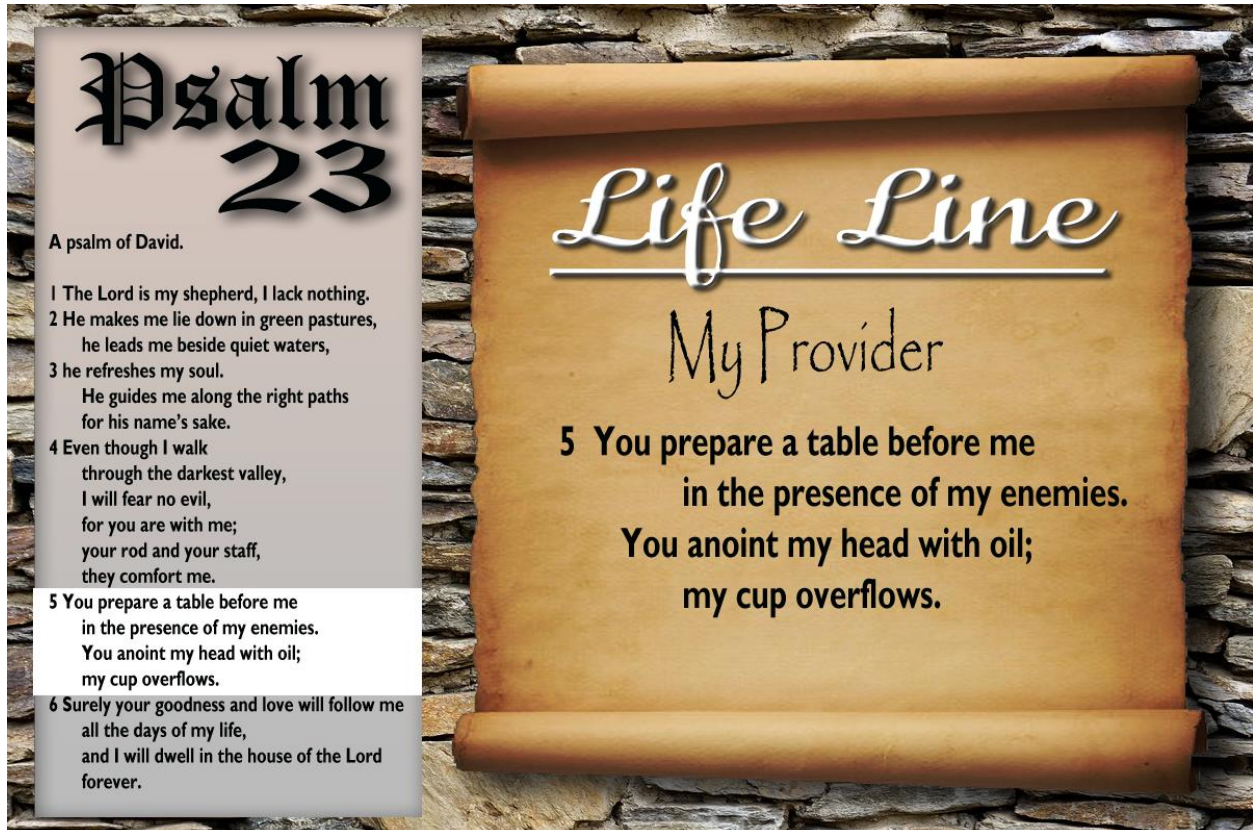


November 21, 2021

23rd Psalm

“My Provider”

Intro: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lZqVm3_M6w



Psalm 23:5

5 You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

Special Music: Psalm 23

Don Moen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nt57mpjeBys>

THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES

I come to the table
Each hand full
One with an ax
To crush my enemies
Another with sacred words
To validate my actions
As I destroy those enemies.
May they be torn asunder
For their misdeeds
And faithless mayhem.

I come to the table
My arms full of pride
My armor of exclusion
Not to keep me in
But to keep everyone else out
My hateful heart
And self-serving lungs
Protected by my breastplate,
Made of metal and leather
My enemies cannot touch me.

I come to the table
But before I can sit
The master suggests that I look around.
I find seated at the table

Are the malignant souls of my enemies,
Malice in their eyes
Mocking me with hollow smirks
Beards tinged with wine.
Battle blood dripping from their lips.
The stench of death like a fog around them.

I come to the table
My Master pulls me to His face.
“Take it off. Let it fall.” He says
“For this is my place.
And ALL are welcome here.”
“But Lord,” I cry.
“Drop it all and let it fall,” He says
“For this is my place.
A place of grace.”
He waits.

I take pause
And as I begin to comprehend.
I drop my ax and misguided words.
I drop my pride,
My armor as well.
My breastplate
Falls to the floor.
And I take my place
At the table of my Lord
In the presence of my enemies.

The oil of obedience
Flows o'er my head
As the Master fills my cup
'Til it flows across the tabletop
Body of bread
Blood of wine
A feast to be shared
With my enemies
I rise and I serve each one.
Lesson taught. Lesson learned.

Jim Jacobson and Bartholomew Peetry hated each other. Both of them owned appliance stores. Anyone in the area could tell you how much these two men despised each other. Every morning, one or the other would open the front door of their store and scream names and epitaphs at the other one. In turn, the target of the tirade would return the insults with more insults. The people passing would giggle with amusement as the two men dressed each other down, both red in the face with anger. Sometimes they would even come out into the middle of the street and shake their fists at each other, threatening to do bodily harm.

The war didn't stop with the shouting. It carried over into their businesses as well. One store would have a sale with a big banner that said 5% off, and the next day a banner would appear across the street that said 10% off. This would be followed by another banner that said 15% off and another would say "will beat any price in town" or "Lifetime Warranty!" There was an occasional lull in the war, but peace never lasted long.

Tammy Felton, who owned the pizzeria on the corner, often would stop her morning prep work to come out of her store and watch the hand waving, fist shaking, shouting match with amusement. It was better than television. When the fighting was over and the participants returned to their stores, Tammy would go back inside and continue her kitchen work.

For decades these men made it their mission to make sure everyone knew how much they hated each other. But, all of their customers loved when the

fighting extended into the business side because that's when they got the best deals. People looked forward to the appliance battles.

One year, Jim and Bartholomew died within a week of each other. People made jokes about how they were probably screaming at each other standing before St. Peter and holding up signs. Everyone was going to miss those sales but they probably were not going to miss the shouting matches, as amusing as they were.

A couple of months after Jim and Bartholomew had passed, Tammy thought it would be a good idea to invite both families over to her pizzeria for a meal together. At first the families were hesitant. After all, how could they sit and have a meal together when these men had despised each other for so very long. Then they reconsidered after recognizing that they really didn't have to continue the feud, especially since they never really knew what the feud was about.

When they arrived at the restaurant, they found that tables had been set up for them. This was going to be a family style feast, a merging of families. Tammy had pitchers of beer on each table, and pitchers of soft drinks for kids and the teetotalers. When she started bringing out the Pizzas, all different kinds, there was something for everybody.

Everyone enjoyed the feast, and everyone got along. No one could figure out why they hadn't done this sooner other than the fact that Jim and Bartholomew despised each other so much. At the end of the meal, Tammy said that she wanted to show the families something that she thought would answer a

lot of their questions, so they followed her to a back room. On the walls hung charts, posters, lists, plans, and photos. In the corner was a pile of various banners carefully folded up.

“I have a story to tell you,” Tammy said. “This so-called feud started about 30 years ago between Jim and Bartholomew. They really did despise each other, and it quickly started to get ugly. Jim was angry because Bartholomew opened an appliance store right across the street from his appliance store. Bartholomew was furious because he felt Jim was trying to keep him from making a living. I couldn’t stand to watch the way they treated each other. As amusing as some of those altercations were, someone was going to get hurt. So, I invited each of them over for pizza without telling them that the other one was coming as well. I put two large pizza pies on that table there, and a pitcher of cold beer. I told them to find a way to work things out before things got out of hand. Then I left and locked the door for a couple of hours. I didn’t even check on them. When I did come back, the beer was gone, the pizzas were eaten, and they were sitting around joking with one another. Well, I thought that would be the end of it, and all the shouting would stop. Jim asked if he and Bart could use the room every Thursday night for a couple of hours. You know, to unwind. ‘Why not?’ I thought if it will keep the peace.

Well, the next thing you know, the shouting started up again. Everything seemed like it was back to the way it was, and that wasn’t good. But every Thursday night, they showed up here to use the room and they were always laughing and joking. I was so confused. And then I started to see all the charts,

lists, photos and banners and realized that all of the new screaming matches were intentional as they made plans each Thursday for the next week's sale, scripting the arguments, knowing that it drew in more customers looking for a bargain. They seemed to have realized that there was enough business to go around, and both of them still make a good living.

You see, they really became the best of friends in the end and all the shouting and fist waving was just part of the game. Which was great for them. But look at this place, I'm not sure what to do with this room now."

**You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.**

David's enemies were all around him. If Saul and his army weren't chasing him, the Philistines were. They both wanted his head. It seems strange to us that David would write about having dinner in the presence of his enemies. Surely there was a better place, maybe someplace a little more convenient and perhaps safer. This valley of darkness that he found himself in was not really conducive to a dinner table or even a picnic. How could he ever enjoy a meal in the "presence of his enemies" without constantly looking over his shoulder? We generally don't wear our swords and armor at the table, but how could he let go of them knowing that someone might just pop up out of the darkness and try to kill him?

David is telling us that it is not only possible, it is expected. But he is also telling us that it is only because of his provider, who is protecting him as well. David goes even farther by making sure we understand that this isn't a quick meal on the run. He's not grabbing a sandwich out of his backpack. The table that God sets for him among his enemies is a feast. God blesses him beyond his wildest imagination even though this all takes place in the dark valley. God anoints him. God feeds him. God takes the stress away and lets him relax. The wine is so abundant that it overflows the cup, spilling onto the table, just like a baptism of grace. There is no hunger here. There is no thirst. This is not a table of meager substance, but a table of bountiful blessings, mercy and grace.

I think we also need to note here that this is not David's table. Yes, David is the recipient, but it is not his table. God sets the table. This is God's table. It may be a feast for David, but it is God's feast prepared for David, not by him. And to remind David that this is God's table, the Creator surrounds David with his enemies, not to taunt him or hurt him, but to ensure that David understands that his presence at this feast is neither an accident or a happenstance. This table is an intentional instrument of God to show David that God is in charge, God is the protector, and God is the provider, even in these dark moments of his life.

I do take liberty here when I tell you my vision of this table. I see David's enemies not only in his presence but sitting at this table as well. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:44-45

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to

rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

In God's eye, the table is not meant to set us apart, but bring us together, even with our enemies. And there is plenty of bounty to go around. Everyone will have more than enough to fill their bellies and quench their thirsts.

The table is under the protection and provision of Almighty God. While everyone is welcome, no weapons are allowed. The table is a place of peace and unity, a safe environment where we can put away our weapons and join in fellowship over food and wine. While we may not resolve our differences, perhaps we can come to an understanding of each other. This is a table where grace and mercy flows over us onto the table. Where we can experience the anointing of God as the Divine pours oil over our head and shows everyone at the table that we are the children and belong to the Creator of the universe.

It is easy for us to think that this table is ours and that we can prevent those who are not like us, those that mean us harm, those that disparage us, from having a seat at this table. For some reason we think that if we don't like who God invites to the feast that we can just pack up our things and go make our own table. But here's the thing, the feast of God is at this table, the table in the presence of our enemies. Only here can we experience the bounty. Only here can we be filled. Only here can we find anointment. This is the table's purpose. It is how God provides for us through overabundance.

This Thursday is Thanksgiving. The essence of Thanksgiving should be with us, each and every day, but Thanksgiving Day has been set aside for family and fellowship, and we thank our Creator for the abundance that God brings into our lives, abundance that he expects for us to share with those around us. There are so many people hurting around us.

I want you to consider this week, that God is preparing a feast for us in the darkness that surrounds us. May we use the table as a time of discourse, compassion and mercy. May we find nourishment, both for ourselves and everyone around us. May we allow ourselves to be filled to overflowing. And may we accept the anointing of God in our lives, allowing our creator to use us for His purpose and glory.

AMEN

Copyright © 2021 Rev. Walt Wellborn

Scripture references provided under copyright by:

**THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973,
1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved
worldwide.**