



From the Heart of the First Lady

You Prepare A Table For Me

Psalm 23:5-6 (NIV) ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

As this issue concludes our journey through the 23rd Psalm, let's read it with a heart of thanksgiving and gratitude for our Good Shepherd. So far, every verse revealed facets of JEHOVAH ROHI (the LORD My Shepherd's) character and love for us (His proverbial sheep) and the following two verses are no different.

You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies: It may seem that there is a change of metaphor here from a shepherd and his sheep to a host and his guests; but this is not necessarily the case. David's use of the word "table" did not refer to a piece of furniture, but rather a piece of land. In Hebrew, it simply means "something spread out". Flat places in the hilly country were called "tables" and sometimes the shepherd stopped the flock there and allowed them to eat and rest as they headed for the fold. Sometimes at the fold, the shepherd would spread out food in a trough, because after a long day, sheep lie down and rest after they have eaten (like many of us). As they slept, they would be protected by a stone wall that surrounded them, and the shepherd himself would sleep across the opening and be the door. During the night, thieves and dangerous animals might approach the fold, but there was no way they could reach the sheep without getting past the shepherd.

We can draw comfort from this concept today when we face challenging circumstances – knowing that we are never left alone, but have a "very present help in times of trouble" (Psalm 46:1). The LORD doesn't always remove the dangers from our lives, but He does help us to overcome them and not be paralyzed by fear. This is what it means to be "more than conquerors" and have peace in the midst of danger (Romans 8:35-39).

You anoint my head with oil: The shepherd would examine the sheep as they entered the fold to be sure none of them was bruised, injured, or sick from eating a poisonous plant. To the hurts, he applied the soothing oil, and for the thirsty, he had his large two-handled cup filled with water. He would also apply the oil to the heads and horns of the sheep to help keep the flies and other insects away. The sheep knew they were safe and they could sleep without fear. For us currently, the oil represents the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Toward the end of Jesus' life on earth, He promised to send us a "comforter" (the Holy Spirit) to help us succeed during daunting challenges. The anointing also breaks

Prayer:

Lord, you are my strength-please protect me. You are my safety-preserve me. Keep me safe in your tender care as I minister to the needs of others. And please protect those around me, the ones to whom I minister. Bless me, Lord, and keep me from my enemies-the ones I see and the ones I don't. I ask for a strong wall of protection to keep out evil and keep in good. I trust You, my strong and mighty Lord. Amen

yokes and removes burdens. This is why Jesus instructs us to "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

my cup overflows: One of the wonderful and amazing characteristics of GOD is His infinite and inexhaustible supply – He gives without giving away. And He loves giving to us. In fact, He longs to do it. (Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; He rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!) Isaiah 30:18 (NIV). He desires not just to meet our needs, but meet them according to His glorious riches (Philippians 4:19). And, do you want to know the best thing? No matter how large our capacity is to receive from Him, He is "able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine..." (Ephesians 3:20). Now that's overflow!

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: As the shepherd lay each night at the door of the sheepfold, he looked back over the day and gave thanks that the LORD had blessed them with goodness and mercy. As an old man, David looked back over his long life and came to the same conclusion. In spite of his sins and failures, he had been followed by goodness and mercy, which is the Old Testament equivalent of Romans 8:28.

Under the old covenant, the sheep died for the shepherd, but under the new covenant, the Shepherd died for the sheep—and we shall meet our Shepherd in heaven! "For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Revelation 7:17).

As we enter this Thanksgiving and holiday season, it is my hope that this series shed light on the many reasons we have to be grateful for our Good Shepherd. May our hearts fill with gratitude and our lips spill over with praise and worship for Him. Moreover, the best way to honor GOD is to share His goodness with others in our sphere of influence that don't have a Shepherd. As the gospel of Jesus Christ is shared in word (via conversation, email, social media, scriptures or even this series) and deed (expressions of thoughtfulness and service) I pray people's hearts will be moved, resulting in many sheep joining the fold.