He Leadeth Me Beside Still Waters

INTRODUCTION: I believe the key to JOY in the Christian life is found in the words of Psalm 23.

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (2) He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. (3) He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. (4) 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. (5) Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. (6) 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 our continuing focus on Psalm 23, we turn our attention to the first phrase of verse 2, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” Please understand that Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship. It is not based on something that we DO; it is based on what Jesus has DONE. Now when we come to Psalm 23, once again we discover there is nothing in the Psalm for us to DO. Psalm 23 is all the work of the Shepherd.

Psalm 23 is not about us, it is about HIM. Psalm 23 is not about what we do through our Christian experience, Psalm 23 is about being completely surrendered and being completely satisfied with the Shepherd.

Now in verse 2 we find that the first two statements speak of rest for the sheep.

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.”

Just as the Shepherd provides rest for the sheep, our Lord desires REST for us, His sheep. In this world, millions do whatever is necessary to take care of their bodies, while starving their souls. Yet, it is our souls that cry out for the rest that only Christ can provide. The psalmist proclaims, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.”

The word “maketh” speaks of yielding to the Shepherd’s desire for our lives. The Shepherd provides for us green pastures, as a sheep we are to yield to His placing us in those green pastures. In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus said,

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you REST. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find REST unto your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

He said, “I will give you rest.” Then He said, “Ye shall find rest.”

Again the only way we are going to benefit from Psalm 23 is to come to the understanding that there must be a TOTAL DEPENDENCE, a TOTAL
SURRENDER to the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible promises believers three kinds of rest – the rest of salvation, the rest of heaven and the rest of faith.

FIRST: There is the REST of SALVATION: When Christ went to Calvary it was through His shed blood that He paid the debt God demanded for my sins. When I received Christ as my Saviour, my salvation was forever settled. The Rest of Salvation speaks of my Eternal Security.

In John 10:27-29 Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: (28) And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. (29) My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”

Someone said, “God planned for my redemption in Christ, Christ accomplished it on the cross when he said, “It is finished,” the Bible recorded it and that settles it. Why should I put a question where God has put a period? Amen and Amen.”

SECOND: There is the REST of HEAVEN. Jesus told His disciples that they would find heavenly rest in John 14:1-3 where we read,

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. (2) In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

There is Rest of Soul in knowing that by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Heaven is my home! I am sure of it, as if I were already there.

THIRD: There is the REST of FAITH.

Let's face it. So often the struggle in our Christian life is not with the world, the flesh, or the Devil; the struggle is with God.

Let me carefully say that again, “Let's face it. So often the struggle in our Christian life is not with the world, the flesh, or the Devil; the struggle is with God.”

As much as we talk about God, we resist Him. We don’t follow Him. We live in disobedience to His Word and then wonder why we don’t have a peaceful rest in our soul. As sheep we must yield to Him. We need to allow Him to place us in the green pastures that He has for us.

Again from Matthew 11:28 Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, (this speaks of yielding) and I will give you rest.” According to verse 29, it is here that we “shall find rest unto your souls.”

Would you like to find rest of soul now, not in the distant future? Would you like to pillow your soul in Christ and find the sweet peace and rest only He can give?

The Shepherd provides this rest by making us to lie down in green pastures. He knows we need rest for our souls. Our public world may be well ordered and defined, but our spirits cry out, "Rest! I need rest!" Our weary souls continue to plead for rest until they find the green pastures God has provided for them.

The Bible says in Psalm 23:1, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” I shall not want for rest because “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” We must always keep our eyes on the Shepherd if we are going to have the rest we so desperately need.
The strange thing about sheep is that because of their very make-up it is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless **ALL four of these requirements are met.**

Sheep will not lie down unless they are free of all **fear.**
Sheep will not lie down unless they are free from **friction** with other sheep.
Sheep will not lie down unless they are free from the **frustration of flies and other parasites.**
Sheep will not lie down until they are free from **hunger.**

For sheep to be at rest there must be a definite sense of freedom from **FEAR, FRICITION, FRUSTRATION and HUNGER.** A flock that is restless, discontented, always agitated, disturbed and hungry never does well. The same is true of people, God’s people.

**FIRST: For sheep to lie down there has to be FREEDOM from FEAR:**

**Sheep are very nervous animals.** They can be easily scared by a strange noise, person, or another animal. They are easily frightened. There is only one thing the shepherd can provide that will relieve their fears - his **presence.**

**We live in an increasingly perilous world.**
**We live a most uncertain life.** Any hour can bring disaster, danger and distress from unknown quarters. Life is full of hazards. No one can tell what a day will produce in new troubles. We live either in a sense of fear or in a sense of quiet rest.

Yes, some of you here today are scared to death.

**You are fearful of failure.**
**You are fearful of the unknown.**
**You are fearful of rejection.**
**You are fearful of some person or circumstance.**
**You are fearful for your job.**
**You are fearful for your family.**
**You are fearful of the economy.**
**You have a fear of man in your eyes.**

Generally it is the **unknown** or the **unexpected** that produces the greatest panic. It is while you are in the grip of fear that most of you are unable to cope with the cruel circumstances and harsh complexities of life. Often your first impulse is simply to get up and run from them.

Then in the midst of your misfortunes, as a Christian, there should come awareness that Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd is there. **His presence will make all the difference.** Suddenly things are not half as bad or nearly so terrifying. The outlook changes and there is hope. Rest returns and you can relax.

**Remember, the fears of the sheep are not relieved by the absence of danger but by the PRESENCE OF THE SHEPHERD.**

Over in Isaiah 41:10 notice five things God does, *“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”*

My friends, that is exactly the setting found in Psalm 23. No sheep will lie down until fear has been eliminated.
Now when your soul understands it is God’s presence and God’s provision and it is His power and His peace only then can fear be eliminated.

II Timothy 1:7 tells us, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”

In Psalm 57:1 we read, “Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.”

In Matthew 6:30-34 we read, “Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? (31) Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (32) (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. (33) But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (34) Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

You cannot rid yourselves of everything in life that may trouble you. However, when you abide in the personal presence of the Shepherd, He has things under control.

With the presence of the Good Shepherd in your life – you need not worry about the past, the present or future. All you need to realize as a believer is you have a Good Shepherd who will give you rest. The hymn-writer wrote

My soul in sad exile was out on life's sea,  
So burdened with sin and distress,  
Till I heard a sweet voice saying, “Make me your choice;”  
And I entered the Haven of Rest!

I yielded myself to His tender embrace,  
And faith taking hold of the Word,  
My fetters fell off, and I anchored my soul;  
In the Haven of Rest is my Lord.

SECOND: For sheep to lie down there has to be FREEDOM from FRICITION with other sheep. Sheep are contrary animals, much like people. They establish an order among themselves. In every animal society there is established an order of dominance within the group.

In a pen full of chickens, it is referred to as the “pecking order.”  
With cattle, it is called the “horning order.”  
Among sheep, we speak of the “butting order.”

People who deal with sheep say there may be an older female sheep that takes charge. Any time another sheep is grazing where she wants to graze, she will put her head down and butt the other sheep just to prove she is in charge.

This causes uneasiness among the whole flock. Always they must stand up and defend their rights and contest the challenge of the intruder.  
This continuous conflict and jealousy within the flock can cause sheep to become edgy, tense, discontented and restless. They lose weight and become irritable.
However, when the shepherd arrives on the scene, sheep stop their butting because they know the shepherd is in charge. The shepherd's presence makes all the difference in their behavior.

To me, this is a graphic picture of the struggle for status in human society.

In any business firm, any office, any family, any community, any church, any human organization or group, be it large or small, the struggle for self-assertion and self-recognition goes on.

Most of us fight to be "top sheep." We butt and quarrel and compete to "get ahead." In the process, people are hurt.

Among God's sheep there is friction, and until it is dealt with, we cannot rest. We are always butting one another. "I don't like what she said." "I don't like what they have." "I don't like how they treated my child." We are always butting. There is always friction.

It is here that jealousy arises.
It is here where petty peeves grow into horrible hate.
It is here where ill-will and deep discontent is born.
It is here that discontent gradually grows into a covetous way of life where one has to be forever "standing up" for himself, for his rights, "standing up" just to get ahead of the crowd.

Families and churches alike have friction when they lack the peace and rest they need. Sheep cannot rest among all this friction. They cannot rest knowing that someone may butt them at any moment.

If we leave Christ out of the picture, we can always find a justifiable reason to be irritated with someone or to criticize others. We may become angry with a teacher, a coach, a principal, a pastor, or a family member. There is always the potential for friction.

But when the Shepherd steps on the scene and we consciously abide in His presence, the friction ceases. Do we really want rest?

If we do, we must deal with our fears, not by chasing all the danger away, but by living in the presence of the Shepherd.

We must deal with our friction, not by making everyone perfect, but by living consciously in the presence of the Shepherd.

THIRD: For sheep to lie down there has to be FREEDOM from FRUSTRATION: Sheep can be driven to absolute distraction by parasites and flies. When tormented by these pests, it is literally impossible for them to lie down and rest. Instead they are on their feet, stamping their legs, shaking their heads, ready to rush off into the bush for relief from these pests. A good shepherd will apply various types of insect repellents to the sheep.

Similarly, in the Christian life there are bound to be many small irritations, annoyances, petty frustrations and reoccurring, disagreeable experiences. In our society, we call this “being bugged.”

I know that some of you are full of frustrations - broken appliances, poor customer service, bad drivers, and people who don't return your phone calls to include teachers, bosses, spouses and children. I grant you that any of these things and many more could cause you not to lie down in God's green pastures of rest.
When that happens, you become so frustrated that you neglect God, God's Word and even church. Is it even possible to come to the place of quiet contentment despite these frustrations? Is there an antidote in Christ? Yes, yes, definitely yes! Remember Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-29,

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you REST. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find REST unto your souls.

When you turn to Him and expose the problem to Him, allowing Him to see that you have a dilemma, a difficulty, a disagreeable experience beyond your control, He comes to assist.

Often a helpful approach is simply to say aloud, "O Master, this is beyond me. I can't cope with it - it's bugging me. I can't rest - please take over!"

Then it is He who takes over in His own wondrous way. He applies the healing, soothing, effective antidote of His own person and presence to your particular problem. And because of the assurance that He has become active on your behalf, over you comes a sense of quiet contentment, as the hymn-writer proclaims:

Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side;  
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;  
Leave to thy God to order and provide;  
In every change He faithful will remain.  
Be still my soul; thy best, thy heavenly Friend  
Tho' thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

FOURTH: For sheep to lie down there must be FREEDOM from HUNGER. If the sheep are going to rest, they must be fed. The Shepherd provides the food needed by the sheep. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." He provides nourishment for us in the green pastures He chooses.

A hungry, ill-fed sheep is ever on its feet searching for another scanty mouthful of forage to try and satisfy its gnawing hunger. Such sheep are not contented, they do not thrive, they are of no use to themselves, or to the shepherd. On the other hand, no sight satisfies the shepherd more than to see his flock well fed on rich green pastures, able to lie down to rest.

The shepherd knows it is his business to provide the green pastures for his sheep. It is the shepherd who finds a location where the soil can be cultivated, where rocks can be removed, where the land can be irrigated properly, and where the proper plants can be found.

Stop right here! If your souls could speak audibly, I believe that most would say, "I am hungry!" No one can see your starving soul because you are well groomed and well dressed. You know just what to say; you have learned all the Christian clichés. But, if your souls could speak audibly, most would say, "I am starving in my soul!"

My friends, God has given us a Book, the Word of God, that is food for our souls. Yet, God's Word is often lying on a coffee table or somewhere in a drawer or on the back seat of an automobile.

It is seldom opened, read, or obeyed.
And yet, you continue to have FEAR, FRICTION, FRUSTRATION and HUNGER in your life. Jesus Christ has provided rich, fulfilling green pastures – the every living Word of God and the spiritual manna for our souls in which we can graze. Because the Shepherd takes care of these things in our lives, we can find sweet rest in His presence.

In the opening words of this message I said, “In our Christian life so often the struggle is not with the world, the flesh, or the Devil; the struggle is with God.” However, the only way we are going to benefit from Psalm 23 is to come to the understanding that there must be a TOTAL DEPENDENCE, a TOTAL SURRENDER to the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. Again in Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus said,

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, (this speaks of yielding) and I will give you rest.” It is here that according to verse 29 that we “shall find rest unto your souls.”

Our weary souls continue to plead for rest until they find the green pastures God has provided for them.

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If God has spoken to your heart, after reading the sermon “He Leadeth Me Beside Still Waters,” right now talk to God about what He has spoken to you.

Do you have the assurance that one day you will go to heaven? If you have no assurance that you know Jesus Christ, then I trust you will decide to accept Him as your personal Savior. The Bible tells us in

Acts 16:31, “...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...”
Romans 10:13, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

This prayer is here for those who need to ask Jesus to be their personal Savior: “I do want to go to Heaven. I know I am a sinner, and I do believe Jesus Christ died for me. I realize I cannot buy this great salvation, nor can I earn it. Knowing Jesus died on the cross and arose from the grave to pay my sin debt and to purchase my salvation, I do now trust Him as my Savior, and from this moment on I am completely depending on Him for my salvation.”

If you made the decision to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, let me know. Please send an e-mail to pdmikBBM@aol.com and I will send you some literature that will help you in your Christian life.

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