

Psalm 23 - *Anoints My Head with Oil*

Oriental kings welcomed their guests by providing fragrant oil for their heads. Perhaps we would compare this to rare and expensive perfume or cologne today.

A banquet guest might be given oil to put on his head as a sign of honor and hospitality. The oil acted like lotion, soothing the skin. Shepherds are still known to carry a little flask of oil to anoint the scratched face of the sheep that seek its food among thorns and brambles.

Priests and kings were customarily anointed with it. Also when the Jews had their festivals and wished to be happy, they would anoint or sprinkle themselves with such precious oil. Jesus mentions this in Matthew 6:17 when He says: "*When you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face.*" This custom, then, of using oil was common among these people when they wanted to be merry and happy (John 12:3). Mary Magdalene (Luke 7:38) also wished to make the Lord happy when she poured precious ointment of pure perfume on His head, for she saw that He was sad.

Max Lucado sheds light on the value of oil for sheep when he states: "Shepherds used oil for three purposes: to repel insects, to prevent conflicts, and to heal wounds. Bugs bug people, but they can kill sheep. Consider nose flies. If they succeed in depositing their eggs into the soft membrane of the sheep's nose, the eggs become worm-like larvae which drive the sheep insane. They forget to eat. They aren't able to sleep. Ewes stop milking, and lambs stop growing. Oil acts like a repellent. The fragrance keeps the insects at bay and the flock at peace. The sheep may be at peace until mating season. Two rams lower their heads and an old-fashioned head butt breaks out. To prevent injury, the shepherd anoints the rams. He smears a slippery, greasy substance over the nose and head. This lubricant causes them to glance off rather than crash into each other. They still tend to get hurt, however. And these wounds are the third reason the shepherd anoints the sheep." (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

By this phrase we are reminded that we are honored guests of Jesus the Good Shepherd. The oil of the God's comforting Word also soothes us when we are battered and beaten by the things in this life. We are given this consoling gift through the Gospel of God's Word. Jesus wants us to be happy in the sense that even during difficult times we can have joy. Then, through Jesus life, death and resurrection we are made His priests to serve Him and those around us.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you pouring your healing and soothing oil on me. Help me to find solace in the Gospel of Your Word. Thank you for using the oil to refresh me during especially difficult times. Help me to serve you faithfully as your honored priest and king. Amen.