

## PSALM 23:2-3

### INTRODUCTION

These verses are looking at the practical implications of what it means to have the Lord as our shepherd (v 1). In verse 1 we see that the implications of this relationship are that He supplies all our needs so that we are content. Having the Lord as our Shepherd also means that we shall be resting every day in him.

He satisfies us and we know the joy of being at peace and rest in Him. We now come to another part of the picture that the Psalmist is painting here, as he seeks to show us the impact that having the Lord as our Shepherd makes upon our life.

### 1. THE SHEPHERD LEADS HIS SHEEP BESIDE THE QUIET WATERS (v 2)

This is a beautiful picture here for we must remember that the country that the Psalmist lived in and was familiar with is not like our own country. In his country water was in very short supply. It generally only rained twice a year in Israel they had what was known as the early and latter rainfall. Therefore the result was that water was a precious thing, and it was especially precious to shepherds, who depended on the rains to keep their flock alive. But note that the water is called 'quiet waters' or 'still water.' The Hebrew word literally means 'waters of rest' and the idea behind the word is that of rest and refreshment. I have learnt a lot about sheep from reading the books that I have told you about by two former shepherds.

One of them said that quiet waters were important for sheep because sheep for some reason and I don't know if anyone knows why never drink from a fast flowing river. Now these former shepherds both tell stories of how their sheep would not drink from rivers that were flowing, but would sometimes walk an extra mile to drink from a calm brook or ford.

Sometimes the sheep even in the hottest days when they were panting for water would go for miles for water from a quiet stream rather than drink from a nearby rushing stream or river.

David as he writes this Psalm under the influence of the Holy Spirit shows us that he knew about sheep, he didn't spend his early life as a shepherd for nothing. He knew sheep preferred to drink from 'quiet waters' but what does it mean? What spiritual lesson is David drawing for us? The lesson surely is that our Shepherd the Lord Jesus spiritually refreshes us and quenches our spiritual thirst. Jesus described himself as one who gives living water for he satisfies our spiritual thirst for reality (John 4:10). Have you ever been spiritually thirsty and you long to be satisfied within your soul. Well what did you do or what should you do? Is that how you are feeling spiritually this evening?

Then you must open up God's word for this is how he quenches our thirst and as you do so ask for the Holy Spirit's help as you read his word and you will find your thirst being satisfied and you will feel spiritually refreshed and rested. Of course you must prepare the ground if your thirst is going to be met. You must examine your heart and ask for the Lord's forgiveness if you discover that there is sin in your life.

In doing so you will be more prepared to receive his water that comes through our relationship with our Shepherd. As we read his word he speaks to us and does us spiritual good. This is how the Lord leads you today to his 'quiet waters.' You have had a tough day at work or school; some work colleagues have had a go at you because you are a Christian.

You are glad to see the time for going home. You feel tired but also spiritually dry because of the situation. You go home get washed changed and relax for a while. That helps your physical

condition but that will not deal with your spiritual dryness. You must do something to satisfy that spiritual thirst and you do that through reading his word and through prayer. However we must be careful that we don't go through what I sometimes call the Christian ritual.

There are people who can read the bible and say their prayers and even go to Christian meetings and yet although they claim to be believers they never seem to get their spiritual thirst satisfied they never seem to find that reality that they long for. The result is that they look elsewhere in order to find some sort of spiritual reality.

They sometimes look for new spiritual experiences, but all along they might simply be failing to use the means given by God to have their thirst quenched. The way to have our spiritual thirst quenched is to go to the Shepherd to ask him to satisfy us through his word. Often the problem is not with the method of reading and praying and attending Christian meeting etc but with our attitude to such things.

We must read God's word and pray over it with seriousness and with a deep desire and longing to put God's word into practise in our lives no matter what the cost. We must come to God in prayer longing for his presence to be with us and longing that he and he alone might meet those deep-rooted needs and longings of one's heart.

The great promise in this Psalm is that if we do approach God with right attitudes, then he will lead us to the quiet waters where we will find our spiritual thirst met and our soul satisfied. It is of great concern to me that there are far too many professing Christians who seem so unsatisfied in their Christian lives and experience.

They are so unsatisfied and so thirsty that they run after the things that this world offers or they run after the latest Christian experience in order to try to satisfy their thirst or in order to fill that emptiness of life that they feel. Their life seems empty; there seems a vacuum that needs to be filled yet they look to have their thirst met in all the wrong places and in all the wrong ways.

The result is that that these professing Christians remain thirsty and ineffective. Yet the answer is not found in what this world offers and it is not found in various so-called Christian experiences but it is found in a vital and living relationship with the Shepherd. We need to spend time in his presence every day reading his word with seriousness. By that I mean with a real inward desire to obey it. Not only with a desire to obey it but also with a determination that will actually lead us to obeying it.

There are in my view many Christians who say they obey the word of God and have every intention of obeying it but who sadly seem to lack the determination to actually put it into practise. They allow their life to become crowded with many other things so that they never seem to get around to obeying God's word.

It leads the individual into a life of dissatisfaction and sadly when there are many such people in the church it can produce unsatisfied and thirsty churches. But God my dear friends is our Shepherd who wants to lead His people beside the 'quiet waters' therefore if you are thirsty of soul let him lead you and let him quench that thirst through His word and by his Spirit.

It is interesting but when David chose the Hebrew word for 'he leads me' he chose a word that underscored the gentleness of God's leading. It is used in the Old Testament of being led by the hand like a Father leading his young daughter as they walk to school (Isaiah 51:18). It is a word that is used of someone who is helpless and aimless. This is not God forcing us to have our thirst quenched but he is gently leading us, encouraging us to come to him and be spiritually satisfied. You know how this works in practise. If we go back to the illustration about a hard day at work and feeling dry at the end of it.

Does our Shepherd at that time not prompt us to come to him for refreshment? Are we not encouraged by Him to read his word and does He not help us to do so. Does He not meet with us as we come to him through reading his word and prayer? But it's not a leading that leaves it all up to us. It's not a case of God leading us to the water but being unable to make us drink. No God's leading is a powerful leading He not only leads us to the water but he helps us to drink from it.

Yes we have to do our part and follow his lead and physically read our bibles but we are enabled by his grace to do so and are helped by Him so that we benefit from it and are refreshed (illustrate - a father leading child to school, gentle but firm). Shepherds in the Psalmist time did not normally stumble over water holes they generally knew where to find water and lead the sheep from one watering place to another. That is what our shepherd does with us. He knows where to find refreshment that is why he leads us constantly to himself. He does that by leading us to his word, to prayer and to fellowship with his people. You can guarantee that if a Christian is not reading and praying and attending the meetings of the church then the Shepherd is not leading them.

Such people have allowed other things or other people to lead them rather than the gentle but powerful Shepherd. Sadly there are Christians who seem to be led by others instead of the Shepherd. The truth is we have become so use to Christians who are thirsty but seem to do nothing about that thirst.

They are so lack lustre about their faith so dissatisfied that when we meet people who are truly in touch with their Shepherd and satisfied in their relationship with Him that we think they are abnormal. Such a person who is being satisfied by Christ will stand out in our churches today. I read a story about a man who worked until 7 pm and then drove 7 miles to be at his church's prayer meeting and he said he didn't think he was doing anything special.

He was a man who knew where to go to have his thirst satisfied and he knew how to go about having his thirst met. Here is a man with such a thirst for God that he could not think of anywhere else he would want to be than at his church's prayer meeting. We would probably call that sort of person exceptional today but really he was just a normal Christian who was thirsty and knew where to go to be satisfied.

He knew he needed to be drawing constantly on God's fresh supply of 'quiet waters' for his own refreshment and his own satisfaction. We call him exceptional today only because of our own pitiful spiritual state before God and because of the state of the evangelical cause in our nation. But really he was not exceptional he was normal and our own experience of the Shepherd is so abnormal today that we have accepted it as normal.

So my dear friends God wants to lead us to the 'quiet waters' and his reason for doing so is so that we can find refreshment and rest for our souls. But perhaps there is one here tonight that does not know Jesus as your Good Shepherd then I know this about you; you are restless and you are thirsty and you are not satisfied. O you might seem quite content for you have all that you need and you might think that you are satisfied for you have plenty of this world's goods but in your soul you are not satisfied and you are restless.

I know that because the only place you can find that peace and rest and satisfaction that your soul longs for is in not found in this world but it is found in knowing Jesus as the Good Shepherd. For that to happen you must admit your need, you must admit you are thirsty and in need of fulfilment.

You must confess your sin for your sin stops you from knowing the Shepherd and you must come to him in faith and cry out to him that he might become your Shepherd. If you do that I can't promise you an easy life or an end to your problems and difficulties. But I can promise you that you will no longer be thirsty for the Lord will lead you gently beside the 'quiet waters' where you will be able to drink spiritually of Him.

## 2. THE SHEPHERD RESTORES OUR SOULS WHEN WE WANDER (v 3)

The Good shepherd not only leads us beside the quiet waters and makes us lie down but he restores us when we wander. You see there is probably no animal more prone to wandering than sheep. You rarely see one sheep on its own, because sheep follow one another. That's why if one sheep breaks out of a field you can be sure that others will follow. Its not just sheep that wander Christians are prone to wander as well.

As I think of my own heart I know I am prone to wander from God. I know that the desire to do my own thing and to go my own way is always there I have to actively fight that temptation to wander. I suppose you are just like me and find it so easy to wander as well.

But the good news is that no matter how far we wander the Shepherd is always prepared to bring us back, to restore our souls. Of course some Christians are more prone to wander than others are, but God is the One who is willing to restore the wanderer back into a place where they once again will be satisfied with God through their relationship with Christ.

The word that is used for 'wander' is a very common Hebrew word, which has many meanings but it seems here to be used in the sense of restoring something back to its true condition. My brother in law many years ago saw an old car in a field. He asked the farmer if he could have the car and his intention was to restore it so that it could be used again as a car. I think the farmer thought he was mad but he took the car home and worked on it for years.

He completely rebuilt it and eventually took it back to show the farmer what he did. Well that is what God does to us. Our Christian life can be allowed to get into a great state of disrepair.

So great sometimes that it seems that we are destined to simply rust away. But then God in his grace begins his restoration work again. He begins to rebuild us and reshape us and restore us to the purpose for which He redeemed us.

People who watched us ruin our lives as we wandered from the Lord can simply watch and be amazed at the work of God in restoring us to His intended purpose. To be honest if you are a Christian then God's restoration work is always going on in your life, our Shepherd has taken us from the ruin of sin and is reshaping and remaking us into the image of Christ.

But the Psalmist is particularly thinking about professing believers who for whatever reason seem to have totally ruined their Christian commitment. But with our Shepherd there is always a way back because he will restore us again so that we come back to that position where we know the rest and satisfaction that comes from walking with our Shepherd.

It could be that there is someone here who is a bit like that car in the field that my brother in law saw. Once you were walking with God useful to him and fulfilling the purpose that God intended you to fulfil. But O now you are in a state of disrepair. Years of spiritual neglect have left you almost unrecognisable from the Christian you once were. On the outside you might go through the routine of worship here on a Sunday but inside you know that your life is in a state of disrepair.

Well I have good news for you because our Shepherd restores wanderers to his intended purpose for them. He willingly and gently deals with repentant people and restores them in such a way that they are useful again in his work. Of course we must desire that restoration and we must do our part by the grace of God.

But if we are willing then no matter how bad a state of disrepair our lives are in, the Lord who is our Shepherd will come to you and begin that work of restoration today. It will take time and yes

there will be much to do from our side but God patiently restores all that come to him and seek his peace and his rest in Christ Jesus.

Will you do that tonight Christian? No one else might know about your spiritual state but you know and more importantly God knows. So why not call out to him and ask him to restore your soul so that you can be placed back in that spiritual condition where you will know the Shepherd leading you to the quiet waters so that you can be refreshed.

Amen