

I Shall Not Want For Rest

Psalm 23:2

Pastor John Miller

We're going to read out loud together Psalm 23:1-6. By the end of this series, you'll have this memorized. It's a beautiful psalm. Beginning in verse 1, let's read.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

In the very first verse, David says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." That is the theme of the psalm: the Lord is our shepherd. I love Kenneth Taylor's paraphrase: "Because the Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need." The first thing we discovered that we need that the good shepherd provides is in verse 2, and that is rest. "He makes me to lie down..."—that's the theme of verse 2—"...in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters." Literally in the Hebrew it's "lie down in fresh, green pastures and lieth by waters of rest." The still waters in the Hebrew conveys the idea of waters of rest.

You know that we're living in a day of extreme exhaustion and weariness. People are mentally weary, people are emotionally weary, people are physically tired and weary and most of all, people are spiritually tired and spiritually weary. But when the Lord is our shepherd—Jehovah Rapha—the Bible says we have everything we need. And the first thing we need is rest. When the Lord is our shepherd, we will find rest.

David was a shepherd, and all David was to his sheep, he realized God was to him. It could be that David was reflecting in the early morning when the grass is clean and wet with the dew, and the sheep eat the grass and are satisfied and lay down. Perhaps after they have eaten, they're taken down by the quiet stream and they lay down. David pictures this beautiful scene of all the sheep lying down in the green grass by a quiet stream. So David pictured the rest that God brought to his soul; he portrays that in this word picture of "He makes me to lie down in green pastures, and He leads me beside the still waters." What a beautiful picture David paints of this pastoral scene.

Not only is it a picture of perfect rest but also of contentment. If I were to summarize verse 2, that's the way I would summarize it: perfect rest and contentment. The Bible says, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." So when you come to the Lord as your shepherd, He gives you rest and peace, and He brings contentment to your soul.

Now this does not mean that God's people never pass through storms. Storms do come.

Metaphorically, they are hard times or difficult times. Life starts to get rough, things shake up and it isn't always smooth sailing. We know that being a Christian does not immune us from trials. Being a child of God or a sheep in His pasture or if the Lord is our shepherd doesn't immune you. Someone said, "There are no Christian fallout shelters." God doesn't put you in a bubble when you become a Christian and protect you from life's hurts and life's harms. He promised to be with us, and He's promised to guide us and He's promised to provide for us and to take care of us. He said, "I'll never leave you nor forsake you." So it does mean that in the midst of the storms, we can have rest and peace for our souls.

There is an amazing book written on Psalm 23—many of you have known of and read it—that was written by Phillip Keller. He was a shepherd in East Africa. He wrote a book titled, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, and it's really a modern-day classic. If you haven't read the book, you should read it. It would be a great supplement to the sermon series on Psalm 23.

Phillip Keller points out in his book that sheep don't naturally lie down to rest because of their very makeup. It's almost impossible for them to lie down to rest unless four requirements are met. We're going to look at those four requirements needed for sheep to lie down to rest.

But first of all, the overarching truth is that Jesus meets all of these requirements. Because the Lord is our shepherd, we have everything we need. All we need is the shepherd, really; the requirement is Jesus. If you have Jesus, you have rest. If you don't have Jesus, you don't have rest. The Christian life begins with resting in Jesus; trusting in Jesus, coming to the end of your labor to try to be right before God and saying "Jesus, I take Your hand. I trust in You. I believe in You. I rest in Your finished work upon the Cross." So we need these things to be fulfilled in our lives, as His sheep, if we are going to find rest.

What are the four requirements or things necessary for sheep to lie down and rest? Phillip Keller describes them in his book. Number one, sheep need freedom from fear. They need to be free from fear. By nature, sheep are timid and fearful. Their only natural defense is to run. Keller tells the story of one day having all of the sheep well fed, lying down and resting quietly when a friend of his pulls up in a pickup truck, the door opens, his friend's Pekinese puppy jumps out of the truck and starts to yap and run at the sheep. It spooked the sheep and the first sheep that jumped up started running and the other sheep jumped up. Finally all the sheep jumped up and they all scattered and ran for their lives. From just a little Pekinese puppy. You could have a flock of sheep and a rabbit jumps out of the bush, and the sheep will stir and spook and go running. Sheep are very, very timid.

Many years ago I was in Australia—I've actually made a lot of trips to Australia to preach. I was involved with the churches in western Australia. I remember on my first trip, I stayed at a 4,000-acre sheep ranch. That morning the shepherd took me out for a drive, and we drove for almost an hour and were still on his property. We came upon a sheep that was tangled up in a fence. So we pull over and he gets out—I don't touch sheep, but shepherds do, so I'm just kind of watching. I don't know what I'm doing. He tried to help this big ewe that was all tangled up in the fence. It started to panic and freak out, kick and fight. He's trying to help this ewe get out of

the fence, but it's so finicky and paranoid and frightened that it just panicked.

We're like that sheep. We too are full of fears. What are the fears that keep you from resting? There was a recent survey done in which people listed their fears. Number one was money, finances. A lot of people are fearful over money and can't rest. They can't go to sleep at night. They're lying in bed at night thinking, "Okay, how are we going to pay the mortgage? What about retirement? How are we going to put the kids through college?" "Hey, your oldest is five years old. Calm down." You're not sleeping at night because you're worried how to get your five-year-old through college! That's a good worthy thing to be concerned about, but don't lose sleep over that. We worry about retirement. We worry about aging. We worry about health care and providing for those things.

So people were worried about number one, money; number two, health. People worry about their health and then the ability to earn income. Number three, people worry about jobs and their careers. Number four, they worry about their marriages. Number five was children. Marriage and children were high on the list. I found it interesting that number six is people were worried about hell. I would put that number one, by the way. You should be worried about your soul before you're worried about your job. People are worried that they'll die and go to hell.

But if the Lord is your shepherd, you don't need to worry; you don't need to be afraid. God actually says in His Word, "Fear not; I am with you." The psalmist also said, "I will lay me down in peace and sleep. Thou God keepest me." If we belong to the Lord and He is your shepherd, you can have rest and you don't need to be afraid.

A story is told of a little girl whose father was an airplane pilot, and they were crossing the Atlantic on one of his flights when a storm came up. The flight attendant awakened the little girl and told her to fasten her seat belt, because they were in some turbulent weather. The little girl opened her eyes, saw the lightning flashing around the plane and asked the flight attendant, "Is daddy at the controls?" The flight attendant replied, "Yes, your daddy's in the cockpit." The little girl smiled, closed her eyes and went back to sleep. I love that: "Is daddy in the cockpit? Is daddy at the controls?" "Yes." Because our Father, Who is our shepherd, is in control, we can rest, and we can have His peace.

The second requirement necessary for the sheep to lie down to rest and sleep is freedom from friction. They can't be fighting with each other. Sheep cannot rest if there is friction within the flock. Like many other animals, sheep have a pecking order. You think of chickens having a pecking order. Sheep have a butting order; they have a desire to dominate one another. Again, Phillip Keller says, "Often an arrogant, cunning, domineering old ewe will be boss of a flock of sheep." What they actually do is butt heads; they knock one another with their heads. They try to control one another. They have very strong heads.

Do you know anybody like that? We use the term "butt heads." Baa. "How are things going in your marriage?" Baa. "We're butting heads." You married couples ever butt heads? Oh, yes, you butt heads. Who's got the hardest head? And as long as we're fighting with one another,

we can't rest. The Lord's sheep need His presence. Keller says that whenever the shepherd would appear, the fighting and head butting and strife would calm down, and then the sheep could rest. As long as you're butting heads with others and fighting against others with selfish ambition and strife, you'll never have rest. Trying to outdo one another and overdo one another to get your own way and to control other people's lives.

In Philippians 2 Paul says, "Let everyone look not on their own interests but everyone on the interests of others." Consider others to be more important than yourselves. Paul says, "Let the same mind that was found in Christ Jesus, be found in you." What is that mind or attitude? "Though being in the form of God, thought equality with God not something to hold on to." It says that He emptied Himself or divested Himself and He "took on Himself the form of a servant...and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross."

So Jesus Christ is always our example of having an attitude or a mindset of putting others first, considering others more important than yourself. Not butting heads with other people or fighting with others. When the Lord is your shepherd and He's present in your life, it brings peace and humility. Then we lay aside selfish ambition and pride, and we are able to get along with one another and have rest.

There is a third requirement necessary for sheep to get along with one another and in order to rest and lie down as David said, "He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters." This one is quite interesting: Keller points out that sheep need freedom from flies. For sheep to lie down and rest, they must be free from the torment of insects, parasites and flies. One of the great enemies of sheep is that many times insects will lay their larvae or eggs in sheep; maybe go up their nasal passages and infect them and cause them distress and trouble. They cannot rest and they cannot sleep. So the shepherd will pour oil over their heads as a kind of insect repellent to protect them from the flies.

The same is true of us: Life is full of irritations—from people and from circumstances—that keep us from finding rest. Not only do we butt heads, but we use the figure of speech, "You bug me." "I told my husband that this morning." Where did we get that? "You really bug me!" Do we throw bugs at people? What a weird figure of speech. Have you ever gone out on the patio on a nice day to read a book, and then a fly comes around and lands right on your nose? Certainly in the entire universe there is another place this fly can land! And certainly there are other people with noses bigger than my nose. Or you go to the beach, and it's a beautiful day—I love the beach. You set up your chair and you're hangin' out and all of a sudden, flies start comin' around. Fly Beach, or something like that. You can't sleep and you can't rest. "These flies are bugging me" or bothering me.

It's the little irritants. If my house burned down, I'd stand in the yard and say, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." But if I can't get an open place to get gasoline—someone pulls in ahead of me—oooh! Why is it that the little irritants get to me? My house could blow up and burn down or the car breaks, and I'd say, "Oh, Lord. I love You. You give and You take away."

The other day my car was out of gas—my wife always asks, “Why are you always out of gas? Because I hate gas stations. I don’t like paying money for gas either. I was late, I had a long trip ahead of me so I had to get gas. I’m already frustrated. So I pull in the gas station toward a pump, and someone pulls in right in front of me! I was like, “Hallelujah. Hallelujah.” So I go around to another spot, but the gas station attendant had hosed off the concrete, so when I went to get out of the car, there was a big puddle. I couldn’t get out. I had to try to find another spot. I finally found another spot, and when I got out, that pump was out of order. So I finally got my gas, and I’m totally losing my salvation.

But I thought that I’d better use the restroom, because I’m going on a long drive. I run into the men’s room, and there actually was a line waiting to get in. I felt like saying, “I’m a pastor. Can I cut in front? I’m a man of God.” So I wait and I’m finally the next one, and the guy coming out closed the door behind him. Bam! It was locked with no one in there. I felt like following the guy out of the store and saying, “Do you know what you just did?” So I had to go back to the counter to get them to buzz the door to get it open, and there was a line of people buying candy bars. I felt like butting in saying, “This is a lot more important than your Milky Way. Can you please open that bathroom?” “Ahh! Oh, Lord! Gosh!” Talk about bugging me! It’s the little irritants.

I confess to you that the Lord always does this whenever I’m preaching a sermon. Yesterday we had to go into a store, and a woman waited on us that bugged me. I knew what we needed, but she started asking too many questions. I thought, “Don’t ask me so many questions. I need to get going.” She was asking me all these questions and I thought, “Oh, Lord! Don’t ask me so many questions, just sell me the thing. I need to get going!” And usually when I freak out in a store, the person says to me, “Oh, by the way, we come to your church.” “Hallelujah.” And then I’m all spiritual: “Praise God!” My wife says, “John, you don’t know who’s watching.”

You know, what’s really bad too is when I lose my patience in a restaurant and people don’t tell me they go to Revival. If I meet you in a store or a place of business, please disclose that immediately when I get there. Okay? Have mercy on me. It’s those little irritants. I can handle the tragedies, but for those little things that bug me, I need the oil of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18 is a Scripture I’m always quoting, always turning to. It says, “...be filled with the Spirit.” “Be not drunk on wine, wherein is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.” When we are Spirit filled, we’ll be joyful, thankful and we’ll be submissive. “Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and in spiritual songs.” “Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” We’ll be giving thanks unto the Father for all things and “submitting to one another in the fear and reverence of Christ.” So we need the oil of God’s Holy Spirit to protect us from those little irritants, so that we can have peace and we can rest.

The fourth requirement necessary so that sheep can lie down and rest is freedom from hunger. This need clearly comes from this text. For sheep to be able to lie down and rest, they need fresh, green pastures, verse 2—which is the morning—and they need still waters—which, as I pointed out in the Hebrew, is “waters of rest”—which most scholars believe is noontime. So

early in the morning in the dry, arid Middle East, the shepherd would lead the sheep up into the hills, and the sheep would eat the grass while it was wet with the dew. Then he would lead them down into a canyon beside a quiet stream to drink, and they would lie down and rest. Keller points out again that a hungry, ill-fed sheep is ever on its feet and on the move, searching for another scant, mouthful of foliage to try to satisfy its gnawing hunger. Hungry sheep will not lie down.

This is why the Bible says, "There is no rest for the wicked," says the Lord. If you don't know the Lord as your shepherd, you're never satisfied. It's from one relationship to another. It's one thing after another, one possession after another. It's always searching, always looking, always wanting to fill the emptiness and the void, which never gets satisfied. You were made by God, and only God can fill that longing in your heart and in your soul.

The great St. Augustine said, "You were made by God. Until you come to know God, you do not have rest for your soul." But when we find God, we find rest, because God fills that void, that emptiness in our lives. So we need to be feeding on the green pastures, and we need to be resting beside the still waters.

What are the green pastures, and what are these waters of rest? I'll mention three things. Number one, we need to rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ. If someone were to ask me, "Pastor John, what does it mean to 'rest in the Lord'?" I'd say that it starts with salvation, and salvation is grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. You can't work your way to heaven. You can't earn heaven. You can't merit heaven. You don't deserve heaven. People try in religion to be good. You know, "I'm going to be baptized. I'm going to go to church. I'm going to be reformed. I'm going to be confirmed. I'm going to commit my life to God, follow God. I'm going to be a good person."

Our works will not get us to heaven. The Bible says that "It's not by works of righteousness that you have been saved." But according to His mercy, He has saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. That means God has to come in by His Spirit and give you new life.

What do we mean when we say "resting in the finished work of Jesus Christ"? When Jesus died on the Cross, and He cried the words, "It is finished," He actually said "Tetelestai" or "paid in full." What He meant by that is that He paid the penalty for our sins; the price has already been paid. We owed a debt that we could not pay, and He paid a debt He did not owe.

How do we appropriate that payment that Jesus made for the debt of our sins? By faith. By faith, we mean by trusting in, relying on, resting in, believing in Jesus Christ. So when we come to Jesus Christ, we are resting in His finished work. We don't have to labor our soul to save. Jesus said it like this in John 6:35: He said, "I am the bread of life. He that comes to Me shall never hunger, and He that believes on Me shall never thirst." Do you find that? Do you find the satisfaction in your soul that only Jesus Christ can bring? Or are you still restless? Are you still looking? Are you still trying to find peace? Only Jesus as our good shepherd can give us that

rest and can give us that peace.

The second thing we need to do is feed on His Word, the Bible. I believe that these “green pastures” and these “still waters” of rest refer to the Bible, God’s Word. First step? Resting in the finished work. He is our Sabbath rest; we cease from our labor and enter into that rest. The second thing we do is feed on the “green pastures” of His Word. Every Christian should develop a habit of getting up every morning and feeding on the Word of God.

Job 23:12, in the Old Testament, says, “I have esteemed the words of Your mouth, O God, more than my necessary food.” More important than feeding my body is that I feed my soul. If I’m going to have rest, I’m going to have to feed my soul with the Word of God. Remember that Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness after 40 days of fasting? That’s a long time. I can only go a couple of hours before I’m having visions. And they’re not visions of heaven; they’re visions of hamburgers.

So after 40 days of fasting, the devil shows up and says, “Since You are the Son of God...”—most English translations have “If You are the Son of God.” The devil knew who He was; he wasn’t questioning. The devil said, “Since You are the Son of God, command these stones to be turned into bread.” For Jesus to do that would be out of the will of the Father. If Jesus had done that, He would have used a miracle to satisfy His own need. By the way, Jesus was fully man and fully God, and in His humanity, He was hungry. It was one of the indications He was a man. And as a man, He trusted in the Father and relied on the Holy Spirit to overcome temptation with the Word of God. So Jesus answered the devil’s temptation with a Scripture, Deuteronomy 8:3. This is what He quoted: “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” “I have esteemed the words of Your mouth more than my necessary food.”

The psalmist said, “They are more to be desired than much fine gold. Sweeter than honey from the honeycomb.” I love to put honey on my cereal. I love to put honey on stuff. I love honey. I thank God for honey. Sweeten it up with honey. It may not be good for me, but I like it. I’ll enjoy my honey and go early. But God’s Word is better than honey. It’s so sweet. It sweetens life. It sweetens all our relationships. It makes me sweeter; it calms me down and helps me to rest. If I haven’t fed on God’s Word, I’m agitated, I’m not resting, I’m searching, I’m butting heads, I’m bugged. I need to read God’s Word. So I rest in God’s Son, and I read and feed on God’s Word.

Then, thirdly, lying in those green pastures and beside those still waters means by faith I’m resting in the promises of God’s Word. It’s not enough to just read the Bible; you need to believe the Bible. It’s not enough to just read God’s Word; you need to be a doer of God’s Word. One of the things we need to do when we read God’s Word is we need to believe God’s promises.

Some of you don’t have rest this morning, because you’re living with guilt and shame. You’re living with unconfessed and unforgiven sin. I John 1:9 is the Christian’s “bar of soap.” It says, “If we confess our sins...”—that means we agree with God that what we thought, what we said,

what we did was sinful—"...He is faithful and just to forgive us..."—"forgive" means to "take away" or "carry away"—"...our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." It's not "some" but "all" unrighteousness. The experience of His forgiveness is rest and peace.

Do you know why you're agitated right now? Why you're not having rest right now? Why you might be butting heads right now? Why you're being bugged right now? Because you have unconfessed sin in your heart. You haven't trusted Jesus. You haven't confessed your sin. You haven't read His Word. When you read His Word, confess your sin and believe His promises, you can leave here today with a clean heart.

There's also a promise in His Word we need to believe and that is that He's with us. His presence. He says, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." You're never alone. You'll never be alone. Some of you are worried and think, "What happens if my spouse dies?" Maybe you have no family or you have no kids. One of the saddest things for me to see—and I encounter all the time—is people who are alone. They've lost their spouse, they've lost their kids or maybe they were never married, so when they get old they have no family, no friends, no one to take care of them. There are a lot of people who are alone in this world, but if you have Jesus Christ, you'll never be alone. You will never, ever be alone; Jesus will be with you. He even says in verse 4, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of deep darkness, I will not fear, because Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." I have the presence of the good shepherd.

The third thing I would remind you of is that God's promises you His provision. He promises He'll forgive you, His presence and His provision. We get this in this psalm in verse 5: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over." God will provide for you, so rest in God's provision.

In closing, look at Matthew 11:28-30. Jesus Christ is speaking. He said, "Come unto Me, all ye that are laboring and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Jesus, the good shepherd, gives us an invitation. He invites us to come to Him. It's the only place where we can find rest. You're not going to find rest in alcohol. You're not going to find rest in drugs. You're not going to find rest in materialism. You're not going to find rest in illicit sex. Immoral behavior will not bring rest. It will not bring peace. You will not be able to lie down. Selfish ambition. Self-centered behavior will not bring peace, will not bring rest.

I hear people all the time say, "I'm leaving my wife. I'm leaving my husband. I'm abandoning my family. I'm divorcing my spouse." Okay, you go right ahead. God will allow you to do that, but it's the ingredient for heartfelt pain, sorrow and heartache. You won't be happy. "Well, I just have to be myself." I run into people all the time who say, "I've got to 'find' myself." Why do you want to find yourself? When you do, you're going to be grossed out. Jesus said, "Deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow Me."

So this is an invitation we need to give heed to: "Come unto Me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden." Jesus was speaking to religious people; people who were under the heavy yoke of the Scribes and the Pharisees. "Do this and live the law commands, but gives me neither feet nor hands. A better word the Gospel brings. It bids me fly and gives me wings."

Religion can't save you. Good works can't save you. It's a heavy burden. "Don't do this. Don't do that. Try to be good. Try to work your way to heaven." It's like a heavy burden. But Jesus said, "Come to Me. My yoke is easy. My burden is light. And you will find rest for your soul."

Jesus mentions rest twice in those three verses. He first said that He will "give" us rest, and then He says that you will "find" rest for your souls. So there is a rest that is to be given, and there is a rest that is to be found. It is given in Jesus Christ, and it is found in Jesus Christ.