

PSALM 23

You Anoint My Head

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Psalm 23.5b | August 16, 2020
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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our summer series in Psalm 23, looking at the phrase, “You anoint my head with oil.” I trust that throughout the previous ten weeks you’ve seen the incredible relevance of this ancient poem for following Jesus, our Good Shepherd. By God’s grace and through the revelation of His Holy Spirit, may this week be the same in this study and Sunday’s sermon!

II. Connecting with One Another

What do you think of when you hear that phrase, “You anoint my head with oil”? Any stories? Experiences? Passages of Scripture?

III. Study the Text

- a. The *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* gives three definitions of the verb *anoint*: “to apply an oily liquid, to consecrate or make sacred in a ceremony that includes the token applying of oil, to dedicate to the service of God.” This prompts Rabbi Harold Kushner to question, “How did we get from smearing liquid to being dedicated to God?”

What do you think? How do you think this practice came about? Have you ever been anointed? If so, how did it make you feel? If not, how do you think you would feel?

- b. As Pastor Bryan noted last week, some students of Scripture feel that the driving metaphor of a sheep and Shepherd shifts, in verse 5, to a banquet table with a host and a guest. This brief phrase, “You anoint my head with oil,” offers no clarification one way or the other. It can be read either way (perhaps that’s part of this psalm’s power – it is accessible to many different aspects of life?).

What did you think of above? A sheep being anointed by a Shepherd? Or a guest being anointed by their host?

- c. Let’s explore each possibility in turn. Read **1st Samuel 16.1-13**.

What is happening in this passage? What is the significance of the oil poured on David’s head? Did it *make* him king right then and there? Why or why not?

How do you think this experience shaped him? How do you think it affected his brothers? Do you think this interaction inspired the phrase in Psalm 23? If so, how?



- d. In the ancient world, anointing someone could occur for a variety of reasons: Consecration, inauguration, hospitality, sickness, and to dress wounds.

Which is happening in 1st Samuel 16?

- e. Shepherds anointed sheep for three reasons. First, to protect them from various insects that would make a home through their nasal cavities in their brains, driving sheep to insanity or even death. Sheep aren't the only animals that can be "bugged," though. We, too, need the anointing oil of the Holy Spirit to protect our minds from infection by the ways of the world.

Have you ever been "led astray" by unchristian thinking? How did a fresh anointing of God's Spirit free your troubled mind?

- f. A second reason shepherds anoint sheep is during the mating season, when rams literally butt heads to win the attention of ewes. Like boxers entering the ring, shepherds anoint their heads so that in their colliding and crashing, sheep would merely glance off of each other with little damage done.

Again, there is a perfect analog: Where do you need the anointing oil of God's Spirit during this difficult and divisive season? How do you need the oil of God's love when you're tempted to "step into the ring against an opponent"?

Who is that opponent you're now thinking of? How could God's anointing oil smooth over difficult interactions you may have?

- g. Lastly, shepherds anoint sheep to help bring healing and wholeness to wounds and injuries (from crashing their heads together!).

Where do you need healing and wholeness?

- h. To be anointed, sheep need to do three things: Go to their shepherd, put their heads down, and trust in his anointing power.

We need to do the same: Go to our Shepherd, bow before Him, and trust His Holy Spirit. Spend some time doing so today, because, like sheep, we need continual reapplication of His anointing.

IV. Pray

- a. Pray for those you know who are "bugged" and need protection, are "crashing their heads" against another, or feeling wounded, that they would know the Shepherd's presence, that he would anoint them with the oil of His Spirit,
- b. Lift up the ongoing threat of COVID-19, that God's wisdom would be sought and relied upon.

V. Digging Deeper

- a. Check out your Bible's concordance or click onto biblegateway.com to see all the references to anointing! Note **Matthew 26.6-13**, **Mark 6.7-13**, **Luke 4.4-30**, and **2nd Corinthians 1.18-22**.

