

## “You Prepare a Table Before Me...”

### 👁️ My enemies

### 👁️ My Shepherd’s delight

In the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, dear sheep:

The Good Shepherd is taking His flock up into the high country, the alp lands of summer pasture. David recalls the LORD’s great care and intelligent skill with these words: **“You Prepare a Table Before Me in the presence of my enemies.”** Behind the Hebrew noun for *enemy* is a verb which means *to press, compress or bind up* to the point of oppression and distress. Our enemies oppress us “between a rock and hard place,” “between two jagged rocks.” Many Americans may think their worst enemy is stress, but Jesus, the Good Shepherd knows the reality of...

### 👁️ My enemies

A caring and resourceful shepherd who wants to nourish his flock in the summer months has plenty of work to do before he leads sheep and lambs into the high country. He endures rugged surveys alone in order to place salt and minerals at strategic points along the way. His skillful eye must size up every meadow to determine how long the flock can graze. He must determine where each camp can provide the easiest access to these pastures. His experience and love will keep him looking for dangers a sheep could never see – **enemies** in patches of poisonous weeds, lurking in the rim rock, hiding in the waters.

Do sheep only want “junk food”? Maybe not quite. But if all they ever get is green grass, they will lack the minerals and trace elements their bodies need to survive the rigors of the high country. So the skillful shepherd must go ahead to place salt and minerals strategically. He knows what we need and carries out His careful plans before the flock even arrives. High school, college? He’s already there.

Every mountain is different. Every meadow has its own strengths and weaknesses. How long and how productively his sheep can graze is all part of the skillful shepherd’s experience. He chooses each base camp to let the flock fan out from there and graze contentedly. You and I as sheep could never choose the right pastures. He wants to keep moving us on to greener pastures. The best is yet to be.

But there are **enemies** I could never know. High in the mountains and along the coastal hills late summer brings out carpets of beautiful blue camas a delight the eyes. But here and there among the blue and sometimes in huge patches will be beautiful white camas which is deadly to sheep, especially little lambs. The lily-like leaves will stiffen their little bodies like blocks of wood. He must rid his wild pastures of such **enemies**. Keller would spend hours on hands and knees with his kids because this job just had to be done.

What is it about our human condition that makes us want to try everything? Wasn’t it white camas for humanity when our first parents ate the forbidden fruit? Right here is church **My enemies** will try to poison my soul. Pastors with personal opinions instead of God’s truth. Distractions of what others are wearing. Or that one thing, some idiosyncrasy that really bugs me about my pastor. It may be the poisonous weeds of prosperity that draw me away from God’s Word. **“The LORD is my Shepherd.”** He goes ahead of me pull the weeds and save my soul. How blest I am to be in His tender, loving care!

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<sup>1</sup> Keller, Philip. *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. Zondervan Publ. House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970. Available from NPH, 1-800-662-6022. Also at Amazon / Audible Books. Ninth in Summer Sermon Series by Pastor Mark A. Cordes.

As the Good Shepherd makes His way through the pastures of my life, **My enemies** are watching from the rim rocks above. Wolves are always lurking to charge the green pastures to scatter the flock and pick off the strays. Cougars played “cat and mouse” with Philip Keller’s sheep, tearing huge patches of wool, draining their blood, eating their livers. So are **My enemies** – Satan, sin and self – always toying with my emotions to stress me out and kill me with sin. Philip Keller never actually saw a cougar. Likewise, I will never see the devil. And some religious authorities want us to believe Satan does not exist, there is no sin, and self is your friend. But with the ears my Creator gave me I can hear my Shepherd’s warning, **“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.”** (1 Peter 5:8f NIV84).

Remember how Jesus warned Peter? **“Satan wants to sift you like wheat.”** Peter was so sure he would never fall, but fall he did. Where was Jesus? Right there Peter’s trial, on trial Himself, with a loving look calling Peter back to Himself in repentance. Before the **enemies** of my soul can even attack, Jesus my Good Shepherd sees them and saves me. He said to Peter, **“I have prayed for you that your faith not fail.”** Like sheep who can barely bleat because of terror in the attack, we may find it hard to pray. But recall today’s Second Lesson (Romans 8:26f) where the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, prays for us with groans that words cannot express. Isn’t it time we walked closer with Jesus? The stragglers, wanderers, distant roamers get picked off by our **enemies**. What terrible tears our Lord Christ wants to spare you. By His own bloody sweat in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus warns us, **“Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation.”** Read His Word each day. Dig in with like minded Christians. Meditate on Christ for you in the dark watches of the night. And you will find more and more that you too can say, “I am...”

### 👁 **My Shepherd’s delight**

Few among us can truly appreciate the bright beauty of a dewy meadow in the morning – maybe hunters, fishermen, golfers. But only a shepherd could know the deep satisfaction of seeing his flock contentedly grazing while he watches over them with **delight**. Jesus our Good Shepherd left all the comforts of home in heaven to walk life’s “mesas” alone. (“Mesa” ~ Spanish, African Kiswahili: “table.”) He must constantly clear the water holes of fallen branches and rocks. Likewise, into every pressing situation and stressing problem He has gone ahead of us. Jesus was **“tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.”** (Hebrews 4:15 NIV84) He wants to give us His peace along the way, to make life an adventure, a mountaintop experience, with Him. Each of us can say with joy, **“You Prepare a Table Before Me in the presence of my enemies. I am My Shepherd’s delight.”**

Even in the high country there is danger. Doubts can still depress you. Sin can weigh you down with guilty like a muddy fleece. And still your Good Shepherd is calling, reminding you of Calvary where He shed His blood for you. Like a lamb He was led to the slaughter and did not open His mouth. He wants us so to remember His loving sacrifice for our souls that He spreads a special remembrance meal in His Holy Supper. When you feel weak and burdened, come. Come to the Lord’s “Mesa,” His Holy Table with your crushed and broken heart, here to be healed and mended as He says, **“This is my body broken for you. This is my blood, shed for you for the remission (i.e. the sending away) of all your sins.”** How deeply He loves you! How earnest His care! How sincere **My Shepherd’s delight!**

Are you experiencing distressing changes in your life? Maybe the pasture where you’ve been grazing is spent. Isn’t the Good Shepherd calling you to move on to meadows more nourishing for your soul? By His Word and Sacrament He convinces us to say, “I am **My Shepherd’s delight.**” Follow Him calmly and peacefully trusting His wisdom and love to lead you to life on a higher plane. **“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.”** (NIV84) “To live thus is to live richly. To walk here is to walk with quiet assurance. To feed here is to be replete with good things. To find this tableland is to have found something of my Shepherd’s love for me.” (Keller, 113) Amen.