THE GOOD LIFE

A STUDY OF THE 23RD PSALM

PART 11 – HE ANOINTS MY HEAD WITH OIL

REVIEW

Did you know that the LORD has a good life for you to live? Sadly, very few Christians ever hear this "gospel" and have been under the impression that we are just relegated to "play the hand we were dealt" because after all, God is sovereign and He is the One who decides what we experience throughout our lives, right? Wrong! I'm here to tell you that this is not exactly true!

You see, just because certain circumstances come into our lives doesn't mean that they are God ordained and part of His plan for our lives. Some things that we walk through are because we live in a lost, fallen world, full of evil people and random circumstances. So to say that all of these situations we have found ourselves in are all just a part of God's plan is not entirely true. No, the devil can orchestrate a lot that happens in this world too, making him a variable in a lot of this. In fact, we need to give the devil some of the credit for the things that have come through our lives that have stolen from us and tried to kill & destroy us. That is the devil's doing, not God's! And finally, the truth of the matter is that a lot of what we've experienced in our lives was self-induced. No, it wasn't a part of God's plan at all, but was a product of choices we made, whether that be choices we made knowingly or ignorantly.

Didn't the LORD say through the prophet – "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge"? That means that God's people can experience destruction in their life just by simple ignorance! So that old worldly saying – "What you don't know won't hurt you" – ain't exactly true, is it? No, what you don't know absolutely can hurt you.

So I just say all this to say that maybe there's something we need to know. Maybe there is something we can learn from the word of truth that will yield a better quality of life, the good life God has for us. Amen? And so what we have been doing is looking at the 23rd Psalm, which I believe beautifully describes the good life God wills for us all to live.

So last time, we moved from the fields of the Good Shepherd to the home of the Honorable Host – that is, we moved to the transition in Psalm 23 where David begins to describe how the LORD hospitably invites us into His home to a dinner He has provided for us.

Again, **Psalm 23:5-6** says, *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

So, what we saw last time is that these last two verses of the 23rd Psalm show us another part of God's nature. Not only is He that Good Shepherd who takes care of His sheep; He is that Honorable Host who crowns us with His lovingkindness and tender-mercies! Yes, He prepares this table before us and makes all

things good and ready! Upon entering, He honors us by anointing our head with oil! He fills our cup up to overflowing! Then our response is, "Surely, my host's goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life! And I will live in His house forever!" Amen! This is living the good life, my friends!

So we camped on that first phrase of Psalm 23 a couple of weeks ago and learned how the LORD prepares this table before us even in the presence of our enemies. And we saw how David was certainly a man who experienced this truth in his life, amen? The Lord honored this man by preparing a table before him even in the presence of King Saul who acted as his enemy time and time again. But even though Saul was driven by iniquity and constantly persecuted David, the Lord continued to bless David and delivered him from Saul's hands.

But what so many of us do is when our brother or sister does something to us like this, we fight back. Yes, we retaliate and take matters into our own hands. However, in doing so, what they are doing is getting up from the Lord's table. So what these need to understand is – even if they are successful at avenging themselves, they are missing the meal! So the lesson we learned was – Never leave the table for someone who decided not to come to the party! Amen?

But we learned that this wasn't the only hindrance to partaking of the LORD's good spread; the main reason is because most don't accept the invitation to the LORD's dinner.

We looked at Jesus' Parable of the Great Supper in Luke chapter 14 and saw how Jesus described just about everyone will tend towards RSVP'ing with excuses *not* to attend. So we learned that just because the Lord has prepared a table for us does not automatically mean everyone invited will partake of it – not because God is holding back, but because those He invites generally don't make showing up to that dinner a priority in their lives. Let's change that! Church, we need to make eating at the Lord's table our priority!

So we looked at the beautiful example of David & Jonathon's son, Mephibosheth, and saw the LORD's heart in inviting us even in our lameness to His table to break bread with Him continually. And one of the awesome things about this whole story of David's kindness & mercy is that when Mephibosheth sat at David's table, his lameness was covered. Yes, it was hidden. That means that he was on equal footing with everyone else who was sitting around the table, including David!

Church, this is what it is like at the LORD's table that He has prepared for us! It is where we walk in the kindness of the LORD! It is where we are accepted in the Beloved! It is where our belonging is found! This is the LORD's table!

WHO IS THE ANOINTING?

So after being invited to this spread at the LORD's house, what are the next things that we see our gracious & honorable Host doing for us? Well, **Psalm 23:5** tells us …

You see, after we are told that He prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies, the next thing David says is, *"You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over."* Mind you again, the context of this phrase in Psalm 23:5-6 is of a gracious host honoring his or her guests, and the original Hebrew language paints this same picture in this first phrase – "You anoint my head with oil." (We will get more into this later)

But the first thing I want to say and something that is very clear from the Scriptures is how this terminology that David used here is a clear reference to the Holy Spirit. Why do I say that? It is because when the

Scriptures talk about the "anointing" and about "oil," they are almost always used to refer to the Spirit of God. Even the fact that David talks about this anointing with oil being done on our heads forecasts the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2 because it was on their heads that there appeared tongues of fire.

So I say this to say that this phrase "You anoint my head with oil" gives not just one, not two, but it gives three allusions to the Holy Ghost. In the mouth of two or three witnesses, let every word be established, amen?

You see, the Holy Spirit is one of the main reasons why we are capable of living the good life. It is because He is "The Anointing" (See **First John 2:20,27**) Whom God has poured out on us in such richness and extravagance! He is the One Who has filled these cups up and Who flows out of our bellies like rivers of living water! Yes, **the good life is the anointed life – the life anointed by the Holy Ghost!**

You see, all throughout the Scriptures when we see someone being anointed with oil that is symbolic of the Holy Spirit being poured out on them – either to equip and empower one for a particular office or to set free and deliver one from a particular bondage.

We see it used in the latter way in **James 5:14-15** where the anointing with oil is seen as a method to bring healing and deliverance to the afflicted. This, of course, is not saying that there is inherent power in the oil itself to heal someone; rather, it is using oil as a *contact point* between the minister and the one receiving the ministry. And since "oil" is symbolic of the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the anointing of the sick with oil is a symbol showing how it is the power of the Holy Spirit to set the captive free.

Now regarding the New Testament usage of the word "anointed," it comes from the Greek word *chrio*. This word was a medical term describing a physician pouring oil on his hands and then rubbing it into the body of the patient until the oil was transferred from the doctor's hands deep into the skin of the patient. So, the word *chrio* has to do with the "hands" of the doctor as well as the oil itself. It describes God as being the Great Physician Who has the Holy Spirit as a type of oil on His hands, and once He has the Holy Spirit on His hands, He can't wait to get His hands on the believer. Once He does, He begins to rub until the believer is totally saturated (you might say, baptized) with the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, to be anointed with the Holy Ghost means to be totally saturated with the Spirit of God. So, saying someone is "anointed" is another way of saying "God's got His hand on them." Amen!

But we also see numerous examples in the Scriptures of people being anointed with oil for the purpose of regal and priestly duties – showing us that it is the Holy Spirit Who equips and empowers us for the work of the ministry.

You see, in the Old Testament, you had two specific offices that were anointed with oil as they entered into their position: The kings and the priests. So, since we are anointed of God, it should not surprise us that **Revelations 1:6** says He has made us Kings and Priests to His God and Father. We are "anointed" to be His children (kings) and to serve Him (priests).

Yes, we are the ones anointed to be kings and priests in this new and better covenant (See **First Peter 2:9**)! This is an important point to understand.

ABUNDANT ANOINTING

But even though it is true that God has anointed us to be His heirs and His ministers, the fact is that David was referring to a different aspect of anointing here. It is an anointing of abundance. It is an anointing of honor.

You see, this word "anoint" is not the common word used for the anointing of a king or a priest. It is for this reason that the Hebrew word David used here is only translated "anoints" this one time in the original King James Version. And the reason why it is not translated this way any other time is because this word literally just means "to make fat, to thrive or to prosper."

It is used this way four times in the Book of Proverbs alone:

1. **Proverbs 11:25** - *"The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself."*
2. **Proverbs 13:4** - *"The soul of a lazy man desires and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich."*
3. **Proverbs 15:30** - *"The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and a good report makes the bones healthy."*
4. **Proverbs 28:25** - *"He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the Lord will be prospered."*

So let's look at this in the context of Psalm 23:5 – There is an anointing alright, but this anointing is done with "oil" and is poured out on our "head."

Based on this choice of words of David, we can clearly see that this describes an anointing all right, but not an anointing for regal or priestly duties. Rather, he was referring to the anointing of a guest at some prestigious banquet with oils and perfumes as a way of honoring them. Yes, the allusion is to the custom of anointing the head on festive occasions, as an indication of prosperity and honor. Therefore, the Hebrew word is indicative of the divine favor, of prosperity, and of joy.

Yes, this oil that our most gracious and honorable Host (the Lord of Hosts, that is) anoints our head with is poured out in such a "full, thriving, and prosperous" manner. In other words, He pours oil on our head *so abundantly* – thus the expression indicates an *abundance of oil*.

Do you see how this correlates with what David said immediately following this phrase – our cup *running over*? Both phrases, therefore, describe "abundance." They echo each other in describing the Lord pouring *more than enough*.

So essentially, what David was saying in verse 5 was, *"He pours out an abundance of oil on my head, and He pours out an abundance of wine in my cup!"*

Now as we see the analogy of both oil and wine obviously being used here, that should automatically direct us to "WHO" these two elements represent in the Scriptures – the Holy Spirit, whom we referred to earlier, right?

You see, one of the first things that the LORD wants you and I to experience when we come to His supper is this abundant anointing! Yes, He wants to pour out the Holy Spirit on us "fully & richly." Church, this is

true prosperity! This is the abundant life! It's not just having more of the world's goods; it's having heavens goods! And the most invaluable resource of heaven that you and I have been freely given is the opportunity to be filled with His Holy Spirit. He is what our heavenly Host has honored us with in His house!

THE ANOINTING IN BETHANY

Now as I've studied this, I was drawn to our one, very solid biblical example of how this occurs, and it is found in the Gospels: This God anointing our heads with oil upon entering His house reminds me of Mary's anointing of Jesus found in Matthew 26, Mark 14, & John 12. For the sake of time, I would like for us to focus on Mark's account of this event.

In **Mark 14:3-9**, we are told that this event transpired when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper. Now Mark just described her as a "woman," but we know from John's Gospel that this was Mary, the sister of Martha & Lazarus (See John 12:2-3).

Now in verse 3, we are told that Mary came with an "alabaster flask" (some translations call it a "box"). In short, "alabaster" was a stone commonly found in Israel. It was a hard stone resembling white marble So, the container Mary used to carry the perfumed oil was made of a white, marble-like substance. Ointment, oils and perfumes used to be put in vessels made of alabaster, which kept them pure and unspoiled. The boxes were often sealed with wax, to prevent the perfume from escaping. And we are told in John 12:3 that when Mary broke open her alabaster box, *"the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."* Alabaster was a strong enough substance to keep the oil or perfume completely contained until the time of its use.

Mark goes on to describe this alabaster flask as containing "a very costly oil of spikenard." Now "spikenard" was a plant that only grew in the Himalaya mountains of India and Nepal. Therefore, Mary's fragrant oil of spikenard was a rare, imported product in Israel.

Now, how expensive was this spikenard contained in the alabaster flask? Well, we don't have to speculate because in multiple Gospel accounts, Judas evaluated that it could have been sold for *"three hundred denarii."* Now, in their day, one denarius was the wage for one day's labor. So, if Judas' estimate of the value of Mary's spikenard was correct, then it would have been worth close to someone's annual salary, the equivalent of several tens of thousands of dollars today.

Other sources tell us that "spikenard's" great cost stemmed from the fact that it had to be transported over 6,000 miles to reach Palestine, and depending on the quality, it could be sold for as much as 400 denarii per pound (or $750 an ounce in modern purchasing equivalent). That made this that Mary used to anoint Jesus' body even more valuable than gold!

In fact, this ointment was worth at least 2½ times more than the 30 pieces of silver that Judas received for betraying the Lord, which is obviously why Judas got so upset about it (see Mark 14:4-5 & Compare John 12:5). So, an interesting note regarding this is: this perfume was worth 2½ times what Judas thought Jesus was worth.

Judas' negative reaction to this act of pure honor and worship is typical of many people's reaction toward worship today. Judas and some of the other disciples evidently thought this was a waste, but that was only because they didn't value Jesus as highly as Mary did. Selah.

You see, something's value is only determined by what others are willing to pay for it. So, even though Judas and some of other disciples thought this was a waste does not mean that the Lord did. She obviously thought blessing and honoring Jesus was worth more than a year's worth of wages and more than silver and gold. Yes, Mary valued the LORD – and what man saw as waste, this woman saw as "abundance" (the literal definition of "anoints" in Psalm 23:5). Amen!

But there was a "breaking" of that box or flask that had to occur to get out what was precious on the inside - for we learn that "this was a long-necked vessel for storing or holding ointment or perfume, and when the neck was broken off, the contents were used …"

Now this event teaches us several lessons:

One is this – I believe that not only is Mary an example to us of how we ought to strive to honor the Lord, but I also see this "alabaster flask" as symbolic of us too. Yes, I see this "alabaster flask" as symbolic of our temples – that is, our bodies – as "alabaster" was also one of the stones used to decorate Solomon's glorious Temple (see First Chronicles 29:2). As the apostle Peter said in **First Peter 2:5**, we are living stones, being built up as a spiritual house. Praise God!

And if this "alabaster flask" is a type of our bodies, oh, what a measure of treasure is contained within us! As **Second Corinthians 2:14-16** states – we are to be diffusing the fragrance of the knowledge of God in every place we go as the Lord's "earthen vessels" (**Second Corinthians 4:7**). Yes, there is a treasure within these "alabaster boxes" (i.e. earthen vessels), and it is meant to be released to honor and glorify the Lord with! Amen!

But the key to releasing the sweet-smelling aroma and blessing the Lord with it is found in being "broken" – that is, learning to lose our own dignity and pride and get "outside the box" where God can be God to us.

You see, one reason why this treasure stays within our vessels is because we like to stay in control. We don't want to lose face in front of people. We keep our dignity and pride and, in so doing, we keep that anointing oil on the inside of us.

Church, we have to make the decision whether we are going to please God or please man. We can't do both. So, start letting that "spikenard" out of your "alabaster box" today: Do it by laying down your pride and worshipping the Lord with reckless abandon!

Do you remember what King David said after he had danced before the Lord with all of his might (**Second Samuel 6:13-23**)? When David fully expressed Himself in praise towards God like he did, the Bible says that Michal disdained him. And why? Because he did not praise and worship his God the way she thought he should have. She thought, being a king, he should have been more dignified. But we all know David's response, right? He said, "Woman, I will be even more undignified than this!" Hallelujah!

And we also know the reaction God had towards Michal's criticism of her husband and king. The Bible says that from that day forth, she was barren. Saints, when we criticize and ridicule the response that others have to God, we are in danger of making ourselves fruitless. Or, you could say, our fragrant oils and perfumes stay all "bottled up."

VESSELS OF HONOR

Now another lesson that we can learn from this anointing of Jesus by Mary is this – How does the LORD literally "anoint our heads with oil" – meaning, how does He honor and pour out His divine favor on our lives? Well, how did it happen to Jesus here? It happened through this "sinful woman" – teaching us that the Lord honors us through other people. In other words, He anoints us through other vessels.

Now our first ambition should not be to get God to get other vessels to bless us; our first ambition should be *to be* the vessels that the Lord uses to bless others. Amen! Yes, church, our aim and goal is to be "honorable vessels." As the apostle Paul said in **Second Timothy 2:20-21**, "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor …"

Now people read this and think – "Oh, that explains it. I must just not be a vessel of 'honor.' I guess I am just a base vessel." No, no, no! Paul goes on to say, "Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work." In other words, whether or not we are a vessel of honor is not God's choice; it is our choice! That's why he said, "if *anyone* cleanses himself …" That means, whosoever will! So, based on verse 21, our prayer should not be, "God use me!" Rather, our prayer should be, "God help me to be usable," and then cleanse ourselves of what is necessary to be more prepared and useful for every good work. Amen.

And what is "the latter" that Paul is referring to cleansing ourselves of to become this vessel of honor? In order to get the answer, we need to back up to **verse 19** where he said, *"Nevertheless, the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.'"* The latter, therefore, would be his second statement of the seal of God's solid foundation – namely, all of us who name the name of Christ departing from iniquity. Therefore, departing and cleansing ourselves from "iniquity" is the key to being God's vessel of honor.

So, what is "iniquity?" In my opinion, iniquity can be best described as "*a sin from within*." In other words, opposed to transgressions and trespasses which are simply missteps and mistakes in the flesh (i.e. on the outside), "iniquities" are sins of the heart. However, iniquity is sin at its worst. Iniquity is premeditated, continuing, and escalating.

So, what this teaches us is that it is not your simply transgressions and trespasses (i.e. the mistakes we all make from time to time) that disqualify us from being used of God. It is the premeditated, continuing and escalating sins of the heart that can keep us from our higher levels of usefulness.

CONCLUSION

But the fact is, the Lord desires to honor us like this. He will not be out-done – for we can never out-give God. So, if the Lord commends Mary for such an extravagant and honorable gift, then you must know that He desires to "anoint our heads with oil" in like fashion.

In fact, we can never truly honor the LORD and anoint His feet like this without first receiving the same honor from Him! Yes, we are able to anoint the Lord with our love, honor, and worship because He first loved & honored us. We love Him because He first loved us. Likewise, the LORD anoints our heads with oil. Therefore, you and I can anoint Him back!

And again, this oil that He anoints our heads with certainly can describe all that the LORD desires to honor & bless us with, but again, His Holy Spirit is what this points to. Therefore, next to Jesus, He is the rich fulfillment and the peak of all God's honor in our lives!

Yes, church, the LORD desires to bless and honor us in such an extravagant way! Mary is our example of that! He desires to give us more than we think we are worth. And it is all because our value is not based on our own estimation of ourselves; our value has been determined by how much the Lord decided to pay for us – and that was A LOT! Amen and so be it!