

The Lord's Roadhouse and Bodyguards – by Rev. Tom Aicken

It's easy to see why Psalm 23 is the favourite psalm of so many Christians. One has only to read it a few times, particularly in times of adversity, and it soon proves to be a great reservoir of comfort and encouragement. Yet, how well do we understand it? Is it possible that we could find it even more encouraging if we understood it a bit better than we now do? Let's take another look at it.

In the first four verses, you'll notice, David uses the shepherd-sheep analogy. Without signalling it, however, in verses 5 and 6 he switches to a host-traveller analogy. Have you ever noticed that? It's very subtle, perhaps, but it's there. Some insist that David keeps the shepherd-sheep analogy throughout, and even suggest that the shepherd anointing each sheep with oil (i.e. linseed oil) is to keep the flies away. I find, though, that this interpretation is rather forced. We don't think of sheep feeding at a table, or drinking from a cup, or living forever in someone's house, and none of that fits the pastoral scene of the preceding verses.

No, what we find in verses 5 and 6 is a picture of a traveller stopping at a roadhouse for a time, and, having refreshed himself with food and sleep, he goes on his way again until he arrives at his desired destination. If anyone should wonder what the anointing of oil has to do with a traveller stopping at a roadhouse to refresh himself, we learn from Luke 7:46 that this was an established custom, every host was expected to anoint his guests with oil – and if (like Simon the Pharisee) he didn't do it, well, he wasn't considered to be much of a host!

As David contemplates his walking through the valley of the shadow of death, a frightening journey encompassed with every danger imaginable, he looks forward to that one roadhouse along the way where he may seek and find refuge for his soul. David, you see, has found something which the unbelieving world doesn't even know exists, and that is the roadhouse of God, that shelter where the Lord is a very present help to His people in trouble. This roadhouse may be the local

church – every church should seek to be such a place of refuge for all its members – but, in point of fact, it can be any place where the Lord is pleased to make His presence known and powerfully felt.

The table here represents His full provision for all our needs. Notice, the Lord doesn't take us out of our troubles much of the time, but more often than not provides what we need in the midst of those troubles, and does so that we might learn more and more to hope in Him.

The Lord feeds His weary travellers, and, more than that, He anoints our heads with oil. I submit, believer, that, this oil speaks of the incomparable quality of God's good gifts to His people in Christ. Ps. 31:19, "Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You; which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men!"

But look, there's more. The Lord feeds His guests, anoints our heads with oil, and, besides all that, He fills our cup to overflowing. If the oil speaks of the matchless quality of the benefits of Christ, surely the overflowing cup, this endless supply of wine, speaks of their immeasurable quantity. Ps. 40:5, "Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done, and Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered."

In ancient times it was embarrassing for any host to run out of wine too soon, which is precisely what happened, you remember, at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. However, not even the most needy and desperate of men can deplete the resources of the Lord, or complain that that rich fare is not good enough, and none who knock at His door (who call upon Him in truth) has ever been denied (Ps 84:11; 145:18).

This is quite a roadhouse, isn't it? It's no wonder that those who know the Lord best, and are well acquainted with the dangers that lie in wait along the path to glory, are most eager to spend as much of their time here as they can!

Ah, but we're not done listing the benefits yet. We may think, after verse 5, that the responsibility of a good host to his house guest is over, that he has done quite

enough for this poor traveller, but, no, there is still one more thing. If this guest had to travel at night, perhaps, or through dangerous wilderness at any time, the master of the house would not consider sending him out into the shadows alone, without fit and able company. What he would do, rather, is send him on his way with a couple of strong and trustworthy bodyguards.

These bodyguards would go with the traveller, and remain close at hand to protect him – one on his left, the other on his right – probably all the way to his destination, or at least until he was out of danger and there was no more threat to his life. Is that not part of the hospitality one might expect? Is that not what you would do for someone, if you had such resources, or would want someone to do for you? Well, that's what the Lord does for us, beloved. Look at verse 6. We enter into His presence whenever we need to do that, which is a foretaste of heaven itself – we come into His roadhouse and under the banner of His love – and then, having been refreshed (our greatest needs are met, our deepest longings satisfied), we are sent out and on our way again, but with these two faithful bodyguards to accompany us.

Who are they? What do we know about them? The one is named Goodness, the other Mercy. We need the goodness of the Lord to supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. And we need the mercy of the Lord to remit our sins, to forgive and cleanse us of them, all along the way. Listen, believer, if you have these as your bodyguards, these big burley fellows who are ready to take on anything, you don't need any other. You are well protected. Notice, too, these able bodyguards follow us, not just part way, but "all the days of my life," says David. They follow the believer all the way through this vale of tears; they see him to the end of the danger zone, which is to the very door of his eternal habitation.

As a result, the believer resumes his journey with greater confidence. He is given every cause to hope that he will at last, at the time appointed for it, reach his final destination. With such hope he declares, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever," and, oh, what a hope that is!

Right now, beloved, we can spend time with the Lord – we can delight in all that we know of Him, in all the riches of His favour that He’s pleased to bestow on us, and even come to learn more of that as we go along – but in the ages to come we’ll stand in His immediate presence (think about it), we’ll gaze upon His infinite glory, and we’ll dwell with uninterrupted joy in the mansions of His matchless splendour and glory forever! The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it.

It’s pretty difficult to take it all in, isn’t it? That’s because, in part, it’s so incomprehensible to our puny and very feeble minds. “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counsellor?” (Rom. 11:34). But our difficulty may also arise from our not having tasted enough of the goodness of the Lord or experienced enough of what it is to trust in Him (Ps. 34:8). If that should be the case for you, believer, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding” (Prov. 3:5).

These blessings of Psalm 23 are what every traveller on the road to glory can and should look forward to, and will discover if he’s looking unto Jesus. The wicked say, “Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?” (Ps. 78:19), and with that question they assert with blind presumption that He cannot. But the believer who exercises his faith can testify, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” To him, that’s not a theory, it’s not a question or a doubt, but a known fact. This is his experience, his unshakeable testimony and a powerful witness to all the world about him.

Can you say, as a result of the Lord’s goodness and mercy attending you, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever?” That ought to be your assurance, my friend, your comfort and joy and peace in believing, if indeed you belong to Christ. If this seems only a remote possibility to you, that you should forever be with the Lord, then you need to make your calling and election sure. Unto you who believe Christ is precious (1 Pet. 2:7); be sure that you have the kind of faith whereby He is made precious to you!