

## Midweek Message

*“Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.”*

(Psalm 116:7 ESV)

I remember hearing a story about a missionary who was having difficulty translating the gospel into the local language. It seems this tribe had no word for faith and how we must trust our souls to Jesus alone for salvation. As he was praying and asking God for wisdom, one of the tribe leaders came into his hut and plopped down in the chair and said in his own language, “It’s so good to be able to rest the full weight of my body in this chair.” As I understand it, that was exactly how the missionary translated what it means to have faith in Jesus.

I believe that’s a beautiful picture of what it means to find rest in God alone as we talked about this past Sunday. Especially in this time of uncertainty, with so many around us in a panic, it’s a great longing within us to enjoy spiritual rest so that we can be calm in the midst of this storm. You see, without being able to rest our souls we simply cannot function as God’s people but will always find ourselves in a panic over the struggles and troubles of life. I do believe God wants us to find that place of rest and comfort so that we can be calm and content even though the world around us is continually in a state of agitation because of our current crisis.

So, first of all, we can rest weary souls in God because we know that He’s always with us. There are numerous Scriptures in which God constantly reminds His people that He will always be there, walking with them through all the issues of life. In Deuteronomy, chapter 31, verse 8 God tells His ancient people Israel: *“It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”* At that time, Israel was getting ready to enter the promised land. Moses was no longer there, and Joshua was getting ready to take the helm. God promised that He would go before them and would never leave or abandon them. You see, no matter where we go or what we’re going through, God is always there for His people, walking with us in this journey we call life. In Psalm 139, beginning in verse 1 we’re told:

*“O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,’ even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.”*

God knows everything about us, and He knows it all the time. Nothing is hidden from Him and as the Psalmist tells us that no matter what’s happening in our lives or even around our lives such as we’re facing today, God’s hand will lead us and God’s hand will hold us. Because of the effect of sin in our lives, one of the truths we often forget is that our God is compassionate, full of grace, mercy, and love for His people. Even though He promises to walk with us through the storms of life we still doubt Him. Even though He’s proven Himself time and time again, not only in Scripture as He was there for the saints of old, but also those times we’ve experienced His presence with us, especially in the darkest of nights.

Secondly, we can rest our weary souls in God because He's always at work for our good. I'm sure we're all familiar with the Scripture from the Book of Romans, chapter 8, verse 28: *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."* Whatever God is up to in the midst of this pandemic we can trust that He's up to our good. It's not always easy for us to grasp how that can be true when we're going through difficult times, but God is good and we can trust in His precious promises where He tells us that His purpose toward us is one of blessing and not cursing, of building us up to maturity and not tearing us down. One of my favorite Scriptures is found in the Book of Jeremiah, chapter 29, and verse 11: *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."* That actually sums up everything about what God is up to as this pandemic continues its course in our world and how it's even affecting those of us who are in the world but not of the world. God has released this and allowed the Devil to wreak havoc for this moment in time because it's necessary for the building up of His church. As I said Sunday, the difficulties we face in life are there so that we'll turn to the Lord and find in Him our eternal salvation. People like to think they're in control of their lives and have no need of depending on anyone else, let alone our Creator. Sadly, that can even creep into the lives of professing believers as well. So, God then acts in ways that are necessary so that we can be brought to the point in our lives where we begin to realize that He's in control and that we need look to Him for our security. All that we have and all what we are or ever will be is solely found in God alone.

Finally, we can rest our weary souls in God because He's given us eternal security in Jesus. When the Psalmist speaks of God dealing bountiful with His those who belong to Him, he's talking, not just about everything we've just covered, but also about the issue of our sin and how we can find salvation in Him. The writer to the Hebrews, in chapter 4, beginning in verse 9 tells us:

*"So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience"*

He's talking about the rest that's ours through the person and work of Jesus who *"became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). You see, it's really our sinfulness, our disobedience to God, that has brought about such a restlessness in our lives, reaching down to the very depths of our souls. God sent Jesus into this world so that we can find complete rest in Him. I've often wondered how many of us who believe in Jesus truly understand that God's rest after creation, as well as the Sabbath rest commanded, were actually pictures intended to teach us of the final rest we all will enjoy when Jesus returns. And even now, as we go through this uncertain time, we can also find rest in knowing that we're held secure in God's love for us in Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus made this abundantly clear in John's gospel, chapter 10, beginning in verse 27:

*"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."*

My hope for all of us, as you walk through this crisis, is that we'll find this rest for our souls and that we'll always be at complete rest in the presence, promises, and power of God.

***Pastor Mark***