

## 41. Psalm 23:5a

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### *“The Great Shepherd” Pt.9*

(7-26-26)

#### **Psalm 23:5 (NKJV)**

**<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...**

In thinking about this statement, we need to remember that it flows from the context of verse 4—

#### **Psalm 23:4 (NKJV)**

**<sup>4</sup> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...**

As we have said, sheep are led by the shepherd up the mountain to the high country or mountain meadows for the hot summer months.

These mountain meadows are known as ‘*alp-lands*’ or ‘*tablelands*.’

In some of the best sheep country of the world, especially in the Western US and Southern Europe, the high plateau of the sheep ranges is always referred to as “*mesas*”—the Spanish word for “*tables*.”

Remember that David is writing this Psalm from a sheep’s perspective, so that his reference to ‘**table**’ here could very well be a reference to one of these summer mountain meadow ranges.

At least that’s the kind of table a sheep would eat from.

And as the sheep were being led up the mountain trail, the diligent shepherd when he came to one of these mountain meadows or tables—would rope off the sheep or pen them in by building a temporary sheepfold so that he could first *prepare* the table.

Phillip Keller, in his book “*A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*” commented on this, he said—

*“The way he did this was by checking for poisonous weeds which he would pull out for if the sheep ate just a small amount of some of these weeds it would mean certain death. Also, the shepherd would take his staff and he would go over the whole area pulling back the tall grass to find the holes where the little-known brown adders lived because they had a tendency to come up out of their holes and bite the noses of the sheep while they were feeding there at the table. And it usually wouldn’t kill them, but it would cause high fevers and inflammation. And so, the shepherd would find these holes and pour a little thick oil, which he always carried with him around the hole so that it would run down inside so that the snake could not get out and thus he would ‘prepare a table’ before the sheep.”*

The Bible likens all of humanity to sheep who have gone astray—“*All we like sheep have gone astray, we have everyone turned to his own way.*” (Isa.53:6)

That speaks of rebellion and disobedience toward God.

These wayward sheep do have a shepherd whether they know it or not—his name is Satan.

As we said to start Psalm 23—everyone has a shepherd that is leading their life.

The issue is not *if* I have a shepherd, the real issue is what kind of a shepherd do I have and where is he or she or it leading me?

Jesus is the only Good Shepherd who can lead our lives all the way to heaven.

As David affirmed when he said, “*He leads me in the right paths for His name’s sake.*” (Psalm 23:3)

Satan on the other hand, as the evil shepherd, leads people down the wrong path that leads to destruction.

And as he leads people down the path of destruction, along the way he has them stop to feed from any number of pastures he has prepared for them.

Pastures that he has sown with all kinds of poisonous weeds that look good to the eyes but are really things that will lead to death.

These would include things like, drugs, alcohol, sexual addictions, a lust for pleasure, power and materialism but also things like, Socialism, Communism, spiritism, occultism, naturalism (evolution)—and the list goes on and on.

Sin is not unlike the bite of the little brown adder which reaches up and bites these wayward sheep as they feed on the philosophies, attitudes, ideologies and mores of this fallen world of which Satan is the god and chief shepherd of.

In Revelation 12:9, Satan is referred to as *“that serpent of old who deceives the whole world”* and his bite if left untreated will often lead, not only to physical death—but definitely to spiritual and eternal death or what the Bible calls *‘the second death (hell).’*

Folks, the only antidote for the serpent’s poison is the blood of the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ!

Years ago, I was watching an animal show that was talking about how scientists found a way to use sheep’s blood as an antidote for snake venom!

It’s amazing how God will use His creation to preach the gospel to us! (Ps. 19:1-2)

And so, feeding on the world's pastures will invite the serpent's bite whereas the food that our Shepherd Jesus Christ has prepared for us is His Word which will make us strong and spiritually healthy—but only if we read and obey it!

And David (likening himself to a sheep) went on to say that our good Shepherd prepares this table—**"in the presence of my enemies."**

You see, David having been a shepherd himself at one time knew that while the shepherd is preparing a table for the sheep to eat from—it's often done in the presence of the sheep's enemies.

These would include—wolves, coyotes, bears, and mountain lions who would be hiding up on the rocks above watching every move the sheep would make, hoping for a chance to get at them.

But the alert shepherd keeps a close eye on the sheep and a careful watch for predators.

Again, we get the picture of our Good Shepherd who knows every move, trick, and treachery of our enemy Satan whom the Bible says, *"goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour."* (1Peter 5:8)

Yet our Shepherd knows the enemy and has warned us in His Word to stay away from things that he will try to use to ensnare us and devour us!

Which is why it's so important to stay close to our Shepherd, walking with Him in fellowship and obedience—which is the only real place of safety.

It was always the sheep that wandered away from the flock and the shepherd that placed themselves in harm's way where they could be picked off by predators—sheep that had wandered so far away from the shepherd that he wouldn't hear their cry for help—

*“Behold, the Lord’s hand isn’t weak that He can’t save you, nor is His ear deaf to hear you call, but your iniquities (brought about by your wandering heart) have separated you from your God; and your sins have caused His face to be hidden from you so that He will not listen anymore.” (Isa. 59:1-2)*

We ought to be scarred to death about getting involved in sin (whatever form it takes) because there might come into our lives, or into the lives of those we love, a spiritual or physical crisis of some kind causing our cries for help to go unheeded by God!

A thousand years after David wrote this, Jesus said, *“I am the good Shepherd, the good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”* (John 10:11)

Jesus Christ went to the cross to die for the sins of humanity to bring whoever would receive Him as Savior into fellowship and communion with God.

And the night before to symbolize this, Jesus in the upper room prepared a table for His disciples in the presence of their enemies (Satan and his demons).

We call this ‘table’—the ‘Lord’s Table’ (Communion) which He instituted to represent the oneness with God that His death on Calvary’s Cross would bring us into.

But not only that, it would signify the victory that would be ours over our enemies that Jesus would win for us at Calvary—for all those that follow Him as their Shepherd.

You see, David’s statement, **“He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”** speaks of protection from the enemy but also victory over the enemy through the Shepherd’s presence and our communion with Him.

This was something Paul spoke of in Colossians 2:13-15 when he said that (I’ll paraphrase) *“Jesus’ death on the cross not only paid our debt (sin) causing God to forgive us—but it also*

*defeated the devil and his demons putting them on display for all to see that they were defeated enemies that Jesus had triumphed over through His death on Calvary's Cross."*

In case you didn't already know this, we have **3 very powerful enemies** that we are fighting against.

We are no match for any one of them individually—but together we have absolutely no hope for victory over these enemies in our own strength.

**The first enemy is—the world.**

(Not the earth as in nature but the fallen world system)

The world constantly bombards us with its philosophies and values.

The devil will use many different platforms to preach his poisonous ideologies from—television, newspapers, movies, music and social media platforms to name a few.

**The world** (controlled by the devil) stands against most everything we stand for and vice versa.

The world says indulge yourself, live for your pleasures, do your own thing.

The world advocates the '*self-life*' (a life of utter selfishness) which is absolutely opposite from everything Jesus commanded was the way His followers were to live.

Jesus said, "*Take up your cross, deny yourself and follow Me*"—the world says, '*Indulge yourself, take advantage of others to get what you want in life and follow your own heart.*' (Jer. 17:9)

And to reinforce this way of thinking, the world holds up and honors those who do live after the flesh and have prospered because of it (movie stars, celebrities, rich CEO's etc.).

But this fallen world system is in rebellion against God and the commandments of God—which is why God's Word says, *"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* (1John 2:15)

**John 15:18–19 (NKJV)**

<sup>18</sup> "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

So, if I stand up and declare myself a Christian, the world calls me *"a weirdo, a religious nut, a Bible thumping Jesus freak"* etc.

And because the world is in such rebellion against God—the minute you try to stand up for what is good and godly, you'll be ridiculed, marginalized, cancelled—and even killed! (Charlie Kirk).

The Bible says, *"Woe to him (or her) who calls good evil and evil good"* (Isa. 5:20)—which is exactly the attitude of the world around us today.

Things like *purity, holiness* and *righteousness* are looked upon by the world as the narrow minded ideas and puritanical relics of the dark ages.

The people of the world consider us to be religious idiots who are out of touch with reality and living in some superstitious unenlightened fantasy world—but certainly not in the real world!

The things of the world have been designed by the devil to pull you away from your Shepherd so that he can devour (destroy) your life like a lion devours a wayward sheep—which is David's point.

And to do that the god of this world has orchestrated everything in the world as a weapon to be used against us:

**1 John 2:16 (NKJV)**

<sup>16</sup> For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

And if you get your eyes off of Jesus and onto the things of the world you'll be pulled under its control—because its promise of instant pleasure and immediate gratification are just too strong! (Remember Demas)

You've got to keep eternity's values constantly in front of you (Col. 3:2)—if you don't you will fall under the world's influence and control.

**The second enemy is—the flesh.**

In biblical terms the *flesh* is often used to refer to our sinful fallen nature—that part of us that we inherited from Adam that is in rebellion against God.

The flesh is a very powerful enemy because it is always with us—we can't escape it.

This was realized by monks centuries ago that tried to cloister themselves away from the world in monasteries in an effort to live holy lives only to discover that the world was not the only enemy they faced—the other was the flesh.

The flesh is an even stronger enemy than is the world because we *can* shut ourselves away from the world—although we're not supposed to.

Jesus commanded us, not to cut ourselves off from the world but rather to go out into the world and bring the gospel to the people of this lost and dying world.

But the point is that we can if we want to run from the world—but we can't run away and hide from our flesh.

The flesh wants us to sleep in instead of getting up early to spend time with God in prayer and the Word.

The flesh wants us to stay home on the couch watching TV instead of going to Bible study.

In general, the flesh wants us to be lazy, selfish, self-indulgent, proud, dishonest, greedy. Etc.

When it comes to the flesh, we can't escape it, so we have no choice but to stand and face it and fight against it in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**The third enemy we face as Christians is the strongest of them all—the devil.**

One of the master strokes of Satan today is to get many people to believe that he isn't a real being but simply an 'idea', a philosophy—the personification of evil but not a real person.

Martin Luther once said to someone who doubted the reality of Satan—“*If Satan isn't real then who keeps hassling me!*”

Understand, the way the devil '*hassles*' us is to use the world and the flesh against us—and only God's power and strength that can give us victory over these three powerful enemies—

**Ephesians 3:20 (NLT)**

<sup>20</sup> Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

**Ephesians 6:10-11 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup> Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Ray Stedman—

*“The power is available to us all — but we often fail to see it, believe it, and act on it. When we feel powerless, we are quick to give up. The struggle overwhelms us and we just throw in the towel. It is because we have lost sight of the One who gives all power, and whose power was demonstrated at the resurrection, when God raised Jesus from the dead. Remember, resurrection power works best in a cemetery!”*

God only gives resurrection power to those who are dead to self and self-effort.

God will not add His power to your hard work and determination to give you victory.

**2 Corinthians 13:4 (NKJV)**

<sup>4</sup> For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.

Paul the apostle told us in 2Cor. 12:10—*“When I am weak, then I am strong.”*

**Philippians 3:10 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup> that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

Ray Stedman—

*“A young man once came to me in tearful emotional agony. He told me that he had been struggling with terrible feelings of lust. The feelings and temptations grew so strong that he often fell back into habits that were wrong and destructive to him and his loved ones. He feared that he would never be able to overcome those temptations to sin. So, I sat down with him and talked with him about the power of a resurrected Lord, and what He has made available to us. I turned to Ephesians 1:19-20 and read him Paul’s words:*

***“I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms.”***

*“You know,” I said, “God’s power is made perfect in weakness. Your problem is that you are trying to feel strong. You want to feel powerful. But God says, ‘No, resurrection power is the kind that works best when you feel weak.’ So, if you feel weak, thank God. And the next time you find*

*yourself threatened with these attacks of lust, run to Christ in your helplessness. Say, 'Lord, I can't handle this myself. I can't control myself. If you don't help me, I'm sunk!' Just cast yourself on Him." "Okay," he said dubiously. "I'll try."*

*A couple weeks later, I saw him again. This time a big, bright, triumphant smile shone from his face. "It works!" he told me. "It really works! I kept reading that passage in Ephesians, and I was struck by two words: 'far above.' It says that Christ is seated at God's right hand "in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given." Those two words, 'far above,' really opened my eyes. I thought, 'Hey, if God is at work in me, if He has that kind of power, then nobody else's power can get even close to me! No demonic force, no lustful urge, can be greater than the power of Jesus Christ. When I saw that fact, I was able simply to rest in the Lord — and it's been working! God has set me free!"*

Once again, you are connected to God and His mighty power through your relationship with Jesus—however, for that power to flow from God into your life it is going to require faith.

**Mark 5:25-34 (NKJV)**

<sup>25</sup> Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, <sup>26</sup> and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. <sup>27</sup> When she heard about Jesus, she came behind *Him* in the crowd and touched His garment. <sup>28</sup> For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well." <sup>29</sup> Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in *her* body that she was healed of the affliction. <sup>30</sup> And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?" <sup>31</sup> But His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, Who touched Me?" " <sup>32</sup> And He looked around to see her who had done this thing. <sup>33</sup> But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup> And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."

How are you touching Jesus?

Is your touch a touch of faith where you expect His power to flow into your life or are you only '*brushing up against Him*' throughout your day and week?

And so, to say it one more time—we are facing **3 powerful enemies** in our lives as Christians, and I am no match for any one of them—let alone all 3!

The good news is—I don't have to be!

I don't have to be because just as the sheep were no match for their enemies, they needed to depend on their shepherd for protection and deliverance—so must we depend on our Shepherd for victory and deliverance over our enemies.

God has provided us victory over the world, the flesh and the devil through the blood of the cross of Jesus Christ!

Remember, it was those sheep that were the 'wanderers' that were usually picked off by the enemy—which is why it's so important to draw closer and closer to your Shepherd, Jesus Christ!

It's only when you stay close to Him that He can protect you, watch over you and guide your life in the right paths.

David, when he was a shepherd himself, knew how dangerous it was for a sheep to wander off which is why he did everything in his power to keep the sheep near him.

And he realized that that's exactly what his Shepherd was up to with the "dark valleys."

The dark valleys (trials, adversity, suffering) taught the sheep to stay near their shepherd—especially when the enemy was lurking nearby, they learned to stay close as He prepared a table before them in the presence of their enemies.

Stay close to Jesus!