



The 23rd Psalm

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?

This Week's Message
January 14, 2024

Psalm 23: Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies...

Psalm 23:5
(New International Version)

Sunday's Scripture Reading ***Psalm 23***

¹*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

²*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

³*He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

⁴*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

⁵*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*

⁶*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

—King James Version.

¹*The Lord governeth me, and nothing shall fail to me;*

²*in the place of pasture there he hath set me. He nourished me on the water of refreshing;*

³*he converted my soul. He led me forth on the paths of rightfulness; for his name.*

⁴*For why though I shall go in the midst of shadow of death; I shall not dread evils, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff; those have comforted me.*

⁵*Thou hast made ready a board in my sight; against them that trouble me. Thou hast made fat mine head with oil; and my cup, that filleth greatly, is full clear.*

⁶*And thy mercy shall follow me; in all the days of my life. And that I dwell in the house of the Lord; into the length of days.*

—The Wycliffe Bible

On Sunday, I will continue the series of messages from the 23rd psalm.

On the left, you will notice that I have again included two different versions of the 23rd psalm. The first comes from the King James Version of the Bible, from which we have read each week, and the second comes from the Wycliffe Bible. John Wycliffe was a professor at Oxford University in England, and the translation of the Bible that was produced under his direction was first published in 1382, making it the earliest English translation of the Bible to be produced, predating the Guttenberg Bible by almost a century, and 154 years before William Tyndale was burned at the stake for publishing his English translation. Wycliffe, realizing that very few people could read Latin, the language of the Bible for centuries, desired to produce a version of the Bible that was accessible and able to be read by the general populace. Because this version of the Bible was also associated with a group who rejected many of the teachings of the Catholic Church, both the government of England and the Catholic Church sought to suppress its availability. The controversy over Wycliffe's translation led to a decision that no

Questions to Consider –

* Read Matthew 5:43-48. Do you think this kind of love is possible? Would such a love make us a doormat to others, as is often claimed?

* Many times, when people read a passage such as Matthew 5:43-48, they quickly want to qualify it, making a comment such as *but Jesus didn't mean this literally. He wouldn't want us to be a doormat, after all.* Considering this passage, when is it proper to stand up and defend yourself?

* Read Romans 12:18-21. Is it possible for us to *live in peace with everyone*? Even when we try to live in peace, what happens if the other party is not interested?

* What do you think is at the root of the conflict between people? Why can't people get along, and why do they do often resort so often to violence? And, on a larger scale, why is it so difficult for nations to get along? Can we realistically hope that it will one day change, or will it always be this way?

* How do we develop the type of love that Jesus demonstrated, the type of love that the Scriptures call *agape* love?

new translations could be produced in England without prior approval. It is a reminder that the history of the Bible is not only a fascinating history, but one that is filled with much controversy and many twists and turns.

Sunday's message comes from verse 5 of the psalm – *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.* We live in a world filled with enemies. People are considered as enemies because of a difference in nationality, political beliefs, religious beliefs, or any of a number of other reasons.

Jesus had enemies, obviously. His teachings so enraged people that he was seen as an enemy, and they put him to death. But Jesus did not name anyone as *his* enemy. In fact, one of the most famous sayings of Jesus comes as he is dying on the cross, when he said *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing* (Luke 23:34). Those responsible for the death of Jesus might have regarded him as their enemy, but Jesus certainly did not see them, or anyone else, as an enemy.

Jesus simply loved all people with no restrictions, no conditions, and no expectations of being loved in return. That is an amazing type of love, and it is what the Scriptures define as agape love.

As Jesus taught his disciples about love, it was always the type of love that exceeded that which is typical in our world. The type of love most often found in our world is a *reciprocal* love. *Reciprocal* love is when we love those who love us in return. *Reciprocal* love is what we would call a transactional love because it depends upon whether or not a person's love is returned by another. It is a type of *quid pro quo* – *if you love me, then I'll love you in return. If you do not love me, I will not love you.*

The love of Jesus, however, had no such conditions. In fact, the love of Jesus had no conditions whatsoever. It couldn't be broken. It was never rescinded because of something done by another person. It was not conditional upon another person returning the love. Jesus simply loved all people with no restrictions, no conditions, and no expectations of being loved in return. That is an amazing type of love, and it is what the Scriptures define as *agape* love.

I look forward to seeing you on Sunday – God bless you!