heart here meaning his inner being, his thoughts, his desires, his emotions.

He did not think or feel too much of himself. A lack of peace can come from considering ourselves greater than we really are because deep down we know our shortcomings.

[10 : 01] Some people are not willing to admit their shortcomings, but we know it deep down that we fall short of the standards we set for ourselves. And putting on a show to protect that standard, people's perception of us is exhausting.

It's peace robbing. It's peace destroying. So he attacks it at the level of feeling, this kind of pride. He attacks this kind of pride at the level of appearance.

He says, my eyes are not raised too high. This phrase is a reference to his countenance. To the way in which he appears to others.

If he were to look to the way he looks or to things to make him look good, he would not have peace. Contentment, true soul satisfying contentment, never comes from without.

It always comes by the grace God works within. He also combats this peace robbing pride at the level of acting.

[11 : 10] He says, I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. Did David act? Of course he did.

He was a king. We mentioned the many things that he was about the work of doing. This is not a man who has abandoned life and therefore he's at rest.

This is a man very engaged in life, but he's doing so humbly. He wasn't listless, but he did not act outside of his ordered purpose and sphere of control.

A person who is always at work trying to control matters that they cannot control will not have peace. So, pride in this way, thinking too much of ourselves and therefore too little of God robs us of peace.

Not understanding and enjoying our place in the cosmos makes our souls noisy. I want your bulletin quote that I provided for you today from John Calvin.

[12:23] It's from that book I commended to you and offered to you, Heart Aflame on the Psalm. And he wrote, 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.

So, this brings us to a second of our questions, which is, how then, how is it that we have peace? If pride robs us of, if pride is the destroyer of peace, well then how is it that we are to have peace? To be humble before God. We do not feel or appear or act in pride, but rather from humility. We do not think too much of ourselves and respond accordingly. David says, 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. Paul writes to the Roman believers in the first part of Romans chapter 12, verse 2, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal, what?

[13:44] Your mind. By the renewal of your mind. Beloved, we are dichotomous beings, right? There is the external man, the physical man, and there's the internal man.

Don't complicate that matter. Right? The way we think is who we are. And so as we think on the truth, we will feel the truth, be motivated by the truth, and act according to the truth.

In order to be at peace, we must think rightly. David, you see, recognizes his place. He's considered it.

And he can make this expression to God. 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. I know my place in the world. He combats pride and puts on humility through careful consideration of what God would have him concerned with and what God would have him not concerned with.

[14:55] So turn with me, if you will. Please mark Psalm 131. We will come back to it, but to Philippians chapter 4. I'd like to make this point further.

Remember, often when we think of Philippians 4, 4 through 6 typically, but I'm going to go on down through 9, we have in mind anxiety.

Right? Verse 6 says, do not be anxious about anything. But we could see in that unrest. Right? This is the opposite. This is the noisy soul. This is the soul that's not at peace in verse 6.

And how is it that Paul instructs us? What is it that we are to do to have peace? Paul and David would have gotten along very well in this matter.

So beginning of verse 4, Paul says, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. And we see right there at the very beginning of verse 4, right?

[16:04] A humility that finds itself finding joy, right? Not in the circumstances of the world, but in God Himself. Right? Rejoicing in the Lord.

It's not a burden to Him. He'll say it again. Rejoice. Find great joy in God. He goes on in verse 5 to say, let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

The Lord is at hand. So he's saying we are to reason, to know the truth, and then to take that truth that's known, our reasonableness, and rightly express that truth, which is what?

What is the truth that we're to rightly express? Right? The Lord is at hand. He is near. We have His presence. We can rejoice in the Lord because we have His presence.

And therefore, verse 6, not be anxious about anything. Not be anxious about anything. Not have noisy souls.

[17:08] Uncalmed, unquieted souls. And you need to see at the beginning of verse 6 that this is an exhortation. It's a command to not be anxious.

And so, beloved, you need to understand that if you are anxious, if you find that you're worried, if your soul is not at rest, it's sin. Do not be anxious about anything.

But, halfway through verse 6, But in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

So, this close God, this near God, this at-hand God, right, that we can rejoice in. We simply make our requests known to Him. Mixing in that, the thanksgiving that He has been good to us, and He will continue to be good to us as He's promised.

And then verse 7 gives us the beautiful promise. And not everywhere in the Scriptures do we have commands for right living, and then promises that immediately accompany them. Do you know that? There's places in the Scripture where we are meant to live in a certain way, and the outcome is not guaranteed of that way of living.

[18 : 21] The thing that's coming to my mind as we've been doing counseling training together is in 1 Peter, when Peter instructs women whose husbands are not obedient to the Word to win their husbands without a word.

But there's no promise in the text that if you just prayerfully submit to Him, He will become the leader that He's meant to be. There's no promise of that. But we have a promise here. It's really precious when we find promises like this.

So if we're doing this activity, verses 4 through 6, Paul says, And the peace of God, the peace that comes from God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

But then he goes on. Many of us stop at the end of verse 7, But he goes on, verse 8, Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there's any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

So set your mind on the things of God. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Verse 9, Which you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and then what?

[19 : 40] The God of peace will be with you. It's a beautiful, beautiful promise as we find ourselves noisy inside.

So turn with me back to Psalm 131. And look at the result of David believing the truth. He believes the truth.

He's been thinking about the truth. He's being transformed by the renewing of his mind. And look at the result in verse 2. He says, I have calmed and quieted my soul.

By this activity of rightly understanding, believing the truth, David says, I have calmed and quieted my soul. And then he uses a simile, Like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

If you don't know what a weaned child is, it's a child that's no longer breastfeeding. So taking off milk in that way. We have no unweaned children. Praise the Lord.

[20 : 46] We have extra time in our day now. John Piper says this of the result that David expresses to us. This weaned child is a picture of contentment.

The unweaned child is frantically rooting around and craves milk for his stomach. Parents, we understand this, right? What a child is like when they are desperately hungry.

The weaned child is simply enjoying the way it feels to be in the lap of his mother. He is satisfied. And it is not about his stomach.

It's about his heart. This is a picture of David's restfulness, contentment, satisfaction, joy, peace, and the secure, loving presence of God.

The weaned child no longer looks to the mother simply as a source of food, but as a source of comfort, as a place to rest.

[21 : 45] It's a powerful simile that David is using. 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 the final question, which we have answered in part already, who is the source of peace? Who is the source of peace? Recall that in verse 2, David says, but I have calmed and quieted my soul. And so why draw out this connection? Who is the source of peace? And I'd say to you, the God of peace. How do we arrive at that? Because in verse 3, he says, O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.

Having experienced the peace of God, he's now calling to the people of God to also experience the peace of God. Hoping in the Lord.

And so it's not inaccurate for David to say, but I have calmed and quieted my soul because the Christian life, the life of sanctification, involves God's work and our work.

[23 : 01] We must work. We must pick up the truth and we must consider the truth. We must meditate upon the truth. And then when we believe the truth, and in this case, our soul is quieted and we have peace, we praise God for the way that He works truth within us.

This is not a thing the natural man does. This is a thing that the spiritual man does. God comes alongside of us and works perfection within us. So, David having experienced this peace that comes from God calls the people of God to also hope in Him.

Here, in David's appeal, a call to you. I read this, right? O Nathan, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.

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.

Now, part of the people of God. Now, Psalm 131 is paired and rightly paired with Psalm 130.

[24 : 16] Psalm 130 was 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, as God's people forgiven, granted the right to enter God's presence because of His mercy.

It finds its author on the other side of peace. Right? So, this is pre-peace. I don't think these psalms were written in this order, but they're paired together for this reason in the original manuscripts.

On the other side of peace, but looking to God for it. So, you may find yourself in this place this morning. You may relate more to the David, we think, of Psalm 130 and less to the David of Psalm 131.

How is it that we move from one to the other? Right? This consideration of the truth. Who is it that we hope in? So, let me read for our benefit. Psalm 130, beginning of 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.

[25 : 42] If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? And the answer is no one. 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.

Here it is again. 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.

Right? Because of God's great mercy, He will save His people. So, we have great reason to hope in Him. So, in times of trouble, whatever those troubles may be, 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.

[26 : 57] And therefore, we can have peace. So, let me ask again. Are you at rest this morning? Is your soul calmed and quieted with you in this day?

Or do you find yourself in a state of stress or anxiety or worry? Is your soul noisy this morning?

I hope you can join with me by the close of our service and with David in saying, 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. But I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

Oh, Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.