

My Rest...

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Psalm 23/

The Divine Shepherd A Psalm of David.

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I 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 goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

(Song – All Who Are Thirsty)

Psalm 23

The Divine Shepherd A Psalm of David.

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I **have no need to worry**.

²He **provides all I need to live and to rest**

³he restores my soul. He leads me **in paths that allow me time to praise Him**.

⁴Even though I walk **through hard times and have to deal with real evil I still don't need to worry; for I know God works all things for good for those who love Him and that He desires a way for me that leads me to the deepest peace**.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of **those things which threaten me; you allow me to be honoured despite them and you allow me to succeed despite the fear I feel**.

⁶Surely **my life will produce the fruit of God's rest and peace and I will be made able to live faithfully forever**.

(Song – Silent Night)

I love Christmas time. As a child the singing of carols evoked a deep sense of joy which has never really left me. Part of this has to do with the fact that my family became a little saner around Christmas. You see because my Grandparents lived in the north Island and since Christmas was the only time we usually got to see them we simply had to pack up and leave all the busy-ness of home and travel to Hastings. So Christmas's became for me about leaving behind the growing ugliness of my school career, the duties of family life, the rigours of piano practice and the competitiveness of male culture and entering into a time of deep relaxation and peace. The moment we set out from Dunedin to travel north all worries and concerns would begin to fade

away. Instead we could ride high on petrol fumes and dim memories of the road and things that happened last year; on the seasickness of the inter-island ferry and the adventure one could have exploring every inch of the boat one could enter; and into the smells and taste of a Hawkes Bay orchard – spray mixed with tractor fumes mixed with the tang of ripening and over-ripe fruit. I'm sure that this is the substance of most of the romance of travel – the ability to relax – to stop all the incessant activity that surrounds one's life wherever one calls home.

Of course my father took the best part of a week to truly enter into holiday mode and to become the playful interested father that I knew him to be. Eventually, however, he would give in to summer's sultry mood and he too would begin to loosen the shirt collar and enjoy the slower pace. And it was good, for the most part. It enabled us all to rest. I wonder, are you able to rest?

Jesus says this to us ...

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. (Matt 11²⁸⁻³⁰)

God's will for us is that we should rest. Specifically we should know His rest. Rest appears, in this reading at least, to be the signal reason why we should come to Jesus. Jesus describes us as a race who are burdened and weary and whose great need is for rest – the rest He and only He can provide. I want to ask this morning, does this describe you? It certainly does me, at least at times.

At times my life has been one of incredible physical tiredness – a bone weary tiredness caused by a succession of broken nights and frantic days where there seems to be hardly a minute's quietness and silence. And, at times this heightened state of work is required. But if it is we must realise that we need a balancing period of quiet.

At other times my life has been dominated by worry. Worry about money, worry about relationships, worry about performance, worry about constantly being worried. And, again, at times it is right to worry. Worry keeps us thinking, keeps us working, keeps us in the game and alert. But we must be able to come away from worry. We must be able to leave worry behind and know that we've done what we can and it is time to trust and to relax.

At other times my life has been a cauldron of stormy surf crashing down again and again on the beach of my consciousness urged on by anger and resentment over some injustice or unfairness. And the feelings and rage allow no rest for a time and perhaps even this is not so bad. Even Jesus got angry and He expressed that anger at least once violently against those who were turning the Temple into another sort of cauldron, that of commercial activity. But again the Bible assures us we must not allow the sun to go down on our anger for this would allow us no rest and rest is when we once again are able to receive God's Word on matters and to understand God's great patience and to receive God's great and abiding peace.

When did we last set aside time to really receive, to intentionally receive God's peace?

(Song – Lead Me To The Cross)

One very odd thing has become clear to me in the last few years. We will not rest until we intentionally set out to do so. Rest does not just happen. It's interesting. Our culture focuses a lot on being intentional in our activity and this can be very good. But we think very little about what will bring us rest. I think we assume we know but assumptions are often untested and can easily be untrue. Share for a moment with each other about what truly brings you rest.

Rest to be truly restful needs to be intentional and targeted. Jesus says '**Come!**' We begin by making an intentional move towards God, towards rest. The Psalmist is led to restful places, he has followed God to these places – he has not found his way there simply by stopping or by doing nothing. He has gone with God in order to find rest. This is perhaps the key to what Jesus is saying about rest. True rest requires us to enter into a relationship with God. This is, indeed, one of the major reasons why we should see relationship with God – **so that we may rest!** Our own attempts at rest are often futile.

How many of us watch TV for rest? While there may be nothing wrong with TV watching per se there is definitely something wrong with it as a restful activity. Much TV is designed not to relax us but to stimulate us, to raise adrenaline levels and to wake us up and even though we may not realise it we come away from an hours TV watching full of quite the wrong things for rest.

And there are habits which do not give us rest. Habits of worry, habits of work, habits of mood. So when God calls us He may have to call us **out** of a habit as well as **in** to a place where we can be still in ourselves and before Him.

One of the things I've discovered about rest is that I need regular physical activity to find real rest. My body seems much more able to rest if it has received a good amount of physical exercise. So rest may, from the outside, appear to be something quite the opposite. A person who loves the garden will spend themselves in it for an afternoon coming in quite exhausted and yet be emotionally and even spiritually wonderfully rested. Furthermore what I eat has a great bearing on how well I am able to rest. Many years ago as a young Christian I felt the Holy Spirit urging me to give up buying sweets. I have a very sweet tooth and could, once, gorge myself on sweets. But I was never able to rest after such gorging. The sugar would just get me going. So I gave up buying sweets and have largely been able to avoid them ever since. I will eat sweets if they're offered to me sometimes but otherwise not. I am convinced this decision has allowed me to find rest.

God comes at Christmas time in order to lend people His rest. 'Peace on earth...' cries the angel. Let us be clear this morning. God wants to recruit you not in the first place to work **but to rest**. God is calling us into His rest first and foremost. We cannot work well for God until we have entered His rest. The question is, are we willing to enter that rest and what might that mean for you and for I? In many ways only the Holy Spirit can really lead us specifically into God's rest and we will need to pray and ask God to help us. But can we elaborate some general principles in regard to God's rest? Two things can be said.

Firstly when Jesus says 'Come' He doesn't mean this in an abstract way. When God wants to lead us into rest He will lead us in a specific way to a concrete place and with a specific agenda. We can be clear that this will not be by the way we have travelled thus far. It will entail us doing something different. It will entail us doing something specific. For me I have found that certain

retreats, certain decisions either not to do something or to do something have lead to rest. Apart from this intentionality rest is not possible.

Secondly, when Jesus says 'Come' He is calling us away from something. We should be open to the understanding that we will have to give something away if we want to rest in God. We will have to change a habit, we will have to give up a lie, we will have to give away something. We cannot rest without giving up something. What is God calling us to give up in order that we might enter into his rest?

Reflection

Think for a moment about what God might be saying to you about rest. How intentional have you been about it? Have you some healthy patterns of rest and work? Is there something God is calling you to do, perhaps to set aside proper time for rest, perhaps attend a retreat, perhaps organise your breaks better. Is there something God is calling you to give up in order to truly rest? Perhaps you simply want help with entering into rest. Write whatever you need to on your sheet of white paper. On your coloured paper you may want to write something that you want God to know or to have or to deal with. You are welcome to come up and to stick this to our cross and we will bring these things to God in prayer.