

Worship In The Wilderness

Psalm 23:5-6

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

In these verses King David changes the metaphor from the good shepherd to the gracious host. Jehovah spreads a sumptuous meal before him, a great banquet, in the presence of his enemies. This figure encompasses all the figures David has used before. That God feeds and provides, leads and protects, is all bound up in this symbol of a gracious host.

Interestingly enough, this figure grows right out of the historical situation in which David wrote. When David was driven into the wilderness by his son's rebellion, he found himself out in the desert, hungry and weary, his army in disarray. As recorded in 2 Samuel 17, three men who were not even Israelites, Shobi, Machir, and Barzillai *"brought bedding and bowls and articles of pottery. They also brought wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils, honey and curds, sheep, and cheese from cows' milk for David and his people to eat. For they said, 'The people have become hungry and tired and thirsty in the desert'"* (2 Samuel 17:28-29).

David saw in this that God, as a gracious host, was preparing a table before him in the presence of his enemies. Paul said it this way: *"And my God will meet **all** your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:19). A final note is that the word follow in verse 6 literally means "pursue." David says that God's goodness and mercy shall pursue him, in contrast to his enemies' pursuit to dethrone and destroy him. David's desire was to go back to the tabernacle and to worship there. God's mercy and kindness ought to evoke the same response from us. We worship not in a tabernacle, but, as Jesus said, *"**in spirit and in truth**"* (John 4:24). We worship in the inner man, where God dwells. Even when we are caught in the wilderness!

In the wilderness the children of Israel discovered that above all others, God was worthy. He was the Father they wanted. He was the Provider they needed. He was the Mighty One without whose protection they would have disappeared in the desert sands, as had so many other lost people before them. As they discovered His worth in the stresses and strains that only the wilderness provides. The wilderness is still the place of worship. But for you and me it is not a matter of dunes and dry ground; in fact, it may even be deceptively green. Our hunger and thirst are more spiritual realities than physical ones. The desolation we often experience involves our yearning for a more palpable feeling of the Presence of God. We need spiritual bread every bit as much as they needed the manna in the wilderness. Our deep thirst for Living Water is just as intense as their parched throats ever knew.

Note, Jesus has entered into the wilderness of your wilderness and has found you, His lost sheep. He has provided everything you need and more. He himself is your provision. He is the answer to that most basic question of worship. Jesus shows us God's true worth and so we should ascribe to Him true worth-ship. But the power of these realisations only come to light in that dim light of the wilderness.

If, you find yourself in the wilderness, realise that though you may not feel like it at the moment, you are in the very place where the Bible reveals that true worship can happen. If you're like me, you might also find that you have nothing to say from where you are, no words to articulate the depth of the dimensions of your hunger, thirst, disappointments, frustrations, or anger. If this is where you find yourself, then I would like to propose that you (along with me) are poised on the edge of a promising place. We need only to push on toward the discovery of what God would have us cry out, of what He commands as the appropriate response to that which we find almost unbearable. And that is, true worship Him!

When we see that the Good Shepherd does feed us and does lead us and does protect us, our response ought to be **worship** - a recognition of all that Jehovah is, a word of thanks for what He has done, and the statement, *"Here is more of myself for You to put to Your intended purpose."*

Life Application: God offers to treat us as guests at His table! He lavishes His love on us sinners. Are we resisting that astounding love, and failing to worship Him with our lives? Is the wilderness a place of mourning or a place of thanksgiving?

"Father, You are the Good Shepherd. You are utterly trustworthy. You feed me, lead me, guard me, and protect me. I surrender myself to You in grateful worship."