HEAVEN’S TABLELAND

**DATE: 9/29/2013 am**

**TEXT: Psalm 23:5 – *“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over”***

**INTRODUCTION**

In our last study we saw the Shepherd taking His sheep through *the valley of the shadow of death*

As we thought about the Shepherd leading His sheep through this dangerous valley …

We were reminded that our journey to the ***“House of the Lord”*** is not without the Valley Experiences of Life

For the Christian, life will end in Glory, but that does not exempt us from the Grief now

The presence of sin will always cause negative effects

The paths of life often lead us through the Difficult and Gloomy Valley Experiences

Yet, we saw that the reason the shepherd led his sheep through the valley was in order to take them to Higher Ground

We saw that the valley was only a passageway to the top of the mountain

The springtime feeding and the arrival of the summer heat left the fields bare …

So the shepherd leads his flock through the valley that he might take them to Higher Ground which would provide for greener pastures

The ***“table”*** in **v. 5** is not a table that you sit at to eat

Obviously, the shepherd was not setting a table that his sheep could pull a chair up too

He’s talking about the rich, green pasturelands found in the high country

It is what is often called a *mesa* or *tableland*

Why does our Lord allow us to go through the Valley Experiences of life?

It’s to lead us to Higher Ground

Or to put it another way; it is to lead us to ***Heaven’s Tableland***

**Song:** The songwriter must have had **Psalm 23:5** in mind when he wrote: *“Lord lift me up, and let me stand By faith on Heaven’s Tableland; A higher plane than I have found – Lord, plant my feet on higher ground”*

As Christians, we should want to be led to Higher Ground

We should never settle for the average or the ordinary

I have often heard people humbly say that they would be content with the crumbs from the Master’s table

I guess that is why we have so many crummy Christians!

**Humor:** I once heard someone describe many of the Christians today as “Brylcreem Christians” You know the kind, *“Just a Little dab’ll do ya.”*

The goal of the Christian should not be, just eternal Life

It should be to go farther and climb higher for the Lord

It is to dwell on ***Heaven’s Tableland***

It is to dwell on another level than just the ordinary

**Quote:** I’ll never forget reading the testimony of Charles Trumbull. He described the great fluctuations in his Christian life. On occasions he enjoyed conscious fellowship with the Lord, but then would find himself down in the depths of defeat. There were seasons when he was lifted up but then there would be the times he was case down. He wrote: *“Sometimes by a single failure after temptation, Sometimes by a gradual downhill process, my best experiences would be lost, and I would find myself back on the lowest levels.”*

**Quote:** A Songwriter from my past put it this way: *“I have these moments so steady and strong, feeling so holy and humble. Next thing I know I’m all worried and weak and I feel myself starting to crumble”*

These testimonies, are the experience of many a believer

They are Up one day and Down the next

On Sunday we are Shouting, but on Monday we are Pouting

You know what I mean

Hot one day and Cold the next

One day In and next day Out

Living one day as a Victor, the next as a Victim

As I read my Bible I find that God never intended the Christian to live that way

He intended the believer to live on higher Ground, not the *“lower levels”* that Trumbull described

God never intended that we live in the Wilderness

He wants us to dwell in Canaan

***Heaven’s Tableland*** is His goal for our life; therefore it should be our goal as well

I like to think of ***Heaven’s Tableland*** as the Abundant or Victorious Life

The Purpose of our Valley Experiences is to bring us to ***Heaven’s Tableland***

A life of Blessing, Power, and Victory

Having said that; I draw your attention to the shepherd bringing his sheep to the Tableland

We read in **v. 5 - *“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies”***

Let’s pray and then think on that thought

***“Heaven’s Tableland”***

**~~~Prayer~~~**

There are 3 things about the tableland I’d like you to understand

First -

**I. THE “PERILS”**

**Quote:** W. A. Rogers in his book, *“The Shepherd and His Sheep” wrote, “From the time the shepherd took his sheep out of the fold in the morning until they were back in the fold at night, they were in a great deal of danger each step of the way”*

He described 4 particular perils that sheep face

**1.** ***Enervation -*** This is the peril of losing one’s strength, or becoming exhausted

**2.** ***Environment -*** The extreme temperatures, such as the heat during the day and the cold at night

There was also the rough terrain and sudden storms

**3.** ***Entanglement -*** A sheep could get caught by its heavy wool in a thorn bush or low hanging limb and be unable to free itself, leaving them vulnerable

**4.** ***Enemies …***

We see in **v. 5** that he speaks of the sheep being in ***“the presence of … enemies”***

The word ***“enemies”*** speaks of the adversaries of the sheep

For the sheep there were several adversaries

David, as a shepherd, was acquainted with all the adversaries of the sheep

In **I Samuel 17:34-36a** we hear him saying to Saul –

***“Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock:” “And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him” “Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear …”***

Not only were there the lions and bears, but also the wolves, coyotes …

And especially in the high country, a little snake called the brown adder

It is very poisonous, and lived in holes in the ground

As the sheep nibble on the grass they would come up out their holes and bite the sheep on the nose causing death

Likewise, as the ***“sheep of His pasture”*** We are not without our enemies

There are the enemies of our spiritual life

First, let me state -

**A. The Enemy’s Presence is ‘Certain’**

Just as certain as the sheep had its enemies

You and I as believers, have our spiritual enemies

David described them as ***“mine enemies”*** (indicates possession, personal)

To illustrate a couple of our spiritual enemies, let me draw from David’s encounter with the lion and bear

**Proverbs 28:15** – ***“As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people”***

These two enemies attacked David’s flock

These two types of enemies attack us spiritually

**1.** The Roaring Lion

Satan is described as a lion in the Bible

It’s often symbolic of how he attacks the Christian

**I Peter 5:8 - *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”***

Satan is like a lion sneaking up on its prey, waiting for the right opportunity to attack

All we have to do is let our guard down for one minute and we will become Satan’s victim

Someone has said that if we give Satan an inch, he will become a Ruler

He will become more than a Ruler, he will become a Destroyer

Satan attacks by means of –

Temptation, Seduction (lies) and Accusation

I remember several years ago a preacher talking about how the devil had been chained by the Lord

I understand what he was saying, but I remind you he is on a very long chain

**2.** The Ranging Bear

A ranging bear carries the idea of a bear traveling in search of food

***“Ranging”*** – means *to seek greedily with an appetite*

The bear reminds me of our Old Nature and how it seeks greedily for satisfaction

Believers have been saved to walk in newness of life,

But there is a part of us that is still attracted to the seductive ways of the world

If we don’t guard our hearts, our Old Nature will pull us away from God

That’s why Paul said in **Romans 13:14 - *“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof”***

He was saying that we should not give sin the chance to use our flesh to fulfil its evil lusts and desires

Just as the sheep had their enemies, we have our enemies

**The Enemy’s Presence is ‘Certain’**

Furthermore, I remind you -

**B. The Enemy’s Presence is ‘Continual’**

The lion and bear never take a vacation from hunting their prey

Nor does Satan or our Old Nature

These enemies are constantly and continually watching and waiting for the opportunity to take advantage of us

**Ill.** I once read that since 3600 B.C. the world has known only 292 years of peace

But for the Christian there’s never been an end to our spiritual warfare

It is a Constant and Continual war

Saying that, I want to point out that David spoke of these enemies while the sheep were in the high country grazing on the tableland

Their new level of living had not eliminated the dangers they had faced in the low country

Being brought into the lush green pastures of the mountains had not removed them from the presence of their enemies

Some seem to think that after they are saved for a while that the battle with Satan and the flesh will ease up

It doesn’t matter how long a person has been saved,

There is always the presence of our spiritual enemies

With their presence; the danger of becoming a victim of their attacks

We must never think that we can get to a place in our Christian life when we can let our guard down

We may find ourselves Growing in the Lord, Experiencing God on new levels,

Being brought to Heaven’s Tableland

But even then we find ourselves in the Presence of enemies

Heaven’s Tableland is a life of Blessing, Abundance, Power, and Glory; but it is not without its enemies

The simple truth is; the sheep are never anymore fatter than when grazing in the high country

Yet, the fatter the sheep, the more tempting they are to the enemy

A life of Blessing does not eliminate our spiritual enemies, it only Invites and Inspires them

Never forget that Heaven’s Tableland is not without its Perils

**The Enemy’s Presence is ‘Certain’ & ‘Continual’**

**THAT’S THE “PERILS”**

But with the Perils, also comes …

**II. THE “PROVISIONS”**

As sheep, we may be in the midst of the enemy, but that does not mean that we are not without Provisions to deal with our enemies

Let’s look at David’s useth of the word ***“table”***

I have already explained that this is a rich pasture of luscious, green grass in the high country – a tableland

The shepherd has brought his sheep here to provide the green pastures in which to feed for the summer

The word ***“table”*** literally means *to spread out*

Imagine the sheep coming through the valley and as they crest the hill, before them is a pasture of green grass *“spread out”* everywhere

I want you to know there is a table spread for you!

But, Most Christians are starving spiritually!

**Song:** “Come and Dine” – “Jesus has a table spread; where the saints of God are fed, Come & Dine the Master Calleth”

We don’t have to be starving spiritually

We can feast off Heaven’s Tableland!

You don’t have to stay in the barren land

There is a tableland prepared for you

Now when I think about the shepherd leading his flock to this ***“table”***

I think of 2 reasons why he has brought them there

First, there is -

**A. ‘Growth’**

- The shepherd leads his flock to the tableland during the summer in order to fatten his sheep off the rich, nutritious grass of the high country

A healthy, growing sheep will produce lots of wool and in return brings a great price

- The Lord our Shepherd wants us to feed off Heaven’s Tableland in order that we might grow and become fat in the Lord

We read in **Psalm 92:14 - *“They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing”***

As Christians we are to be spiritually fat!

The sad thing is most Christians are Physically Fat

We all could go on a diet

Yet, may I say that when it comes to our spiritual life we should never be dieting

We should want to be as fat as we can

We want to grow spiritually as much as we can

We should desire to grow in the Lord and to experience His blessings and power as much as possible

May we all become fat sheep in the Lord pasture!

But there is another reason why the shepherd has brought his sheep into this tableland

There is not only **the ‘Growth’ of the Sheep**,

But there is also -

**B. ‘Girding’**

What do you mean by Girding, Preacher?

Girding means – *to get oneself ready, it’s a reflexive verb meaning to prepare yourself for conflict or vigorous activity*

The shepherd not only leads the sheep to the tableland in order to Satisfy His sheep,

But also to Strengthen His sheep

He wants the best grass for them so they will be healthy and strong

Notice the word ***“preparest”***

(We will look at this word in our next point)

But let me point out something interesting about the particular word that is used by David

The word is used in a variety of situations …

But one that I found very interesting is that the word is frequently used in a military sense

In **I Samuel 17:2** we read - ***“And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines”***

The words, ***“set the battle in array”*** is the same word translated ***“preparest”*** in **Psalm 23:5**

In this setting the word is used to speak of equipping soldiers with the proper food, training, and equipment to fight a battle

As believers, we have our spiritual enemies,

But the table that the Lord has spread for His people provides a source of spiritual nourishment that makes us strong in the Lord

If we are being overcome by the enemies of our spiritual life, you can mark it down …

We have not been living in Heaven’s Tableland and feeding off the table the Lord has provided for you

We do not have to be weak Christians

We can be strong!

As we feast off Heaven’s Tableland we are made strong

As we chew on the truths of the Word of God and draw from the resources of the Spirit of God, we are made strong

What I am saying is that as believers do not have to be Victims

We can be Victors!

We do not have to be overcome

We can be the one that overcomes!

We can be victorious in our battle with enemies of our spiritual life

Heaven’s Tableland is not without its Perils, but neither is it without its Provisions

There are Divine Resources from which we can draw and be made strong

Saying all that, there is one more very important truth that I want to share with you from our Text

**THE “PERILS”**

**THE “PROVISIONS”**

Lastly, notice with me -

**III. THE “PREPARATIONS”**

Now let’s look at that word ***“preparest”***

Let me describe what this word pictures

We need to understand that the tableland that the sheep are feeding on …

… Has been prepared for them by their shepherd

Early in the season the shepherd will make preliminary trips to the tableland to prepare it for the arrival of his sheep in the summer

- He will find the best bedding area

- He will check and see if there are any poisonous plants

- He will look for signs of predators

- As well, he will clear out the waterholes, springs, and drinking places for his sheep

He carefully looks over the pasture for anything that could be detrimental to the sheep and carefully and thoughtfully prepares it for their arrival

This picture speaks volumes to the Believer

From this picture we can glean one of the most important lessons we can ever learn in our Christian life

Now Listen Carefully

First, in this picture we see -

**A. The ‘Work’ of the Shepherd**

Everything that benefited the sheep was because of the care of the shepherd

All they enjoy and experience came from merely trusting in what the shepherd has done for them

The secret to the Christian life, the secret to living on Heaven’s Tableland, the secret to overcoming the enemies of our soul is resting in what Jesus has done for us

As believers, we find ourselves in the presence of our enemies

The spiritual enemies of our soul seek to defeat us

Yet, the victory that we can have over them is not found in ourselves

But in our Saviour and what He has done for us

**Romans 6:4 – *“Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”***

Let me put it this way

Our Lord’s work for us on the Cross, in His Resurrection, and now making Intercession for us is our source of spiritual Strength, Power, and the Ability to overcome in life

The grounds of my victory are the work He has done for me and is doing for me

In short, the secret to living a victorious life is just JESUS!

**Quote:** I love the illustration that Charles Weigle told in his sermon “The Victorious Christian Life.” He wrote: *“There are thousands of church members who are living beneath their privilege.*

*They sing about living on the mountain, while they stay in the valley. They are trying to be Christians without the power of Christ. They are enduring religion instead of enjoying relationship.”*

**Humor:** A young man who has been raised on a farm decided to take a job in the city. He got work as a porter in a 15 story Hotel. On the first day, the front desk sent him to the 10th floor to deliver a package, so up the stairs he went. All day long he was seen climbing the stairs to the various floors, and when evening came, he was exhausted. The next day was the same thing, and so on till the end of the week. When he opened his pay envelope at the end of the week and found only seven dollars, he was disgusted and went and found the Hotel Mgr., he said; *“I will not climb the stairs all week for such wages”.* The Mgr. asks in surprise, *“What are you doing climbing the stairs?”* he replies, *“How am I going to reach the other floors unless I climb the stairs?”* The Mgr. then took him to the elevator. They got on board and road to the top. The boy was so delighted that he decided to keep the job. The next day he is seen asking if there is anything anybody wants him to take to the top floor. His work had never been any easier nor his pay a bigger delight.

Many believers are running up and down the stairs

They are about ready to call it quits

They are so weary and defeated in their Christian life

Their tongues are hanging out from trying so hard to be what they should be, do what should do, and not do what they should not do

Yet, what they don’t realize is that Christ is their spiritual elevator

Just as the sheep depend on the work of the shepherd,

We depend on His death, burial, and resurrection for the power and strength we need to be victorious

**The ‘Work’ of the Shepherd**

Furthermore, from this picture I remind you of -

**B. The ‘Watchfulness’ of the Shepherd**

As I mentioned earlier, during the shepherds trip to the high country he looked for any signs of predators

If he sees any, when he brings his sheep to the mountain, he is particularly watchful of their presence

He is ever on guard for their attack on his flock

I have stated on former occasions that sheep cannot defend themselves

They are totally at the mercy of the care and watchfulness of the shepherd

If a bear suddenly comes wandering out of the rocks, it will not be the sheep that will face and fight the bear

It will be the shepherd

One writer said that it is interesting to watch the behavior of the sheep in the presence of danger

When danger arises, instantly all faces are lifted, eyes turned, not to the danger, but to the shepherd

The simple truth is we do not have what it takes to defeat the devil or the flesh

But we know “One” who can!

**CONCLUSION**

Every day we are faced with the enemies of our soul

Spiritual enemies that want to defeat and destroy us

Within ourselves, we may not have what it takes to overcome the devil and the flesh,

But if you can say, ***“The Lord is MY Shepherd”***

Then you know the “One” that can overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil

That is why you want to live on **HEAVEN’S TABLELAND**

**THE “PERILS”**

**THE “PROVISIONS”**

**THE “PREPARATIONS”**