

New hope sermon 10 20 19 Resting in God's love

Introduction

I believe I know why Psalm 23 is so well known among Christians around the world: It pictures the amazing care that God takes of us as our Shepherd. Listen to the verbs.

*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³he refreshes (or restores) my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. ⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
⁶Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

This is a picture of an intimate, all-encompassing relationship between God and those who are His sheep. And with all this care and work of God on our behalf, we can rest secure in Him. That's our theme today.

One of the earliest hymns I memorized as a new Christian was "Jesus, I am resting, resting."

"Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art
I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart.
Thou hast bid me gaze upon thee and Thy beauty fills my soul
For by Thy transforming power, Thou hast made me whole."

The Kentucky trip

On our trip last week to Kentucky with Jingjing this was the environment in which I was singing this song out-loud to the Lord:



Oh how great thy loving kindness, vaster, broader than the sea
Oh how marvelous thy goodness, lavished all on me.
Yes, I rest on Thee, beloved, know what wealth of grace is Thine
Know the certainty of promise and have made it mine."

Ever lift Thy face upon me, as I work and wait for Thee;
Resting neath Thy smile, Lord Jesus, earth's dark shadows flee.
Brightness of my Father's glory, sunshine of my Father's face
Keep me every trusting, resting, fill me with Thy grace" (words: Jean Pigott, Music: J. Mountain)

I think the Lord knew all the stress and struggles ahead of my life that I had still not encountered in my early twenties and why this theme would become basic to my well-being. I also believe that this truth of resting in the Lord is needed for every Christian on the planet, particularly given the fast-paced lifestyle in North America, Hong Kong and in many major cities in the industrialized world. Humans can tend to be frenetic, striving people.

Even businesses understand this. Have you heard of powernaps international?

“In 2005, a store called MinneNAPolis opened in Minnesota's Mall of America. It rents comfy spots where weary shoppers can take naps for 70 cents a minute. Founded by PowerNap Sleep Centers of Boca Raton, Florida, the new store includes themed rooms such as Asian Mist, Tropical Isle, and Deep Space, and the walls are thick enough to drown out the sounds of squealing children outside.

The company's website says, "Escape the pressures of the real world into the pleasures of an ideal one." "It's not just napping," reads the press release. "Some guests will want to listen to music, put their feet up, watch the water trickling in the beautiful stone waterfall, breathe in the positive-ionization-filtered air, enjoy the full-body massager, and just take an enjoyable escape from the fast-paced lifestyle." *www.powernapsleepcenters.com (10-28-05)*

Instead, let's go deeper and look at what God means by resting in Him. We start with scriptures which deal with this topic directly.

Exodus: 33:14 – God's promise to his people before Moses was to resume the journey with God's people in the wilderness: The Lord said 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'

Ps. 37:7 *Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him*

Ps. 62:5 *Find rest, of my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation. He is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock...*

And the final psalm that is the key for us today: Ps. 131:

LORD, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty.

I don't concern myself with matters too great or too awesome for me to grasp.

² Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother's milk. Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

The Messages translates v. 2 as "I've kept my feet on the ground, I've cultivated a quiet heart.

Like a baby content in its mother's arms, my soul is a baby content.

According to an old Jewish story, once upon a time there was a four-year-old boy named Mortakai who refused to attend school and study Hebrew. Whenever his parents tried to immerse his mind in the Torah [or the Word of God], he would sneak away and play on the swing set. Every form of persuasion failed. Mortakai remained stubborn and defiant. The exasperated parents even brought him to a famous psychiatrist, but that also proved futile. Nothing changed the young boy's heart, which seemed to grow more distant, lonely, and hardened every week.

Finally, in utter desperation, Mortakai's parents brought him to the local rabbi, a warm and wise spiritual guide. As the parents explained their plight, pouring out their frustration and despair, the rabbi listened intently. Without saying a word, he gently picked up Mortakai, took him in his arms and held him close to his chest. The rabbi held Mortakai close enough and tight enough so the young boy could feel the safe, rhythmic beating of the rabbi's heart. Then, still without a word, he gently handed the child back to his parents. From that point on, Mortakai listened to his parents, studied the Torah and, when it was appropriate, he also slipped away to play on the swing set. *Matt Woodley, The Folly of Prayer (IVP Books, 2009), pp. 141-142*

So what do these images speak of with a baby resting on its mother's breast? At least 3 emotional and spiritual states:

First, peace = I am content and at peace, a soul calmed and quieted

Second, security – laying safely in his mother's embrace. The fears and alarms and pressures of the world are not dictating the inner state of the child's heart. There is security in his mother's embrace.

Third, belonging – knowing the love of family, of one who cares for me, who cares for my heart, who knows the plans that are best for me. The sovereign love of a father or mother figure – who tends and nourishes.

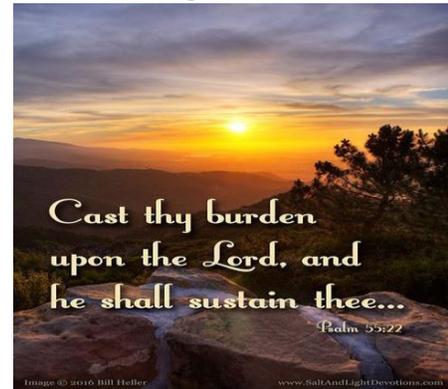
In the New Testament Jesus fulfills all those roles for us. In Mt. *He called out: Come. All of you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light* Mt. 11:28-29

The Message translates this as: ²⁸⁻³⁰ “*Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me— watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.*”

What makes us heavy-laden? – it’s feeling weighed down or worn out with stress and deadlines, assignments, major decisions re: our next steps, an unknown future, health issues etc. Jesus offers to shoulder those burdens with and for us. *Taking his yoke upon us* means partnering with him but knowing He will bear most of the burden-bearing – he is the strong ox in the team. We walk with him and work with him and learn to live in the unforced rhythms of grace. The rhythms of grace. Isn’t that a lovely picture phrase? In all the ups and downs, the pressures and the stresses that come and go in intensity, His grace can be our pace-setter and He can carry us along through the ups and downs. Our soul can be relieved from all the burdens we internalize and carry ourselves and we can release these to Jesus.



As I was talking to the Lord at that Kentucky farm and walking along the road, singing to Him, (and taking pictures!), He brought another



song that describes this release Jesus offers: *Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee. He will never permit the righteous to fall; he is at thy right hand.* The

NLT makes that ever simpler: *Give your burdens to the LORD, and he will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall.*”

When I am truly resting in the Lord, then I am able to turn my burdens over unto Him. And that’s exactly what I did. The Lord knows everything every one of His people are facing anywhere in the world. And He is able to meet them abundantly in that need. He sustains us. He carries us. He delivers us. He restores us. He rescues us. He is the One who shoulders the world and holds it together moment by moment. So He can certainly deal with our issues! And when we trust Him to do that, we are resting in His love.

God’s Interventions After Kentucky

To encourage your faith, because as a family what happens with Keith and I involves all of you, let me tell you 6 ways the Lord answered my prayers since Kentucky, as I cast the concerns about Keith’s Alzheimers on the Lord. Six ways! What a God! 1. I was counseled to get into a local Alzheimers caregivers support group, so when we got back from Kentucky I began the research to find one close at hand. There is one at Belmont Assisted Living, the very community where I worked for 7 years as a chaplain. It’s twice a month on the first and third Wed. from 6-7pm. Jose can drop me off at the end of his shift and Evan has agreed to pick me up at 7☺. An open door. 2. I was also counseled to get out of the house twice, not once, a week for my own refreshment. Marti offered to take me out every Saturday afternoon, but I needed a consistent caregiver for Keith. Yesterday (on Saturday) a new caregiver Jose got for us arrived. His name is Alex. He understands

Alzheimers; he is willing to help Keith shower (once Keith has gotten accustomed to him) and go with Keith on errands etc. He is an easy conversationalist so a good companion for Keith. He is a good driver and a good presence in the household. Another open door. All gifts from the Lord. 3. As my daughter Laurie had suggested, I began thinking to build an addition on the back of the house creating an Alzheimers wing when Keith is in the final stages of the disease. Last week I started the research and went so far as to get a contractor and an architect out here after the Wheaton city council gave the first OK of our plans. Bruce was also here this past week and we went over the proposed addition together. But in calculating the cost of all that would be involved with both the contractor's estimate and Bruce's input of what would also need to be included, I realized I don't have those funds, so we cancelled the project and will see how God works next summer/fall. I feel peace in that wisdom. 4. But that look at our financial situation made me realize that I need to work on our money flow so I can have more money in the future. On Thursday when Erin was here, she and I worked out ways we could trim the budget here at New Hope to free up a bit more money for my salary. That's immensely helpful. 5. I have really felt the difference that people's prayers have made in me. The situation has not changed but I have experienced more peace and evidences of God's goodness this past week and am now more at rest with the Lord in terms of our Alzheimer future. And 6. On Thursday at our healing service Max had a vision of Keith healed, so he went and laid hands on Keith and anointed his hands with oil and put the mark of the cross in oil on his forehead as he prayed for his healing. Wow. We will see how God does that healing! We haven't had an Alzheimer incident since thurs. night. Wahoo! Six ways God is sustaining me so I can encourage you through our story.

Resting in the Lord does not mean you have a Disneyworld life, with no hardships or sufferings. Life is hard for everyone and being a Christian does not take those hardships away – God will remove hardships some of the time but certainly not all the time – because they strengthen our appreciation of God's presence and promises and goodness as God sustains us and holds us up. In fact, our God is the *God of hope who fills us completely with all joy and peace in believing so His love overflows for others through us by the power of the Holy Spirit*. Rom.15:13. We can rest in the Lord because of who He is. We live in His sufficiency; He is the strong ox in our partnership with Him and He bears the heavy part of our burdens and gives us His joy as we go forward with Him. This is how we experience well-being (shalom) in Him. Praise the Lord!

So, in response, I want us to sing this signature song about resting that God brought to me in 1958 when I first began my walk with Jesus as Lord and Savior. “Jesus I am resting, resting, in the joy of what Thou art. I am finding out the goodness of Thy loving heart.” This is true, beloved. Amen and Amen.

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 10/20/19