

Communion

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 November 2013

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] Turn with me this morning to the passage we read in Psalm 23 and verse 5.

Psalm 23, verse 5, where we read, You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Have you ever had a meal with Jesus?

The Gospels are filled with stories of people who had a meal with Jesus. Many of the most memorable episodes in the life of our Lord take place around a meal.

For example, it was the wedding meal at Cana which provided Jesus the opportunity of changing the water into wine. And in the words of John 2, verse 11, revealing His glory for the first time.

[1 : 04] Jesus probably spoke the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin and the lost son of Luke chapter 15 around a table. These parables of the irresistible grace of God.

In John chapter 21, it was over a meal, over breakfast, that the risen Lord Jesus Christ reinstated Peter, the preacher of Pentecost, the pillar of the church.

Great things can happen, you see, when you have a meal with Jesus. You can see His glory. You can experience His grace. You can hear His call.

None of us were present at those meals, and yet the question remains. Have you ever had a meal with Jesus? Have you ever had a Bon Accord banquet?

Have you ever had a Bon Accord banquet? Now, by now, of course, I'm sure you'll have realized I'm speaking of the Lord's Supper. The communion meal. Every time we come together in this way, we're eating a meal with Jesus.

[2 : 10] By and through faith in Him, the most amazing things can happen when, in His presence, we eat the bread of His body, and we drink the wine of the new covenant in His blood.

Now I'm fairly sure that when David wrote Psalm 23 verse 5, he did not have the Lord's table in mind. And yet under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, he was saying far more than he knew.

For all these wonderful truths promised in this verse can become ours today, as together we eat this meal with Jesus. The David who had so recently reflected upon the courage God's presence gave him in the valley of the shadow of death writes, you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. And as today we share this meal with Jesus, we reflect on four promises God makes to us through Psalm 23 verse 5, which become ours as we eat this bread and drink this wine.

Four promises which change the world for us and through which we see the glory of Jesus and we experience the grace of Jesus and we hear the call of Jesus.

[3 : 33] First of all, he provides for me. Secondly, he triumphs for me. Thirdly, he commissions me. And lastly, he satisfies me.

Perhaps you've been going through a period of stagnancy in your Christian faith. You've been struggling with doubts. You'd own personal circumstances.

And yet you so desperately want to follow Christ more closely as perhaps once you did. You want to live for him more passionately and not in the lukewarm way you know you are at the moment.

Let these promises become yours. It's the day you eat a meal with Jesus. First of all then, he provides for me.

He provides for me. You prepare a table before me. Psalm 23 means so much to so many of us. We read our own experiences and we interpret our own circumstances in its verses and its sentiments and its words.

[4 : 46] And in our minds anyway, it finds its genesis in David, the shepherd boy, sitting in a field, lying back and contemplating the world, life, universe in general.

It seems to me that the backdrop and the context of this psalm isn't fields of sheep. It is the exodus of God's people from Egypt and their subsequent wanderings through the wilderness on the way to the promised land of Canaan.

David is speaking as an individual in the way he thinks about God, but he is also speaking on behalf of Israel, the nation, the Israel who had experienced the shepherding, the guiding, the protecting, the restoring, the providing hand of God through 40 years wandering in the wilderness.

And here in this verse, verse 5, he is particularly thinking, David, of the Israelites in the wilderness. And of the way in which in the heart of the barrenness of the desert, God prepared a table for his people by providing them with manna and with quail and with water.

The manna which is described in Psalm 78, verse 25, as being the bread of angels. God prepared a banquet for his people in the desert.

[6 : 15] Some thousand years later, Jesus would prepare a table in the wilderness for 5,000 people. And he would miraculously feed them with 5 loaves and 2 fish.

All ate. All were satisfied. It was a banquet and 12 baskets of fragments were gathered up. The picture is of a God who provides for his people, even in the most auspicious and unpromising of circumstances, he provides a banqueting table for us.

Now, the Christian church has always understood the Christian as having been redeemed from bondage to sin and on a lifelong journey through the wilderness of this world's hostility, barrenness, and difficulties to the promised land of heaven.

Was that not what inspired John Bunyan's famous book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*? That journey, that progress through life? And we know only too well, don't we, of how desert-like this world can be, how difficult it is for us in our workplaces to maintain any sense of spiritual vibrancy and passion.

And yet, it's in this very place, in the wilderness, in the world, the wilderness which is sometimes filled with still waters and green pastures, and sometimes filled with valleys of the shadow of death.

[7 : 48] It's here, in this wilderness, in your workplace, in your home, that God is providing and preparing for you a table as he did for his people as they left Egypt.

He provides for us. What has he provided for us? In Luke chapter 2 and verse 30, in the words of Simeon's Nankdimetus, where having held the Christ child in his arms, he said, Sovereign Lord, as you have now promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations. Simeon, this godly old man, he saw the table God had provided for his people.

He saw it in the eyes of Christ, the child in his arms. The table God has prepared for us is salvation in and through Jesus Christ.

All the blessings of salvation through the coming and through the cross of Jesus Christ are laid on the table like the courses of a meal. The blessings of the assurance of faith, of the forgiveness of sins, of righteousness before God, of the hope of life eternal, of our adoption as sons and daughters of the living God, grace in all our weakness, comfort in all our pain, joy in all our despair, and so forth, and so forth.

[9 : 20] They're all for us. They're all provided by God the Father in his love for us, secured by God the Son on the cross, and applied by God the Spirit in his power.

And God says to us, They're there for you in the wilderness. Take them. Eat them. They're for you. I'm sure it's already hit Aberdeen.

Hit Glasgow first. A new craze. It's the Brazilian steak joint. It is a living, walking meat fest where waiters come with deliciously roasted pieces of meat to you every few minutes as you sit around.

And you can eat as much as you like or eat as much as you can. After all, it costs enough. You eat beef. And then you eat lamb. And then chicken.

And then the waiter comes back and he says, More beef. And then he comes back and he says, More lamb. And he comes back and he says, What about a bit of pork? And then he comes back and says this. And comes back with this and that.

[10 : 24] And the next thing until you finally sit back on your seat feeling hyper-satisfied or a little bit queasy, you just couldn't eat any more meat if you tried.

There are two of these Brazilian steak joints within 400 meters of the church I minister of. So it's amazing I'm really quite so thin. And the waiters, they just keep on coming with more meat.

More beef. More steak. More this. More that. Here in Psalm 23 verse 5, we have a very similar picture. God brings us blessing after blessing after blessing and he says to us, It's for you.

It's yours. But unlike my Brazilian steak joints, which I like to go to, we don't have to pay for these blessings. Jesus has picked the tab up for us on the cross.

He has paid the price. He's paid the price of our participation at the table. He's paid the price of all the benefits and blessings which come to us. It's yours for the wilderness journey.

[11 : 35] Think of your minister here as being one of the waiters in this Brazilian steak joint. He speaks the wrong language. He speaks the wrong language. But think of him that way anyway. Every Lord's day. Every Lord's day, He brings you out a new salvation blessing from God through His faithful preaching of the word.

And He says, Take it. It's for you. Receive it as you would receive from the hand of God Himself. And spend the week chewing over that truth.

And spend the week experiencing that truth. That truth that I'm a son of God. That truth that I've got comfort in all my pain. Let me apply this by looking back to the way in which the Israelites so often complained and grumbled as they went through the wilderness.

They used to say, Where's the water? This manna stuff? Bread of angels? It's boring. Wouldn't we be better off back in Egypt?

You know, discontent in our lives as Christians is often brought about by refusing to accept and receive from God.

[12 : 44] Or to realize that we already have access to all the benefits of Christ's salvation for us. Grumbling, complaining, and discontent are very often linked to our lack of understanding and appreciation and experience of all we have in Christ.

Of all these blessings. Of the banquet He's prepared for us in the wilderness. Do you have a grumbling, discontented spirit? Are you unhappy with your lot in life?

Are you always complaining? About where God has put you. And what God has called you to do. And who God has put you with. Let me encourage you if you're like this.

And I think we all have a little bit of this in us, don't we? That you spend some time exploring all the features and the range and the variety of the blessings which God has for you in Jesus Christ.

Don't just study them in order to understand. Study them in order to be content in God's provision for you in Christ. Because our discontent, however it's manifested, whether against the church, whether against our boss, whether against our wives or our husbands or whoever, it says more about our lack of understanding and experience of the blessings of God in Christ than it does of those things we're grumbling about.

[14 : 19] So study and pray that we'll know and experience and understand the delight of the banqueting table God has prepared for us through Christ in the wilderness.

And that means perhaps as we go to the table we need to pray. Lord, show me just how many blessings are mine through faith in Christ.

And assure me that as I eat this bread and as I drink this wine today, that every one of them is mine. He provides for me.

You believe that? Second promise. He triumphs for me. He triumphs for me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

These wandering Israelites, as they passed through the desert, they did not only have to contend with the barrenness of the wilderness in which they wandered, the lack of food, the lack of water, the danger from wild animals and from snakes.

[15 : 27] They also had to deal with hostile peoples intent on their annihilation. The history of the wandering peoples of Israel is the history of their conflict with the surrounding nations.

And yet God provided for them in the face of their enemies. Their enemies must have wondered, how is it possible for these Israelites to live in such a barren place?

But survive the Israelites did. And they thrived and they multiplied. And their enemies must have thought to themselves, no matter how hard we try, no matter what new strategies we employ, we cannot defeat the Israelites.

Every time we fight against them, they win. And especially when their leader Moses stands on top of a mountain with his hands in the air. We can't win.

Yes, the history of the wandering peoples of Israel is the history of their conflict with their enemies, but it's also the history of their victory and their triumph in Christ.

[16 : 33] God was not merely supplying his people's needs in the wilderness. He was continually parading his triumph before the face of his enemies.

You will notice the most profound contrast between verse 4 of Psalm 23 and verse 5. God's people once were walking in the valley of death's shadow, and now the triumph of their God is being paraded in the sight of all their enemies.

They have faced real difficulties, their own weaknesses, fears, and uncertainties, but through it all, God has triumphed. It reminds us of what God did to the Egyptian army in the Red Sea and its impact of the surrounding nations.

We read about that triumph in Exodus chapter 15 in the song of Moses and Miriam. When the nations will hear, anguish will grip the people of Philistia.

The chiefs of Eden will be terrified. The leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling. The people of Canaan will melt away. Terror and dread will fall upon them. The triumph of God by providing for his people a table in the desert and fighting for his people is paraded in the sight of their enemies.

[18 : 01] And you know there's a sense in which as we gather around the Lord's table today, the victory of Jesus Christ over all our enemies is being paraded in their faces as the triumph of Jesus Christ on the cross is being proclaimed.

After all, think of our own fear. Our own fear of the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death.

Jesus has triumphed over it by being that great and dawning light who himself, having experienced the blackness of death, draws the sting from it.

Think of our own spiritual failures, that accusatory list which Satan has drawn up and throws it in our faces to try and drive us to despair.

Jesus has triumphed over it by nailing it to the cross and paying the price of all our sins. Satan has nothing new with which to accuse us. Think of the militant antitheism with which you're assaulted at every turn in our society.

[19 : 10] Jesus has triumphed over it with his declaration of the victory of God over the world through his cross and his supernatural resurrection from the dead.

He's triumphed. At the height of the Roman Empire, victorious generals would be afforded the privilege of a Roman victory procession. At the head of their armies, they would parade through the streets of Rome and receive the praises of all the peoples of Rome.

Before him, he would parade his captured enemies, chained by the neck and manacled, to be displayed in shame before the emperor. The victory of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is something of a Roman victory procession where along with him, we, we exult in his triumph.

Before Jesus, chained and manacled, he parades our enemies in all their shame, the fear of death, the list of our sins which drives us to despair, the temptations of Satan, the godlessness of our society, the hopelessness of secularism, and so on and so on.

He parades them all before us. And he parades in triumph. And he says to us, come up and sit on my chariot with me at the head of my army.

[20 : 34] Come and sit here with me. Except his chariot is shaped like a table at which we eat the bread of his triumph and drink the wine of his victory.

This communion table, this is the chariot of his victory. And as we sit here, we triumph with him and in him through the cross.

You don't hear the cheering of any crowd in Aberdeen today, but if you had ears to hear it, you would pick up the heavenly songs of the glorious angels rejoicing and exulting over Christ's triumph.

Perhaps today you're daunted by your own weaknesses and failings. Perhaps you're scared of the secularism of our society and the impact it's having upon your little ones in school.

Perhaps you're afraid of death. Perhaps you're afraid of the valley of the shadow of death, those seemingly dark providences of life. Let the triumphant parade of the communion, when sitting in this table-shaped chariot of Jesus Christ, you proclaim his victory until he comes again.

[21 : 45] His victory over all your enemies. Let it give you confidence and assurance to go live for Christ. Go live for him in your classroom and in your university and at home and in your workplace.

Go live for him there. Let his victory dominate your life. Do not choose to willingly walk in the valley of the shadow of despair. Rather, as you hear week by week from this pulpit new aspects of the victory of Jesus Christ, choose to live in him.

Choose to hold your head high. Choose to live in triumph. Adopt the air of someone who is more than a conqueror through Jesus Christ.

And let that choice begin with you now as you come to the Lord's table with another prayer. Lord, show me just how victorious Christ is and let me live in his victory today and every day.

He triumphs for me. Thirdly, he commissions me. He commissions me. You anoint my head with oil. You anoint my head with oil. Now, let's bear in mind the backdrop of Psalm 23.

[22 : 59] It's the exodus of God's people from Egypt. They're wandering through the desert to Canaan. Here we have a picture taken from the world of Old Testament priests. According to the laws of the priests in the book of Leviticus, priests were anointed with oil.

Oil was poured out over their heads to signify God's commissioning of them and God's equipping of them to serve him. Later on, through the baptism of Jesus and then what happened on the day of Pentecost, we learn that the oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon his people to empower them for service, worship, and mission.

This is what God does for all those who have faith in Christ. He anoints us with his Holy Spirit. He empowers us for holiness and for service and for mission.

That means we believe in the priesthood of all believers where all who follow Christ are anointed with the Holy Spirit of power. God provides for all our needs.

Not just the blessings of being in Christ and of enjoying Christ's service. He prepares a table for us. But at this table is the empowerment we need to live for him, to serve him.

[24 : 21] One of the things that younger Christians are taken up with is the question of what God wants them to do in life.

I spent many years sitting in a pew over there thinking, what does God want me to do with my life? Does he want me to be a teacher? Does he want me to work in industry? Does he want me to be a missionary or a minister?

Does he want me to be a husband? Does he want me to be a wife? Well, that's not for me, of course. Is that what God will anoint us with power to do? You know, it seems to me that more important than what God wants us to do is what God wants us to be.

Not to do, but to be. To be holy, Christ-like, and obedient in who we are every day. And this is the primary area in which he will empower us by his Spirit.

He will anoint our head with oil so that we may be his people and live as his children. This commissioning, this equipping, this empowering presence of God through his Spirit is given to us so that we may be holy in all we do.

[25 : 32] So that we may live for him in our homes and in our workplaces and everywhere else. And this is another function you see of the Lord's table. That it becomes the place where God through his Spirit strengthens us as by faith we eat the bread and drink the wine together.

So that we may live in holiness. So that we may become more like Jesus Christ in our thoughts and our words and our deeds. And so therefore, be determined today to eat this bread and drink this wine with a view to the equipping and empowerment of who you are.

And come and be determined to pursue holiness in every area of your life. I had the privilege of leading 20 years of pre-church youth camps.

I can see some of those I had at camp here. And one stands out in particular for me. It was the 2005 Senior Football Camp. And all these kids come from all Aerts and Perts in Scotland.

And when our kit came from central offices, we checked it out. And for a senior football camp, we discovered that we'd been given two cricket bats, four tennis balls, a unihawk set, some badminton rackets, and one of these little table tennis nets you put across the table.

[26 : 54] Not an awful lot of use for a football camp, right? We weren't even given a football. No goalposts. No shin pads. Nothing. Just a couple of cricket bats, table tennis net, a couple of badminton rackets.

Imagine a football camp where instead of kicking footballs, you're kicking unihawk packs around the pitch. God does not commission us to be holy without giving us the equipment and empowerment we need to be holy.

The Holy Spirit who empowers us to say no to sin and yes to righteousness, to say no to lukewarmness, and to say yes to the Christ. And the Lord's table is this place.

It is a strengthening, recharging, renewing ordinance of God where the Spirit comes upon us in power once again to empower us to live in holiness.

He anoints our head with oil. He pours out His Spirit upon us so that whether we are the people of God in Glasgow, when I ministered at Aberdeen, here, we may live holy, consecrated, Christ-like lives glorifying and enjoying Him.

[28 : 09] Use the Lord's table therefore today as a personal spur toward public and private holiness, toward a more disciplined, self-controlled and passionate walk with your Lord Jesus.

And use the Lord's table as a spur to communal holiness, toward a more loving, compassionate and self-giving attitude toward each other.

We are priests of the living God. He calls us to be holy as He is holy. And so let's make that prayer as we come to the table.

Lord, take away my lukewarmness. I'm sick of it. Anoint me with Your Spirit that I may live in holiness and consecration to You all my days.

He provides for me He triumphs for me. He commissions me. And lastly, He satisfies me. He satisfies me. My cup overflows.

[29 : 19] What is it you are really looking for when you come to the Lord's table? What is it you're really looking for? Maybe this goes back to the first point. Are you looking for assurance, for forgiveness, for strength, for the journey?

What are you looking for? What are you hoping to gain by coming to the Lord's table today? Perhaps you're not thinking of anything at all. In which case, that's a very worrying state of affairs for you indeed.

Let me urge you to come to the table hungry, thirsty, to come looking for something eager to receive. Let me encourage you to come praying that God would give you a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ through the bread and the wine.

This is Christ's table. The bread is His body, the wine is His blood. If you want to find me, in general, you'll find me at my dinner table where I eat with my family.

If you want to find Christ and all the blessings which are in Christ, then look for Him at His table seated with His family.

[30 : 32] But let me give you two reasons as we close why you should come looking for Christ and His blessings here at the Lord's table and why, if you should do so, you'll find your cup overflowing.

You'll find your heart running over it with the fullness and satisfaction that is to be found in Jesus. First reason is this. Jesus drank the cup of God's curse empty so that you can drink the cup of God's blessing full.

Jesus drank the cup of God's curse empty so that you can drink the cup of God's blessing full. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus went into the garden of Gethsemane and He prayed most earnestly that the cup would pass from Him.

Now that cup to which He was referring was the cup of God's curse, the cup which is spoken of in the Old Testament as the wrath of God against all human sin. On the next day, Jesus was going to die on the cross as our sacrifice.

He was going to bear the penalty of our sins and the full wrath of God against our sin. All the wrong things we've ever done or ever will do, Jesus paid the price for them all upon the cross.

[31 : 47] He drained the cup to its very dregs. He paid the penalty in full. In the bread and the wine we have His body and His blood. We have the physical manifestations of how for us He drained the cup of God's curse empty on the cross in His tortured body and shed blood.

When in a few moments we eat and drink, we'll remember how He emptied the cup of God's wrath that we should drink. How He drank the poison which was due to us.

But not only on the cross was Jesus emptying the cup of God's curse due to us, He was filling the cup of God's blessing and offering it to us. He was filling it with all the blessings we spoke of in our first point today.

The blessings of forgiveness and righteousness, assurance and hope and love and meaning and fulfillment and joy. He was filling the cup with all His glorious perfections and through the gospel He says, it's for you.

Take it. Drink it. When we eat and drink at this table, we are not eating and drinking the judgment of sin unto ourselves. We're eating and drinking all the blessings Christ has prepared for us.

[33 : 06] All those blessings we listed in the first part of our sermon today. Drink this cup knowing there's not one drop of it which is of any condemnation for you.

There's not one part of poison in this cup. There's only the sweetness of the syrup of Christ's gospel goodness in the cross. And so pray as you go to the table.

Lord, fill me with gratitude for how Christ drank my death and how Christ offers me life through the gospel.

The second reason our cup overflows is because Christ offers us a cup overflowing with the blessings of knowing Him.

He offers us a cup overflowing with the blessings of knowing Him. Through the gospel, Jesus doesn't offer us a cup that is filled with blessing. a cup rather, He offers us, which is overflowing with blessings.

[34 : 12] A cup, a cup you can never empty. But every time you take a sip or a drink from this cup, you find that more has filled the void you drank from and then more and more it overflows.

in Ephesians 1, verse 3, Paul says, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

He's withheld nothing from us. He's opened up the treasure houses of heaven and He says to us, Here's the keys to every treasure chest. Take it, it's all yours.

Every sip of this gospel blessing satisfies, but there's no sip in this cup. This cup is overflowing. Every golden coin of the treasure house of blessing in Christ Jesus makes us richer than the world could ever know.

The treasure house is filled with blessing. Compare this with what we might have in the world. John D. Rockefeller was one of the richest men in the world of his day and he was once asked the question, How much money is enough?

[35 : 31] To which he famously answered, Just a little bit more. The cup of our economic prosperity may be full.

And yet it will never flow over. And we shall be utterly empty on the inside and dissatisfied with life. There is nothing this world can offer you which comes near to the heart joy of knowing Jesus and living in His blessing.

This is the piety of the Psalms we sing. This is the piety of the whole Bible. This is that which drove the first Christians to martyrdom in order that they might tell a lost world of the gospel of Christ's saving love.

No amount of money is enough for even the richest of men but Jesus is enough. And when you've got Jesus your cup overflows.

It's a picture you see of contentment and satisfaction and peace and joy. And this is something you can know through the gospel. This is something you can experience in even a greater way as you come to the Lord's table and eat His bread and drink the cup of His new covenant.

[36 : 43] By coming here to this table you're making a statement to the world. You're saying I find a deeper more lasting satisfaction in knowing Jesus than ever I could have done in anything the world has to offer me.

You find an overflowing cup when you come to Jesus and His salvation. And so now come to Him with the prayer Lord in this wine I'm going to drink show me just how much I've got in you and how much better knowing you is than anything else this world could offer.

Let's sing together now from God's Word in Psalm 23 Psalm 23 we're going to sing from the Sing Psalms version the tune is Terwathi page 28 The Lord is my shepherd no one shall I know He makes me lie down where the green pastures grow He leads me to rest where the calm waters flow My wandering steps He brings back to His way In straight paths of righteousness making me stay And this He has done His great name to display Psalm 23 the whole psalm to God's praise psalms Prince the soul de Sid God'scen psalm you the person of he the confusing in children the people say he