

MEDITATION ON A PREPARED TABLE

One of the most sumptuous tables of culinary magnificence I have ever seen was aboard a cruise ship several decades ago. I had never witnessed such a display; it was truly overwhelming. There were exotic fruits of every color, pungent cheeses from around the world, fresh seafood cooked to perfection, sides of beef, racks of lamb, roasted poultry, the freshest of salads, and of course, those tantalizing desserts. A beautifully ornate ice sculpture was always placed at the center of the table and the ever-present attendants were available to satisfy your every desire.

There is a table, however, that is even greater than this. It is provided by the Lord Jesus and therefore more satisfying than any cruise ship extravaganza.

Psalms 23:5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

No one may partake of this lovingly prepared table except those who belong to the Lord Jesus, even though the delicacies are displayed for all to see. Here we are offered the incomparable fruit of the Spirit, the sincere milk and meat of the word sweetened with honey, the oil of gladness, the bread of life and the living water. I am humbled and grateful as I stand before this table but the choices are all so desirable. Which do I choose? If I greedily load my plate with everything, will it become bitter in my stomach? If I select only a portion, am I refusing the food that will supply the nutrients that I need to grow thereby?

There is a story in 1 Chronicles detailing David's dilemma when he is required by the Lord to choose his own punishment for his sin in numbering the people. The choices were; three years of famine, three months of destruction by the enemy, or three days of pestilence brought on by the sword of the Lord. David's decision reflected a thorough knowledge of the God he served, for he said:

1 Chron. 21:13 I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the Lord; for very great *are* his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man.

This table before me, lovingly prepared, holds what I need for my spiritual growth at this particular moment in time, but because I recognize my inability to choose wisely that which is needful, I make the following plea:

Proverbs 30:8 give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:

Through the lovingkindness of my Lord and Saviour, I am guided to a section of the table that looks rather unappetizing to me. I would never have chosen these morsels for myself. In this section, there is no colorful fruit, sweet honey, or oil of gladness. What is displayed here, in stark contrast, is the bread and water of affliction (1Ki 22:27). My flesh recoils, my heart begins to race, and my knees weaken as I remember the pain and suffering of past seasons of affliction. But, I do know my Lord and, as David, I know of His great mercies. Trials are designed to benefit me with spiritual growth, increased dependence on God, patience, a re-ordering of priorities, a renewed prayer life, and other like purposes, but there is a result that far exceeds any benefit to me. **My trials always prove God's faithfulness.** Whether through His blessings or through His appointed seasons of affliction, He is judged faithful; and for that, I rejoice.