

Who is Your Shepherd? (#6)

Joe Slater

Having described the Lord's care for him in terms of a shepherd tending a sheep, David shifts in Psalm 23:5 to speak of God's care for him as a man. *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over."*

David, a great warrior king, certainly had more than his share of enemies. With the Lord looking after him, he felt so confident he could sit down to eat at a table (the food being provided by the Lord) and enjoy a meal even in close proximity to people who wanted to kill him. Now that's security!

Anointing someone's head with oil was done for a variety of reasons. Prophets, priests, and kings were set into office by an anointing with oil. The very word "messiah" means "anointed one." But in the context of Psalm 23 David isn't referring to another man anointing him as a prophet or king. Rather, it was the Lord who did the anointing in a metaphorical sense. The Lord was acting as a gracious host, courteously anointing His guest's head with oil (a common practice in that arid climate). In Luke 7:46 Jesus reproved Simon the Pharisee for his lack of this common courtesy: *"You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed my feet with fragrant oil."*

The Lord's graciousness as David's host is further expressed by the words, *"My cup runs over."* A good host doesn't let his guest's cup go dry.

As the Lord kindly provided everything David needed, so Jesus does for us. We freely eat and drink of the meat and milk of His word even when surrounded by a hostile world. What a cordial host He is!

(More Next Week!)

Write It All Down

In the present US administration's effort to cut costs and eliminate waste in government spending, federal workers received a directive to submit in writing a bullet list of at least five things they accomplished on their jobs last week. The directive for workers to justify their jobs has been met with much confusion and resistance from both employees and agency heads. But this nothing new. As a retired federal employee, I recall many years ago being required to fill out a daily log of my accomplishments to justify my position. I was literally showing that I was putting in an honest day's work for a day's wage.

What if God required us to write down at least five bullet points of spiritual accomplishments each week? Would it be easy to submit a list filled with prayer, worship, bible study, and good works? Or would our list consist of just a few items, like sitting in church for an hour per week?

Thank the Lord we don't have to write it all down! Christianity is not a "check the box" religion. It does not consist of bullet points we can check off and, once completed, go on our merry way. The written lists and ordinances of the Old Testament were nailed to the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:14).

Lastly, there is no need for us to keep a record of our Christian accomplishments, because God is doing it for us. *"And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books."* (Revelation 20:12) Just as federal workers must give an account of their job performance, Christians are accountable for their work in the kingdom of God (Romans 14:12).

-- Jay Launius (Maud, TX)

SPIRITUAL CYSTINOSIS

"But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Hebrews 3:13 NIV).

A few years ago, I read about Lillie Sutcliffe, a five-year-old who had a rare genetic ailment called cystinosis. Without a daily cocktail of drugs her body would turn to stone. Only about 2,000 people worldwide have the condition. The genetic condition causes the amino acid cystine to accumulate in cells, forming crystals that build up and damage cells. The crystals harm many systems in the body, particularly the kidneys and eyes. The condition also stunts growth. At five she's the size of a two-year-old. She goes to school and does well academically, but she cannot walk far or play sports.

At least her tragic situation is not Lillie's own doing. *"Time and chance"* happen to us all (Ecclesiastes 9:11). But what is more tragic is when people choose a spiritual form of cystinosis – a hardened heart. When the scriptures mention that Pharaoh's heart was hardened, it refers to a stubborn will brought on by pride (Exodus 8:15, 32). Each time Pharaoh rejected Moses' appeal to let his people go, he became more hardened. Finally, the Word says God hardened his heart (Exodus 9:12). God gave him over to a depraved mind (Romans 1:28).

Each time we say "no" to God, it gets much easier. Finally, we won't care enough to say "no." Scary? It should be. This *"past feeling"* condition (Ephesians 4:19), doesn't come upon a person suddenly, but over years of rejecting God's offer. We must realize the longer we practice sin the more difficult it will be to repent. Let's take our medicine! Let's keep our hearts from cystinosis.

--Rob Redden (Arroyo Grande, CA)