

RESTORING THE SOUL
PSALM 23
September 25, 2022

Psalm 23:4

- 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 shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.¹**

Psalm 23 is so often read at funerals that many think the message of the psalm is about death. It is not. In fact, the primary focus is the exact opposite. This is a song of life. A psalm of joy. The short psalm chronicles the feelings and thoughts that David faced during a particularly dark time in his life. It is a parallel psalm to Psalm 16 which also speaks of the protection of a God who loves and knows and sees.

In verse 2 we see that God; the Good Shepherd provides for physical needs. In verse 3, David declares God's goodness in providing for spiritual needs. In verse 4, the mental and emotional needs are covered. And now it's verses 5 and 6 and the shepherd is the host.

THE SHEPHERD IS MY HOST

Picture a great banquet hall with the table set, prepared for honored guests. Now picture it set up in the middle of a battlefield. The enemy is defeated. The Lord is king and the victor over sin, death, and evil. And now it is time to celebrate.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ps 23:5–6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

The shepherd is now the host – providing the meal, the feast, the blessed gathering with a seat reserved for you. Let that image resonate a bit – a seat at the table for his beloved children. For David the psalmist, but also for you who are God’s child, and for me. A seat for the undeserved.

Don’t rush too quickly over this verse and miss that amazing reality. The God of the universe, creator of all, the one who existed before anything we can fathom, the Lord who spoke every single created item into existence, the holy one, the perfect one, the one who never needs, who cannot and will not tolerate sin, sets a table for a feast and ensures that you and I have a seat.

I read this and cannot help but think of an event that took place later in David’s life. Long after Saul is killed and Jonathan, Saul’s son and David’s best friend is dead, the psalmist who had been anointed by Samuel the prophet is now on the throne. David the shepherd, the harpist, the victim, the one sought by Saul, is now king and only certain people have the right and honor to sit at the king’s table for the daily feasts.

And I think of *Mephibosheth*.

When Mephibosheth was five years old his father Jonathan, son of Saul, was killed in battle. The fear that the enemy would kill the boy as well, his nurse fled with him to Gibeah, but in her haste dropped him and as a result both of his feet were crippled. He was carried to Gibeah and protected by Machir in his house for years. When David was king and had conquered all Israel’s enemies, he remembered that his best friend had a young son.

2 Samuel 9:6-7

⁶ And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and paid homage. And David said,

“Mephibosheth!” And he answered, “Behold, I am your servant.”

⁷ And David said to him, “Do not fear, for I will show you kindness

for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always.”²

I have always wondered if when David prepared a place at his table for Mephibosheth if his memory was jogged to remember his own time of despair and uncertainty when the Holy Spirit led him to pen the words of Psalm 23.

THE SOVEREIGN ANOINTS MY HEAD
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

The literal translation of this phrase “anoint my head with oil” is “make my head fat with the oil.” It seems to lose something when translated that way, but the image of something being made fat was clear in the ancient world as a symbol of showing lavish provision upon someone.

The anointing signifying that this isn’t a latecomer to the table who forgot to RSVP. This isn’t one of those “Hey grab a chair from the other room and we’ll squeeze you in.” This is the shepherd-host sovereign publicly acknowledging David, his children, us, as honored guests—much like Mephibosheth—as family, at the table. This ancient ritual is of pouring oil over one’s head mixed with perfume that would smooth the skin, moisten the hair, and give a sweet fragrance. It is a mark of friendship, acceptance, and celebration.

The overflowing cup is an image of having more blessings than we deserve and more than we even need. He supplies our needs and even more.

THE SAVIOR PREPARES MY HOME

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.³

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (2 Sa 9:6–7). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ps 23:5–6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

The shepherd who is sovereign is the host who is holy. His rod and staff bring comfort along the way of life, even in the most difficult valleys of shadows where death resides, but on this journey that our shepherd leads, what follows us along the path are goodness and mercy.

This goodness and mercy is also called steadfast love. A love that is never shifting, never changing, never modified. Steadfast in that nothing can shift its foundation or lessen the quantity or quality of the love.

When you write your autobiography and the challenging chapters seem to be longer than the easy ones, when the villain in your story seems more powerful than the hero, when despair and grief seem to be the adjectives that most define you...child of God, take heart and listen to the psalmist. There is hope. There is love. Steadfast and everlasting. There is joy available. The enemy continues to attack – with a goal of stealing, killing, and destroying, but...he does not win.

In fact, in the midst of the battlefield the enemy will lay defeated. It is there a feasting table is placed, with a setting for you. Oh, how good our God is. Even when we cry out wondering why he doesn't listen or hear, when those we trust break the trust we gave them, when light seems dark and questions seem unanswered, we have a shepherd, a sovereign, and a savior. The Lord God is his name and the great I AM is, has been, and always will be.

As difficult as it may be to hear this and understand it today, it is true. I guarantee it. I know this to be true.

Just as a man who faced some of the greatest pain of grief, death, disease, distrust, and despair stated...

Job 19:25

²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives,

and at the last he will stand upon the earth. ⁴

David knew this. David believed this. And David of the tribe of Judah, not the tribe of Levi, shares a Messianic truth here in this psalm for he states that he shall dwell in the house of the Lord. The house of the Lord would have been considered a place for the priests in the tribe of Levi, but God's children were never meant to be from only one tribe and David's statement clarifies a truth for him as he looked forward to the coming Messiah and for us as we live with this as part of our history and present.

Christ has come and he has shown the way, for he is the way. He is the way to the Father and through him you can be saved, born again, transformed from a creation to a child.

Through Christ a place is set for you at the table. Through Christ (the real Christ, not this muddled version that is often sold in western Christianity today, not the version that became made in the image of white Europeans centuries ago with baptized paganism attached. Not the buddy Jesus that was mocked in the movie Dogma, but only worked as a joke because so many see him like that. Not the Jesus that is simply a man who at some point realized he was the Son of God as some fiction writers declare.

No, the Christ who has been, is, and always will be the eternal Son of God, God the Son, second person of the Trinity, Messiah, Christ, King, Lord, Way, Truth, and Life. That Jesus. That real, biblically-revealed, resurrected Jesus Christ has come to give you LIFE, full and abundant. Through his death, burial, and resurrection he paid the penalty for the sins of the world, but even better, for the sins of your heart. For your sins. The ones you were born with. The sins you practiced over and

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Job 19:25–27). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

over. The sins you have perfected. The sins that keep you from knowing God personally as Father have been paid for, in full, by the Son.

And if you would repent of those sins, believe that Jesus is the Son, raised from the dead, surrender your life to him, you will be saved.

Forever.

John 14:2-3

²In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.⁵

Charles Spurgeon states it well when he said “A servant abideth not in the house forever, but the son abideth ever.”

**and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.⁶**

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Jn 14:2–3). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ps 23:5–6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.