

Psalm 131

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[0:00] The chapter is, come on Christ the King people. Psalm 117, very good. That has two verses. Our chapter has a whopping three verses.

I'll try and get through it in the time that's been allotted to me. But don't let its brevity fool you. What it lacks in length, it makes up for in light.

This psalm is a lamp that we need for our feet with our sinful hearts living in our particular culture. So don't let its brevity fool you.

As Charles Spurgeon says, Psalm 131 is one of the shortest chapters to read. But it's one of the longest psalms to learn.

It might be one of the shortest psalms to read, but it is one of the longest to learn. So let's make a concerted effort to not just read it this morning, but to begin to learn it.

[1:04] With that said, let's read our psalm. Psalm 131, Oh, Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forward.

The psalm is constructed in two parts. The first is structured around a contrast between what David refuses to do on the one hand and what he's already done on the other.

That's verses 1 and 2. In the second part, verse 3, David urges God's people toward what they should be doing.

So in part 1, David, what he refuses to do and what he's already done. And then in part 2, verse 3, what we as the people of God should be doing.

In the first part, David is addressing the Lord. That is, Yahweh. Remember, when you see the Lord in all caps in your Bible, that means it represents God's personal name.

[2:27] If God is what he is, the Lord, Yahweh, is who he is. But notice in the second part, verse 3, David turns to address all Israel, the people of God.

Notice how verse 3 begins with, Oh, Israel. That's how we can tell there's two different parts to this psalm. There's two different audiences. Let's begin with the contrast that makes up part 1.

Notice the word not is used three times at the beginning of the psalm. My heart is not lifted up. My eyes are not raised too high.

I do not occupy myself with things too great and marvelous for me. So this is something that David doesn't do, something he refuses to do.

But what does it mean for a heart to be lifted up? What does it mean to have eyes that are raised too high? These are common expressions in Scripture.

[3:35] The word for lifted up is sometimes translated as haughty. Thinking you're better than others. Thinking that you're superior.

You look down on others because of your self-perceived importance. Paul gets at this idea when he says, Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think.

When your heart is lifted up, it means you esteem yourself more highly than you ought to. You've exalted yourself in your heart. Similarly, when your eyes are raised too high, you are setting your sights on things that are out of reach.

Such a person is characterized by ambition. You covet something. You aspire to be something. Your eyes are filled with the greed of wanting to be something more than you are. You ever feel that way? You're not. So David is saying that he has kept himself back from a prideful attitude of heart.

[4:49] I refuse to think of myself as more important than others. I refuse, David says, to have an inflated view of my own gifting. My own abilities.

My own contribution. David began with his heart. Then he moved to his eyes.

And now he moves to his feet. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. The word translated occupy literally means to walk.

And the ESV does a good job of getting to the heart of the expression. To walk in something too great or too wonderful means to try and deal in matters beyond your capacity. In other words, David recognizes that he has limits. There are things beyond David's understanding.

[5:54] There are things outside of David's control. There are things David doesn't have the necessary clearance for. In other words, David is saying that he doesn't spend his time trying to do things that God hasn't assigned to him.

He doesn't spend his time trying to do things that God hasn't given him. For David, a calm and quiet soul is a product of living within limits.

A bit of self-disclosure here. Perhaps a number of you can relate to a recent season of life for me. I was working long hours. Going in early.

Coming home late. Stressed. I struggled to be a joyful presence with my family.

Felt like I lived life under an ever-present cloud. I don't know if you ever feel that way. Easily frustrated with my kids when they'd misbehave.

[7:10] Emotionally distant at times even with those who are closest to me. And I was convinced that this was just my cross to bear. I thought my unquiet soul was a product of my position.

Right? I'm a pastor. After all, I'm doing the Lord's work. I'm doing my best to put God's gifts to good use. And if that meant routinely going in early or coming home late or staying up late into the night to write sermons like this one, then that's just how it had to be.

Right? But what the Lord used David to teach me through this psalm is that an unquiet soul is not a product of my position. It's a product of my pride.

Right? It's a product of a heart that wants to impress. It's a product of eyes that are raised too high. It may be that my eyes or your eyes are raised too high.

If we're blowing past God-given limits. If our emotional resiliency is running thin. If our constant busyness robs us of the necessary exercise or sleep or healthy community.

[8:30] If we're burning ourselves out in pursuit of another promotion. Requiring more things. Might it be that our hearts are a bit inflated with pride?

Psalms 127. Just maybe a page back. It's written by David's son. Who seemed to learn this lesson well.

He says in verses 1 and 2. Unless the Lord builds the house. Those who build it labor in vain.

Unless the Lord watches over the city.

The watchman stays awake in vain. In other words. If God's not in it. You're wasting your time. It's in vain that you rise up early.

And go late to rest. Eating the bread of anxious toil. Man, I just feel like I need to work hard to please God.

[9:37] To earn a smile from God. And Solomon says that is a worthless pursuit. That is in vain. For God gives to his beloved sleep.

God wants you to be a soul at rest. Love the way Dane Ortlund puts it. He says we live from the smile of God. More than we try and live for the smile of God. God gives to his beloved sleep.

We don't want to busy ourselves in a vain pursuit of doing what God hasn't assigned us to do. Or try and get what God hasn't given. Now back to Psalm 131.

The contrast. Notice in verse 2 it begins with the word but. Here's what David has done. So verse 1 what he refuses to do. Now here's what he has done.

I have calmed and quieted my soul. It's not that his heart doesn't long at times for something more. He's tempted to think highly of himself.

[10:50] He's tempted to be driven by ambition and marked by arrogance. But David has made a concerted effort to quiet those thoughts when they come.

The words calmed and quieted provide the striking contrast between verses 1 and 2. He has refused the restless pursuit of verse 1 in lieu of the rest and peace of verse 2.

In light of the contrast, Christopher Ashe helpfully says, One of the surprises of Psalm 131 is that the cause of an unquiet soul is not simply anxiety or pressure, but pride.

David continues with an image that only heightens the contrast between verse 1 and 2. Like a weaned child with its mother.

Like a weaned child is my soul within me. David likens himself to a child on his mother's lap. Not crying out.

[12:06] Not wanting to be fed. At peace. Just content to be with mom. I know that she'll provide what I need.

Rather than thinking too highly of himself, David compares himself to a little child. See the contrast? I love the way Joe Rigney puts it. He says, David is comforted by his own smallness.

The more that you grow up in Christ, the more you begin to feel a sense of your own smallness.

And as we mature in Christ, we begin to be comforted by that smallness.

I'm just a child on my heavenly father's lap. And he'll provide what I need. I don't need to work or earn something that God isn't willing to give as though I'm trying to pry it from his fingers.

God gives to his children good gifts. I can trust him. God gives to him.

[13:38] So they are doing the opposite of what David refused to do in verse 1. Right? What David refused to do, here are the disciples in that very disposition. And what does Jesus do in response?

Taking his cues from David, he puts a child in front of them. And he said, truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

You see, at the heart of what it means to follow Jesus is becoming like a child on mom's lap. Not grabbing for something God hasn't given.

Not marked by a restless pursuit, but cultivating rest and peace. Content just to be held by such a good and caring God.

Is that you? Jesus continues saying, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

[14:43] Greatness in God's kingdom is for those who are content to be small. That's what David has come to terms with here in Psalm 131.

I imagine that David wrote this psalm after he was anointed as king. Here's David. He's a young man.

Promised to be king one day. But for now, he's just a shepherd out in the field with the sheep. David is the recipient of such precious and great promises.

And he could have let those promises or the anointing as king go to his head. He could have become inflated with pride. Or driven by restless ambition to seize the throne.

But instead, David contented himself with just being a little child on his mom's lap. He contented himself with patiently waiting for God's promise to come to pass.

[15:48] I think that's how David calmed and quieted his soul. He recited those precious and great promises and trusted God at his word.

So if you're asking the question, what does it mean to calm and quiet our soul? I think the answer is taking God at his word.

And I'll explain that in just a minute as to why I think that. Here's David. Trusting that God will bring his promises to pass at the perfect time.

I can just be content here in God's presence. And the reason I think that there's a connection between calming and quieting in verse 2 and patiently waiting for God to bring his promises to pass is how David moves from the first section in verses 1 and 2 to the second section in verse 3.

So now God moves from addressing the Lord. It moves from a prayer in verses 1 and 2. Oh, Lord.

[17:01] Right? He's praying to the Lord. And now he's moving to address Israel with an encouragement. With a command. And he does so saying, hope in the Lord.

Right? That's the instruction from David here at the end of the psalm. Hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. And that word for hope literally means wait.

Wait on the Lord. What's David learn from this experience of calming and quieting his own soul? What does he want to impart onto the people of God?

It's to wait on the Lord. Patient waiting for God's promises is the process of calming and quieting our souls.

This psalm is built on the rock of God's faithfulness. See, David is trusting God to provide. If God has promised something, then God will be faithful to bring what he has promised to pass.

[18:04] And so I don't have to eat the bread of anxious toil. I can trust my heavenly Father.

Maybe some of us are carrying the burden of anxiety and stress.

Underneath a pressure that God never meant to be on our shoulders. But that pressure is coming from within.

A heart that's prioritizing the wrong things. Disciplined by our culture, we're after achievement and productivity and accomplishment. We want to impress.

We want to be perceived as important in the eyes of others. So there's this pressure as a mom. Or as an employee. Or as a friend. Meanwhile, God wants us to calm and quiet our souls by patiently waiting for his promises to come to pass.

[19:17] We can hope in the Lord because the Lord is faithful to his promises. Maybe some of you are coming in this morning feeling hopeless.

Feeling like you lack a sense of joy. Feeling like you don't have a dollar to your name. Feeling lonely. So I want to invite you into these precious and very great promises.

If David knew that God was faithful from his own experiences, how much more do we have reason to know God's faithfulness? Because he sent his son into the world. To die on a cross.

To be buried and to be raised from the dead. So that God's promises to us might come to pass through the person of Jesus Christ. We have every reason to trust God's faithfulness.

To patiently hope in the Lord. And so this morning, if you're feeling hopeless, I want to invite you into the hope that there is in Jesus Christ. There is an inheritance that is unfading.

[20:29] Never going away. Undeified. Imperishable, as Peter would say. And it is for those who believe and trust in Christ.

There is a rich fellowship with Jesus where you can come to know the very source of joy and satisfaction and light and life. He invites you to eternal life with him on the basis of his death and resurrection.

We have every reason to take David at his word that we should hope in the Lord. So I want to invite you out of the season of pressure.

Anxious toil and stress. And into a life of calming and quieting your soul on the very promises of God. As Charles Spurgeon said, Psalm 131 is one of the shortest psalms to read, but it's one of the longest psalms to learn.

So how do we learn it? How do we learn to patiently calm and quiet our souls so that we're operating from a place of rest and not anxiety?

[21:39] Well, certainly we can learn it from David through his experiences as we encounter it in Psalm 131. But I want to encourage us to learn it not just from David, but from David's son, Jesus.

Another point in the Gospels, Jesus is calling out to anyone who would hear him and he says, Take my yoke upon you. All you who are weary and heavy laden.

Everybody who's tired of trying to live this restless lifestyle. You feel like you're burnt out and worn down. I'm calling all of you who are tired this morning to come and take my yoke upon you, Jesus says.

Learn from me. Anybody know the next part?

Rest for your souls. Jesus says, I want you to come and learn from me what it means to be gentle and lowly in heart. Take my yoke upon you.

[22:47] Jesus is not some authoritative taskmaster, but he is gentle and lowly in heart and he invites you into a life finding rest for your soul.

And so let us learn the lesson of Psalm 131, not just from David, but from David's son, Jesus. Learn what it means to come and sit on Jesus' lap.

There's the story of Mary and Martha in the Gospels, which is a beautiful one, where Martha is frustrated, tired, working. She sees her sister Mary just sitting at the feet of Jesus.

And she says, Jesus, tell my sister to help. You know what Jesus says? Oh, Martha. You're anxious about a lot of things, but Mary, sitting at my feet, has chosen the good part.

There's an instruction there for us as followers of Jesus that the good part, the life that Jesus is calling us to is life lived at his feet. Life lived in his lap, so to speak.

[23:56] Learn from me what it means to be gentle and lowly in heart. To have a heart that's not lifted up. Eyes that aren't raised too high.

Feet that don't occupy themselves with things too great or too marvelous, but a life just content with the very lot God has provided for us. There's a beautiful Christian book called The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment.

It's a Puritan book written hundreds of years ago by a man named Jeremiah Burroughs. And I love that phrase, The Rare Jewel. He's speaking the very preciousness of Christian contentment.

And what he says about Christian contentment is that it's a sweet inward disposition whereby we trust and rejoice in the very disposal of God in every season of life.

That means whatever God has given us, wherever God has us, whatever God has given us to do in this season of life, I'm going to be content to live in this season, resting in my Father's care.

[25 : 12] I'm not trying to be somebody else. I'm not stretching myself thin for another promotion. I'm not thinking the grass is greener on the other side of having a different wife or a different job or a different house.

Cooler vacations. No, I am content with what my Father has given me in this season of life. And so I will live joyfully happy with what God has given me now.

And that, my friends, is a rare jewel. But you might be thinking, wait a minute. Is the Christian life purely like passive, right? Where we just sit in our Heavenly Father's life.

Aren't we to pick up our cross? Aren't we to labor and toil for the name of Christ? Aren't we supposed to take the gospel to the ends of the earth? And isn't that difficult, hard labor?

Indeed. But I love the way that Dane Ortlund puts this. He says, All Christian work flows from fellowship with the living Christ who's transcending, defining reality is gentle and lowly.

[26 : 24] He astounds and sustains us with his endless kindness. Only as we walk ever deeper into this tender kindness can we live the Christian life as the New Testament calls us to.

Only as we drink down the kindness of the heart of Christ will we leave in our wake, everywhere we go, the aroma of heaven. And die one day having startled the world with glimpses of a divine kindness too great to be boxed in by what we deserve.

You see what he's saying? Accomplishing anything in the Christian life flows out of a heart that has come to learn what it means to be gentle and lowly.

What it means to drink in the very kindness of Christ. If we want to be the aroma of heaven, then we need to be like a weaned child on our Heavenly Father's lap.

So my encouragement to you is David's very encouragement. Christ the King, hope in the Lord from this day forth and forevermore. Amen?

[27 : 37] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are faithful.

We sang of your faithfulness. We worshiped you this morning for your faithfulness. But don't let that be just mere lip service. We want to stamp it with our lives.

People who are patiently waiting for your promises to come to pass. People who have weaned their souls. Sitting on your lap, content just to be with you.

So Father, by the power of your Spirit, would you give us that gift, that disposition of David to have a heart that is gentle and lowly like Christ.

Father, would you give every heart and every soul in this room the rest that you intend? Father, would you fill the cups that are just empty, feeling burned out, feeling weary and tired.

[28 : 48] Would you give them a joy, a profound joy that flows from just being in your presence. God, would you make us unbusy. Would you give us hearts that are humbled underneath your word.

So as to live in the very way that you've intended us to. With joy and peace. With calm and quiet. We pray in Jesus' name and all God's people said. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.