

Rest

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Preacher: Ray Sweet

[0 : 00] Well, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana, and I just want to say thank you. Thank you for tuning in to this radio broadcast today where we are all about preaching God's Word.

And it's my prayer over your heart and mine that today, as we just sit and listen to the Word of God, here it explained that God will take this Word, drive it into our hearts, and mold and shape you and me both into His image more and more every single day.

Now, I want to start off here in Psalm 23 with verses 1 and 2. The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters.

Last week, we started off this series in this famous psalm, and we talked about how familiar these words are for even people outside of the church. We mentioned that you hear this passage most at funerals, and while these words are comforting for sure, they're also words meant for the living that show the difference when we are truly dependent on our Good Shepherd.

And we just kind of took a step back, and we saw a glimpse of who our Good Shepherd wants to be in our lives. He is infinite, never-changing, self-sufficient, all-powerful, all-knowing. He's everywhere.

[1 : 24] He's wise, faithful, good, and the perfect picture of justice. He's merciful, gracious, loving, holy, glorious, and majestic.

And that same God cares about little old you and little old me, and He desires a relationship with us where He, the Good Shepherd, leads, feeds, protects, and loves us as we walk in His resurrection power, as we stroll step-in-step in the Holy Spirit's daily leading.

That's why a worship service should never feel like a funeral. That's why I can proclaim, as whether I'm an introvert or extrovert, that I can proclaim that the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

And today we come to verse 2. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. There's an old story about two rival lumberjacks.

And when I say rival, it was mainly in one of the guy's heads, and the other guy was still pretty chilled about it all. But the lumberjack, who was always trying to outdo his neighbor, challenged him to an all-day woodcutting contest.

[2 : 35] That day came with their axes in hand, and they began to chop away. The challenger worked hard all day, only to taking one quick lunch break.

However, the other lumberjack didn't seem in a hurry. He took a long, relaxing lunch break, several other breathers through the day, and yet at the end of the contest, he had cut probably 20-25% more lumber than his challenger, who worked harder taking only that one 15-minute break.

And as you can imagine, he was not only mad, but confused, and he said, I just don't get it. It seemed like every time I checked, you were taking a break, and yet you cut this much more wood than I did.

And that's when the winner said these words, But you didn't notice, when I sat down to rest, I was sharpening my axe. Now, please know I would never advocate for laziness, but I have a feeling that I'm not the only one who probably falls on the workaholic side of the spectrum, where my very gracious wife has said to me, Hey, don't you think you've probably worked enough days in a row and enough hours lately?

Don't you think a rest would recharge you a little bit? And my foolish response has been, Oh, I can rest when I get to heaven, okay? But today, I'm going to let God's Word guide us on a topic that obviously I need to grow into.

[3 : 55] Because getting seven to nine hours of sleep a night doesn't automatically mean rest. Having a few hours to chill or going on a nice vacation does not promise you will actually rest.

Just showing up at church most Sundays does not guarantee rest. In fact, St. Augustine of Africa once said, Oh God, thou hast made us for thyself, and our souls are restless, searching till they find their rest in thee.

And I have to tell you, as I was reading about verse 2 last week from W. Philip Keller's book called, A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23, I was just blown away by what I didn't understand about sheep that honestly makes this verse come alive.

See, sheep, you know, the not-so-bright animal that God compares us to about 200 times in His Word, and we just kind of have to take it because He's God and He's obviously right. Yeah, it was almost impossible for those sheep to lie down and rest if four different requirements weren't met. And this is coming from an author who raised sheep for something like a decade. And this would have been something that King David, the man who wrote this psalm, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he would have understood this world of keeping sheep.

[5 : 15] And this Old Testament Israelite culture that he would have been writing to would have fully grasped this as well. And yet here we are, not completely understanding it, sitting 3,000 years later in a much different place, disconnected from the context for the most part.

So that's why my philosophy on preaching has changed a lot over the last probably five to seven years, as I do very little topical preaching now, and I simply love to just open up a book of the Bible and go deeper into the context and the rich truth of God's Word.

So let's look at our first phrase here, Psalm 23, 2, He makes me lie down in green pastures. How many of you would say that like sheep, you have a hard time resting?

Maybe it's because we're a little more tightly wound in personality like myself. Maybe it's because there's always more things to do. Maybe it's because we're not content and busyness at least keeps me moving and not focusing on the realities of my world.

Maybe it's a struggle with perfectionism. Now for sheep, it was the four F's that had to be just right. Fear, friction, flies, and food. Fear of outside disturbances and wild animals coming for them.

[6 : 34] Friction within as they too had their struggles with their peers. Flies or other bugs and parasites that made life miserable at times. And then food, like us, they wanted to be well fed and satisfied.

And yet sheep couldn't fix any of these other issues. The answer was them having a good shepherd who truly cared for the flock. Because when he was armed and watching for outside threats, the sheep felt safe.

When he was in their presence, those internal squabbles and pecking orders faded. Kind of like when a teacher walks into a classroom full of 25 bickering fifth graders. Or when the shepherd put treatment on the sheep to keep those flies and those parasites under control, then they had relief. Or even when the shepherd took care of his land and led the sheep to healthy green pastures. That's when their bellies were satisfied. It had everything to do with the shepherd and the role he was allowed to play in their lives, just like it does for us.

So let's do this. Let's sharpen our axes a little bit today and talk about those four F's that keep us from resting in Christ. Those four barriers to true rest.

[7 : 50] And then first is fear. Fear. You know, I got to thinking the other day, fear is a liar. When he told you you're not good enough.

When he told you you're not right. When he told you you're not strong enough to put up a good fight. When he told you you're not worthy. When he told you you're not loved. When he told you you're not beautiful, that you'll never be enough.

You know, fear, he is a liar. He'll take your breath, stop you in your steps. Fear, he is a liar. He'll rob your rest, steal your happiness.

So cast your fear in the fire, because fear, he is a liar. You know, I wonder if Zach Williams has ever thought about singing a song like that, as I try to creatively not plagiarize, okay?

Just having some fun with that. But on a serious note, let me ask you this. What keeps you up at night? Maybe all the what ifs. Your children. Your parents.

[8 : 49] Your own health. Your job. Your marriage. Maybe your singleness. Regrets. Unforgiveness. That giant to-do list.

Anger or resentment. Money or lack thereof. Sin. Loved ones. Exhaustion. Guys, we can keep going, but I don't think any of us need reminded of those outside fears that we often allow to rob us of our rest.

And I agree with Zach Williams, who got this from the Apostle John. Yes, Satan is a thief. And he will rob your rest as we allow him to plant fear in our minds.

And we even water those fears sometimes by dwelling on these things instead of truly believing God's promises. So do me a favor. Sit back and listen to truth as we look at fear from God's perspective.

Isaiah 43.1 says, But now this is what the Lord says. And by the way, he's speaking to the Israelites. But we too are a part of his chosen people now covered by the blood of Jesus.

[9 : 56] He says, See, we have been bought with the blood of Christ for a purpose.

And we don't have to run back and put those shackles of fear back on like we're all tempted to do. We get to walk in freedom because we are children of the King.

We belong to the King of Kings, the King Jesus, and he replaces fear with peace. Listen to what Jesus says here in John 14, starting here in verse 26.

So we know that the Holy Spirit brings peace, right?

Peace, not chaos. Christians who walk in chaos are not allowing the Holy Spirit to lead. Then verse 27 of John 14 puts it this way. Peace I leave with you, Jesus says.

[11 : 01] My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. So do not let your hearts be troubled. And listen to this. Do not be afraid. So all these outside things that could go wrong.

I can't control that. But I know my good shepherd has every single one of these things under control. He's got me under control. He has my heart that under control that can dwell in his peace and not in fear.

See, that's a promise. And just like these sheep who needed the security of the shepherd's protection to rest, we have it if we're a child of God and we can rest in him.

Now, second thing that keeps us from resting in Christ is friction. Friction. Relational friction. Not that any of us have ever dealt with that one, right?

So we just talked about those outside circumstances. Now we know that sometimes we lack rest because of the internal conflict that tears apart workplaces and schools and families and organizations, businesses, sports leagues, even, sadly, the church.

[12 : 11] See, in chickens, they have what's called a pecking order. With cattle, it's a horning order. But with sheep, it's called a budding order. So there's always going to be a chain of command and relational friction that happens as it's enforced.

And for sheep, they headbutt each other. And when this is going on, the sheep can't rest. The bullying and the stress is just too much for them to lie down and rest.

And as Keller teaches us, this continual conflict and jealousy within the flock can make the sheep edgy, tense, discontented, and restless.

They lose weight and they become irritable. And the same things are true of us. But for me, instead of losing weight, I usually eat more and gain weight when there's conflict. And yet, what's the answer?

The answer is the shepherd. Do you remember when you were a kid in school and you were doing something wrong, maybe not treating other kids very well for whatever reason, and the teacher walked in and was like, oh, hey, what's up, bro?

[13 : 14] Give me nooks. We're best buds now, right? And we really thought the teacher had no idea that we were up to no good. And sheep are kind of the same way. When the shepherd appeared, the friction stopped.

And I would make this charge. When our eyes are really on the good shepherd, how we treat others and how we see our status within a group, that changes. So grab your Bibles and turn with me here to Matthew chapter 20.

If you can do that quickly, Matthew 20. And we're kind of going to look at an odd passage where James and John, two of Jesus' disciples, they basically have their mommy come to Jesus to ask if they can sit on his right and his left when he comes into his kingdom.

In other words, they want to be known as the greatest. And I want to pick up here in Matthew chapter 20, verse 24. It says, He says, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them, and their high officials exercised authority over them.

He says, Not so with you. Okay? So Christians, you are to look different. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. And whoever wants to be first must be your slave.

[14 : 38] Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Wow. See, that mentality, that servant-hearted pick-up-your-towel-and-wash-feet-put-your-own-agenda-to-the-side mentality, that doesn't just happen on our own.

That's what happens when my life screams out, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. That only happens when my life is in Christ and the Holy Spirit has taken residence in this heart. That only happens when I die to self, I pick up my cross, and I follow Jesus as an authentic disciple. See, that only happens when I'm seeking to love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength.

And out of that flows a love for my neighbor like this world cannot understand. See, when my eyes are fixed on my shepherd, relational friction ceases.

Now, other people may try to do it, but we're just not going to bite. Okay? Relational friction ceases, and I can truly rest in my Savior. Third, for the sheep, it was flies and parasites, but for us, it's frustrations.

[15 : 51] Not just the things that I'm fearful of or friction within with relationships, but also those annoying frustrations that every single one of us have to deal with daily. That crazy driver, or for those of us who are the crazy driver, that slow driver going under the speed limit.

That bossy person, or for those of us who are those people who don't seem to have much giddy up in their step. Gas price is going up 30 cents on the day that you need to get it. It's tax time right now, and you have to pay in more than maybe you expected.

The washing machine goes out the same day that your car breaks down. See, just a couple weeks ago, it was Easter week, where it's already crazy.

And I started to have some major sinus issues that was happening, much more than just a stuffy nose. I mean, it was headaches and pressure and feeling lousy.

And I just kind of threw my hands up and said, Really? I have five services that I'm helping to lead this week, and all the setup that goes along with it. God, I need your help because I don't need this frustration on top of it all.

[16 : 57] And for these sheep, imagine trying to rest, especially in the summer months, when you're being driven crazy by nasal flies, bot flies, warble flies, and even ticks.

Instead of lying down, they're stamping their legs, they're shaking their heads, rubbing up against bushes to try to get some relief. And this is where the good shepherd comes in. Because even in ancient days, I'm sure they had concoctions to put on the sheep to keep those pesky bugs away. And one thing that some of you may not know about my family is that between my dad, my brother, and I, and our families, we have three black Angus cows that we're raising for food.

Their names are T-Bone, Frankie, and Skeeter. And while my dad does most of the work, which he loves to do in his retirement, I've had to run to Rural King before to get some powder to put on the cows just to keep those bugs away, to make them leave them alone.

Frustrations can keep us from resting. And yet, when you and I belong to Jesus, we have God's promise that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. That means God living inside of us, teaching us and guiding us into all truth, interceding to the Father on our behalf, sanctifying and enabling our hearts to bear good fruit, helping us in our weaknesses, imparting spiritual gifts, giving revelation, wisdom, and power, and even convicting us of our sin, helping us to deal with every single frustration that comes our way, and giving us the strength to persevere and stay faithful to Christ through it all.

[18 : 36] And you know what? Even giving us the maturity to understand a passage like John 16, 33, where Jesus says, In this world, you will have trouble, but take heart, because I have overcome the world, Jesus says.

And we can even learn to praise Him and be thankful for how He uses the frustrations of life to mold us and shape us into His image.

So fear, friction, frustrations. And then the last barrier that keeps us from resting in Christ is famine. Famine. Did you know that the great sheep countries of the world, where you probably have the most sheep, are mostly dry, semi-arid type of areas?

And while there are a few reasons why this is the case, one struggle for the shepherd wanting to lead his sheep to green pastures is that green pastures aren't easily found in these type of areas. And Palestine, especially near Bethlehem, where King David would have been a shepherd, is known as a dry, brown, sunburned wasteland. Green pastures did not just happen by chance in

these areas.

[19 : 48] Instead, they were a result of a good shepherd who put in a lot of time, hard work, and skill into transforming the land. They had to clear the rough, rocky terrain, tear out the brush and roots and stumps, plow and prepare the soil, even irrigate the water, irrigate with water.

And yet, if you wanted your sheep to lie down in green pastures, this is exactly what had to happen. Because when they were hungry, they were constantly up and on the search for food.

But when they were chowing down in green, lush pastures, it was common to have lambs reach 100 pounds and wait within 100 days from birth. And when they could fill up quickly, free from fear and frictions and frustrations, that allowed them to quietly rest, to lie down and rest in peace, and it made for healthy livestock.

And you know what? As we think about our own walk with Jesus, there are a lot of Christians who spiritually live in famine mode, who stay in Egypt instead of entering the promised land, who are consumed with self and sin instead of walking in Christ's contentment and victory.

And yet we have a good shepherd whose grace through his death and resurrection calls us to health and maturity in Christ. And he can clear that stony unbelief out of our hearts.

[21 : 11] He can tear out the roots of bitterness. He can break up that sun-dried clay soil of a hard, proud human heart. And he can sow the seed of his word that will produce crops of contentment and peace when we get into the word of God.

When the word of God gets into us, that changes everything. See, he can make me lie down in green pastures where struggles like fear, friction, frustrations, and famine are taken care of as I look to the good shepherd.

And while the sheep need green pastures, the shepherd also has to lead them beside quiet waters to drink that pure, uncontaminated water.

And in Matthew 5, verse 6, Jesus made a very simple statement that is absolutely true. He said, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

See, here's the thing. When you belong to the good shepherd's flock, when you've repented and been baptized into Christ and now you're walking in him every day, you know that you have a shepherd who has given everything to prepare the way so that you can lie down in green pastures to rest and even rise to be satisfied by pure water.

[22 : 31] So, what does that mean? While we belong to the good shepherd who we can trust completely, we still have to follow him, right? It's still our choice whether we will follow him and be obedient.

We have to go back to the fundamentals where our faith isn't just about feelings or fancy programs, where it's not just about coming to the show once a week, but our hearts truly long to know Christ and grow deeper in him, where we're committed to the body of believers and things like worshiping and growing alongside like-minded believers, where getting into the word of God comes first every day and other things get prioritized around that, where my prayer time in Christ is unceasing.

I'm daily listening to the Holy Spirit's leading, where I'm committed to serving Jesus with my gifts and talents instead of just coming and being a consumer because that's not godly at all.

And I hate to admit it, but we, like sheep, are restless. Sadly, we often fulfill these words from Jeremiah 2, verse 13, where God, speaking of the Israelites, says, they have forsaken me, the spring of living water.

He says, they've forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. And yet, while we're so prone to wander like sheep, to rely on our own broken cisterns and our own effort, I love that we have a good shepherd who makes us lie down in green pastures and who leads us beside quiet waters.

[24 : 08] A God who, like the lumberjack story we started off with today, realizes that we need rest in Him as He sharpens the axe and sends us out recharged and ready to make an impact for Him.

So here's the questions for today. Here are the questions for today. Is there one of these areas that's become a barrier for your walk with Christ?

Is it fear that keeps you from resting? Is it friction in your relationships with family or co-workers or friends or church people? Is it those life frustrations that we all face that just keeps you from truly being able to surrender to Christ?

Or are you spiritually in a famine where it's time to truly seek the Lord's heart like maybe you never have before? See, the good news is that you belong to the good shepherd.

And your good shepherd, He's more than enough for you. Pray with me. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for these words that you have spoken to us today.

[25 : 23] These words that bring life into our hearts. And we just pray that as we look at this passage and we understand sheep maybe greater than we've ever understood them before, that we will see that we are not meant to be people who walk in fear.

That because we belong to the good shepherd, fears can cease because I am under His leading and His control. That we are meant to be people who don't allow relational friction to get in the way of us truly resting in you.

That when there's issues that we go and we deal with it and we love one another and we lay our pride down and we serve.

We wash feet and we serve. That God, we know that sometimes in life that the frustrations, that when the washing machine and the car break down in the same week and the money is going to be more than I really have or whatever the frustrations are.

God, we know those things when we are in you and our roots are deep, they can't steal our joy. And so help us to truly trust you that you have this under control.

[26 : 40] And God, sadly, I too can struggle with being in a spiritual famine where I am trying to operate out of a broken cistern and I am trying to do things in my own power and my own strength when I belong to the King of Kings, the Good Shepherd.

And so Jesus, I just pray that you will help us to get in your word every day, to get on our knees in prayer, to truly seek your heart and follow the Holy Spirit's leading, to be plugged into a church where we are growing alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ and even where we're serving and using the gifts that you've given us to make an impact for your kingdom.

So thank you for these words of life that you have spoken over us today and I just pray that you will have your way in each of us and we pray this in Jesus' precious name.

Amen. Hey, I want to give this invitation to you today. Once again, my name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor at First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. And we would love to come alongside you.

If you'd like to have a conversation about what it means to truly follow Jesus, I'd love to take you to the Word of God, show you what it teaches and even get you baptized here soon. And so please reach out.

[27 : 58] Here's a couple ways you can do that. You can call the church office at 812-663-8488. Once again, 812-663-8488.

812-663-8488. Or you can email me at rayatfccgreensburg.com. rayatfccgreensburg.com.

Hey, I hope that you have an amazing week as you feast on those green pastures.