

A Quiet Soul

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today.

If you are new or visiting with us, welcome. We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we are trying to fill seats, but because we are following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we are convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace and His forgiveness, and no one so bad that they can't have it.

Which means that God has something to say to everyone in His Word, and everyone needs to hear what God has to say. And so that's why we come week after week to look at God's Word, because we believe that God speaks to us, and He speaks to us in ways and in words that we can actually understand.

If you've been with us, you know that we are in the book of Psalms, and we're going to be in the book of Psalms for just a few more weeks before we start 1 Peter in September. And as I've told you many times, the Psalms are the prayer book and the hymn book of God's people in the Old Testament.

[1 : 06] And so it's hard to summarize them, just like it would be hard to summarize any hymn book. If you look at any book full of songs, especially songs that are hymns that are in the church, they're going to touch on all kinds of topics.

If you look in the back of most hymnals, you might even find an index by topic. And so there's not one thing that we could say, but many things that we can say about the Psalms. And so I've given you a lot of different categories and ways.

And one way the Psalms help us, and that we use them, is the Psalms are their poems, and they're poems that talk about emotions. The Psalms are a part of the Bible that more than some other parts of the Bible address directly our hearts.

They direct how we feel, our affections, what we love, how we love. And so we're going to look this week, and probably a few more before we're over with the Psalms, about a Psalm that talks directly about what it is that goes on and happens inside of our hearts day by day.

The Psalms help us address and diagnose the struggles of our hearts as we walk through life thinking about various things, worrying about various things, having fears and anxieties and ambitions. And if you sort of are aware of the water that we swim in right now as a culture and as a people, we are in what some people refer to as an anxious age.

[2 : 20] We're at a time when anxiety is at an all-time high, it feels like. And we worry and fret more than other generations have, even as we have increasing wealth and comfort.

We face fears about the world in this year and last year more than we have in other years in this country of other decades. And the reality is, as we look at our hearts, our hearts reveal our hope. Our ambitions and our fears and our anxieties and our worries and our dreams about the future all reveal what it is that we hope in. And if you're anything like me, you have the temptation at times to maybe be frantic or panic in the face of life's challenges.

And yet Jesus at the same time tells us in John 14, he says, My peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.

Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. And so as we come to this psalm, this psalm highlights the temptation, the temptation that we are tempted to put our hopes in all sorts of things.

[3 : 28] And the psalmist instead tells us in the last verse, verse 3, to put our hope in the Lord. And so we're going to see in Psalm 131 that because God cares for us, we can rest in him.

And with that, I'm going to read Psalm 131. You can follow along in your worship guide or in your Bible or your phone.

And as we come to this psalm, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. In other words, God has not left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead he's given us his word to show us the way to go.

And so it's for that reason that we're going to read now, starting at verse 1. Hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Father in heaven, we thank you that our hope is in you.

[4 : 55] That it's not in ourselves and what we can accomplish. It's not in our families and what they've done. It's not in our abilities and our skills.

It's not in our bank accounts. It's not in our friends and our social circles. It's not in our reputation or our social media accounts. But our hope is in you from this time forth and forevermore.

We ask that you would send your spirit now to help us as we look at this psalm and that we would grow in our hope and trust in you. We ask these things not because we have earned them, but because Jesus has earned them for us.

And so we ask them in his name. Amen. Now there's lots of things as we've looked at the psalms over the last couple months that I've mentioned as aspects and ways of thinking about it.

And there's one thing I haven't told you about. And it is the anti-psalm. And the anti-psalm is not something that shows up in the psalms, but it's something that sometimes people will do, people who study the Bible, to help us understand the psalms.

[6 : 01] They'll write an anti-psalm. And an anti-psalm is simply the opposite of whatever a psalm says. So you'll have someone who studies and meditates a psalm, and they'll think, what would the exact opposite be of this psalm so I can highlight what this psalm is doing?

And Psalm 131 has gotten a lot of attention from various people because of its, not just its brevity, it's short. So it's a helpful psalm for us to memorize and remember. But also because of what it teaches us about God and our relationship with him.

And so there's at least one anti-psalm. And I'm going to read it to you now. This is written by a man, a pastor named David Pallison. And he's written this opposite of Psalm 131. And it goes like this.

Self, my heart is proud. I'm absorbed in myself. And my eyes are haughty. I look down on other people. And I chase after things too great and too difficult for me.

That's verse 1. Verse 2 of the anti-psalm. So, of course, I'm noisy and restless inside. It comes naturally to me. Like a hungry infant fussing on his mother's lap.

[7 : 07] Like a hungry infant, I am restless with my demands and my worries. Verse 3. I scatter my hopes on anything and everybody all the time.

What the anti-psalm does is it helps us understand what's going on, especially in verse 1. And the psalmist is telling us in verse 1 what he's not. And by telling us what he's not, he's probably telling us what he has been in the past.

And so verse 1. When his heart is not lifted up, a lifted up heart would be someone who's proud and arrogant. Someone who thinks very highly of themselves. My eyes are not raised too high. Another way to translate this would be haughty eyes.

That's how it shows up in other parts of the Bible. And so not only am I proud and I think very highly of myself, but because I think very highly of myself, I think lowly of other people. I think poorly of other people. I look down on them.

I'm arrogant and proud because I'm able to accomplish and do a lot of things. And I realize there are other people who are not able to accomplish and do a lot of things. And so I look down on them. That's my raised eyes. And then finally, still in verse 1, this is what this proud person does.

[8 : 12] We could call this not just the proud person, but the loud heart. Because in verse 2 we're going to see there's a quiet soul, a quiet heart. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

In other words, I used to be a person who tried to do things that were impossible for me. I used to try to accomplish things that were not meant for human people to accomplish.

I tried to do what only God can do. And I tried to only understand what God can only understand. In other words, this person that we're meeting in verse 1, this is someone who believes that the world rises and falls on what they are able to do and accomplish.

This is someone who believes that the world is able to accomplish. That causes their heart to be filled with pride.

And it causes them to look down on other people. And even more than that, it causes them to think they can do what they can't do. It causes them to try to do things that are impossible for them.

[9 : 16] And you might be wondering, well, it doesn't sound too bad. There's certainly lots of things that we can do, right? Some of you think, well, I do have lots of capacities.

There's lots of capabilities that I have. I wouldn't have made it to this point in life if I didn't. And yet the problem with this person is that they are the opposite of verse 2. And so we find out not only that they're proud and they look down on other people, but they don't have what the psalmist has in verse 2.

They don't have a quiet heart. Now, it might seem odd to think of someone who's proud as having a loud and busy heart. And that's exactly what the psalm is telling us.

People who are proud are walking through this world not filled with peace, but instead they're filled with noise and ambition and irritability and anger and resentment. They're filled with disappointment as they're not able to fulfill and achieve and accomplish everything that they believe that they can.

The other side of this is that there are people who don't think they're proud, but they are. There's a sense in which if we are fretful and anxious constantly, that we're proud. Because if we're fretful and we're anxious constantly, it means that we believe that everything is up to us.

[10 : 30] And if everything is up to us, we must be a very powerful person. And so whether we feel proud or not, verse 1 is telling us that when we believe that the world rises and falls on us and what we can do, that is when we live in a world filled with anxiety and fear.

That's the world that causes us not to have peace and rest and quiet in our hearts and our lives. But it's the kind of thought that fills us with pride and anxiety.

It fills us with minds that can't be still. With hearts that aren't able to fall asleep. That's the problem that the psalmist sees here.

That's the one that he's bringing to God. We get another picture of it too in verse 2 because we find out the opposite. He tells us he has calmed and quieted his soul. And he's calmed and quieted his soul specifically like a weaned child.

Now I'm going to make a confession this morning that may surprise many of you. It is true that I have never weaned a child. I want you to think about that for a second.

[11 : 42] But I am told that if a child is not weaned, and sometimes I experience this, not as a weaner but as someone just in the world, there's a strange urgency that unweaned children have.

In fact, sometimes if there's a child who's not weaned and they don't have the food that they want, they communicate in such a way that it sounds like the world is about to end. And that they are actually going to die if they do not get what they want right now.

Some of you are parents who have experienced this. Some of you are parents who will experience this. Some of you are parents who are experiencing this. This is a child who is frantic, panics easily. They want anything to solve their problem as quickly as possible. Some of you have had the experience, perhaps you picked up a child that's not yours, and that child has started trying to nurse you. Because it's thinking, anywhere and anything that I can do, as fast as possible, I need to have this need met right away.

There's no ability to wait. These children are fixated on a solution, on one solution. It's their solution. There's only one way to solve this problem. They only know one way, and they're the ones who are going to have to make it happen.

[12 : 52] And there's this knee-jerk reaction that comes from the unweaned child. Their need has to be met immediately, and so they're upset. They're hungry. They're frantic.

There's no ability to be still and rest and be quiet. And so that's what happens if we have a verse 1 kind of heart. If we have the loud heart, the psalmist is telling us that we are like unweaned children. We're constantly frantic and worried and scared, looking around, needing our needs to be met immediately, believing we're the ones who know the solution and that we have to find it.

And if it doesn't come right now, then we are actually going to die. That is the belief of the Psalm 1 heart. That's the anxious heart, the fearful heart, the proud heart.

The heart that doesn't have hope in the Lord. And so the first question that Psalm 131 puts to us, the verse 1 question, and by the way, this psalm has three points and three verses.

[13 : 50] It's very convenient that it works out that way. Where is your heart loud with fear and anxiety and control and pride? Where is your heart loud?

Where does your heart believe that you are actually going to die if your need is not met right now? And where does your heart, even more than that, believe you are the only one that can meet that need?

That you have to squirm and reach and grasp for everything that you could have and get. Where do you struggle to trust God?

Where do you struggle to have contentment? To know, like a weaned child, that you may not have what you want right now, but that God is going to provide.

That he hasn't left you alone. And then where are you trying to be God? Where are you trying to fix and solve and control things that God did not mean for you to fix and control and solve?

[15 : 01] That's the proud heart and the arrogant heart that we see in verse 1. It's the heart that is loud. And so the psalmist doesn't just leave us, thankfully, with the loud heart, but he gives us the quiet soul here in verse 2.

He tells us that he has calmed and quieted his soul like a weaned child with its mother. Like a weaned child is my soul within me. So I've told you about the unweaned child.

Now we have the weaned child. The weaned child is not frantic. The weaned child doesn't panic.

The weaned child, we find out here, is able to be still with its mother. The weaned child has trust.

The weaned child knows that she is not going to die if she's not fed right now. If the weaned child is hungry and upset, the weaned child can pull herself together because she knows that her needs will eventually be met.

She knows that her mother loves her and cares for her and will provide for her what she needs when she needs it. The weaned child is more mature. She knows that the world is bigger than being comforted and fed.

[16 : 20] And so the weaned child doesn't need to grasp constantly squirming, trying to find the next source of food, trying to do for itself what it can. And so as Christians, as people who have hope in God, as we struggle with fear and anxiety and control and ambition and failure and greed, our goal, our hope, is to be like weaned children.

This psalm has its own illustration. We want to have calm and quiet souls, not frantic souls. The psalmist before, verse 1, there was only one source, him and his abilities.

Whatever he could do. Whether that made him proud and arrogant or anxious and afraid, there was only one way for him to be provided for.

After, there's the mature Christian here. He's moved to a calmness, a quiet from knowing that God is in control. That he can trust. He knows that he's going to be fed when he needs to be fed.

So verse 2 gives us a picture here. It gives us a picture of what it looks like when we trust God.

What it looks like when we know that it's not up to us to make everything happen.

[17 : 41] It's not up to us to provide for ourselves. But that God is bigger and greater. That he knows what we need. That he's with us. And that he's for us. But verse 2 does not just give us a picture.

It also gives us a process. Because the psalmist tells us this is something he has done. He has calmed and quieted his soul. These are action verbs. It's something actively that he's done.

If you've ever weaned a child, unlike me, you know that this is something that doesn't happen instantly. It's a process. It's a process to convince and help a child understand that he or she is not going to die.

And so the same is true for us as well. Verse 2, The psalmist has calmed and quieted his soul. The challenge is for us to calm and quiet our souls as well. And so what does it look like to cultivate a calm and quiet soul in a busy and frantic world?

We see the first thing the psalmist does is that he is talking to God. Verse 1, he addresses God. Oh Lord, my heart is not lifted up. My eyes are not raised too high. In other words, he prays.

[18 : 56] And if that sounds too simplistic, remember that every time we pray, we are acknowledging that God is able to do things that we can't. And we're acknowledging that God is in control and we are not.

And so the very act of the psalmist praying here is a reminder. It's a way of quieting his soul because it's recognizing and admitting and acting on the knowledge that not everything he needs is something he can do or accomplish.

And so we quiet our souls by coming and praying to God. That's what verses 1 and 2 are. They're a prayer. That's what our New Testament reading said, by the way. We looked at Philippians chapter 4 last fall.

And we also looked at it this morning. And Paul tells us that the opposite of anxiety is prayer. If we don't want to be anxious, then we present our concerns to God.

And it tells us in Philippians 4, the peace of God which passes all understanding will be with us. So this process of weaning, this process of calming and quieting his soul is something that the psalmist does for himself.

[20 : 05] He does it by coming to God over and over. The assumption of many of the psalms is that they are telling us a story in very short form. That they're telling us something that happened over a long period of time and the psalmist makes it very succinct.

So that's most likely true of Psalm 13, the psalm of lament. It's probably, I would guess, true of this psalm as well. That the psalmist had a long process of calming and quieting his soul. And then finally he was able to write Psalm 131.

Not only do we wean our souls by praying to God, have a calm and quiet soul, but I would actually encourage you, and I don't do this with every psalm, but I've done it with a couple, I would encourage you to memorize Psalm 131.

It's very short. It's only three verses. When you come into a situation where you can feel your anxiety rising, your fear rising, you can catch yourself, and you can say to yourself, if you memorize it in your head, you can say, 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. And so as you're struggling to have a calm and quiet soul, this psalm is a tool for us.

[21 : 22] And it's an especially potent tool because of how short it is. There are some scriptures that we memorize that we're going to use more than others. I'm going to suggest to you that Psalm 131 is a high ROI psalm.

There is a high return on investment here. There's a psalm that you're going to memorize. In fact, I would encourage you to think about this summer as we go through the psalms, pick one psalm. It doesn't have to be this one.

I'd encourage you to consider this one. Pick one psalm that you want to shape your life. And be a Psalm 1 person about it. And meditate on it over and over and over again.

Let it shape the way you think, the way you feel. If you're struggling to face injustice in the world, Psalm 5 might be your psalm. If you are struggling to believe that God is the most powerful person in the world, memorize Psalm 2.

And if you struggle with a loud and noisy heart, memorize Psalm 131. A man named Paul Miller says this about Psalm 131.

[22 : 31] He says, And then he says this, God knows that we face many things in this life that would cause us to panic and be frantic.

And so he's given us this psalm as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path to show us the way when we face those situations in life.

So how do we quiet and calm our souls? One way is talking to God. We pray to God. The way you can do that is memorizing this psalm. The other thing that we can do is talk to ourselves.

I'm going to jump ahead a little bit, but in verse 3, the psalmist is not talking to God anymore. He's talking to the rest of the Israelites who are gathering and he's telling them to hope in the Lord.

So he talks to God about his hope and his quiet and then he talks to the other people around him.

We would say he talks to the other Israelites. I would say we, as people in the New Testament, can talk to other Christians and we can say, O Christians, hope in the Lord.

[24 : 08] Church, hope in the Lord. When we sing here in church together, we are primarily singing to God songs of worship to him.

We are secondarily reminding and singing to each other. And so the weaning process, the process by which we have a quiet soul rather than a noisy, busy soul, the process by which we have peace rather than being frantic, is one that involves both talking to God and talking to ourselves.

We remind ourselves of God's faithfulness and his love. It's exactly what we talked about in the Psalms of Lament, that we're remembering what God has done for us in the past and we're reminding ourselves over and over again.

We're whipping up. Remember we talked about the cream that you make into whipped cream. We're whipping up the hard peaks of faith and trust and hope and confidence. And so the Psalms present us with that process.

Remind ourselves of God's faithfulness to us specifically. We remind ourselves of God's faithfulness to us and all Christians through Jesus. That we look to everything that God has done for us.

[25 : 25] And so we're asking for God's help rather than relying on our own. Now if you're thinking that I'm telling you to memorize and remind yourself of Psalm 131 to pray to God as a way to escape the problems in this world, the way to escape personal responsibility, to escape doing what you need to do to accomplish what's before you, that is not what I'm saying.

And I'll tell you a story. I recently found out about something. Many of you probably already know about this. I've heard this is a big thing in the military. It's called box breathing or tactical breathing or combat breathing.

And it's where when someone is feeling nervous and anxious and they're facing a high stakes, high stress situation, they'll go through certain breathing techniques that will calm their body down. So they'll breathe in for four seconds.

They'll hold their breath for four seconds. They'll breathe out for four seconds. And then they'll let their breath sit out without breathing in again for another four seconds. I'm not going to demonstrate for you. You're welcome.

And this is often for people who are in really high stressful situations, in high combat, in special ops. The Navy SEALs apparently use this. Now I'm going to suggest to you that no soldier who uses this technique thinks to themselves, man, this is a really high stress situation.

[26 : 44] I just need to escape for a little bit. The enemies will understand. I'm going to tell them like, hey, it's a timeout right now. I've got to do my box breathing. I'm really stressed. And if you could just give me a second, then I'm going to get back into the game.

Okay? No, the box breathing is not an escape from combat. It's not an escape from moving forward and making hard decisions in life.

It is what allows soldiers to calm themselves down so that they can proceed in combat. When we have a quiet heart, when we're praying to God and trusting Him, it is not to escape from this world. It's not to absolve ourselves of our responsibilities. It's not to say, well, I'm not going to be proud so I guess I can't do anything. I can't accomplish anything. Instead, it's to say, I'm going to move forward in this life, this busy life, with a quiet heart.

And I'm going to face the challenges that are ahead of me doing what I need to do, not being controlled by believing that everything rises and falls on me, but knowing that God is the one who is in control.

[27 : 48] He's more powerful than I am. He's more powerful than the challenge that I face. And so I'm going to pause and stop not to retreat from life, but to be able to move forward in it.

It is prayer, it is Psalm 131 that is the box breathing, the combat breathing of the Christian. This is how we pull ourselves back as we are in the challenges and the friction of life.

And we're able to remind ourselves that God is in control so that we can move forward. We are asking for God's help rather than relying on our own power and strength and ability.

It's knowing that we can't make things happen. It's not all up to us. It means that we can have quiet hearts. And so this doesn't mean that we're passive. It just means that we're not restless anymore. We can have peace in the midst of difficult circumstances. It's sitting with someone who is hurting and remembering, my words are not going to be able to solve this situation.

[28 : 55] That would be something too great and too marvelous for me. And so I am now able to actually sit with and be with this person. It's applying for jobs and knowing I have to be faithful in pursuing work.

But I can't make this happen. And so I'm going to trust God and have a calm and quiet heart in the midst of it. It's facing illness and knowing there may or may not be a solution or a cure to this. But I can't heal myself. And so I can trust God. I can seek out doctors and solutions with a quiet and prayerful trust and hope in God.

Jesus asked this question at one point. He says, in Luke, in which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? Our hope is not in ourselves and what we can do, but it is in God.

And so that's how we end in verse 3. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. This isn't some sort of mindfulness technique in which the psalmist pulls back from his situation, but it's a reminder technique in which the psalmist remembers that God is his hope. [30 : 24] Now, hope can sometimes be something of a pie-in-the-sky word. We might talk as Christians about hope without giving a firm and clear definition. And we've seen various types of hope in the psalms already.

As the psalms define hope, it's several things at least. First of all, it's our hope. The previous psalm, Psalm 130, talks about this. It's our hope in God's forgiveness. As Christians, part of our hope is that God is going to forgive us of our sins because of Jesus' death for us.

That Jesus has taken the penalty for our sins. And so we can hope in forgiveness. But we're not just hoping in the forgiveness of our sins. The psalms also talk about God's steadfast love.

That's also our hope. Not just that God has forgiven us, but that he's also adopted us. We are Jesus' brothers and sisters because of what he's done. And so God's never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, and always and forever love is with us.

It's something that we can rest in and hope in and trust in. That's part of what the psalmist is saying when he says hope in the Lord. Hope in the Lord for his forgiveness. Hope in the Lord because of his steadfast love that he's not going to leave you or forsake you.

[31 : 39] We've also seen in Psalm 2 and Psalm 6, we hope, or Psalm 2 and Psalm 5, we hope in God's justice. That's part of our hope. Our hope is that one day God is actually going to make everything right.

And so when the psalmist says in verse 3, hope in the Lord, he is not talking about a pie-in-the-sky hope. He's not talking about an ambiguous, undefined hope.

He is talking about the trust and confidence and love that comes from knowing that God's forgiveness and his love for us are unshakable. and knowing that his justice is unstoppable.

And so it's that hope that allows the psalmist to not have a lifted up heart but instead to calm and quiet his soul. His hope as the psalmist in the Old Testament and God's people of Israel is our same hope even more clearly defined in the New Testament.

That as he looked to God's forgiveness, he did not know exactly how it was going to happen and yet we as Christians in the New Testament know exactly how it happened. The forgiveness of our sins comes because Jesus took the penalty for them.

[32 : 59] Because Jesus lived the perfect life that we should have lived and then he died the death that we should have died. And so we look to his death and his resurrection as our hope for forgiveness.

Jesus is also our hope for God's steadfast love. Because Jesus died we are now his brothers and his sisters. We are God's children.

And so not only is God's forgiveness with us but his steadfast love is with us as well. Jesus earns God's favor and his care for us. He earns what we need to be able to have calm and quiet hearts. Jesus says in Matthew chapter 10 are not two sparrows sold for a penny and not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father.

But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore you are of more value than many sparrows. And then he says in John 14 I will not leave you as orphans I will come to you.

[34 : 01] And finally our hope is not just in God's forgiveness and his steadfast love but also in his power. That he is actually powerful enough to care for us and provide for us.

There's a story in Matthew 8 where Jesus' disciples are afraid. The pastor I mentioned before David Pallison connects this psalm to this story.

They're afraid that their boat is going to sink and they're going to die. They wake Jesus up and Jesus and they're going to die. They wake Jesus up and Jesus is able to disciples say this in Matthew chapter 8 What sort of man is this that even the winds and sea obey him?

That is the God in whom we have a quiet confidence and a quiet trust. And so when we're tempted to put our hope in all sorts of things the psalmist tells us to put our hope in the Lord.

We put our hope in him because he cares for us and he loves us he provides for us because he is the powerful king who's able to do what he promises. And so I invite you to join me as we pray to that king right now.

[35 : 21] Father in heaven we thank you that even the storms and the seas obey you.

We're tempted to believe that it's our job to calm the seas and the storms and yet you remind us that that's only pride and arrogance.

And so we ask that you'd help us that you'd build a calm and quiet trust in you as we face the challenges of this world. And we thank you that we can have that trust and that confidence not as the pie in the sky confidence but a true and steady hope.

And it's true and steady because we look to our hope and we look to Jesus as the one who provides it. And we trust in the truth and the steadiness of his life and his death and his resurrection that pays the penalty for our sins and brings us in as part of your family the family that you care and provide for and will bring justice for fully and finally.

And so we ask these things not because we have earned them not because we're capable of achieving them not because we're better than other people but we ask them because Jesus has earned them for us and so we ask them in his name.

[36 : 40] Amen.