

Experiencing the Shepherd's Preparation

Psalm 23:5

Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

Take God's Word and open it to Psalm 23. Over the past several weeks we have been going through Psalm 23. We have focused on one verse at a time. Today we will camp on verse 5. But let's begin with **verse 1**, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. (2) He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, (3) He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. (4) Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. (5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."

This reminds me of the boy who sat down at the dinner table and saw what they were having for supper. He began to complain about it. He told his parents he didn't like it and it tasted horrible. He went on and on about how much he did not want to eat it. As a matter of fact, he stomped away from the table and went to his room and slammed the door. His father went to his room, gave him a good "talking too" telling him how blessed he was to have a meal that day and grounded him for the next several days. He also made him go back downstairs apologize to his mother and sit down at the table. After they had sat down the father asked his son if he would say the blessing for the food. Here is how the boy began his prayer, "Dear God, you have prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...."

I don't think that is what God intended for Psalm 23:5 to refer to but we do find some great lessons for life from this incredible verse. We see the Heavenly Shepherd's power working in our lives in three ways. Three ways He is prepared to be your Shepherd, to meet your needs and to use you in His kingdom.

1. The Heavenly Shepherd is prepared to fill your soul.

First of all, the Heavenly Shepherd is prepared to fill your soul. To fill your life up with good things. Who sets the table at your house? When we have a special guest or a special event happening at our house, we give a lot of attention to setting the table. I say "we" loosely, because it is actually my wife who is the expert at hospitality.

Now look at **verse 5**, who prepares the table to which David refers? David says, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil...” That “You” is talking about the Lord. This spiritual table is prepared by the Lord Himself.

One of the responsibilities of a shepherd is to go before the sheep and make sure there are no poisonous grasses or weeds in the fields his sheep will be grazing on and to get rid of any wild animals that may be harmful to the sheep. In essence, the shepherd prepares the table for the sheep to graze in safety and peace.

But what about our table? What is on our table? Notice that God didn’t tell us exactly what kind of food is on this table. **But I do know that God created food in such a way that it not only fuels our bodies but illustrates important spiritual lessons.** In the Bible food is used by God to teach us many things. Let me give you some examples.

A. Food reminds me of God’s provision

Number one, God uses food to remind me of God’s provision. Throughout the Bible God uses food to remind people that He provides. **Psalm 104** says, “He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate – bringing forth food from the earth; (15) wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.” The point is that God provides. Every plate of food on your table is a reminder from God that He cares. Whether you grab an apple or open up a can of beans and weenies that is a postcard from God saying, “I provide.” When you had breakfast this morning God was saying, “I provide.” When you have lunch today God is saying, “I provide.” When you have supper tonight God is saying, “I provide.” And by the looks of some of us, God has been providing a lot.

B. Food reminds me to enjoy life

Number two, God uses food to remind me to enjoy life. Life comes in a variety of flavors. There is a lot to enjoy. God made a variety food. He made bananas, apples, oranges, carrots, celery, corn, watermelon, cantaloupe, sugar, salt, herbs, and spices. Then you can throw in some chicken or steak with mashed potatoes and gravy and with some rolls or biscuits on the side. Mmm. That makes you enjoy life more just thinking about it. Just as food comes in a variety of flavors, so does life. There is a lot to enjoy about life.

When God decided to describe the abundance, the joy, and the pleasure of the promise land He said it is “flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8). God wants your life to be described as flowing with milk and honey. He wants you to enjoy life. Every time you sit down to eat let it remind you of the many pleasures that God created you to experience.

C. Food reminds me that everything has its season

Number three, God uses food to remind me that everything has its season. The seasonal cycles that produce food today are signs of God’s ordered providence for His people. There is a time to plant, water, grow, and harvest. Everything has its season. **Galatians 6:7** says, “A man reaps what he sows. (8) The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (9) Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Everything has its season. God decided to use the food planting and production process to remind us of that. There is a time for work and a time for play. There is a time when things are going great and a time when things are not great. Everything has its season. There is a time to plant and a time to harvest. Every slice of pepperoni pizza reminds us everything has its season.

D. Food reminds me of spiritual truths

Number four, God uses food to remind me of spiritual truths. When God created all this food He made it in such a way that it could be used to illustrate and help us understand spiritual truths.

For example, honey illustrates abundance and prosperity. In Biblical times honey was known for its sweetness¹ and its medical qualities². It was considered a delicacy and was sometimes presented as a valued gift.³ For these reasons honey often indicated or symbolized abundance and prosperity.⁴ In **Psalm 81:16** God tells His people if they were to repent and turn back to Him they “would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.” At least twenty times the OT calls the Promised Land a place “flowing with milk and honey.” So the next time you have a

¹ Judge 14:14; Ps 19:10; 119:103; Prov 24:13; Ezek 3:3, Rev 10:9-10

² Proverbs 16:24

³ Gen. 43:11; 1 Kgs 14:3; 2 Chron 31:5; Ezek 16:13, 19; 27:17

⁴ Deut 32:13; Job 20:17; Ps 81:16; Jer 41:8

peanut butter and honey sandwich or a biscuit with honey you thank God for the reminder of the abundant blessings you have in your life.

Throughout the Bible God uses food to illustrate many spiritual truths. **Milk** is used to symbolize blessings and luxuries and family relationships, but the most well known one is spiritual hunger. We are told in **1 Peter 2:2**, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, (3) now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” So the next time you have a glass of milk or a bowl of cereal let it remind you to check your hunger and craving for spiritual things.

God created everything to point to Him in some way. At every meal there is a reminder of some spiritual truth or an illustration that points you to God.

Bread is used to point to salvation and God’s providence. **Water** symbolizes life and the movement of God in the depths of someone’s heart. Every time you sit down to eat, there is a sermon by God staring you in the face.

On God’s table that He has prepared for you, you will find whatever it is you need. Whatever spiritual food you need for life and victory over your enemies you will find on the table that God has prepared for you. The table is ready, so come often.

2. The Heavenly Shepherd is prepared to freshen your spirit.

Secondly, the Heavenly Shepherd is prepared to freshen your spirit. Look at **Psalm 23:5** again, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil...” Shepherds used oil to anoint the heads of their sheep to help rid them of nagging pests such as flies. The oil was also used to heal their wounds and to soften up dry skin. Without such an application, the sheep would be frantic, frustrated and completely focused on getting relief. But with the application of the soothing oil, the sheep were refreshed and able to once again peacefully graze and rest and focus on what the shepherd wanted them to do.

Just as a shepherd would anoint his sheep with this refreshing oil, our Heavenly Shepherd anoints us with a spiritual oil, a spiritual anointing to bring refreshing and healing to our own lives.

Listen to **Psalm 45:7** which says, “You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.” The word “anointing” means to be set apart for a special service.

Do you realize that God uses joy to set you apart for ministry? Do you realize that some ministries call for an anointing of joy? God wants to anoint you with joy and freshen your spirit. This joy “sets you above your companions.” This does not mean joy makes you better than the people around you, but it does make you stand out from among them.

When the Lord declared the start of His earthly ministry He read from **Isaiah 61:3** where it says He had come “to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” Your Shepherd wants to pour on your pain the oil of gladness. God recognizes your pain, but He also recognizes your need... the oil of gladness. God wants you to be the most joyful and glad person there is. God wants to freshen your spirit. He wants to restore your joy.

3. The Heavenly Shepherd has power to free you for service.

Third, the Heavenly Shepherd is prepared to free you for service. At the end of **Psalm 23:5** David declares, “My cup overflows.” God not only gives you what you need, but gives you more so that you can share it. Do you know what some people want when their cup begins to overflow? They want a bigger cup! They want to keep it for themselves, but God wants you to give the overflow away. He wants you to bless others with that overflow.

What has God filled your cup up with? Has He blessed you financially, let those blessings flow over into others lives. Has He blessed you with wisdom, use that wisdom to bless others.

God wants His people to overflow. You need to overflow at work, school, and home. Be a Christian that overflows. God wants you to be an overflowing child of God.

Psalm 119:171, “May my lips overflow with praise, for You teach me Your decrees.” When you learn something new from the Word of God you should overflow with praise and thanksgiving, because God just spoke to you. When you are overflowing with praise from what God is teaching you in His Word it frees you up for service.

Romans 15:13, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” One of the benefits of trusting God is an overflowing attitude of hope that comes from the Holy Spirit. When you overflow with hope it frees you for service. When you are filled with

joy and peace and are overflowing with hope you can serve anywhere and go through anything.

1 Thessalonians 3:12, “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else.” When your love is increasing and overflowing for people, it frees you up for service. It is so much easier to serve and minister to others when you are overflowing with love for them.

God wants you to be an overflowing Believer. He wants you to overflow with love, hope, and praise. As your Shepherd He is going to prepare a table before you that will help you to overflow.

Conclusion

If you are a child of God you have a Heavenly Shepherd that is prepared to fill your soul. He wants you to have a complete and strong life even when your surrounded by your enemies.

Your Heavenly Shepherd is prepared to freshen your spirit. If you are hurting let God apply His oil of joy and His oil of gladness to your heart.

Your Heavenly Shepherd is prepared to free you for service. He wants your cup to be overflowing. He wants you to be a blessing wherever you go. He wants you to have what you need and enough to share with others.

But if you are not a Christian, this Heavenly Shepherd is prepared to offer you salvation. You can have eternal life today [explain salvation].