

“The Lord is my Shepherd” – A In-depth Study of Psalm 23

Teacher: Nick Watts * Verse 5

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

In This Session, We Will Learn:

1. How we can dine calmly and peacefully “in the presence of our enemies.”
2. Learn what it means to be “anointed with oil.”

Introduction

- For a brief introduction to the Psalms, Psalm 23, Christ’s presence in the Psalms, and of Christian author/shepherd, W. Phillip Keller, please see “Session One.”



Psalm 23:5

- **“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”**

1. “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies”

A. Earthly Observations

- 1) Keller – In thinking about this statement it is well to bear in mind that the sheep are approaching the high mountain country of the summer ranges. These are known as “alplands” or “tablelands”
 - a) *“Lord, lift me up and let me stand, by faith on heaven’s tableland,....”*
Johnson Oatman, Jr., *Higher Ground*
- 2) Keller – In some of the finest sheep country in the world – especially in the western U.S. and Southern Europe, the high plateaus of the sheep ranges are called “mesas” – the Spanish word for “tables.”
- 3) Keller – In preparing these “tablelands”, the shepherd had to make a number of preparations. He checks for poisonous weeds, clears out water sources, looks for signs of predators in the area (wolves, coyotes, cougars, and bears). Often, what actually happens is that these crafty predators are up on the rimrock watching **every movement** the sheep make, hoping for a chance to make a **swift**,

sneak-attack. I never once actually saw a cougar on my range. **So cunning and skillful were their raids that they defy description.**

B. Biblical Implications Based on Earthly Observations

- 1) There is agreement among scholars that, since the metaphor David uses changes from “shepherd” to “host”, there are a couple of contexts from which to interpret this statement. However, the overriding theme is the same: we are **completely** taken care of by our Shepherd/Host.
 - a) Steven Lawson; *Holman Old Testament Commentary* – The same central theme of this psalm is reinforced [here in vs. 5]. Even under the most adverse circumstances, in the face of threatening enemies, David would **lack nothing.** (cp. v 1)
 - b) Willem VanGemeren; *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* – This symbolizes the care and provisions of God, previously represented by “green pastures” and “quiet waters.”
 - c) Peter Craigie; *Word Biblical Commentary; Psalms 1-50* - Psalm 78 – a rebellious Israel mocks God by asking, in vs 19, “Can God spread a table in the wilderness?” Glad you asked. And, by the way, **yes – He can.**
- 2) But, David’s claim goes beyond simply “having his needs met”. **There is a most comforting context in which those needs are being met.**
 - a) Charles Spurgeon; *The Treasury of David; Psalm 23* – Every believer has his/her enemies. We would not be much like our Lord if we didn’t. In other words, when following Christ you will not please everyone.
 - b) Keller – Again, we are given a sublime picture of our Savior who knows **every** wile, **every** trick, **every** treachery of our enemy.
 - c) Bruce Waltke & James Houston; *The Psalms as Christian Worship* – The theme of provision and rest [goes deeper still] by adding that the feast takes place in the sight of my enemies who look on **helplessly.** So **mighty** is David’s Host that David enjoys a royal banquet right in front of his enemies **who cannot touch him.**
 - d) Spurgeon – When a soldier is in the presence of his enemies, if he eats at all he snatches a hasty meal, and away he hastens to the fight. [But here, we find], **nothing hurried.** There is **no confusion.** **No disturbance.** The enemy is at the door and yet God prepares a table. **And the Christian sits down and eats as if everything were in perfect peace.**

2. “You anoint my head with oil”

A. Earthly Observations

- 1) Keller – In the terminology of the shepherd, “summertime is fly time.” By this, reference is made to the hordes of insects that emerge with the advent of warm weather....For relief from this agonizing annoyance, sheep will deliberately beat their heads against trees, rocks, posts, or brush.
- 2) Keller – Only the strictest attention to the behavior of the sheep by the shepherd can forestall the difficulties of “fly time.” At the very first sign of flies among the flock he will apply an antidote to their heads....Once the oil had been applied to the sheep’s head, there was an **immediate** change in behavior. **Gone was the irritability.** Instead, they would begin **feeding quietly**, then soon lie down in **peaceful contentment.**
- 3) Waltke & Houston – In a climate where dry skin was a problem, especially for travelers, anointing with oil was a refreshment.
 - a) Psalm 23:3 (amp) He **refreshes** and restores my life (my self)

B. Biblical Implications Based on Earthly Observations

- 1) Keller – Just as with sheep, there must be a **continuous and renewed application of oil** to forestall the continuous annoyances in life; there must be a **continuous anointing of God’s gracious Spirit** to counteract the ever-present aggravations & distractions of life.
 - a) Luke 11:13 - If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”
- 2) Keller – There are those believers who believe that one only need have a single, initial anointing of God’s Spirit. Yet the frustrations of daily issues demonstrate that one must have Him come **continuously** to the troubled mind and heart to counteract the attacks of one’s tormentors.
 - a) Ephesians 5:18 -**be filled** with the Spirit.
 - b) John MacArthur; *MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Ephesians* 5:18 – “**Be filled**” translates the present passive imperative of “pleroo”, and is more literally rendered as “**be being kept filled.**”
 - We are “indwelt” by the Holy Spirit at the moment of justification (professing our faith in Christ). However, being “filled/controlled” by God’s Spirit is a **daily** battle for the believer – which is why Paul, **writing to Christians**, includes this command.

3. “My cup overflows”

A. Earthly Observations

- 1) Keller – What a picture of the shepherd we’ve been given. **He is with his sheep in every storm, every** approaching disaster, **every** potential danger, **providing every single need, and more.** The flock is **calm, content, at peace.** Every single need in their life – green grass, pure water, & protection - is provided by the watchful shepherd.

B. Biblical Implications Based on Earthly Observations

- 1) Keller (from Session 1; “I shall not want/lack”) - What we see here is the sentiment of a sheep **completely satisfied** with its owner, perfectly **content.**
- 2) Spurgeon – David had not only enough, a cup full, but more than enough, a cup overflowing. [If we are discontent/unsatisfied with the Shepherd’s provisions], our cup will be cracked, continually leaking, driving us into a worldly/maddening pursuit of “more.”
 - a) Lamentations 3:22-24 (amp) ...His [tender] compassions **never fail.** They are **new every morning; great and abundant** is Your stability *and* faithfulness. **The Lord is my portion** *or* share, says my living being, therefore will I hope in Him *and* wait expectantly for Him. (cf. Eph 3:20)
- 3) Christ is our “portion.” Nothing more. Nothing less. Nothing else.

Christ is my Shepherd.

He is all I need.

Nothing more. Nothing less. Nothing else.