

Psalm 23:2

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.”

Introduction

- The first line of this Psalm tells us what the Psalm is all about.
 - The second line reveals how the Shepherd cares for the sheep.
 - This verse tells us a lot about the needs of the sheep as well as the action of the Shepherd. To be more specific, the verse addresses the importance of “rest” in the life of God’s people.
1. Virtually all of Paul’s letters include these words as a part of the salutation.

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

 - a. As an under shepherd, Paul’s concern is that the sheep find a place of favor and rest for their souls.
 - b. The source of the “Grace and Peace” is the Lord.
 2. The restless Christian worships at work, works at play and plays at worship.
 3. “Jesus is coming, look busy.” (bumper sticker)
 4. Characteristics of the restless Christian
 - They define “fruitfulness” in terms of numbers rather than character.
 - They need to “be productive” or at least “look busy.”
 - They pray for more discipline and efficiency rather than faith and wisdom.
 - They worry a lot about a lot.
 - They feel guilty for not doing more, doing it better, doing it quicker, and doing it more efficiently.
 5. If I were Jesus’ ministry consultant –
 - He would have written lots of books.
 - He would have traveled more extensively.
 - He would have had a longer career.
 - He would have solved more problems.
 - He would have spent a whole lot less time alone.
 - He would have corrected Mary and commended Martha.

A. Inner peace does not depend on physical comfort.

“in green pastures” This is a metaphor suggesting a place where food is abundant and safety is assured. The idea is, The Shepherd puts me in “green” pastures not “barren” deserts. My rest and peace come with nourishment and security.

- While it is true that we all need rest for our bodies it is even more important that we need peace in our souls.

- The verse suggests that the sheep tend to be restless, anxious, fearful, and insecure. Anyone who is in touch with the fallen world will understand that the sheep's anxiety is a rational response.
- David was probably not experiencing physical comfort or rest when he wrote this Psalm but he was experiencing inner peace through his faith. Paul wrote his letter of joy (Philippians) while in prison. Jesus demonstrated a great sense of peace in His response to His temptation in the wilderness (Matt.4:1-11).
- Soul peace = a relaxed attitude (toward self, others, the world, and God) based on a realistic perception of life and faith in Christ as our Good Shepherd.
- Those who have found a deep inner peace also tend to find physical rest and energy.

B. Inner peace does not come naturally in this broken world.

“He makes me lie down” The shepherd quiets the sheep by bedding them down in lush green grass. My tendency is to not be quiet or rest. I must be made to rest.

- The structure of the Apostles' letters supports this. Each letter starts with an explanation of our peace with God through faith in Christ. They then build on that explanation with an exhortation to live a Godly life.

C. Inner peace is shaped by inner environment.

“beside quiet waters” Literally “waters of rest.” This could be a reference to waters that are still (not fast flowing) but I sense that the emphasis is more on the tranquility of the setting.

- The theme of this verse is not so much spiritual feeding but rather the quiet setting of rest.
- When we follow the Shepherd we will be able to relax. But we cannot relax if we are always whining about the pasture and the waters.
- The challenge for us is two fold. 1. Will we rest? 2. Will we be led and fed?
- Part of our problem is that we do not often recognize the green pasture or the still water. Paul was in prison and found pastures green. Israel had sheep that abused the pasture and the water so that others could not use it (Ezek.34).
- The internal environment of the restful soul –
 - a. Is realistic in its expectations of the outer life.
 - b. Is committed to live by faith and an eternal perspective.
 - c. Is grounded in Biblical understanding of the nature of the believer's hope.
 - d. Is deeply convinced of God's love as revealed in Jesus.

D. Inner peace is something I can't find by myself.

“He leads me” The shepherd leads me, suggesting that I do not know where to find restful waters. Israel's story is one of carving out broken cisterns that hold no water and failing to enter and occupy a land of rest.

- The theme of this verse is not so much spiritual feeding but rather the quiet setting of rest.

- When we follow the Shepherd we will be able to relax. But we cannot relax if we are always whining about the pasture and the waters.

While a prisoner Paul wrote in Philippians 4

“4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”

Moses is told of God’s ways in Exodus 33:13-14

“13 If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.’ 14 The LORD replied, ‘My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’”

Jesus invited the weary to come to Him in Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

- The first thing the shepherd does for the sheep is give them rest. “lie down” “waters of rest”. It is not only or primarily rest for our bodies, although that is important. The soul that is at rest is far more valuable for it energizes the body. For much of David’s life there was not much physical comfort.
- There is a perceived tension in the Christian message between (resting and running, faith and faithfulness, grace and work, hope and realization). This tension would not be so great if we understood the true nature of rest, faith, grace, and hope. The former virtues energize the latter virtues.

E. Social peace comes from inner peace, which starts with legal peace.

- I have peace with God in that I am reconciled to Him through the sacrifice of Christ.
- I experience inner peace as I walk in the Spirit of Christ.
- I promote social peace as I selflessly serve others.

Note that the world tends to reverse the order. It often suggests that we must have social peace before we can have inner peace.

Is my soul at rest?

A. The well-worn path of the restless soul.

1. Follow a hireling shepherd – mate, parent, job, church, pastor, etc.
2. Load them up with expectations – “Your job is to make me happy.”
3. Manipulate them to meet our needs – Use anger or withdrawal to motivate them to be what “I need them to be.”
4. Become angry when they fail to meet our expectations.

5. Blame God when He fails to let them to meet our expectations. (**Blame god for not supporting our idols.**)
 - Matthew 11:29-30 “Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.”
 - Hebrews 4:9-10 “there remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.”

B. Finding true rest is not easy. (three common mistakes)

1. Asceticism – remove yourself from “the world.”
2. Moralism – look to self-discipline as a source of rest.
3. Hedonism – look to the world as the source of rest.

C. Three levels of rest. We seek peace at many levels.

1. **CASUAL LEVEL** - for superficial things that bring cosmetic happiness - ILL. money, free time, good health.
2. **CRITICAL LEVEL** - for significant relationships that make life rich and full -ILL. being loved by parents and family, being respected in the community, having close intimate friendships.
3. **CRUCIAL LEVEL** - for life at the deepest level of my being - ILL. a sense of inner holiness and wholeness.

NOTE: The more mature we are, the less superficial will be our avenue of search for life.
ILL. *Do I strive for a new car, a better job or God?*

D. Three tests of “soul rest.”

1. **TRUTH & JUSTICE** – when we are slandered or treated unfairly.
2. **WEALTH & SECURITY** – when we lose our stuff.
3. **HEALTH & RELATIONSHIPS** – when we lose our health or friends and family.

E. A path to find “rest” for our souls.

1. **SELF-AUDIT** – You will learn a lot about yourself when casual, and critical levels of life are attacked.
2. **SELF-AWARENESS** – Renewing or reviving the soul’s life starts with a realization that it is needed.
3. **SELF-TALK** – Enlightened reflection is an important part of a renewed mind.
4. **COMMUNITY** – Work with others (who share this insight) in the quest for spiritual formation and growth.

Conclusion

1. The soul at rest
 - is not an idle life but a life that is at peace with God, and self.

- does not confuse “soul rest” with laziness or slothfulness.
 - Is not the same as a type “B” personality.
 - has clear boundaries with respect to personal differences, responsibilities, and expectations.
 - is not manipulated or manipulating.
 - does not judge self or others inappropriately.
 - is able to look deeply into the lives of others and connect with them.
 - tends to liberate others as it contacts them.
 - is able to hear the leading of the Spirit.
 - is better able to make wise decisions without personal prejudice or self -serving defenses.
 - does not suffer from psychologically destructive feelings of guilt or shame.
 - is meek and humble in that it does not fear honest exposure nor does it have to prove anything.
 - is not concerned with being busy or productive so much as doing the right thing, the right way, at the right time.
 - is a peace-bringer not just a peacemaker.
 - is easily edified.
 - does not fear the truth or its distortion.
 - does not fear death or conflicted relationships.
 - is free to serve the needs of others.
 - is not afraid of uncertainty.
 - has a view of the world that is consistent, integrated, and realistic.
2. Do you know the 23rd Psalm? Here is the acid test - The challenge for us is two fold. 1. What are we following? 2. Are we at rest?
- a. Do you have a gracious spirit? Or are you angry because the false shepherds that you have been following have not given you rest? You need to follow the right shepherd.
 - b. Do you have a gentle spirit? Or are you anxious and refusing to be led to a place of rest.
3. Part of our problem is that we do not often recognize the green pasture or the still water. Paul was in prison and found pastures green. Israel had sheep that abused the pasture and the water so that others could not use it (Ezek.34).

Ezekiel 34 *Why the Lord must be my shepherd*

“¹ The word of the LORD came to me: ² “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ³ You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴ You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not

brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. ⁵ So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. ⁶ My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

- The shepherd should provide a safe place of rest for the sheep – He cares for the sick, seeks the lost, and protects from predators.
- Human shepherds have too often left the sheep vulnerable.
- When sheep put their faith in man they will sooner or later be disappointed.

⁷ “Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ⁸ As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, ⁹ therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁰ This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.

- First, the Lord will remove the human shepherds that do not do their job.

¹¹ “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴ I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

- Second, the Lord will rescue the flock and give them rest.

¹⁷ ‘As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. ¹⁸ Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? ¹⁹ Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? ²⁰ ‘Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, ²² I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. ²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

- Third, the Lord will judge between the sheep.

²⁵ “I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety. ²⁶ I will bless them and the places surrounding my hill. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. ²⁷ The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. They will

know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them. ²⁸ They will no longer be plundered by the nations, nor will wild animals devour them. They will live in safety, and no one will make them afraid. ²⁹ I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations. ³⁰ Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Sovereign LORD. ³¹ You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

- Fourth, the Lord will rain down blessings on the sheep.