

Dear Friends,

When David wrote these words of his "Shepherd's" anointing his head with oil, he wrote as a shepherd who had often anointed his family's sheep's heads with oil, soothing, healing, and a protective shield to keep flies and biting insects from biting the sheep. All of these caring shepherd's actions resulted in contented sheep who could feed peacefully and grow lots of wool, while living long and contented lives under their shepherd's good care. I love pondering these thoughts as David applied them to the Lord, his greater "Shepherd."

David's basic thought of the Lord was not as an indifferent judge, but as a personal, caring, and protective Shepherd. His perception of the Lord is far healthier and good than the alternative. How do you view the Lord? It will powerfully impact how you respond to Him and His teachings in Scripture.

I'm mailing this week's Gleanings a day early. Tomorrow morning I'm scheduled for an outpatient surgical procedure. I appreciate your prayers for my family and me.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Shepherd's Preventive Care and Abundance

Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. (Psalm 23:5b KJV 1900)

I have learned much about raising and caring for sheep in this study. Although I grew up on a farm, my family maintained dairy cattle, not sheep. In some ways, caring for cows and for sheep is similar. In so many other ways, their care is quite different. Once common denominator with both is the annoying presence of flies. I think this problem goes with raising and caring for any variety of livestock.

Regardless other problems, flies can be an annoyance to livestock, just as they are to us. In the heat of summer, I recall our cows' tails almost constantly swishing back and forth to keep flies off their backs and sides. Flies also were attracted to livestock's moist nose. There they could pose a danger for disease or infection in addition to annoyance.

Ancient shepherds mixed a variety of ingredients with oil, likely olive oil, and rubbed it over the sheep's head and nose. It was both an insect repellent and a healing balm for insect bites or scratches the sheep suffered in grazing thick shrubs. Likely wise shepherds applied this oil to the sheep's heads before they observed a problem as a welcomed preventative to ensure the sheep's contentment and good health.

How do we translate this ancient shepherd's care of sheep into wise spiritual truth for us? How much could a sheep do to control those annoying flies? Nothing whatever, right? And how many times does the Lord quietly, lovingly apply the healing, soothing balm of the Holy Spirit to our lives to resolve problems that we have no idea how to resolve? I love that Jesus devoted three lengthy chapters (John 14, 15, 16) to the new role the Holy Spirit would fill after His ascension. The Holy Spirit was not a new being at the resurrection of Jesus. He is eternal; He is God no less than Jesus or the Father. 1 John 5:7 may be the most despised verse in the Bible. It simply states the profound truth of God in the simplest terms possible to our finite minds. John's simple description says it better than we can say it, "**There are three...and these three are one.**" Any belief in the being of God that fails to accept **both** truths fails the test of Bible truth.

Quite early in the Old Testament, shortly before the flood, God said, "**My spirit shall not always strive with man....**" (Genesis 6:3a KJV) The Holy Spirit worked in many ways throughout the Old Testament era, from new birth^[1] to directing the writing of Old Testament Scripture (2 Peter 1:21 KJV) to calling and directing His prophets.

As Jesus taught in those three chapters, after His ascension, the Holy Spirit would begin to fill a new and expanded role in the lives of God's children. He would be the same "Comforter" to them that Jesus had been to His disciples during His public ministry. In Acts 1:9-11, we read of Jesus' ascension. Just ten days later, on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the Spirit started His new work in the lives of God's children. In his Day of Pentecost sermon, Peter devoted time to teach those present that this new outpouring of the Spirit was taught in prophecy in the Old Testament. (Joel 2:28-32 KJV)

From Pentecost till the Second Coming, the Holy Spirit shall faithfully dwell in and with all born again people, guiding, comforting (Like that oil on the sheep's head), and blessing the Lord's people with the things they need to remain blessed and safe in their Shepherd's fold. So many of life's wounds to the soul are deep and infected, far beyond our ability to heal or resolve. But the Holy Spirit knows no such limits. According to Jesus in those three blessed chapters, the Spirit would be to the disciples, and to future disciples,

everything they would need, just as Jesus had been to them during His time with them.

We sometimes question the Lord's care of His people—of us because He doesn't prevent every pain, illness, or tragedy in our lives. Scripture doesn't promise that kind of insulation for us. If we had that profound care now, we'd be in heaven, not on earth! The Book of Acts reports multiple examples of godly, faithful people suffering many things because of their faith. We are no better than they, are we? If the Lord didn't remove Paul's thorn, why think He will remove every trouble in our lives? But we should gratefully live with the comfort of the Spirit's faithful abiding and never leaving. Whatever we face, good or bad, His presence assures us that we do not face it alone. He shall abide with us through the greatest of life's storms and difficulties.

Think of all the things in life that irritate and discourage you. If you knew that a spiritual "First-aid kit" existed that contained the ideal healing balm for every one of those troubles, would you be interested? Well, that is precisely what we have in David's symbolism in Psalm 23:5. What a blessing we have in our good Shepherd.

My cup runneth over. David frequently uses the symbol of a "Cup" in the Psalms, both for God's judgment against the wicked and for His blessings on His people.

The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. (Psalm 16:5 KJV)

In this Psalm, David celebrates that the Lord Himself is the "...portion of my cup." This though resonates with the Lord's assurance to Abraham. The encouraging comfort of this verse is only emphasized by its appearance in the prophecy of Jesus' resurrection at the end of the Psalm.

After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. (Genesis 15:1 KJV)

The Lord didn't merely tell Abraham that He would provide a shield from danger to Abraham. He told Abraham that He would personally be that shield.

What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. (Psalm 116:12-13 KJV)

Overwhelmed with the realization of the Lord's rich and tender care of him, David poses the question to himself. "What shall I render?" God's blessings had covered David with care and goodness; his first thought was how he might act out his grateful heart to the Lord for all those "benefits." David answers his question. The best way to honor the Lord for His blessings is to remember and to celebrate our "salvation" and pray, pray thanksgiving prayers to Him daily.

When David pondered his life, not the perfect or model life by any stretch, and the Lord's blessings, he could only think joyful thoughts of thanksgiving prayers. Would that we could, in this instance, follow David's example. Keep our minds focused on the good things the Lord sends our way instead of allow the angry bad thoughts of all that is wrong in this world, real or imagined, to weigh us down. Has the Lord blessed you above what you deserve? Yes, without question. How should we then respond? Follow these verses and remember the Lord's blessings, not contemplate all the bad stuff we think hovers near to do us harm.

Reflect on your life and all that you've experienced. Think of your life in terms of a "Cup." What is the main content of your "Cup"? Interesting, I suspect that our description of our life's "contents" might differ, depending on our experiences of the day. So much of how we look at life is shaped, or at least strongly influenced, by our disposition. Remember the cup "Half empty" or the cup "Half full" attitudes. We often identify people, perhaps even ourselves, by such comparisons. Can we push our thoughts beyond our disposition and try to look at our life from a broader perspective?

I look over my life and can well recall seasons that stressed me to the limit. Some of those seasons could well push me to think of a bitter "Cup." Then I think of other seasons and my mind is flooded with thoughts of one kind mercy after another. The Lord didn't weigh me in the scales and judge me harshly. Quite the opposite. He regarded me as one of His children, and His blessings came to me, measured by His love and goodness, not by my merit. And when I get to the proverbial "Bottom line," I must join David and say, "My cup runneth over" with blessings and goodness from the Lord. So how do we realize the "Cup runneth over" mindset that David taught in this Psalm? We face a moment-by-moment choice. Where do I focus my mental, emotional, and spiritual energy? On the bitter cup or on the blessed cup? It is your and my choice.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. (Philippians 4:8 KJV)

“Think on these things.” That is our daily charge from Scripture. Where we focus our minds, our actions and attitudes will follow. I offer Paul’s words to you and to myself, “**Think on these things.**”

Elder Joe Holder

[\[1\]](#) Yes, the new birth was as true for Old Testament saints as for New. Remember Jesus’ rebuke of Nicodemus, “**Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?**” (John 3:10b KJV) If Nicodemus had been as wisely informed of Old Testament truth as he thought himself to be, according to Jesus, he would have readily understood Jesus’ teaching on being born again because it occurred in the Old Testament just as in the New.