

Safe in the Storm

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Go ahead and make your way to your seats and flip with me to Psalm 131. Psalm 131. We are going to continue our pause of Mark.

If you are new here, we usually go pretty much verse by verse. I think we'll get through Mark at least inside 10 years.

But we're having a ton of fun, and so pausing it may be a little bit disconcerting for you, but we felt it's appropriate to pause this morning and study this psalm.

One of the smallest, shortest psalms in our Bible. So Psalm 131. It's the Word of God.

[1 : 12] A song of a sense of David. 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. O Israel, hope in the Lord.

From this time forth and forevermore. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of God abides forever.

[2 : 15] May God bless us as we give attention to it. The past 10 days of my life have been unlike any other time.

As you've probably heard by now, one of my childhood friends, best friends, lost both his parents and two children in a sudden, shocking, and tragic way on Wednesday, April 7th.

Which happened to be my birthday. And Taylor's birthday. Go figure. I was away at a class on the psalms in Louisville at the Pastors College with Taylor.

After hearing the news, I packed up, left for South Carolina the following morning. After a few days there and receiving counsel from several friends, it seemed best that I stay with my friend through the weekend and until the memorial service the middle of this past week.

And so I did. Spent as many moments as possible by my friend's side. Before I go further, let me just say thank you.

[3 : 37] Thank you for your prayers, your texts, your concern, your care for me and my family. While I was away, I will never forget it. We will never forget it.

Being there was so hard. What do you say when faced with such a senseless act of evil? How do you comfort?

How do you help? How do you pray? The first evening as I went to sleep, all the words that formed in my mind seemed so puny and pathetic.

After all, moments like these are so hard because beneath them are the gnawing age-old questions of the problem of evil. Where was God on that Wednesday afternoon?

Why didn't He intervene? Why didn't He stop it? Why didn't He still the storm? And if He could have intervened and didn't intervene, how could He be trusted again?

[4 : 45] How could the all-powerful and good God allow such evil? The Greek philosopher Epicurus puts the problem in three points back in about 200 B.C.

God is good, God is powerful, yet evil exists. That's the nub of the issue. Now, it would be helpful to tackle these questions head on.

It would take a lot longer than 40 minutes. Though they're hard, God's Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, even in these moments and these days. But we cannot do that this morning.

I don't think we should do that this morning. Instead, I want us to take up Psalm 131 and let it lead us by the hand into calmness and quiet in the face of unimaginable evil.

I think these words are in our Bible to show us how to pray and how to find inward peace in the deepest darkness we could imagine.

[5 : 54] These words, even as you notice, as I read them, these words come to us differently. Scripture sometimes tells a story. As we've been walking through Mark, they tell the story of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news about Him.

Scripture sometimes gives us a command like, Thou shalt not, or something like that. Scripture sometimes just tells us about the Lord. There is one God, one mediator between us and God, the Lord Jesus Christ, or something like that.

But Psalm 131 speaks differently. In many ways, Psalm 131 is wholly eavesdropping, as one author says it.

We're given access into the prayer closet of someone who is faced down darkness calmly and quietly.

We only eavesdrop. We overhear. More than that, we peer into a heart that has looked into the dark.

[6 : 55] We peer into to see what to think, what to feel, and what made all the difference. In a word where we're going, the only safe way through trouble is humble faith in God.

The only safe way through trouble is humble faith in God. We're going to tackle this in three points to go with the three verses.

We're going to walk it verse by verse. The first is stop talking. Stop talking. The psalmist begins by describing how he has, or describing his quiet mind and heart.

Look in verse 1a. Oh Lord, my heart is not lifted up. My eyes are not raised too high. You know, each of these phrases describe the puffing up of pride.

They seem a bit out of place at first, and yet they help us. So they're describing the puffing up of pride, and they're telling us that pride begins in the heart. My heart is not lifted up.

[7 : 57] And so pride begins when our heart is lifted up. You know, sometimes we think of pride as a sense of accomplishment or fulfillment, like the satisfying feeling of cutting the grass or of a long run completed or something like that.

But here it helps us understand that pride begins in the heart with a desire of the heart. Pride is a hunger. It's a hungerous desire, that's a word, to be in power and control.

It's a craving to call the shots. It's an ingrained tendency, this side of the Garden of Eden that all of us share, to boil life down to what we want and what we think we deserve.

A heart that is lifted up is a problem with God because only God is to be lifted up, as Isaiah 57.15 says, and all throughout the Scripture.

So He says, my heart is not lifted up. My eyes are not raised too high. Pride is not just about me. It's about you. It's about everyone.

[9 : 13] Changes the way we look at other people. It results in eyes that are raised too high and eyes that look down on others. We remember this from the Proverbs series we did in the fall.

Proverbs 6 says, there are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to Him. Number one on the list, haughty eyes. That's eyes that are raised too high. that are matched with a heart that is raised too high and looks down upon other people.

But pride does not stay in the heart as we see immediately right here. Pride flows out in the action. Pride gives birth to great drive and ambition and drive. And ambition are great things, but they can be used to fuel blessing and prosperity in the lives of those we love.

But this verse describes how drive and ambition turn bad. Look in verse 1b, I do not occupy myself with things too great or too marvelous for me.

Pride turns bad when our drive and ambition are for things too great and too marvelous. Now, aren't we supposed to be great? Aren't we supposed to shoot for the stars, you know?

[10 : 24] As Lewis say, aim for heaven. You'll get earth thrown in, but aim for earth, you'll get nothing. He said it in the reverse order.

But what are these things that are too great and too marvelous that he's talking about? These things that are too great and too marvelous are things that are beyond our ability and beyond our control.

They are things that only God can bring about. Things that only God can provide. And there are things that we far too often, though, try to secure on our own.

So we all want to be successful, right? We don't want to stay in the basement, play video games our whole life. We want to be successful, but what happens when we put career above everything else?

We become preoccupied with our work. We chase promotion. We cheat every other calling in our life. More importantly than all those is that we fail to realize that blessing is from the Lord.

[11 : 27] We're chasing the wind. We all want our children to be safe, but what happens when we put safety above everything else? We become consumed with providing the best things, preventing the least inconvenience, avoiding every potential danger.

We fail to realize that safety is from the Lord. Now, that doesn't mean we just throw safety to the wind, throw caution to the wind. We all want others to like us, but what happens when we put this desire above everything else?

We hide our shortcomings, exaggerate our successes, spin the truth. We follow the crowd. We become a chameleon, reading every room and doing what others would like us to do or something like that.

We become a monster because we fail to realize that favor is from the Lord. What happens in each of these scenarios? Our hearts are lifted up and our hearts are filled with noise.

That's what's going on. That's what the guy has said. He's rejected by not thinking about things too great or too marvelous for him. He's pushed out the noise, things that only God can give.

[12 : 34] He does not chase after. David Pallison puts it like this. Most of the noise in our souls is generated by trying to control the uncontrollable. How's your heart?

Noisy? Most of the noise in our souls is generated from trying to control the uncontrollable. We grasp the wind. We rage, fear, and finally despair.

Now what's all this got to do with trouble? Well, pride is our greatest enemy in all of life, even in trouble.

Tim Keller says, the stakes are high here. Suffering will either leave you a much better person or a much worse one than you were before. Trials and troubles in life, which are inevitable, will either make you or break you.

But either way, you will not remain the same. How will suffering leave you worse?

[13 : 49] How will it break you? Ben said at the beginning of the meeting that all you have to do is live long enough and you will suffer.

Through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God as what the apostles preached. It will break you through pride. When trouble comes, when tragedy comes to your house, will your heart be quiet?

C.S. Lewis again says, same, well not same area, God whispers in our pleasures but shouts in our pain. The Lord shouts a list of questions.

Will you serve me when I don't seem to be serving you or giving you what you think is best? Will you lean on me or will you lean on your own understanding, on your own reasons of why this happened or that happened?

What matters most to you? What I think or what you think. Will you trust me even when you cannot see what I am doing?

[15 : 05] Or will you stiffen your neck and put God in the dock? Will you interrogate and question me?

Now don't be confused. The Lord's not afraid of questions. I'm not afraid of questions. Not afraid of some difficulty in the Scriptures or something like that.

But the Lord confronts us when our questions are really veiled demands. The question is will you let God be God?

Now that means we're not going to see everything. We're going to know everything. Proverbs 25.2 puts it bluntly. It is the glory of God what is it?

To give mercy. Show grace. To conceal things. Now let that settle into your morning cup of coffee. It's the glory of God to conceal. The secret things belong to the Lord but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever that we may do all the words of the law.

[16 : 12] So there's this idea that the Lord's very comfortable with that there are things that you know and things that you will never know. this side of heaven. Pascal said something like a God who is not hidden is not a God.

If He has to run the plans by you and me is not God anymore. If we will only praise and follow God when He runs His decisions by us we will not make it through suffering.

Suffering is filled with mystery. Suffering is filled with things that will not be fully understood this side of eternity. Suffering is filled with darkness. But if you notice the psalm is teaching us these things about pride because He's telling us how He's turned from it.

So He said my heart is not lifted up. My eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things too great or too marvelous for me. The psalmist has received the only advice he's given.

He's stopped talking. He's quieted his heart. He's calmed. I don't know if there's a better word to sum up last week with my friend Jeff than this word quiet.

[17 : 45] there was, there is a deep sense oh Lord I do not know what you're doing.

I don't know how I can do it but I quiet myself from things too great and too marvelous for me. No wonder Job's friend before they said some really unhelpful things sat quietly with him for seven days and didn't say a word.

In fact this emphasis on quiet aligns directly with Psalm 46. I wish I could have been here last week to see Jeff. I've been begging Jeff to come since the beginning of this church plant and he did offer while I was in the car on the way to South Carolina I was like I'd already turned down a few people because I had this crazy idea that I was going to drive back and preach and Jeff offered I was like absolutely yes please he did an excellent job he is a dear friend but you remember the main command of Psalm 46 be still and know that I am God and in so many ways it aligns with what's going on in verse 1 it doesn't mean be quiet and meditate don't hang it on your shelf be quiet and meditate you know he's saying stop striving stop interpreting your life according to your own wisdom stop living like you don't know me stop talking the only safe way through trouble is humble faith in God point to pray point to pray prayer is always prayer is always a word in season but it is here as well he says

I have calmed and quieted my soul like a winged child with its mother like a winged child is my soul within me how has he become calm and quiet so he kind of begins with the result actually says my heart is not lifted up and then he tells us how he became quiet how he became calm he says I've weaned it like a child now this is a simile you know this where the meaning of a phrase is found in comparison by following that like where it goes so what does this comparison mean and it's like the weaning of a nursing child most of us have seen a nursing child before they are weaned when that child is hungry sitting in his mother's lap he only sees groceries you know he's ready to eat he's squirmy and rooting around milk his life and joy and satisfaction so he climbs in her lap looking for food sorry mother and if for some reason he doesn't get it right away he gets fussy he becomes agitated and angry throws a fit but a weaned child is very different he is satisfied and still in his mother's lap he's been eating solid food he's calm and quiet so you get the image there you know in the same way he's calm the psalm is saying

I've calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with his mother like a weaned child is my soul within me there's maybe not a more tender image in scripture than a mother with her nursing and now weaned child so how does he become this way so the actual reality we don't have in the verse it just dominated by that metaphor right it's dominated by that simile it's like a weaned child he does say my soul within me is weaned but he still doesn't take us out of that metaphor and I think though the idea is that he weans himself through prayer I think the assumption is the psalmist has done all this through prayer the psalmist has turned from the noise of pride to the quiet of humility through prayer humility is our greatest friend in all of life even trouble is there any greater sign of humility than prayerfulness than their willingness to admit that you need help that you can't do it on your own you don't have all the answers

[22 : 12] Jerry Bridges says this in his book is God really in control prayer is the acknowledgement of God's sovereignty and our dependence upon him to act on our behalf I think that's a wonderful summation prayer is not just asking the Lord to do a few things for us prayer is a way of humbly presenting everything to the Lord and it's a weaning process this humility and this calmness this quietness does not come naturally I've just said naturally innately we are filled with noise we're filled with the pride we're filled with the desires of the flesh and the noise of the flesh and humility is learned through a prayerful weaning process now that's good news humility is learned I mean what we see in this psalm is not the calmness and quietness of a certain personality type nor is it a result of indifference to life to the pain of life nor is it the result of retreating from the pain of life into ease and wealth or something like that nor is it even at the result of quieting the pain of life with a glass of wine or prozac this calmness and quietness is the fruit of processing everything before the

Lord of being weaned before the Lord and that's a wonderful thing because it means you and I can do it Psalm 131 is not placed in our Bible for us to marvel at this calm man or woman but it's placed in our Bible so that we would walk in the way of humility after prayer is how we become calm and quiet it's how our hearts become undisturbed by hard circumstances prayer is how we turn from our wisdom and acknowledge that God is wiser than we are prayer is how we turn from our best laid plans and acknowledge that God wants what's better for us prayer is how we turn from trying to control our life to quietly living before the face of God prayer is how we align our heart with the will of God that's why he taught us to pray your will be done on earth as it is in heaven John

Calvin says it like this by this prayer your will be done we are formed to self denial so God may rule us according to his decision and not this alone but also so that he might create new minds and hearts in us ours having been reduced to nothing in order for us to feel in ourselves no prompting of desire but pure agreement with his will now that sounds a bit harsh but you remember our Lord who we're trying to be conformed to says my food is to do the will of him who sent me not my will but your will be done it's the essence of what it means to be a Christian now this psalm reads so simply and easily doesn't it but this process is not simple or easy this prayerful weaning process required loud sighs and tears for our

Lord it will require the same for us we won't be weaned this side of heaven but we can be weaned more than we were before this prayerful weaning process will begin at new birth and continue until we go to glory being weaned from our wisdom our plans our love of approval our love of comfort and ease and so much more it's where the money is made it's what matters if you want to be a person that matters this is how you do it you want to be a person of substance this is the only way and the results are so worth it they're so worth it

I love I think there's another image in that image I think there's another truth in that image the child that is weaned sits safely in his mother's lap so he's able to receive her as more than groceries but receive her as a place of safety in his mother's lap a place of protection so too through weaning our soul sits safely within us in the midst of a pain filled world I think that's what's going on so like a weaned child is my soul within me my soul is weaned it is safe come what may let them of this now that's incredible that's what's held out here this isn't that too great too marvelous and yet we find this type of safety only the safety that God can give only the safety that God can provide through leaning on him and living in his everlasting!

[28 : 09] Tim Keller tells the story of one of his professors in seminary that one that professor loved to share the professor spoke at a missionary conference two young women heard the preaching about global missions a need to take the gospel to the end of the earth and decided to devote their lives to become missionary but both sets of parents were extremely upset with the professor they said the professor made their children religious fanatics they said you know that there's no security in being a missionary the pay is low the living situation may be dangerous we tried talking to our daughters they need to get a job and a career maybe a master's degree or something like that so they can have some security before they go off and do this missionary thing the professor responded you want them to have some security we're on a little ball of rock called earth we're spinning through miles an hour someday a trap door is going to open under every single one of us and we will fall through it and either there will be millions and millions of miles of nothing or we will fall into the everlasting arms of

God and you want them to get a master's degree for more security so too the Lord says I am your security I'm the only thing that can't!

from you everything else will be taken away I will hold you in my everlasting arms and no one can snatch you from there your soul is safe with me the only safe way through trouble is humble faith in God point three wait wait our favorite part the psalmist concludes by calling the people to wait on God you know the psalm has been this eavesdropping it's been looking in they've been overhearing this prayer but then suddenly the psalmist turns and addresses all of Israel some people say this was tacked on just to make this one fit into the Psalter or something like that I don't think that was the case I think it grows out of this this this the content of this psalm look in verse three he says oh

Israel hope in the Lord from this time forth and forever more you know we often use the word hope as something a little more than wishful thinking I hope it won't rain tomorrow maybe we hope it does rain tomorrow we hope that our finance our investments mature and are profitable but this biblically hope is different hope is confidence in what will happen because God promised it will happen hope is a confidence it is assurance and note the object of the hope he says our hope in the Lord Jeff pointed this out last week but the word Lord in all caps is what's used here and in the address so it's kind of bracketing this whole psalm is it's not just a word for the generic God someone out there I'm just crying out for someone is there anyone out there that's not what's going on this passage he's talking to the

God who revealed himself to Moses who promised to be with his people and to be for his people all the way regardless of what came come what may this is Yahweh this is his name that's what but look our hope is in the Lord from this time forth and forever more it is this time forth and forever more that's a literary device meaning for all time from right now until forever from right now and through everything you face and into forever there is no time Israel there's no time where your hope should not be in the Lord because in the Lord it's worthy for all time this time and forever well did

[32 : 50] Andy say in Shawshank redemption hope is a good thing maybe the best of things and no good thing ever dies so wait in hope hope that is seen is not hope for who hopes what he sees but if we hope for what we do not see we wait for it with patience hope is by definition waiting so what is the substance of our hope in the word here it is hope is the certainty that on the far side of trouble is security peace and joy because the Lord has promised hope pushes back hope believes all trouble comes with an expiration date but hope knows that the promise of

God will never expire if the psalmist could hope in the promise of God how much more should we who are on this side of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we're not two weeks removed from celebrating!

the resurrection and hope will not put us to shame because hope is rooted resurrection of Jesus Christ hope tells us that everyone who believes in Jesus will not die but fly into eternity the trap door will fall out and they will fly into eternity of security peace and joy forever and ever in the arms and the hands of our Lord that's what we offer to you a hope that will never die through our Lord Jesus Christ if you call on him you come to him you can be granted new life but it abides hope abides forever C.S.

Lewis says hope is I don't quote him every week but I did reference him about five times only this one was intended so there you have it hope is one of the theological virtues this means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not a form of escapism or wishful thinking but one of the things a Christian is meant to do I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country which I shall not find till after death I must never let it get so snowed in or turned aside I must make it the main object of my life to press on to that other country and help others do the same so death be not proud you are only the final stop before we fly into the arms of our true country but hope is not just for the next life one of the books

I read this week and I felt that my words were super puny and pathetic was this lament for a son by Nicholas Walter store written 87 or something like that 87 he lost his son and a lot of people say this is the most important he was a professor philosophy professor at Yale Calvin College for that one of the most important works at understanding what lamenting that meant and this is what he said he said to believe in Christ rising and death dying is also to live with the power and the challenge to rise up now from all our dark graves of suffering love if sympathy for the world's wounds is not enlarged by our anguish if love for those around us is not expanded if gratitude for what is good does not flame up if insight is not deepened if commitment to what is important is not strengthened if aching for a new day is not intensified if hope is weakened and faith diminished if from the experience of death comes nothing good then death has won then death be proud in the moments before my friend's children died his parents cocooned them one of the things my friend said about a hundred times last week was

[38 : 41] I want to cocoon someone else I want to protect someone else I want to help someone else I want to live for someone else so death be not proud we will not back down we will stop talking we will pray and we will wait with a rugged death defying hope the only safe way through trouble is humble faith in God now now what I just want to ponder this what would be the effect of this prayer if we took it to heart what would be the effect on this little congregation if we took this to heart I think in so many ways we would be a little outpost in a world marked by pain where people see it and carry it and look into it and press on with calmness and quietness and courage we would be men and women that the world needs oh how the world needs them because the world does not understand suffering it does not understand hope and so when all else seems to be failing and falling away we would be the men and women the world needs offering them food from another world we would be the people that would stand for the next this year we have been teaching our children the Westminster shorter catechism so that they will be those types of men and women the first question is chief end of man man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever always applicable in his book on the value of the Westminster confession of faith the great pure Princeton theologian B.B.

Warfield tells this story about the value of this confession of this catechism talks about an officer in the U.S.

army he was in a great western city we think this was LA he doesn't specify at a time of intense excitement and violent rioting the streets were overrun by a dangerous crowd could have been this year but it wasn't so they're overrun by this dangerous crowd and one day he observed approaching him a man of singular these are his words combined calmness and firmness of mind whose demeanor inspired confidence what he's saying he saw a man walking towards him that was very calm in the midst of the storm so impressed was he by his calmness amidst the uproar that when he passed by him he looked back so so this man passes by this man who was very calm and he looks back and unbeknownst to him when he looked back the stranger looked back as well so here they are in the midst of this uproar in the midst of this rioting and they both look back at one another on observing his turning the stranger at once came back to him touching his chest with his forefinger and demanded without preface what is the chief end of man the stranger responded!

man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever! he responded! cataclysm guy well I was just thinking the same thing about you that's pretty funny but y'all didn't laugh thank you Ken that's what I get for asking for it that's that's what we need it's the truth of God that make us calm in the uproar let us pray father in heaven we thank you we praise you and we humble ourselves before you oh lord there's nothing we want more than this not to be known for our accolades or not to be known for our talents or not to be known for some silly accomplishment but to be known as someone who's been weaned whose soul is calm and quiet whose heart hopes in the lord we pray that you would help us and keep us we pray that you counsel us with your eye upon us until the day you receive us to glory we praise you in

[44 : 00] Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message given by walt alexander lead
pastor of trinity grace church in athens tennessee for more information about trinity grace
please visit us at