

Psalm 23-Provision-You Prepare a table so my cup overflows

Psalm 23:5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

The story is told that some years ago an actor from England was putting on a show where he was performing eloquently saying his lines with perfect intonation and perfect sound. After he was done, he asked the audience if they had any request for him to recite. One old clergyman from the crowd spoke up and said, "I would like for you to recite the 23rd Psalm." The actor said, "sure, but only if you recite it after I am finished." The old clergyman said, "I'm not as gifted as you, but of course I will once you have finished." So, the Actor begin to recite the psalm, and he had the audience in amazement at how perfectly he spoke and how eloquent he sounded that as he came to an end, the audience erupted with applause. And he said, "now my gentleman it is your turn." The old man began to recite the 23rd Psalm, but he didn't have the eloquence of the actor, he didn't speak with perfect intonation, and when he was finished, the crowd did not applaud, but there wasn't one dry eye in the house, and most of the crowd sat with their heads bowed in solemn worship. The actor with a shaky voice put his hand on the old man's shoulders and said, I may know the 23rd psalm, but it is clear that this man knows the shepherd.

Last week we learned how this Shepherd restores our souls, today we learn that this shepherd provides for his sheep.

As we move a couple verses down, today we find ourselves at verse 5 and it seems the writer David has changed metaphors. It seems he has decided to use another figure other than shepherd to describe God by saying that God prepares a table. There are some who believe that David is speaking of God as a gracious host and by speaking of the table, he is painting the picture of a king hosting his guest.

While that may be in association with this thought and not ruled out as an application, if you study sheep herding, you learn that there are places that are plateaus, they are known as mesas, but they are referred to as tablelands. Flat grounds that have been prepared and treated so that it was a great plush area for sheep to pasture and feed.

The table land is an elevated and fairly level region, a perfect place for summer grazing. Now in verse 5 we're at the summertime meadows where the sheep can be tended in remote pastures.

Verse 5 is a message of provision, it tells of our shepherd who makes sure we have all we need, it tells of a shepherd who cares for His sheep so much that he spares no expense in providing for his sheep. It paints the picture of a shepherd who puts himself in harm's way to make sure his sheep are protected.

In verse 4, David describes the sheep walking through valleys of shadows of death now we see the other side of the valley and that is the plentiful tablelands prepared for the sheep even though enemy lurk looking to capitalize on unsuspecting sheep, but the enemy is no match for our shepherd.

What we will see is Our Lord Jesus Christ the good shepherd provides for us physically and spiritually on life's tableland.

There are three lessons we learn from verse five about our shepherd the provider...

1. God's provision for my physical needs is extensive.

Psalm 23:5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

Remember we just learned that when David speaks of tables, he has in mind the tablelands used to graze and pasture the sheep in the summertime. These tablelands are prime real estate, but they also are not easy to come by. They are full of enemies that the shepherd has to deal with.

W. Philip Keller in his book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, talks about how it requires a lot of work to convert plateaus into pastures. These tablelands don't just appear on the horizon fully developed. They must be prepared, and sometimes this could take years, generations, or longer to prepare.

David says, He prepares the table. What he is teaching us is that God cares enough about us to preplan the situations of our life that will be necessary to grow us into what He wants us to be. You would not have planned to be in so much pain, but God prepared it for what He has next for you. You would not have planned for the trial you are in, But God prepared it for you, because it is what is needed to form and fashion you into His masterpiece.

The idea of preparation takes into account, a God who loves you and knows you so well, he has the perfect formula to take you from where you are to where He wants you to be. God is not the God who reaches in a bag and haphazardly pulls out circumstances randomly and throws them at us to see how we will handle it. God prepares the table, puts you in a position to learn and grow, and find rest. And he does this in the presence of our enemies.

One of the enemies the shepherd has to deal with are the poisonous plants that lie amidst the fresh grass.

The thing with sheep is they are not picky eaters, you don't find sheep on gluten free diets, choosing not to eat a piece of grass because it doesn't look right. If it is in front of them, they eat it. Even if it is something that made them sick before, they will still eat it if they come across it.

Sheep are highly allergic to certain plants, so all these poisonous plants have to be removed, gopher holes and potential ground hazards have to be filled and bare patches have to be seeded. It takes ongoing work by the shepherd to make sure these tablelands are prepared for the sheep to graze.

We like sheep feel like we have to try everything that comes our way. If someone says it tastes good, we have to taste it, if someone says it looks good, we have to see it, if someone says it feels good, we have to try it, only to find that it makes us sick, cost us money, breaks up our lives, and ruins our reputations.

We try things sometimes knowing that it is not good for us, yet we try it anyway.

But we have a shepherd who prepares the table of life, walking before us removing things that will cause us harm, leaving us warnings to yield not to temptations, providing ways of escape when we are in places we don't belong. He gives us his word to guard and govern us from the poisons of life. He prepares the table and provides for us in His preparation.

The tablelands also have coyotes and wolves that are looking for opportunities to prey on sheep in the flat lands, the predators sit at cliffs that look down on the land to plot and plan attacks on sheep who may be weak or who have strayed away from the pack.

Let's be clear. We have to be careful not to see this as a boasting opportunity. Like God is providing for us in a way that makes our enemies jealous. They may get jealous, but that is not the point. On the contrary, this is God providing for us and allowing us to recognize our enemy does not stop pursuing. The presence of the enemy is a constant reminder that we need God. The enemy keeps us humble and focused on the one who is doing the providing so that we do not start thinking we don't need a shepherd to provide for us.

I found this quote from an author, Mary Hunt Webb, "Those of us that choose to wander away from our Heavenly Shepherd must suffer the consequences of our supposed independence."

We talked about Israel a few weeks ago when we heard the story of Gideon and the seven cycles of Judges and how God would bless Israel, and Israel would worship God for a season and then they would forget about God and God would bring an enemy country in to overthrow them, they would call out to God and God would send a savior to rescue them.

The enemy would be used by God to drive His people back to Him. The enemy would be used to remind His people that their provision was not by their own power or might or know-how or cleverness.

We too have to be reminded that our provision is not by our own hand, and sometimes the enemy is not destroyed or totally dismissed, because God knows we need the enemy present to keep us vigilant.

Because some of the best lessons are learned in fiery furnaces. It is in the fiery furnace that we see there is a 4th man when only three were thrown in. It is in the fiery furnace that we see how we can walk through fire and not smell like smoke. It is in the fiery furnace that we learn that God has a way of making us look and feel better than the stuff we have been through. I know some of your stories and I see you thriving and worshipping. I see you singing and saying Amen when most people would have given up and thrown in the towel from what you have been through. And you can only stand here today because the Good Shepherd prepared a table for you, provided strength for you, provided peace for you, provided a way out for you. That's the only way you can stand here today.

God prepares the table before our enemies, not in the absence of our enemies, because the enemies remind us that though we are doing great now, we still need God.

You know, it is always the distant sheep the roamers, the wonderers that are picked off by the predators in unsuspecting moments. The predators are waiting on those who stay away from the shepherd, who wonder off on their own.

That's why when you come face to face with the enemy, don't try to fight him on your own, call on the Lord. He will prepare a table.

Like the little boy who was giving the report on what he wants to be when he grows up. He said I'm going to be a lion tamer. I will go into the cages of ferocious lions and I will train them and teach them how to behave and put them in their place, and oh yeah of course my mommy will be with me.

You don't have to face the lions alone, your daddy will be with you, you don't have to tame the lions by yourself, your father will be with you, you have a shepherd who will go before you and prepare a table, who will deal with your enemies...all you have to do is call on the Lord

He will go before you, When you call on the Lord for your family

He will go before you when you call on the Lord for your children

He will go before you when you call on the Lord for your addictions.

When you call on the lord, he will prepare a table, he will clear the way, he will provide for your needs, even when it seems the enemy is standing in the way. He will provide for our physical needs.

1-God's provision for my physical needs is extensive.

2. God's provision for my spiritual needs is refreshing.

You have anointed my head with oil;

Psalms 23 is the journey of a shepherd's life with his flock, at this point in verse 5, we are in the summer, the tablelands come with the summer, but also the flies. The gnats. These are major distractions for the sheep, often they can affect the nasal passages of the sheep so much that the sheep beat their head against post and trees trying to find relief. The irritations are so bad the sheep stamp their feet and run in panic because of these distractions and irritations that have disrupted their peace.

The shepherd would apply an ointment made with oil that would act as a fly repellent. It is reported that when this ointment this oil was applied... the nature of the sheep would change immediately. The aggravation would be gone, the frenzy would be gone, the irritability and the restlessness would be gone. In stead the sheep would start to feed quietly again, then they would lay down in peace and contentment.

How often do we let the troubles of life irritate our spirit, frustrate our peace. We let the trials of life nag at our quiet time, we let worry and anxiety cause us to want to beat our heads for relief, that's when God reminds us that we are anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout scripture, we see our savior, Jesus is anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit.

We see this in Isaiah 61 a prophetic passage about the coming Messiah. Isaiah 61:1-3 1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 3 to grant to those who mourn in Zion to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

We see this when Jesus was baptized in Matthew 3:16

Matthew 3:16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; And he is given unlimited measure of the spirit.

John the Baptist Exalts Jesus in John 3:34

John 3:34 For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

That's why we call Jesus the "Christ" from the Greek term Christos which means anointed one.

Just as our Great Shepherd was Himself anointed with the Spirit without measure, so He anoints His children. He anoints us with the Holy Spirit, Who has come to be with us and within us.

The spirit comes to rid us of the gnats and flies of life that seek to disrupt our peace.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit pours on us all God's graces, and He infuses us with all-sufficient power. His presence abides with us. He is the Comforter, the Counselor, the One who comes alongside to help.

The Holy Spirit makes real to us all the Father has planned for us. We as Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and should walk in the Spirit, be filled with the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, be empowered by the Spirit.

The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit within us is a deposit strengthening us and guaranteeing all God has for us in the future and in eternity. Paul tells us this in...

Romans 8:14–17 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

He pours his spirit on us without measure.

I was watching the Royals game this week and after the game when the Royals win, you know they have what they call, the Salvy splash. This is when the person highlighted in the game is being interviewed and another team-mate, usually Salvador Perez, takes a bucket of Gatorade or water and dumps it on the player's head. Drenching them with ice and whatever drink was in the bucket.

David says, my God, my Shepherd does a Salvy splash of His Spirit out on his sheep, without measure He drenches us with His spirit, without measure He showers us with his presence, without measure He pours out all His grace so that we can live knowing He is always there and providing peace for our soul.

1-God's provision for my physical needs is extensive. 2-God's provision for my spiritual needs is refreshing.

3. God's provision for all my needs is abundant.

My cup overflows.

One of the jobs of the shepherd is to make sure the water troughs are full and overflowing. Providing water for the sheep required a lot of work. A mature sheep needs between one and three gallons of water each day. Shepherds had to dig wells, and in biblical times, this was done by hand with crude shovels and picks. The wells had to be maintained and covered with stones.

The sheep didn't appreciate all the work that went into preparing the well. They were just happy that when they went to the wells, their water troughs overflowed.

In Psalm 23, David was saying, God's blessings have been poured out into my life so greatly that they overflow.

I can't contain all of them. I may not understand all that goes into God making sure I am provided for, but I live in constant thanksgiving that my cup overflows.

When I need forgiveness, forgiveness overflows, when I need mercy, mercy overflows, when I need love love overflows, when I need peace, peace overflows.

I don't know if you have ever poured too much water in a cup, but what happens is when the cup has taken all it can take the water runs over the side so that everything around the cup is now affected by the overflow.

Because my cup overflows, my life overflows, and everything around me is affected... because he filled my cup to overflowing, my service for him overflows.

Because I have a good shepherd, who takes care of me, my cup overflows.

Before I close today, I just have one question for you, You may know the psalm like the actor I spoke of in the beginning, but do you know the shepherd?

The shepherd that supplies all my needs, do you know the shepherd?

The shepherd that heals the broken hearted, do you know the shepherd?

The shepherd that cleanses and washes white as snow, do you know the shepherd?

The shepherd that loves like no other, the shepherd that reached down and pulled me from the pit of life.

The shepherd that drank of the cup of suffering and emptied his cup of glory,

The shepherd that provides for my physical needs, my spiritual needs with abundance.

Do you know the shepherd? The good shepherd that prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies and overflows my cup, so that everyone and everything around me is affected by His goodness. Do you know the shepherd that gave his life for me, so I can live my life for him. Do you know the shepherd? If you don't know Him. You need to get to know Him today.

To God be the glory for the things he has done.

And the Church said Amen!