

The Shepherd's Gift of Rest

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He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.

—Psalm 23:2a

A flock of sheep feeding and resting in rich, green pastures by a cooling stream is a pleasing sight in any country. But green pastures are a rare feast for sheep in Israel. Not only are the sheep grazed in the wilderness instead of cultivated fields, but lack of rain allows for verdant grass only two or three months a year.¹ Such a pastoral scene understandably becomes a vivid symbol of spiritual rest and contentment, and David used this symbol in saying: the Lord “maketh me to lie down in green pastures.”

Some people are quick to interpret the blessings of Psalm 23 as natural benefits. We will not deny, of course, that everyone needs physical rest. There must be pauses and parentheses in every life, for our hand cannot always be laboring, nor our brain always given to intense thought. Pleasure and relaxation are a part of enjoying God's good gifts. But if we apply the Shepherd's benefits of Psalm 23 only in a natural way, we soon forget the spiritual benefits enjoyed by God's people in addressing their deepest spiritual needs.

Due to our fall in Adam, we lost God and His image as well as true, spiritual rest. Augustine rightly said, “Thou

1. Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Good Shepherd: A Thousand-Year Journey from Psalm 23 to the New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 40.

hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee.”² To fill the void within, we grasp for the world’s promises of satisfaction. Even though the world around us and within us is but a land of deserts, we still pursue its elusive promise of rest. We live as if we were the first persons in the history of mankind to find true contentment apart from our Creator. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt” (Isa. 57:20).

Today’s generation is living proof of this truth in its restlessness, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness. Millions immerse themselves in senseless forms of entertainment. Millions more grasp illegal drugs, alcohol, and prescription medications to try to lift their moods. Flashing advertisements constantly promise peace, popularity, and happiness for a price. Our society is one mass of restless people, continually returning empty-handed from selfish pursuits.

True rest is to be found by grace in God alone. There is true rest only in the Jehovah-Shepherd. This rest is reserved only for His people and is granted only by sovereign grace. This rest makes a lost sheep willing to follow the Shepherd in the day of divine power, for He alone can lead to rest. The Lord “maketh me to lie down in green pastures.”

The Shepherd Provides the Conditions for Rest

It would seem easy to get a sheep to lie down and rest. A shepherd, however, knows better. Kenneth Bailey writes, “A dog can be trained to sit and lie down. Not so a sheep.”³ Sheep will only rest when certain conditions have been met. Just as an earthly shepherd will labor diligently to

2. Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Co., 1886), 1:45.

3. Bailey, *The Good Shepherd*, 39–40.

provide the necessary conditions to grant his sheep natural rest, so the heavenly Shepherd will labor to provide the necessary conditions for His flock's spiritual rest.

The Rest of Safety

Freedom from fear and a sense of safety is something a shepherd must provide his flock for them to feel free to lie down and rest. Phillip Keller writes, "Sheep are so timid and easily panicked that even a stray jackrabbit suddenly bounding from behind a bush can stampede a whole flock. When one startled sheep runs in flight a dozen others will bolt with it in blind fear, not waiting to see what frightened them."⁴

Sheep need a sense of security in order to rest. Keller explains, "As long as there is even the slightest suspicion of danger from dogs, coyotes, cougars, bears or other enemies the sheep stand up ready to flee for their lives. They have little or no means of self-defense. They are helpless, timid, feeble creatures whose only recourse is to run."⁵ Indeed, a single predator can kill several, even dozens, of sheep in one night.

How does a shepherd quiet his flock's fears so that they may lie down and rest? Certainly, he seeks to remove as many causes of their fear as he possibly can. Yet nothing brings more of a sense of safety to the flock than the presence of the shepherd himself. Simply seeing him in their midst puts their fears to rest.

Such is also the condition of Jesus Christ's spiritual flock. Due to their helplessness and vulnerability, they are a timid flock with many things to fear. When the Lord begins His saving work in their souls, they learn

4. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 36.

5. Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, 36.

that they have no strength in themselves to fight against spiritual predators.

First, they come to fear *sin*. Their guilt, penalty, power, pollution, and results press upon their consciences. They also fear the *law*. Its demand for perfection allows them no rest, but drives them like an Egyptian slave-master to make bricks without straw. They also fear *Satan*. Where can they find rest when they are continually confronted with this roaring lion's fearful attacks of temptation and accusation? And, they fear *death and judgment*. How can they rest if their everlasting destiny lies in the balance and is found wanting?

Only the presence of their Shepherd can dispel these fears. His blood has brought reconciliation and peace in the midst of all that threatens them (Col. 1:20). His presence makes them calm as the Shepherd stands with them and leads them in the strength of the Lord. He is their peace (Mic. 5:4-5). The Lord Jesus said, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18). Literally, His promise is, "I will not leave you *orphans*." By the indwelling Spirit (v. 16), Christ and the Father dwell in the believer, are always present (v. 20), and are "a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1).

The Shepherd stands by His flock and grants them the faith to behold Him and to believe that He is looking on them in His favor. They are thus free to lay all their fears at His feet and to place all their trust and confidence in Him as the Great Shepherd. By protecting the sheep from the things they fear, but especially by staying close to them and enabling them to behold His presence, Jehovah-Shepherd provides His flock with the first condition necessary to make room for spiritual rest.

The Rest of Harmony

Sheep must also be at peace with one another to rest. Keller writes, "The second source of fear from which the sheepman delivers his sheep is that of tension, rivalry, and cruel competition within the flock itself."⁶ Like other animals, sheep fight among themselves, creating strife and tension within the flock. The stronger attack the weaker and claim the best pasture for themselves. As a result, the flock cannot lie down and rest.

Is it any different with Christ's flock spiritually? Did you ever find one of God's children at rest spiritually while striving to be "top sheep"? Do not the head butting and shoving among God's children sometimes cause so much disorder that the entire congregation becomes edgy and tense? Paul's advice in Philippians 2:3 is needed among believers today: "In lowliness of mind let each esteem [the] other better than themselves."

The Good Shepherd responds to fighting in the flock in justice, wisdom, and love. He disciplines the strong for pushing around the weaker sheep. In Ezekiel 34:21–22, He says, "Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad; therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey."

The Shepherd also makes known His presence in the flock as Lord and Son of David. Ezekiel 34:23–24 says, "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it." Just as the presence of the shepherd often causes sheep to stop fighting, so the presence

6. Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, 39.

of the Lord silences bickering and promotes humility and peace among all who are truly His.⁷

Furthermore, the Good Shepherd shows special compassion for the weaker sheep. Isaiah 40:11 says, “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” The Shepherd shows His sheep that the greatest advantages come not from striving to dominate others but from being the servant of all. “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6).

Then, instead of a *butting order* the sheep respond with a *bowing order*. The Lord’s sheep cannot come low enough. Are you seeking grace to become one of the lowliest sheep of God? Have you learned that the closer you are to the bottom the closer you are to the Shepherd? Let this be your prayer: “Lord, give me grace to come down, for I cannot bring myself there. Make room for spiritual rest by bringing me before Thee as one of the lowest sheep. I am glad to rest there, if only I may be of *Thy* flock.”

The Rest of Tranquility

A third thing that prevents sheep from lying down to rest is the painful bite of insects. Keller writes, “Sheep, especially in the summer, can be driven to absolute distraction by nasal flies, bot flies, warble flies and ticks. When tormented by these pests it is literally impossible for them to lie down and rest. Instead they are up and on their feet, stamping their legs, shaking their heads, ready to rush off into the bush for relief from the pests.”⁸ The shepherd

7. Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, 40, 42.

8. Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, 43.

must help ward off these insects by applying oil to the sheep's head.⁹

Jehovah's sheep are also preyed on by pests that prevent spiritual rest. Although true believers strive against worldliness, the world often comes back to live within them, much to their annoyance. It encroaches upon their souls through many disguises. Like Lot, the sheep can become entangled with the world even as its filth vexes their righteous souls (2 Peter 2:7). Various temptations can be such spiritual pests that the sheep cannot lie down to rest. Some of God's sheep struggle with doubts concerning doctrinal truths, while others battle the temptation of a particular sin or fear that they will one day commit a gross sin. The greatest pest, however, is *self*. Like the apostle Paul God's sheep often discover that "what I hate, that do I," so that they cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" (Rom. 7:15, 24).

The divine Shepherd provides something far better than insect repellent for relief from tormentors. He dips His flock in *the oil of the Spirit*, who cleanses, sanctifies, heals, comforts, and transforms the flock, working faith in their souls and uniting them to the Great Shepherd. Christ shares with His sheep the oil of gladness and joy that God has poured out on Him through the Spirit (Ps. 45:7; Isa. 61:1–3). The Spirit's work gives them relief, especially when He takes the things of Christ and shows them to the flock (John 16:13–14). That allows them by faith to place their feet on the neck of the world, on temptations, and even on self. In this way too, the way is opened to true spiritual rest.

9. Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, 116.

The Rest of Sufficiency

Finally, hungry sheep will not lie down to rest. Keller writes, “A hungry, ill-fed sheep is ever on its feet, on the move, searching for another scanty mouthful of forage to try and satisfy its gnawing hunger. Such sheep are not contented, they do not thrive.”¹⁰ Only when sheep have sufficient food to fill their hungry bellies can they lie down to rest.

Given the semi-arid climate of Israel, it is challenging for a shepherd to find good pasture for his flock. It demands careful forethought and constant effort. Bailey recounts how he was near the summit of Jabal Sannin (elev. 8,600 ft.) in Lebanon, where, he says, “I had an interesting conversation with an experienced shepherd (with his large flock) who described to me in fascinating detail the various options and the numerous decisions he was obliged to make each day as he sought forage and water for his more than one hundred sheep.”¹¹

The Good Shepherd leads His sheep to good pasture. He is the door through which they enter into salvation and go out to find the pasture of life, even abundant life (John 10:1–11). Jesus Christ is Himself the pasture of His people, for He is *the living Word of God*. To provide that cost Him more than planning and hard labor—it cost Him the bloody sweat of crucifixion and death. He is the pasture land of eternal satisfaction for His own. As the true meat and drink of life eternal, Christ feeds and nourishes hungry and thirsty souls with His crucified body and shed blood. His sheep find in Him everything they need for time and eternity. He is the Bread of Life (John 6:35). He is the Father’s house in which there is bread enough and

10. Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, 46.

11. Bailey, *The Good Shepherd*, 41.

to spare. He is the focus, the centerpiece, the delight, and the all-in-all of His flock.

He also gives *the written Word of God* as pasture for His flock. The living Word (Christ) and the written Word (the Bible) are inseparably associated with each other. Christ is the great message of all the Holy Scriptures (Luke 24:27, 44; Acts 3:18, 21; 2 Tim. 3:14–16). The Scriptures reveal Jesus Christ as the righteousness of sinners and the Lord and Savior of all who call on His name (Rom. 1:16–17; 10:12–15).

God's people love Scripture and honor it as the Word of God (Ps. 119:97) for it is their life, their food, their pasture. It is their bread when they are hungry (Isa. 55:1–3, 10), their honey when they are faint (Ps. 19:10), their milk when they are babes (1 Cor. 3:2), and their strong meat when they are men (Heb. 5:12–14). They are brought by faith and through grace to "receive with meekness the engrafted word" (James 1:21), to keep this Word (John 17:6), and to continue in this Word (John 8:31).

God's house becomes their home where they feed in the green pastures of the Word of God with its ordinances for the worship of God. In the Old Testament, God gave Himself to His people in His special presence in the temple, though He also heard every prayer whispered in the Israelites' private homes. Psalm 87:2–3 says, "The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." In the New Testament, Christ indwelt every believer by the Holy Spirit, but promised His special presence whenever the church gathers in His name (Matt. 18:20). In the congregation, the sheep hear their Shepherd's voice speaking to them through the reading and the preaching of the Word.

In addition to the Holy Spirit, the ministry of the Word is the principal benefit or gift of the Great Shepherd's

ascension (Eph. 4:10–11). It is a standing pledge to the church that Christ is now “in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:24). Therefore it pleases Him to put special honor upon the preaching of “Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23, 24). Oh, what a blessing it is to find rest for the soul in God’s preached Word! In the house of God, Jehovah’s flock meets their God and shepherding King. There Christ rests and dwells, “for the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation.” He promises to “abundantly bless her provision” and to “satisfy her poor with bread...and her saints shall shout aloud for joy” (Ps. 132:13, 15, 16).

There, like sheep lying down in green pastures, the Lord’s flock experiences divine rest. There the Shepherd provides spiritual *safety* from the predatory fears of sin, Satan, death, and judgment. He gives them spiritual *harmony* with one another so that they dwell together in humility and peace. He blesses them with spiritual *tranquility* as the oil of the Spirit soothes the pricking irritations of temptation and self. He feeds them with the spiritual *sufficiency* of His own fullness offered in His Word, the Holy Scriptures. Have you experienced this rest?

Arise, O Lord, our God, arise
 And enter now into Thy rest
 O let this house be Thy abode,
 Forever with Thy presence blest.

I will abundantly provide
 For Zion’s good, the Lord hath said;
 I will supply her daily need
 And satisfy her poor with bread.

Salvation shall adorn her priests,
Her saints shall shout with joy divine,
Messiah's pow'r shall be revealed,
His glory in His Church shall shine.¹²

Enjoying Divine Rest by Faith

Jesus Christ is not only the Redeemer who purchases salvation for His flock, but He is also the King who applies that salvation to His flock. "He maketh me to lie down," David says. Jehovah provides salvation based on Christ's objective work of grace for His sheep. However, the Shepherd also works subjectively in His sheep, and this work appears in their experience and activity. *God* did the work, but *David* had to lie down.

Likewise, we must experience not only how the Lord provides the four conditions necessary for spiritual rest, but also the application of true rest to our souls. If we are one of Jehovah's sheep, the divine means that are instrumental to embrace spiritual rest must be exercised within our souls, enabling us to confess, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." This is the exercise of true, saving faith.

True faith is *of* the Lord and its only object *is* the Lord. Faith is essential for every aspect of spiritual life. It is the captain of all spiritual graces. George Swinnock (1627–1673) wrote, "Call forth that commander-in-chief; and then the private soldiers, the other graces, will all follow."¹³ Christ honors faith the most, because faith honors Christ the most. Faith focuses upon Christ, believes in Him, trusts Him, and leans upon Him. True faith lies down in the finished work of Christ, confessing by its very

12. *The Psalter*, no. 368 [Ps. 132].

13. George Swinnock, *The Christian Man's Calling*, in *The Works of George Swinnock* (1868; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), 1:202.

exercise both self-deficiency and divine sufficiency. Oh, for grace to *abide* in the pastures of the living and written Word by faith!

In the exercise of faith the Holy Spirit offers to meet all the needs of His people in the Lamb of God, applying to them the written Word of God so that they are enabled to rest in the living Word. Through faith, they come to see that Christ is the answer to all the problems that burden their souls.

Are they *sinners*? Christ became sin for His people to redeem them from it (2 Cor. 5:21).

Are they *law-breakers*? Christ is the law-keeper (Matt. 5:17).

Are they *separated from God*? Christ was forsaken of His Father as Judge so that they might never be forsaken of Him (Matt. 27:46).

Are they *unrighteous*? Christ is the all-righteous One, having a perfect robe of righteousness through His active and passive obedience to the will of God (Isa. 61:10).

Are they *cursed*? Christ died the accursed death as curse-bearer of His elect (Gal. 3:13).

Are they under divine *wrath*? Christ is the peace-maker (Isa. 53:5).

Are they *enemies of God*? In Christ “mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Ps. 85:10).

Are they *foolish*? Christ is wisdom (Prov. 8).

Are they *filthy*? Christ is “holy, harmless, undefiled” (Heb. 7:26).

Are they *tempted*? Christ was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

Are they spiritually *poor*? Christ, who was rich, became poor so that through His poverty they might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9).

Are they in spiritual *bondage*? In Christ there is liberty, for "if the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Are they *weak*? Christ is their strength (1 Sam. 15:29).

Are they *in need of prayer*? Christ is the praying High Priest, sitting at the right hand of the Father, who never ceases to make intercession for His people (Rom. 8:34).

Are they *restless*? Christ, who by Himself purged our sins, is now sitting on His throne of rest, causing His people to rest in Him as the Priest who has paid everything, as the Prophet who teaches everything they need to learn, and as the King who rules over everything on their behalf.

There is no end to it. The green pastures of God's living and written Word can never become parched or overgrazed as long as we receive this Word in faith. The Word of God reveals Christ's person, natures, states, and offices as a medicine cabinet out of which the Holy Spirit administers healing for every disease that may afflict Jehovah's sheep.

By teaching that faith is the instrument through which God provides these rich spiritual blessings for His flock, we do not imply that the life of faith is easy or can have everything it desires. Far from it, for true faith can only receive what God gives. Faith does not labor to deserve anything from God. Faith is only the hand by which we receive God's gift in Jesus Christ. Christ's merit alone saves sinners.

Ever since the fall of mankind, we have fought to be our own shepherds, to find our own rest, and to be our own Lord. God's grace breaks this stubborn pride, making us dependent upon Him. Only then can we find true rest. By faith, we come to Christ and learn the reality of His promise: "Come unto me, all ye that labour 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 ye

shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28–30).

The Holy Spirit works this rest in the souls of God’s people. This rest increases in God and decreases in self-righteousness, self-reliance, and self-idolatry. It is spiritual rest, not a rest dependent on earthly circumstances or goods. As Luther said, the Spirit gives the believer “spiritual eyes” so that he knows “what is the best and noblest thing on earth,” not visible splendor, power, and wealth, but “that the Lord is his Shepherd and that he is in His pasture and in His care, that is, that he has God’s Word.”¹⁴ This rest leads them to sing in hope,

Thou wilt stretch forth Thy mighty arm
To save me when my foes alarm;
The work Thou hast for me begun
Shall by Thy grace be fully done;
Forever mercy dwells with Thee;
O Lord, my Maker, think on me.¹⁵

As the faith of God’s people increases, it flowers and bears fruit in full assurance of faith. The Spirit applies the work of Christ deeply to the conscience. There is a difference between justification by faith, and the assurance of grace and salvation.¹⁶ The first is an objective reality for all believers; the latter is a rich privilege which we must seek in growing experience.

United to Christ, believers can say with Asa even in days of conflict, “Help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee” (2 Chron. 14:11). Yet this rest can attain greater stability and personal application. It has been said, “The

14. Luther, “Psalm 23,” in *Luther’s Works*, 12:161.

15. *The Psalter*, no. 381 [Ps. 138].

16. Cf. Westminster Confession, 11.4 and 18.2–4.

heart of religion lies in its personal pronouns.”¹⁷ God's sheep thus learn to say, “I know whom I have believed” (2 Tim. 1:12); “My redeemer liveth” (Job 19:25); “I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*” (Gal. 2:20).

Spiritual rest in God becomes the flock's rich possession only as a fruit of justification. “Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). The guilt of sin is removed in its condemning power. The law of God no longer curses us with its impossible demand for perfection, for Christ has fulfilled its precepts and carried its curse (Gal. 3:13; 4:4). Conscience, once accusing, now rests quietly in Christ. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

In Christ, God becomes a glorious resting ground instead of a cause for terror. Has God's *justice* become your strong fortress, knowing that Christ satisfied justice for you? Do you rest in God's *eternal truthfulness*, praying, “Fulfill this word unto Thy servant upon which Thou hast caused me to hope; O Lord, do as Thou hast said”? Are you conscious of your sin and are you being led to rest in the *mercy* of God which alone can blot it out? Burdened with guilt, have you found a resting place in sovereign, divine *grace*? Overwhelmed with affliction, have you been brought to rest in the *omnipotence* of Jehovah? Bound up with your own foolishness, do you rest in the *wisdom* of God? Has the Lord enabled you to rest in His *immutability* as a sure anchor in the troubled sea of life? Despite your unfaithfulness, are you resting in God's *faithfulness* whose promise is as good as His fulfillment?

The gospel gives us rest from our enemies. Satan's accusing head is crushed in Christ. The believer receives

17. The saying is attributed to Martin Luther.

courage in Christ as his crucified, exalted King to resist the devil and put him to flight. Having died with Christ and raised with Him, the Christian finds some rest even from self; the old nature can no longer have the upper hand, though the conflict continues until death.

At peace with God and in victory over his enemies, the redeemed sinner gains new strength to submit to the will of God, praying, "Thy will be done." Whatever the Lord does is best. The assured Christian wants to do God's will because it is *His* will. This gives believers great liberty in prayer. The Lord does not hesitate to hand them the keys of the storehouse of divine grace, saying to them what He did to the Canaanite woman: "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt" (Matt. 15:28). Indeed, they may then experience more rest in the furnace of affliction than with the king in his palace (Dan. 3:24), knowing that "many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivereth him out of them all" (Ps. 34:19). They learn the secrets of Psalm 37:7, "Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him."

All the lions that once terrified them are chained. They see Jesus holding the keys to death and hell (Rev. 1:18). They commit themselves to His hands for time and eternity. Sin itself is defeated and has lost its power to dominate them.

Oh, blessed is the rest that a sinner experiences in salvation! Secure in the possession of everlasting good, he may say, "'Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee' (Ps. 116:7). He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. Till the pastures of God wither and the river of life fails, my soul cannot lack anything, for the LORD is my Shepherd." This is a blessed foretaste of heaven.

Resting in the Love of the Triune God

The exercise of faith in Christ brings God's sheep to "boldness and access of confidence" (Eph. 3:12) to the triune God. After describing the peace-making work of Christ, Paul writes, "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18). There is an experiential resting in God by coming to know Him personally in His three divine persons. Paul desired this blessing for all believers: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14). Augustine taught that the Trinity is the true object of our enjoyment beyond anything that this world can offer.¹⁸ By grace, we come to know the love and grace of each divine person, and in return our love and joy overflow.

The child of God has the privilege of knowing the Second Person of the Holy Trinity as his Elder Brother (Rom. 8:29), as a merciful and faithful High Priest (Heb. 4:15–16), and as his advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). The believer can become personally acquainted with Immanuel Himself. He can know Christ as "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24). Christ's gifts and benefits are wonderful, but His person is "altogether lovely" (Song of Sol. 5:16). Blessed are they who cannot only say, "He gave me peace," but also "He is my peace." This conviction strengthened the early Christians as they faced martyrdom; they inscribed on the walls of the catacombs, "In Christ, in peace."

What a wonder it is to be admitted into the circle of Christ's personal friends! He brings us to rest in Himself with the very rest which He enjoys with His Father. He

18. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. J. F. Shaw, 1.5, in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, ed. Marcus Dods (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892), 9:10.

rests in grateful submission in the Father's sovereign decree of electing love. He rests in the blessed contemplation of all that is delivered unto Him by the Father as the fruit of His work as Mediator. He rests in the completion of His work that the Father gave Him to do in this world (Heb. 4:10). He rests in the full knowledge that He has of the Father and the Father of Him, and in the incomprehensible love between them. He rests in the very heart of His Father as the only-begotten Son (John 1:18). As we come to know Him better, we increasingly rest in His rest.

To know the Son is also to know the Father (John 14:9). Christ brings His friends and brothers to know the First Person of the Holy Trinity. He opens up for them the experiential enjoyment of their adoption into the household of God. The Father makes their adoption real by the Spirit of the Son, who witnesses with their spirits that they are children of God, leading them to cry out, "Abba, Father!" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Through the last Adam, the Father restores the relationship they lost in the first Adam. Justification removes condemnation from a sinner and places him in a status of righteousness in God's courtroom. However, adoption goes further; it brings him to the table of God's household as one of His dear children.

Blessed are the prodigals who experience not only repentance and confession but are also received into the arms of a loving Father. In mercy the Father sees them a great way off, has compassion on them, runs to them, embraces them, and kisses them (Luke 15:20). Instead of being servants, they are restored to sonship; instead of filthy rags, they are given the best robe, a ring for their fingers, and shoes for their feet; and instead of the death they deserve, they partake of the feast of fattened calf. Blessed are they who know what it means to rest in the green pastures of God's fatherly heart. They have access to His throne of grace, which is the richest blessing in the

whole world. They may tell the Father everything. No need is too small. No sin is too great. When they ask for bread, He will not give them a stone. "As a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him" (Ps. 103:13).

Finally, true children of God may rest in the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. At Pentecost, the disciples were allowed to embrace and rest in the triune God. Through Christ, they received reconciliation with God and adoption by the Father. As the "promise of the Father," they also received an experiential knowledge of the Holy Spirit. Jesus became their Elder Brother, God became their Father, and the Holy Ghost came to dwell with them and work in them, in His offices as comforter, sealer, and intercessor (John 14:16; Eph. 1:13; Rom. 8:26). By the Spirit's dwelling in them, Christ's resurrection life dwelled in them, and the Father and the Son made their home with them (John 14:17, 19, 23). Richard Sibbes wrote that the Spirit "knits us to the Father and the Son... because all the communion we have with God is by the Holy Ghost."¹⁹ Resting in the Spirit, we find ourselves resting with the Son in the heart of the Father.

Yet all resting this side of the grave is a mere shadow of the perfect, eternal, and heavenly rest to come. Moments of rest that are "unspeakable and full of glory" here on earth (1 Peter 1:8) are but a foretaste of the river of pleasure flowing out of the throne of God (Rev. 22:1). Rest on earth from the guilt and dominion of sin foreshadows eternal rest from the pollution of sin. Here on earth, children of God are pilgrims passing through a wilderness, but soon they will arrive at the Father's house, where all their sorrows shall cease and they shall enter eternal rest.

19. Richard Sibbes, *A Description of Christ*, in *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (1862–1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), 1:17.

In the mountains of Scotland a steep trail finally leads to a breathtaking mountain pass called Glencoe. At the top of the pass a stone is engraved with these words, “Rest, and be thankful.” Sheep of the Lord’s flock, the summit of the narrow way will be won. Here, though we are not weary *of* our Shepherd’s service, we are often weary *in* His service. But the day will come when we shall look back at the way of life with true thankfulness as we view the wisdom of every little winding turn in the steep ascent by which we were led. Here in this world our sense of rest in God is feeble at best, but “when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away...then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Cor. 13:10, 12). Finally, we will know perfect, eternal rest!²⁰

20. This is a sample sermon from Dr. Beeke’s forthcoming book, *The Lord Shepherding His Sheep*, to be published by Evangelical Press by December, 2015 (see www.heritagebooks.org).