

The Lavish Hospitality of God

Psalm 23:5

We have come in our six-week study of Psalm 23 to verse 5. This is a verse that speaks about the lavish hospitality of God. Listen to what David says to the Lord in Psalm 23:5.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil;
My cup overflows.

Commentators are divided on whether David is moving away from the shepherd/sheep imagery in this verse. Some think that David is envisioning the Lord as a shepherd who makes a pasture ready for grazing by removing poisonous plants and such. But it seems more likely to me that he is envisioning the Lord as a **host** who welcomes him into His home in a most generous way. My comments today will reflect this understanding. In either case, this verse as an expression of the lavish hospitality of God.

I don't know what comes to mind for you when you hear the word "hospitality." But David tells us that:

Through God's lavish hospitality, we experience abundance, safety, and acceptance.

When David says to the Lord, "You prepare a table before me ***in the presence of my enemies***," it's as if David is sitting down at the table with his enemies watching. God hadn't destroyed his enemies (yet); they were in proximity. But even though he had enemies, he experienced abundance and safety.

This is consistent with what we saw last week in verse 4. There David said, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. . ." (i.e., "even when I am in a dark, dangerous place in life") ". . . I fear no evil, for You are with me. ***Your rod*** and your staff, they comfort me." The rod was a weapon that a shepherd used against predators, enemies of the sheep. The fact that the Lord had a rod (and was willing to use it) meant that David was **safe** even if his enemies were still present.

We need to understand some basic things about David's enemies and about our enemies. This will be important if we want to be able to say, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." In the first 41 psalms (Book 1 of the Psalms), David mentions his enemies a couple dozen times. Psalm 1 and 2 set up the scenario in which kings and nations rage against God and His anointed king in Zion; in other words, God and His king in Jerusalem have enemies. Ultimately Jesus would be identified as THE King who would reign on the throne of David forever. But in the Psalms, David was God's anointed king. Because of this identification between God and His king, David's enemies were God's enemies.

Not surprisingly, when David prayed about his enemies, he sometimes mentions to God that they are also God's enemies. For example, in Psalm 5:10, after listing some of the ways that his enemies had mistreated him, he writes:

10 Hold them guilty, O God;
By their own devices let them fall!
In the multitude of their transgressions thrust them out,
For they are rebellious against You.

David's enemies not only rebelled against him as God's anointed king; they had rebelled against God Himself! Of course David wasn't sinless, but his enemies were God's enemies also.

How does this apply to us? First, ***we need to have the right kind of enemies***. Like David we need to be so identified with God and His Son Jesus that we have the right kind of enemies. If we have enemies because we've been arrogant or unkind or unjust, we shouldn't expect to experience the safety in their presence that David did. Jesus said in Matthew 5:11:

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

If you have enemies because of your loyalty to Jesus, you are blessed; and spiritually you are safe and secure. Perhaps you've heard about the account of someone asking Abraham Lincoln whether he thought that God was on his side. "Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side . . . my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right." (Cited [HERE](#) at firstthings.com) If we have enemies because we have sided with God by bowing the knee to Jesus, we can say with David, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies."

Second, we need to make sure that we are treating our enemies the way Jesus instructed. In the New Testament we see a radical shift in the way God's people are supposed to think about and relate to our enemies. The New Testament reiterates what is taught throughout the Old Testament, namely, that we all start out as enemies of God. We are sinful by nature and by choice. But wonder of wonders, Paul tells us this in Romans 5:

8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. . . 10 . . . while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son. . .

The mission of Jesus was to convert and transform God's enemies into His friends. Jesus experienced the wrath of God so that all who believe in Him don't have to. Paul never forgot that he had been an enemy of God. He was traveling to Damascus to persecute followers of Christ when Jesus appeared to him. Paul never forgot that when **he** was God's enemy Christ died for Him (see 1 Timothy 1:12-17). Consequently, he renounced the arrogance he had as a Pharisee toward people who were far from God.

Paul spent the rest of his life taking the gospel to other enemies of God - people like you and me. I've noticed that believers who live with this remembrance ("I was God's enemy, but Christ died for me!") share the gospel in a convincing way because they are convinced on a heart level that the gospel is good news (the best news); believers who forget that they were enemies of God either don't share the gospel at all or share it in a dispassionate, clinical way.

Because Paul was so passionate about the gospel, he had enemies - people who hated him and his Lord, Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, because of God's lavish hospitality in Christ, he experienced abundance and safety even in the presence of his enemies. In Acts 16, for example, Paul and Silas had been beaten in public and then thrown in prison in Philippi. At midnight they were "praying and singing hymns to God" (verse 25); they experienced abundance and safety in the presence of their enemies.

And because Paul never forgot that he had been an enemy of God, he was able to live out Jesus' instructions on how we should treat our enemies. Jesus, for example, said this in the Sermon on the Mount (in Matthew 5):

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Jesus says that we'll demonstrate that God is our Father if we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Jesus demonstrated that God was His Father, right? He loved His enemies by dying for them; from the cross He prayed for His enemies, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing." Unless you are convinced that you were (or are) an enemy of God who deserves His wrath, you will never understand or accept what Jesus taught about loving our enemies; it will seem completely unreasonable and impossible. But the New Testament ethic is that we should treat others the way God in Christ treated us. Therefore, we love our enemies.

Let's think about the last two lines in Psalm 23:5.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil;
My cup overflows.

"You have anointed my head with oil" is a reference to a tradition that was well-established in that day. A gracious host would honor guests by anointing their head with oil (often perfumed olive oil).

You may remember the account in Luke 7 which describes how Jesus accepted an invitation to have a meal at the house of a Pharisee. While He was there a woman known as a "sinner" entered the house, wept at Jesus' feet, and wiped His feet with her hair. She also **anointed His feet with oil**. The Pharisee reasoned that if Jesus were a

prophet He would never allow a “sinful woman” to touch him like that. Jesus told a parable illustrating that those who are forgiven much love much (like the woman). Here’s His comment to the Pharisee:

44 Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 “You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. 46 “You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume.

By not showing Jesus the common courtesy of anointing His head with oil, Jesus experienced a lack of acceptance and a lack of love. Back in Psalm 23:5. . .

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil;
My cup overflows.

. . . when David says to God, “You have anointed my head with oil,” he is saying, “You welcomed me into your household as a good host. I feel **acceptance**, like an honored guest in Your household.”

In the last line of verse 5, David says, “My cup overflows.” I don’t know if you’ve ever been to a restaurant where the person who’s serving you is so attentive to you that they refill your water (or whatever you’re drinking) so often that it’s always full. That was David’s experience with the Lord and then some! It’s as if God kept filling his cup so full that it overflowed. David wasn’t an unwelcome guest at the Lord’s table. This is a picture of the abundance and the over-the-top hospitality God showed to David. David felt accepted and wanted in God’s house.

Through God’s lavish hospitality we experience abundance, safety, and acceptance.

Jesus shows this same type of hospitality toward all who allow Him to be their good shepherd. We’ve talked about the three parables in Luke 15 a couple of times in this sermon series. I have to mention Luke 15 again today because Jesus’ words and actions reflect the type of lavish hospitality we’ve seen in Psalm 23:5. Just as the Lord prepared a table for David in the presence of his enemies Jesus ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners in the presence of their enemies, the Pharisees; tax collectors and sinners felt welcomed and wanted by Jesus. And the father in the parable of the prodigal son had prepared a lavish banquet for his younger son when he returned home in the presence of **his** enemy, his older brother; the younger brother surely felt welcomed and wanted by his father because of the robe and the ring and the fatted calf.

In light of everything we’ve talked about today, I now invite you to ***the Lord’s Table***.

In his book *The Good Shepherd*, Kenneth Bailey made a rather profound connection that I'd never seen before. He pointed out that Paul says that Psalm 23:5 finds its' fullest expression when the church gathers to celebrate the Lord's Table.¹ In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul confronts the Corinthians who celebrated the Lord's table **and** participated in pagan feasts that involved idol worship. Corinth (like America) was a spiritual "food court" where you could go eat at the Lord's table, then dine at Aphrodite's table, and finish up at Poseidon's table.

In 1 Corinthians 10:21-22 Paul wrote this:

21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. 22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?

God is appropriately jealous when we divide our loyalty between Him and other gods. Our relationship with Him was always meant to be exclusive. In the next chapter, 1 Corinthians 11, Paul says that at the Lord's Table "we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes"; in other words, we rehearse the gospel through the bread and the cup.

At the Lord's Table, the lavish hospitality of God is on full display. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we can say:

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil;
My cup overflows.

Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we experience abundance, safety, and acceptance. We're going to give you a couple of minutes to enter into the presence of the Lord in light of His lavish hospitality. Let's pray.

¹ Bailey writes:

When Paul looks at Psalm 23:5 and asks himself, *What is the "table" that the Lord prepares for me at great cost, and what is the "cup" that he offers?* Paul's conclusion is that this language finds its fullest expression in the "table and the cup" of the Eucharist [i.e., the Lord's table].