

# A Psalm for Troubled Times

By JAMES FIELDS



I was awoken at 3am two Sundays ago to my wife telling me she just got off the phone with her brother. They were in the hospital due to medical complications with their pregnancy. They weren't due to be there for another two months, and it was looking like they would be doing an emergency C-section. So we rushed to wake ourselves up, get dressed, and drive thirty miles to the hospital to support them.

These weeks have been hard on all of us, and immensely busy as we've run around trying to fill in for their needs and be there for our brand new nephew. In the midst of it all, I've been resting my mind on one particular picture of God found in Psalm 23:5. Sitting in the NICU is often a stressful experience, but this verse has sustained me throughout it all.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies

When I was young and would read this verse, I thought it was referring to a banquet table, probably outdoors and surrounded by my enemies carrying machine guns and the like. It's only been in the last couple years that I've come to realize that all of Psalm 23 is referring to the yearly life of sheep under the careful protection of their shepherd. The table isn't a banquet table, but a *mesa* or *plateau*. The shepherd would go ahead of the sheep to weed the fields of poisonous plants, kill or chase off predators, plant lushes grasses, and clean the water supply for his flock.

When the Shepherd prepares the table, he is going before the sheep to prepare the way for them. The shepherd is making the area safer and more comfortable for His sheep. What David is exclaiming to be true about God here is that our Father has gone before us to prepare the situations of our life before we get there. As hard as a situation may be, God has made it bearable for us.

As I sit in the NICU wondering what will happen to this precious life laying in my arms, I can rest confident knowing that God has brought the right people to this situation. The doctors, nurses, and family that are here are here after careful consideration and concern. That doesn't mean nothing bad will

happen, a wolf can still swoop in and drag off a sheep, but it does mean God knows what He's doing and I can trust in Him. God has brought me into this situation to encourage, help, and admonish where needed (1 Thessalonians 5:14). I will trust in His beautiful plan.

## You anoint my head with oil

Sheep are anointed with oil for a variety of reasons. First, there are tiny little bugs that will terrorize sheep and drive them crazy. Their life cycle demands they crawl up the sheep's nose and make the way to the brain. Sheep hate these bugs with such a passion they'll stamp their feet and beat their heads against things to try to find relief. Sheep have been known to kill themselves in the process of trying to kill these tiny little bugs. Oil protects the sheep from the harm of these bugs.

Second, sheep in heat will butt heads with one another in their attempts to assert dominance. When properly oiled up, the sheep glance off one another instead of causing harm.

Third, there are tiny little mites that live on sheep in a parasitic fashion, much like lice in humans. Scabies cause a bluish-red rash to form that is highly contagious to other sheep and livestock. Only a special treatment of oil can't prevent the spread of this and kill off the mites.

It is here that we see the power of God's anointing on us. His protective anointing protects us from the harm others would intend us from both inside

the flock and outside the flock. As the stress of the situation causes friction, I know that God is protecting me with His divine protection. Nothing can bring me to harm when I rest in His perfect care.

My cup overflows.

Sheep are a helpless species of animals. They are incapable of doing anything to save their own lives, and this is especially true in the coldness of winter storms. At the freezing rain pelts down upon them, the coldest of sheep will lay down and await death. The vigilant shepherd moves among them with a mix of water and brandy and gives the tired and worn out sheep a swig from his flask to heat them back up and invigorate them.

We know that God moves in and around us, looking for those of us that are fainthearted and weak, and He lifts us up on eagle's wings (Isaiah 40:31).

This last two weeks have been full to the brim, but this simple verse has sustained me. Jesus prepared this situation with me in mind, He has anointed me, and He walks beside me through it. No matter how hard it gets, I know Jesus has me here for a reason, and I rest my joy in Him.

What verse sustains you in your trials?