

THE GOOD LIFE

A STUDY OF THE 23RD PSALM

PART 10 – HE PREPARES A TABLE BEFORE ME

REVIEW

So for close to three months now, we have been learning that God has a good life that He has prearranged and made ready for us to live (See Ephesians 3:10 Amplified). And the reason we are teaching on this is because there is a misconception in many Christians – both in groups and in individuals – that the Christian life is just a life of suffering, pain, heartache, loss, etc. These believe that when we get to heaven, that's the time when we can expect to see God's goodness and to experience this good life. And while the kingdom of heaven will certainly be far better than anything we can experience here on the earth, that doesn't mean we can't taste and see that the Lord is good now. Amen?

So while religion certainly won't tell you this, the LORD has a better life planned for us on this earth than we can possibly even imagine. Yes, an honest look at the Scriptures will reveal to us that God's plan for our short, physical lives is GOOD! No, not evil and full of death. It's good and full of life!

But one of the main points that we have seen the Holy Spirit continue to reemphasize is the role both the Spirit of God and the Word of God play in leading us into this good life. Yes, this is one thing that has been a repeated lesson throughout this series – how God's Word and the Holy Spirit are the catalysts in the good life. The Spirit and the Word agree, church! And you are about to see this again as we continue where we left off last week with the last part of **Psalm 23:4** ...

At the end of this verse, David went on to say, "... *Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*" So, let's pick back up this week with this phrase and then we will move into the 5th verse ...

THE SHEPHERD'S ROD AND STAFF

Now both the shepherds' rod and staff served a purpose in their duties as a Shepherd, and what we see the sheep telling their shepherd here is that purpose is to bring comfort.

Now the rod was considered more of the shepherd's weapon. It was what he used to ward off predators and to defend his flock. So, I would liken the rod of our Good Shepherd to God's Word – for it is His Word that's the offensive weapon of God's kingdom (See **Ephesians 6:17**).

If you recall, it was Moses' rod that was used time and time again as the instrument that brought Egypt to its knees. The magicians of Pharaoh did the same miracle as Moses the first time because demons are good at performing lying signs and wonders. But then Moses' rod gobbled up the ones of the magicians. Yes, the Great I Am gave Moses this rod to execute the judgment of God on the king of Egypt, and this honor have

all the saints today - to execute on the principalities and powers the written judgment of God! Amen? (see **Psalm 149:5-9**).

Yes, we too have God's "rod" today that brings comfort to our souls. As **Romans 15:4** calls it, *"the comfort of the Scriptures."* And **Second Timothy 3:16-17** tells us that *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

His truths and promises give us the comfort that our God will provide, that He will deliver us, and that He is indeed with us and for us! God's **Word** is God's **Rod** with some letter rearrangement and a capital "W" at the beginning of them! Amen?

Now the shepherd's staff served a different purpose: First of all, it was the distinguishing mark of a shepherd. Yes, that long staff with the rounded hook at the top was one of the primary ways that one was recognized as a shepherd. However, the staff was not used just for show. It was a tool that the shepherd used for tending his flock of sheep ...

You see, it has been said that the shepherd would use his staff to "hook" his sheep. He would do this by using the rounded hook to physically turn their heads and bodies in the direction he wanted them to go. Therefore, this staff was used for the purpose of leading and guiding the sheep.

This is why I see the staff as symbolic of the Holy Spirit: He is the tool (more literally, the Person) that God uses to lead and guide His sheep today. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is to us today the distinguishing mark of our Shepherd. In other words, He is the part of the Godhead who reveals to us who our Good Shepherd is. His job is to glorify the Good Shepherd and to lead us unto Him. Amen.

And isn't the Holy Spirit also called our "Comforter"? Therefore, like our Good Shepherd's rod, His staff is also what is used to comfort us!

Church, we need to prioritize our Good Shepherd's rod & staff in our lives! Yes, His Word and His Spirit play an integral part in our lives because as we spend time in the Word and in communion with the Holy Spirit, we walk in the comfort of this good life. Amen?

THE HONORABLE HOST

Now this good life is not only realized in the example of the sheep being cared for by their shepherd. I want you to notice the example that David moves into in the last two verses of Psalm 23 ...

Psalm 23:5-6 says, *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

Notice that in these verses David is continuing to directly address His Shepherd like he began to do at the end of verse 4. However, I want you to notice the transition: Now the example of a Shepherd and His sheep is no longer being used. Now, in verses 5&6, he is using the analogy of a person being invited into someone else's home and being shown great honor and hospitality.

So, these last two verses of the 23rd Psalm show us another part of God's nature. Not only is He that Good Shepherd who takes care of His sheep; He is that Honorable Host who crowns us with His lovingkindness and tender-mercies! Yes, He prepares this table before us and makes all things good and ready! Upon entering, He honors us by anointing our head with oil! He fills our cup up to overflowing! Then our response is, "Surely, my host's goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life! And I will live in His house forever!" Amen! This is living the good life, my friends!

Now one thing that these verses ought to teach us is how we should act when we host people in our own homes or in God's house: Our guests should feel honored, blessed, and made to feel special. This is the way our Heavenly Father operates. Likewise, His children are to imitate Him in being "given to hospitality." Amen?

Now let's move into these verses and see how our Hospitable & Honorable Host treats us. David begins by saying in **Psalms 23:5**, *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies ..."*

ACCEPTING THE INVITATION

As we begin looking at this portion of verse 5, there is another Scriptural example of being invited to the Lord's table that I believe we must first consider:

In **Luke 14:15-24**, Jesus used an example to describe how the Lord invites all of us to His table for a meal, and in His parable, how all that were invited began to give excuses one by one as to why they could not attend. These excuses ranged from someone having bought a piece of land and needing to go see it, another having bought five yoke of oxen and needing to go test them, and another just getting married and simply saying, "Hey, I cannot come!" Now these excuses were not something that the Lord understood. In fact, it angered him that all of these people that he had honored with this invite had other things that were more important than his dinner invitation. So this compelled him to begin inviting those who were less noble – the poor, the maimed, the *lame*, etc. (Notice here the reference to the "lame." This will become important later). And when these demographics of people didn't fill every seat, the master told his servant to go out into the highways and hedges and invite these strangers so that his house would be filled!

So what's the lesson here? The Lord has prepared this table before us and has invited each of us to come partake, but we must accept the invitation – not having anything or anyone else be more important than attending His supper.

So, just because the Lord has prepared a table for us does not automatically mean everyone invited will partake of it – not because God is holding back, but because those He invites generally don't make showing up to that dinner a priority in their lives. Let's change that! Let's make eating at the Lord's table our priority! God is not looking for the *able*, but for the *available*. He can and will enable us to do whatever He calls us to.

Just as it was said to the Church of Laodicea in **Revelation 3:20** – the Lord is standing at the door of our hearts knocking, desiring for us to open the door, invite Him in, and dine with Him. And this was written to a church, saints! So, evidently even born-again Christians are capable of not experiencing all that the Lord desires for them.

So, in this example, we can see that the way to accept the invitation is not for us to just show up somewhere, but rather to open the door to our heart and let Him come sit at the table and fellowship with us. That's how you and I accept the invitation and come to the table that He has prepared for us.

DON'T LEAVE THE PARTY

But what we see here in Psalm 23:5 is that all that God has for us does not just include us eating at the Lord's table; it includes eating "in the presence of our enemies."

Now David was certainly a man who experienced this truth in his life, amen? The Lord honored him time and time again during his time in King Saul's presence. Yes, even though Saul was driven by iniquity and constantly persecuted David, the Lord continued to bless David and delivered him from Saul's hands time and time again.

This shows us that our God delights in defending us from our adversaries, but the key to experiencing this is found in doing the same honorable things that David did in the midst of his persecution. You see, David continued to honor the king. He never took things into his own hands but let the Lord justify and deliver him. Even when he seemed to have every right, he did not touch the Lord's anointed.

Now we will find this out more next week, but we are all the Lord's anointed now. Yes, if you are a part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, you are an anointed king and priest. Therefore, even when one of your brothers and sisters in Christ (who are also loved by God as much as you are) do things that hurt you, you are to respond like David did, letting the Lord defend you. Yes, you and I are still to do good to them. We are to pray for them and to bless them. Bless and do not curse, knowing this: that you were called to inherit a blessing! (First Peter 3:9)

But what so many Christians do is this: when their brother or sister does something to them, they fight back. They retaliate. They take matters into their own hands. However, in doing so, what they are doing is getting up from the Lord's table. So what these need to understand is – even if they are successful at avenging themselves, they are missing the meal! (See **Romans 12:17-21**)

Do you know how many of God's children are missing out on the party at God's table because they decided to let their enemies spoil their fun? This is precisely why the devil loves to plant people in our lives – to distract us from dining with the LORD at His table!

Church, when people – even God's anointed ones – simply irritate us or go as far as attack us, we don't need to miss the meal God has prepared for us because of what they are doing. Most of the time, these enemies are missing out on the dinner the LORD has prepared even for them anyways. So always remember this – **Never leave the table for someone who decided not to come to the party!** Amen?

EATING AT THE KING'S TABLE

Now, as I meditated on this truth about eating at the Lord's table, I couldn't help but think of that story in the book of Second Samuel that is a beautiful type and shadow of what we have in Christ – the story of a man named Mephibosheth ...

Notice in **Second Samuel 4:4** that we have a brief description of this, Jonathan's young son. And when the news came from Jezreel that both his father and grandfather were killed, his nurse took him up and fled in haste. And we are told that this is when she fell and he became lame.

Now as we are going to see through this story of David and Mephibosheth, it's important to understand that these things are a type and shadow of our relationship with Christ. So, I want to bring to your attention the lesson we can learn from this initial event with Mephibosheth:

Why did the nurse flee with Mephibosheth after hearing the news of both Saul and Jonathan being killed? It was because it was customary then for one, when taking the throne, to kill all surviving descendants who might ever try to reclaim their family's throne. Therefore, this nurse assumed that David would do the same. But she obviously didn't know David, did she? She was completely unaware that he was different from other kings. Yes, David was kind. He was noble and He was gracious. But she didn't know Him to be this way.

Do you reckon that there are many of God's children out there today who are, likewise, unaware of how good, gracious and kind our Lord is? It is sad, but a good portion of God's church do not truly know their God's true nature. Just as this woman assumed David was like any other king, likewise Christ's bride assumes their God is like any other god (i.e. quick to judge, harsh, condemning, critical, etc.)

So, this misconception of David caused her to do what? To take Mephibosheth up and flee from David's presence! Likewise, this misconception of God's true nature has led many Christians, when they have missed it and fallen short of His glory, to run from Him rather than to Him.

But notice that this response of fear that caused Jonathan's house to run from David is what caused this accident that left Mephibosheth lame. The same happens to us, my friends! When we run from God in fear, guilt, condemnation, etc. this is when we open ourselves up to falling even further into more permanent spiritual conditions (i.e. spiritual lameness). Amen?

You see, we attract what we believe. Much of the body of Christ does not realize how our belief system impacts the fruit we receive in our life. And this is particularly true with how we see our God. I am convinced that there is so much more that God desires to do in our lives than we allow Him to. Yes, just as the children of Israel were guilty of limiting God's will for them in their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, we limit God through our wrong thinking and wrong believing.

We have a powerful proverb that teaches us a similar lesson: **Proverbs 28:1** says, *"The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion!"*

You see, we are not wicked anymore. If you are a born again, child of God, your nature has been changed, and you are not a sinner any longer. Sure, you can still sin after you have been saved, and likely you will. But that does not change your nature.

But what if you still see yourself as wicked? What if you still identify as an old sinner? Well, you can still have the same response as the person who is a wicked sinner. And notice what that response is ...

Notice how this Proverb says that the wicked "flees when no one pursues." Isn't this what Mephibosheth's house did in our story? The nurse took him up and fled, even when no one was pursuing them. And this is exactly what sin consciousness will do in our lives: When we see ourselves as "wicked" – that is, when we

are conscious of all of our faults, weaknesses, mistakes and shortcomings – we will flee from the Lord even when he is not out to get us. This happened in the beginning after the first sin of man, and it is still happening today when God's children sin. We sin, and instead of running to God (like we should), we run from Him thinking He is pursuing us to punish us. But the truth is that God is pursuing you when you sin, but not to punish you; He is pursuing you to restore, redeem, and reconcile you!

So, again, the wicked – or the one who thinks he or she is wicked - will flee when no one pursues. This describes far too many Christians. They are running from the righteousness of God because they have an incorrect view of God and of themselves. But, again, God is not pursuing to punish; He is pursuing to pour out His protection and provision.

Do you see the perverted thinking much of the church has adopted? We think we are being pursued! We think God is out to get us. No, church, God is for us, so who can be against us! This is what we should be believing!

But now notice the second half of Proverbs 28:1: "But the righteous are bold as a lion."

This is the truth we need to displace that lie with! The devil just walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, yet we see him as the big, bad lion. But we are the righteousness of God in Christ, and we need to see ourselves as that big, bad lion! Why? Because we are in the Lion of Judah! We are the ones who are hid in the King of the Jungle! Therefore, we should be the bold, confident ones! We should be the ones that are walking about boldly like lions, seeking which works of darkness that we can devour, not the reverse! Hallelujah!

Friends, understanding our righteous position in Christ will produce boldness and confidence! Having our state of justification revealed to us will produce the full assurance of faith in our hearts! Hallelujah! We are to be playing the part of the lion, not the devil! We are to be the ones on the hunt; not him! We are the ones with the authority and the position! We are the ones with the name above all names! We ARE the righteousness of God in Christ!

So, stop fleeing like the wicked and start pursuing like the righteous! Be bold and be confident! God is on your side, O Mephibosheth!

CONTINUE EATING AT THE KING'S TABLE

Now let's go back over to the Book of Second Samuel and look at **Second Samuel chapter 9** ... In this chapter, we get to see what happened with Mephibosheth later in his life:

Chapter nine begins with David saying, *"Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (verse one)*

Notice, here in verse one, that David said that he was going to show this kindness *for Jonathan's sake*. Here, we see a beautiful type and shadow of how God shows us the same "covenant faithfulness" for Jesus' sake. Amen! In other words, all the goodness, grace and mercy of God that was shown to us was not given to us because of who we are, but because of the Father God's and the Son of God's relationship. Amen!

Then notice in **verse three** that David said that his desire was not just to show any old kindness, but *"the kindness of God."* You see, there is a big difference between *"our kindness"* and *"God's kindness."* Our love is oftentimes conditional; His love is unconditional. Our love is oftentimes merited; His love is unmerited. Our love oftentimes fails; His love never fails! Thanks be to God!

So David's next question was – "Where is he?" (**verse four**). And we are told that he was dwelling in a place called "Lo Debar."

Now the name Lo Debar described a place of barrenness or desolation. But when you dig a little deeper, you find something interesting that relates to the 23rd Psalm. You see, the Hebrew word "Lo" means "no or not" and the word "Debar" means "pasture." Therefore, the name "Lo Debar" literally describes "No Pasture." That sounds like the opposite of what we've been learning in the 23rd Psalm, right?

So Mephiboseth was living in a barren place with "no pasture." All because his nursemaid ran with him from the king and he became lame in his feet. Church, running from the Lord's kindness and getting this "lame identity" will always lead you away from the pastures He wills for us. Amen?

Then, in **verse seven**, I want you to notice several of the same characteristics of the good life of Psalm 23 that are found here:

1. First of all, David encouraged this man not to fear. This is echoed the truth that we do not need to fear any other evil as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.
2. David said again that this kindness he was going to show Mephibosheth was for his father's sake. Remember that David said that He would lead us on the paths of righteousness *for His name's sake* – that is, for His own reputation and name's sake.
3. David told him that he was going to *restore* to him the land that was his rightful inheritance - reminding us of the truth that we serve the God of restoration, who restores to us the years that we have had stolen from our souls.

However, David went on to promise Mephibosheth that he would eat bread at his table continually. The word "continually" comes from the Hebrew word *tamid* (pronounced "tah-meed") which means "constantly, always, evermore" but the root word describes continually from an *eternal* standpoint. This hints towards the last thing we learn in Psalm 23:6 – that we will dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of our life (i.e. continually).

So, when you look at this from the perspective of us eating at the Lord's table, we are invited to eat from this table today in the presence of our enemies, but we will continue to partake of it all the way to the marriage supper of the Lamb and forevermore. That's a lot of food, amen?

Then notice in **verse eight**, Mephibosheth's response to this good news: He said, *"What is your servant, that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?"*

So, what we see here is this man had a serious identity problem. To refer to oneself as a "dead dog" means that they see themselves as having no value. This could have been because of what happened to his father's house, but it also likely had to do with his lameness. You see, sometimes the things that have happened to us in life can warp our sense of value. But what we should be encouraged by here is that it did not change the king's perspective of him. You see, we tend to think of ourselves as having little to no value and are

unworthy, but to God, we are extremely precious and have been made worthy through our "Jonathan" – our Good, Heavenly Father.

Finally, in **verse thirteen**, we are told, *"for he ate continually at the king's table."* This is the fourth time in this chapter that Mephibosheth eating at David's table is mentioned. Biblically, the number "four" describes "totality." Therefore, this table has been "totally" prepared for us! It is a done deal! All things have been made ready and complete! Now it is just up to us to come partake! Amen.

Notice that this beautiful story ends with the phrase, *"And he was lame in both his feet."* Now the awesome thing about this whole story of kindness and mercy is that when Mephibosheth sat at David's table, his lameness was covered. Yes, it was hidden. That means that he was just like everyone else who was sitting around the table, and that includes David himself.

Likewise, when eating at the table of the Lord, there is no sign or indication of our weakness or inadequacy. We are on equal "footing" even with Him. Amen!

Church, this is what it is like at the LORD's table that He has prepared for us! It is where we walk in the kindness of the LORD! It is where we are accepted in the Beloved! It is where our belonging is found! This is the LORD's table!