(07-16-25) If the Lord Is My Shepherd (5)

| He Prepares a Table Before Me  Psalm 23:1-6 (NASB) |
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Each Sunday, we’ve been exploring a different Bible translation of Psalm 23. So far, we’ve read it in the KJV, NRSVUE, ESV, and NIV. Today, we turn to the New American Standard Bible (NASB), a translation known for its commitment to staying as close as possible to the original biblical languages.

Today's scripture is Psalm 23:5. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows." (Psalm 23:5 NASB). **If the Lord is my Shepherd, He prepares a table before me.**

Verse 5 is the most challenging passage in Psalm 23. What does it mean? Let us think about the meaning of the verse here.

"In the presence of my enemies."

We are living every day in the presence of our enemies. As we recognize God's presence every day, we must also acknowledge that we are in the presence of our enemies. As God's presence is real, so is the presence of our enemies. As God's protection for His sheep is real, our enemies' attack on us is real. Our enemies are always looking for a moment that can trap us and keep us away from God.

"Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8 NRSVUE).

We are called to stand against the wiles (or schemes) of devil (Ephe. 6:11), not to be outwitted by Satan, not be ignorant of him (2 Cor. 2:11), and resist the devil (Jam. 4:7). Satan means "adversary," and "accuser." Devil (Greek) means "false accuser," and "slanderer." Both are considered the same in the Bible.

In essence, we are engaged in spiritual warfare. Let me quote John Wesley on his understanding of our spiritual warfare from his diary.

"I found more and more undeniable proofs that the Christian state is a continual warfare; and that we have need every moment to watch and pray lest we enter into temptation." (John Wesley's Journal, May 17, 1740)

The more he had done ministries, the more he realized he was waging spiritual war against Satan. We can find his acuteness and urgency as we see how he handled his spiritual engagement with Satan.

"You prepare a table before me."

Then, what is the meaning of the phrase "You prepare a table before me"?

John Wesley interprets this phrase as "God furnishes me with plenty of provisions and comforts" (John Wesley’s Notes on Psalm 23:5). It means God's protection, provision, support, and comfort for His people are abundant and bountiful. Here, the table symbolizes banquet, celebration, and honor, which are a foretaste of the ultimate feast God will prepare for His people in heaven. In the Reformation era, the table was interpreted as the Gospel or one of the Sacraments, the Lord's Supper. They are still valid interpretations today.

So I firmly believe that he table signifies our worship. It is because in worship we encounter God's presence. Communion in our worship is a time when heaven and earth meet, giving us confirmation that we are God's Kingdom people, not only in heaven but also on earth. In worship, we are restored, reshaped, and transformed as the fragrance of Christ to let people know the wonderful work of God in and through Jesus Christ.

"The Road to Peace" is a book by Henri Nouwen on the topics of peace and justice. In the last chapter of the book, Henri Nouwen emphasizes the importance of our worship following the liturgical year. We observe the church calendar, following the life of Jesus Christ, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. By doing so, we live out Jesus' life throughout the year. That is the way to bring peace and justice to the world.

"Worship is coming together as a community of God to claim the presence of Christ. So we listen to the readings, we break the bread, we share the cup, we sing songs. They are all gestures in which we remind each other that no matter what we are experiencing – whether it is joy or pain or suffering – God is there. The world around us is trying to pull us away from that. It wants to say that nothing is happening here so why don't you buy this or go here or find your happiness there? **The worshipping community is saying God is right here with us.** **The worship life of the church over the year is bringing Christ back into the center of our lives** and realizing that we as a body of people are representing the living Christ in our world." (Henri Nouwen, The Road to Peace (1998), p. 216.)

"You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows."

Shepherds would use oil to protect their sheep from insects and parasites and also to treat their wounds and skin irritations. So, they anointed oil on the sheep's heads. It is the shepherd's duty, love, and care for their sheep.

Additionally, kings, prophets, and priests in the Old Testament were anointed with oil to set them apart for service to God. A prescribed formula is outlined in Exodus 30:22-25. This kind of oil was considered very sacred. So, anointing with oil means **God's authorization, empowerment, protection, and guidance** for His holy work through his anointed people.

In the New Testament, **the Holy Spirit** descended upon Jesus Christ's disciples as a tangible expression of God's anointing, representing **God's authorization, empowerment, presence, and protection** for His people to engage in His missionary work.

Here, **the cup** represents what is allotted to us by God, signifying our life, circumstances, or overall experience of life. So, if my cup overflows, we are saved from our bondage of sin and led by the Holy Spirit to enjoy **God's blessings, presence, provision, and protection abundantly in our lives**. As God's protection and provision are bountiful, our thanksgiving is also overflowing.

Let us read the scripture on the screen together.

"The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows]." (John 10:10 Amplified Bible)

When Jesus Christ fed the five thousand with the five loaves and two fish (Mark 6:38), not including women and children, they all ate and were satisfied. Do you remember how many baskets they needed to collect the leftovers? Twelve baskets (Greek: ***kophinos***). When Jesus fed four thousand (Mark 8:1-10) with seven loaves and a few small fish, how many baskets did they need to gather up the leftovers? Seven baskets (Greek: ***spyris***). This basket is much bigger than the former case. But both show God's abundant and overflowing provisions and blessings for His people. Additionally, both twelve and seven symbolize perfection, representing God's perfect provision.

When I served at Glendale Korean UMC as a student pastor, a tragic incident occurred in 2003. One of our church members was babysitting the granddaughter of another church member in Koreatown, Los Angeles. She was found dead in the bathroom of the apartment where she had been working. She had been shot, along with the baby and the baby’s mother. The babysitter was discovered holding the baby in her arms, as if she had tried to protect the child until the very end. You can find the information in wikipedia with the title of “Miracle Mile Murders.”

The tragedy shocked not only our church but the entire city of Los Angeles. The Los Angeles City Council increased the reward for information several times. During the funeral service, many news crews gathered and lined up outside the church. But we couldn’t speak to them—we, too, were emotional victims of the tragedy. People wept again and again, and their tears saturated the sanctuary throughout the service.

About three months later, during a Sunday worship service, the senior pastor invited the babysitter’s daughter and the baby’s maternal grandmother to the front of the church. They had made the courageous decision to become a mother and daughter to one another. Even in the midst of deep sorrow among the congregation, we witnessed God’s special blessing being poured out on the two women and their families. They held hands, and the pastor prayed over them. The whole congregation gave thanks and celebrated their new bond as a family.

Though no one in the church could fully understand why the innocent had to suffer, we could all see that God was still at work—not only in the lives of those families, but also in our church.