

PSALM 23 #6 6-22-14

“My Cup Runneth Over”

Psalm 23:4-6 *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.* As we continue our study in this wonderful psalm we find ourselves today in verse 5. His name was Eric Liddell. In 1924 he was the premier sprinter in Great Britain and his nation's leading hope for a gold medal in the prestigious 100 meter dash at the summer Olympics in Paris -- until the schedule for the 100 meter trials were sent out. What Liddell discovered, no doubt to his profound disappointment, was that the Olympic heats in his best event were to be held on Sunday, the Lord's Day. Liddell said, "No, I cannot run. I will not run on Sunday." Some called him a traitor to his nation, some tried to persuade him against his conviction, but Liddell stood firm and the decision was made that he would run instead in the 400 meters. In the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, which dramatizes Liddell's Olympic story and won the Academy Award for best picture in 1981, it shows him lining up to run in the 400 meter finals when the American sprinter, Jackson Scholz, approaches him with a note. And although portions of the movie most of you have seen is apocryphal it is true that he received a note. It was not however from Jackson Scholz; it came from one of the British team's trainers, but the note he received said, (do you remember?) It said, "He that honoreth me I will honor." That was taken from I Samuel 2:30 and God's word to Eli. "He that honors me I will honor." And what happened in that 400 meter Olympic race? Eric Liddell not only ran to victory but he also broke the world record in that race by a full second. His accomplishment was called the greatest in the 1924 Olympics and Liddell became a British sports legend.

I begin today with that story because I think it illustrates what is taught in our passage. Verse 5 is probably the least understood verse in this psalm. Many are unable to perceive the point but what the psalmist is celebrating here, in a nutshell, is the promise of God to crown his servants with honor. Remember that. I am persuaded that, beginning with verse 5, the metaphor of the shepherd and the sheep is gone and to try to read it in here is more confusing than helpful. The line of thought though is still the same. The psalmist celebrates what the Lord is to him. He has already said that the Lord feeds him and refreshes him and leads him and soothes him. Now he says the Lord goes even beyond those things and honors him. What does it mean for God to set a table for

us in the presence of our enemies? That is done to honor. What is the significance of being anointed with oil? That is done to honor. What does it mean to have an overflowing cup? It means that you are exceedingly blessed, that you are being served by one who has an endless supply of good things to share. Verse 5 really portrays God not as Shepherd but as a host. Having led us through Death Valley God is now throwing a party. Again, who is the Host? God is. That is tough enough to conceive but then think about this - who is the guest of honor? You are. ® I know it sounds crazy but we are taught here that God is going to treat us royally. He is going to roll out the red carpet for you and me. He, the Almighty, is going to honor us. Now, if that sounds strange and unbiblical then you read your Bible again. Many times we read of God doing exactly this for his servants. I Samuel 2:30 we have already mentioned. There is also John 12:26 where Jesus says, *If any one serves Me, the Father will honor him.* Certainly, we know that the servant is to honor the Master, but just as truly the Master promises to honor the servant. Romans 2:10 promises, *glory and honor and peace to every man who does good.* In II Timothy 4 the apostle Paul echoes the psalmist when he says **8** *In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.* He says there will be a crown awarded to him. The New Testament says believers will reign with Jesus forever. Jesus will be honored for sure but so will his followers. I Peter 5:**6** *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty Hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.* It is God's plan to exalt everyone who humbles himself. God help us get that in our hearts. We are not just going to be rescued. We are not just going to make it in to the good place. We are going to be the honored guests at an unbelievable party in glory. God honors those who honor him. He picks the time doesn't He? Our last verse says He does it at the proper time. For some, that means here and now, for all of us it means there and then but the promise is equally sure.

All of the phrases in Psalm 23:5 speak of this party which God is hosting in our honor. The first of those phrases is **5a** *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.* Here we should envision a table set and stocked with the most delightful delicacies we can imagine. It is a feast prepared for us by God. This is one of the popular images used in the Bible to depict the riches of being God's people. For sheep it is green pastures, for us it is Christmas dinner. Jesus said in Luke 13:**29** *They will come from east and west, and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God.* In Revelation 19, He said, *"Blessed are those who are invited to the*

marriage supper of the Lamb.” And what is provided there is more than bread and water. When God sets the table it’s gonna be good. He makes it good to honor those he loves.

Interestingly this line in the psalm includes another point about the location of this table and this feast. It says that God will serve us, He will honor us in the presence of our enemies. Interesting. Why would you want to have supper with your enemies looking on? So you could gloat? Well, yeah, that’s kind of the point. As I thought on this I remembered a basketball game I played in as a ninth grader. Now, generally speaking, ninth grade basketball games do not draw major crowds. My team was used to playing before a few parents and friends and cheerleaders and that was about it. But on one occasion we had a game against our cross-town rivals, Vanguard High, and what they did was let the students out of their sixth period class if they wanted to go to the game. So, of course, the gym was absolutely packed. The atmosphere was loud and exciting and we were getting booed and we were loving it - because we knew we would destroy their team. And that is exactly what happened. Now there was nothing righteous to it but I remember the extra thrill that came with the honor of victory because their whole school had to sit there and watch. Does this relate? I think it does. Those who were the enemies of God's people will be witnesses to the bliss of the righteous. That is a fact. You remember how the rich man who went to hell could see poor Lazarus now in the bosom of Abraham. The enemies of God will look on his glory and the rich treasures of His saints. That happens now to some extent. It will be complete in glory. God is glorified as He honors his chosen ones while the wicked observe in hot-burning envy and humiliation. In this there is vindication for the saints. Don’t forget that we are engaged in this life in a great war. Christians may not have many personal enemies but we certainly have ideological enemies. We certainly have spiritual enemies. At times those enemies seem to have the upper hand. At times those enemies exult in the mirage of power and persecute the lovers of truth. But God and His servants will have their day.

I thought as well of the story of Mordecai and Haman. Remember that? In the book of Esther. Haman was this self-seeking, proud, wicked man who determined to punish Mordecai for his refusal to bow down to him. Haman had built gallows for the sole purpose of hanging Mordecai. But, in the end, Haman was assigned the job of walking Mordecai through the streets as the righteous man sat atop the king’s horse, wearing the king’s robe and crown as his bitterest enemy was made to cry, "Thus it is done for the man the king desires to honor." Mordecai was exalted,

Haman utterly humiliated. That is how God intends history to fall out. Those who serve God will be exalted before their accusers. He will prepare a table for us in the presence of our enemies.

The second thing you are told your Divine Host will do in your honor is to anoint your head with oil. I don't know if that sounds very appealing to you or not but in the ancient near East this was a way to show honor to a guest. You may remember the story of Jesus when he was in the home of Simon the pharisee and how a woman came up and anointed his feet with oil and kissed his feet. As Jesus discussed this with Simon he said, Luke 7:44-46 *“Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. 46 You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume.* These were all the customary ways to treat a guest of honor. You washed his feet, you kissed him and you anointed his head with oil. The anointing oil was considered something of a luxury. It certainly isn't among the necessities of life. But God goes beyond providing the necessities. He bestows on his people rich gifts. In Ephesians 1:7 it speaks of the riches of God's grace which He has lavished upon us. I love that word, "lavished." It speaks of an outpouring of grace that is beyond the norm, exceeds expectation. And surely that is what God has done for us. He not only forgives our sin, He makes us His children, He seats us at His table. He supplies us lavishly. Some commentators make much of the connection in Scripture between the oil of anointing and the Holy Spirit. That connection is certainly there but I think the purpose of Psalm 23 is more general. Again the Psalmist is saying in picturesque language that the Lord honors his servants. He makes us rich and glad. Psalm 45:7 *You have loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of joy above your fellows.* The point is: do well, by faith, and God will graciously honor you.

Finally we come to 5c *My cup runneth over. My cup overflows.* So how do you feel about your lot in life? I wonder what you think about when you read that line. Again, it pictures God as the gracious host who supplies His honored guest with a cup that never runs dry. In fact, so great is his bounty that it spills out. Does the word "lavish" come to mind again? Listen to what Spurgeon said in 1875: *The poet can mount no higher. He has endeavored to express the blessedness of his condition, in having the Lord for his shepherd, but after all his efforts he is conscious of failure. His sonnet has not reached the height of the great argument, nor has his soul, though enlarged with gratitude, been able to compass the immeasurable gifts of grace, and therefore, in holy wonder at*

the lavish superfluities of mercy he cries, "My cup runneth over." In one short but most expressive sentence he does as good as say, "Not only have I enough, but more than enough; I possess not only all that I am capable of containing, but I inherit an excess of joy, a redundancy of blessing, an extravagance of favor, a prodigality of love, my cup runneth over. (21:145) Jesus spoke in the same way in Luke 6:38 He said **38** *Give and it will be given to you: good measure pressed down, shaken together, running over.* The language that David uses in the psalm is that of a man who is blown away by God's goodness. He is overwhelmed at what he has been given. It is beyond description, it is more than he feels he can handle. You may remember when David came in II Samuel 7 and sat before God, having received not only the kingship of Israel, but having been promised that his dynasty will last forever, David said, "Who am I? What is my house?" He could not fathom that God would so favor him. It's as though he looked at his cup, his lot in life, and said, "this can't be my cup. This is not what I deserve." But it is what God gives. There is grace abounding even to the chief of sinners. And do you know how that can be? How can a just God give us what we do not deserve? How can He fill the cup of rotten sinners like you and me with so much sweetness? The answer to that involves another cup. A just God is able to give to sinners a cup which overflows with blessing because He gave His son a cup which ran over with sin and wrath. Do you remember what Jesus said in the garden of Gethsemane, as he agonized over the cross which awaited Him? He said, "Father, if it be thy will, take this cup from me." The cup was full of my sin and your sin, and the wrath of God which they deserved and Jesus drank it all. Then having filled the cup of His holy son with all our sin and all his holy fury against evil God now fills our cup with what Jesus deserved, an eternity of goodness.

At least, that's how David saw it. How do you see it? Can you say the amen when you read, "my cup runneth over"? Or do you feel otherwise? Many of you, you hardly have to say it, it's written on your face, many of you feel you have been cheated. You think life has dealt you some very bad cards. Your cup is not running over, at least as you see it. Why is that? Why did David feel this way and you feel another? There are several possibilities. One is that some people have empty cups because they take them to the wrong source. You take your cup to the leaky cistern of worldly pleasures and riches and you can expect to come away dry. Those things do not satisfy. You put your cup before the faucet of the world and you are asking for frustration. The second reason many cannot agree with David is that you think on the wrong things. ® Let me tell ya, I don't know when David wrote this psalm but he had his share of suffering, throughout his life. If he had wanted to

focus on the hard things and the painful things he could have. He could have done like many of you and dwelt on all his many problems and it would have sapped him of joy. It is remarkable how we can sit around the Christmas tree in our warm, roomy homes, with presents under the tree and a Bible-full of promises on the shelf and then throw ourselves a pity party. Surrounded by a garden of plenty we find ourselves a little pile of thorns and sit on it. How foolish! The hymn says, "Count your blessings name them one by one" but we've decided to count our troubles. So, joy is often lacking! Listen, a person's happiness is not so much determined by his situations as his contemplations. ® Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you see it.

So, you give some thought to what God has done for you, especially what is conveyed to us in the glorious gospel of grace. Think of your blessings present and future. Read what God has said is true for us and will be for us. Open your heart to the anointing of His spirit. Feed your soul on the riches of his table and you will say with David, "My cup runs over." You too will be overwhelmed by the mighty grace of God. And when that occurs, or if it already has, then you have a problem don't you? Don't you? You people whose lives have been filled by Jesus, you have a peculiar problem. You have this cup and what's it doing? It's running over! And you are gonna make a mess unless you find some outlet for the overflow. You follow? You want to figure out what to do with that overflow. And I am happy to suggest a couple of ways to handle it. Number one is to let God's goodness run over into generous service ®. You know there are various motives for service to others. Many, many people serve in order to feed their own ego needs. We want to be appreciated, we want to be liked so we pursue that by doing nice things and giving gifts and so forth. Now a whole lot of good things get done because of this motive but it may create more problems than its worth because when you serve to meet your own ego needs then you find yourself getting in fights over what you do. You never feel appreciated enough and you get that chip on your shoulder. The root cause of that is what I call the empty cup syndrome. You aren't serving as an outlet for the overflow of your joy, no, you serve in order to gain what is lacking in your life. You have what psychologists call a deficit motivation. So many in Christian service, in the church, serve out of a deficit. Their lives are not filled up by God, so they have to fill them up with ministry busy-ness. I get concerned for people like that because I know that somewhere down the road they are going to blow up. They serve for what it pays and someday the rewards won't be there and "kablooeey." God's plan is that we serve Him out of a full and overflowing cup, that we serve Him with joy and gratitude as the major impetus. So, ask yourself this: am I working in my

job, in my home, in my church in order to gain the love and favor of God and others, or am I serving in response to God's unmerited, gracious love and favor? Do you see the difference there? ® God's word says "the joy of the Lord is my strength." And that is how we want it to be. You err if you try to fill your cup with service or obedience. That doesn't work. You fill your cup at the fountain of God's grace and rich mercy, then let it flow out in service to others and loyalty to Christ..

Then secondly, you let the blessings of your cup overflow into joyful thanksgiving. Joyful thanksgiving is the opposite of grumbly self-pity. When we give thanks we recognize what we have been given. We focus on the treasures not the trials. And that's just reasonable because only one of those is going to last forever right? I mean, your trials are very temporary and your treasures quite eternal. So when you give thanks you recognize what you have been given and you recognize the giver, the One who fills your cup. I should say He deserves great glory. One poet has said, *"Through all eternity to Thee my grateful song I'll raise. But oh eternity's too short to utter half thy praise."* Poetic license is required to say that eternity is too short for anything, but this is the true sentiment of all the souls made rich by the grace of God, who can join with David in saying, "my cup, my cup runneth over." Is that your confession? Does your cup overflow with joyful gratitude that others can see? Did you hear the one about the dog who could play poker? Really, there was this dog who could play cards which would be amazing except that he wasn't very good. Do you know why? Every time he got a good hand he would wag his tail. How about you? Has God dealt you a good hand? Has He pulled you out of the pit and restored your soul and showered you with blessings of spirit and promised you honor and glory and eternal reward? Has God done that for you Christian friend? Then let your tail wag. Let your joy be seen. Sing out your songs in joyful gratitude. Live out your life in joyful service as one who has a cup filled and overflowing. Let's give thanks to God in prayer. Take some time to ponder your cup and what God has poured into it from the fountain of His grace in Jesus.