

“RESTING PLACES FOR THE SOUL”

Text: Jeremiah 50:6

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We live in a restless world~ When Jeremiah said, “They have forgotten their resting place” he set forth what could be a headline for any newspaper in our day.

Modern society is restless. We see frenzied people who rush on in a crazy climb from one peak of sensation to another. All around us we can see jaded society, tired of normal sex activity, go panting from one erotic sensation to another.

Modern youth is restless. How else do you explain the restlessness on practically every college campus? How else do you explain the crazy kids with their crash programs?

Nations are restless. There never was a time when there was so much unrest in the United States as today. The nations of Africa are restless. The nations of Asia are restless. The nations of South America are restless. The nations of Europe are restless. The latest thing I read in last night's newspaper was "Italy is filled with unrest".

Sad to say, even churches are filled with unrest. Seldom do you find a congregation, which is perfectly at rest. Many faithful devout Christians are shaking their heads at the directions their respective denominations are traveling. Modernism rears its ugly head so often that many of us hail as wonderful news that Southern Baptists turn to conservative, Bible-honoring leadership of Dr. W.A. Criswell as President of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Even the most normal of us are itching to move. Jeremiah was right when he said: “We have forgotten our resting place.” Dr. W. B. Martin says, "We are trying to compensate for the lack of inner stability by outer activity." He points out that there are two kinds of activity. There is the creative activity that is the spontaneous overflow of abundance. Then there is the other kind of uncreative activity that is an artificial attempt to create abundance, or to fill up the emptiness. Much of our activity comes from a desperate attempt to pump up some kind of resemblance to life.

Let me suggest some of the resting places of the soul, which are true resting places.

I. THE GREATEST RESTING PLACE OF THE SOUL IS IN GOD

I don't believe even a nation can be at rest unless it finds rest in God. "Blessed is the nation who's God is the Lord." When did the modern restlessness in America find its greatest acceleration? I believe that it was when it was practically decided that we must leave God out of our national life. I believe much of this started with Madeline Murray -the high priestess of restless atheism!

Jeremiah chapter 51 verse 7 gives us a quick picture of what can happen to a nation. "Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand. God used Babylon to discipline the nation Israel. But Babylon came to the time when she was described with these words: “Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed. Howl for her." Could it be that one day we might substitute the word “America” for Babylon? We would then read Jeremiah 51:8-9: “America is suddenly fallen and destroyed. Howl for her. Take balm for her pain if so that she may be healed. We would have healed America but America is not healed. Forsake her and let us go every one into his own country, for her judgment reacheth unto heaven and is lifted up even to the skies.”

We miss the whole message of the Book of Jeremiah unless we see that the nation of Israel is away from her true resting place-God. Israel is likened to poor lost, scattered sheep. God is pictured as a loving Shepherd. In our text, we have this image: My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains" Look at verse 17. "Israel is a scattered sheep; the lions have driven them away." Israel was a nation of lost and scattered sheep. Entangled in the briars of the wilderness, torn and pierced by its thorns, devoured by the lions, wandering around were the survivors in futility. . Man has "truly nibbled himself lost" like silly sheep. Man's heart, Man's mind, and man's soul were made by God and made for God. Man will never rest until he finds rest in God.

God as a loving shepherd knows we are lost in the wilderness, and in a pitiful condition. God has compassion on us. If God had His way, he would take "the prey from the mighty and deliver the lawful captivity." He wants to do what David described: "He restoreth my soul." He wants us to find the security of His fold. He wants us to "go in and out and find pasture." Eventually, he plans to remove us from the fold of earth to the fold of glory. Thank God, one day there will be one fold -- and I don't mean on this earth in a super, politic-religioso World Church. The one fold that I refer to will be in heaven, when all of the redeemed of all ages will be in our heavenly fold, eternally with God, led by Him through the ever-verdant pastures of eternity.

Jeremiah would indicate that not only is God the Shepherd, but Christ is the resting place of the Saviour. Jeremiah must have had a revelation of the Redeeming Son of God. Hear him say: "Their Redeemer is strong; the Lord of Hosts is His name" Jer. 50:34. The Hebrew word for Redeemer is "Goel", the kinsman-redeemer.

What a wonderful suggestion of Christ as our Redeemer. We can learn some tremendous lessons from a study of the duties of the kinsman-redeemer of Israel. Let me suggest two of them.

1. The first is connected with property.

In Lev. 25: "If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold." Isn't it wonderful how Christ restored the property, the inheritance from God, which we lost in sin!

Actually, all of us have lost an inheritance in sin. Our inheritance is God. God is the only possession that makes a man truly rich. Only when you have God in your hearts, God in your heads, and God in your souls are you truly rich! It is a tremendous teaching of the Word of God that all that we lost in Adam we can regain in the second Adam- even Christ.

2. The second duty of the kinsman-redeemer was to bring back from slavery a member of the family who has fallen into slavery. Again we read in the Old Testament: "And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner...after that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him." Leviticus 25:47,48. Notice that it was in the case of a Hebrew who had sold himself! No other person can sell you into the slavery of sin but you only. Sin is a voluntary bondage. No one else can rob you of your freedom. You are the only person who can sell you into sin's slavery. The world, the flesh and the devil could never bind you as captives of sin until you first held out your hands and said: "Handcuff me!"

What a blessed truth that Christ brings back his brethren from the enslavement of sin. Some of us do not realize that we are slaves of sin. Like the religious leaders in the time of our Lord we are unsuspected slaves. They said: "We were never in bondage to any man." Perhaps I am talking to some one who is so foolish that you deny you are a slave of sin. Jesus said: "Whoso committeth sin is the slave of sin." Did you ever try to break a bad habit or vice in your life? Did you find it easy? You thought the habit in your life was no stronger than a spider's web, but when you tried to break that habit, you found chains of steel instead! You will never find rest until Christ redeems you. He does not redeem you with corruptible things like silver and gold. He redeems you with his own precious blood.

We could summarize Jeremiah's challenge to restless people- and some of you are in this group today- by saying that you will never find rest until you find rest in God as *your* Shepherd and in Christ as your Saviour. Yes, God is the foremost resting place of *your* soul!

II. A SECOND RESTING PLACE FOR THE SOUL IS HUMAN FRIENDSHIP.

I have already covered the greatest friendship that is possible to man- the friendship of God who reveals himself as Shepherd and Saviour, but human friendship is also very important. The philosopher, John McMurry of Scotland used to summarize his philosophy in these words: "All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action. All meaningful action is for the sake of friendship."

Some of you are restless because you do not have true friendship. Life will never have true meaning until you share with others friend- ship. Make sure that you have true friends. Kingsley once said: "A friend is a human soul we can trust literally, who knows the best and the worst of us, and who loves us in spite of all our faults; who will speak the honest truth to us; who will give us counsel and reproof in the day of prosperity and self-conceit, but who will comfort us and encourage us in the days of difficulty and sorrow." Or as some unknown person has described a friend: "A friend is one who comes in when all others are going out!"

Too many of us substitute friendliness for friendship. I have known people who were overly friendly, but you could not trust them! Judas was never more friendly in gesture than when he planted a kiss on the face of Christ. I have no use for the man who calls me his friend, then betrays me in my Garden of Gethsemane when things get rough!

But you are blessed when you can take friendship as a resting place. Blessed are you when you have friends who make themselves available to you. Blessed are you when you have 'friends who are large- hearted instead of little, generous instead of greedy, friends who will pat you on the back instead of stabbing you in the back.

Somewhere I ran across this significant quote from an unknown writer: "False friends are like vermin that abandon a sinking vessel or like swallows that depart at the approach of winter. True friends are like ivy that adheres to the tree in its decay. True friends are like the light of phosphorous brightest in the dark."

I would rather have a friend and not a penny, than to have the entire world and not a friend. Such a friend is not bought with money. Such a friend is not made by force. A friend is a friend for friendship's sake only. When you have such friends, you have a truly great resting place for your soul!

III. A GREAT RESTING PLACE FOR THE SOUL IS WORK OR SERVICE WHICH OFFERS A PURPOSE FOR LIVING

Even your vocation should be a resting place. If you are working in a vocation or occupation and getting no pleasure from it, you are in the wrong work. You should enjoy your work. The ministry is a place of rest for me, because I enjoy it, even when difficulties, disappointments, and disillusionments come. I am still glad that I am a minister of the Gospel.

We need to turn back to wise old Thomas Carlyle who used to preach "the gospel of work". Perhaps the word "Work" needs to be put back into our vocabulary. There are people today who if - heaven forbid- they were guaranteed an annual income they would still find fault. They have never found any satisfaction in work, and they never will. I am afraid that there are some in the poor peoples march who wouldn't take a job if you offered them one! That poverty display called "Resurrection City" in Washington may be well named by implication. Some of them in Resurrection City want to lie down dead and expect someone else to resurrect them!

Some people regard work as dreary. Work should be a gospel of good news. There is healing in work. When sorrow comes, when your human props collapse, you will discover that a man's work will give him something to live for!

But: make sure that your work is one that God called you to. Otherwise you will find no rest in your work. When I speak about work, I am not referring just to church-related vocations. All work is sacred. That is why I beg you young people to carefully and prayerfully consider the trade or profession you enter, not only because you are going to be in it a long time, but also because your work will either make you or break you. It will fill you either with delight or a sense of having been cheated.

Henry David Thoreau wisely observed: "A man is cheated if his work rewards him only with wages." Your job should payoff in life wages, life satisfactions, life rewards.

Let me summarize this message by saying that some people think they need rest, but what they actually need is peace! All of us need peace with God. All of us need the peace that comes from great friend- ship. All of us need the peace that comes from work that we enjoy. When you realize such peace, it will never be said of you that you have "forgotten your resting place."