

43. Psalm 23:6a

“The Great Shepherd” Pt.11

(8-9-26)

Psalm 23:4–6 (NKJV)

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life...

As we have spent the last 3 months studying this psalm, the thing that David has been emphasizing, the theme that the psalm has been driving home is his confidence in his Shepherd's care, concern and competence toward him and for him.

Another word for confidence is—FAITH

The reason David could have such great faith in his Shepherd's care, guidance and ability was, not because he understood all the circumstances and situations his Shepherd led him into—but because he knew his Shepherd!

If you know your Shepherd, you don't have to know 'why' because you know Him (intimately).

And all of David's thoughts on this subject and all of his confidence toward his Shepherd are summed up in his statement—“**Surely goodness and mercy ('loving-kindness') shall follow me all the days of my life...**”

But of course, only if you're following the Lord Jesus, the Good and Faithful Shepherd.

One pastor put it well—

“Think of a shepherd walking in front of his sheep. The sheep follow him, and behind them are two sheep dogs named Goodness and Mercy, chasing the stragglers and keeping them close to the shepherd. The Good Shepherd keeps you close to Himself through His goodness and mercy always chasing after you.

Everything good in your life comes from the hand of God, so thank Him for it. Goodness is God giving us what we don't deserve. Mercy is God not giving us what we do deserve. This is good news, because if God chased after us in justice, we would all be in trouble.

If God was chasing after you with judgment and condemnation, of course you would run. But why would you run when you are being chased by goodness and mercy?”

When your confidence in the Lord is such that you allow Him to really lead your life even though He may lead you through some dark, and scary valleys at times—

Your trust in His character will allow you to say confidently like David, **“Only goodness and loving-kindness shall follow me...”**

Now, that's quite a statement by David—in fact, it's a statement that can only flow from a heart of faith—a heart that's totally confident in the Lord's leading and love.

Only faith can see goodness and loving-kindness in all God's past dealings in our lives.

One author gives insight into this statement, he said:

*“There is a strong verb tucked inside statement from Psalm 23. The word often translated ‘**follow**’ here carries the weight of pursuit. It paints a picture of steady feet and alert eyes, of care that moves toward you, that keeps coming. That simple sentence is like a hand on your shoulder. It reminds us that the Shepherd doesn't send supplies from a distance—He stays. He doesn't just write promises—He walks beside us. And because He is with us, His goodness and mercy are not random raindrops; they are a steady, sweet rain that softens hard ground and awakens new life.”*

And yet, how many Christians actually feel this way about their Shepherd's leading when they're going through difficult times in the present?

How many Christians really believe that no matter what occurs in their lives, they are being followed by God's goodness and by His loving kindness?

You see, this promise will only bless you and help you cope with the problems and adversities of life—if you look at those adversities through the eyes of *faith* and not with the eyes of *flesh*.

When Christians look at the circumstances of their lives through the pessimistic eyes of unbelief, it results in pessimistic conclusions—“*Surely anxiety will follow me all the days of my life or depression’—but not God’s goodness and loving-kindness.*”

Listen, it’s easy to see the goodness and loving-kindness of God when things are going well—when my health is good, or when my finances are prospering, when my job is secure or when my family is well and being blessed—when everything in my life is secure, prosperous and happy!

In those circumstances it’s easy to say, “*Surely goodness and mercy have been following me...*”

- But what about when my health fails (or the health of someone I love)—even to the point of death?
- What happens when my job is phased out and there is no money to pay the bills?
- What happens when my marriage is crumbling or my child rebels against the faith I tried so hard to instill in them and walks away from me and the Lord seemingly without a reason?
- What happens when a good friend suddenly turns against me and starts to trash me to others?

If at those times I can still say with confidence, “*Surely, God’s goodness and loving-kindness is following after me because I know He is with me and that all things are working together for my good because I love Him and belong to Him.*”

If at those times my faith remains strong—then I know it’s genuine and my relationship with my Shepherd, Jesus Christ, is real!

The truth is most of us when told this respond like Gideon when the Angel of the Lord spoke to him in the midst of a crisis and said to him, “*The Lord is with you*” to which Gideon responded,

“If the Lord is with me then why has all this happened to me (and to all of Israel)—and where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about saying, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the Lord has forsaken us!”

The truth is any unbeliever can thank and praise God when they see only good in their life—but only a true child of God looking through the eyes of faith can praise God in the midst of adversities.

We see this kind of faith manifested in the life of Job, when all of his possessions and children were suddenly taken from him in a single day:

Job 1:20–22 (NLT)

²⁰ Job stood up and tore his robe in grief. Then he shaved his head and fell to the ground to worship. ²¹ He said, “I came naked from my mother’s womb, and I will be naked when I leave. The Lord gave me what I had, and the Lord has taken it away. Praise the name of the Lord!” ²² In all of this, Job did not sin by blaming God foolishly.

When David said, “**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...**”—he was expressing a statement of faith about the future based on past experiences.

He was looking back over his life at the many trials and adversities he had experienced—and how God had been with him and had brought him through them all.

And as he reflected on the times that were the most painful and difficult he realized that God had used them in his life to make him the leader and man of God he had become.

And that because God *had* caused His goodness and loving-kindness to follow him in the past—he knew by faith that He would *continue* to cause them to follow him in the future.

In looking back over our lives as Christians there no doubt have been things that we have gone through which, at the time, seemed like senseless calamities and tragedies.

There have been paths which He has led us down that to us looked like blind alleys, dead ends, hopeless situations where we've felt confused and forsaken.

But that in the end turned out to be a blessing, where it eventually became obvious that the Lord worked it out for our good—

Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

When are we going to learn that our understanding of a situation is limited?

That when our Shepherd begins to lead our lives through one of those 'dark valleys' we talked about a couple of weeks ago and we're not sure where He's taking us—we need to see the road we're on through the eyes of faith.

And even if the path is rough, and the valley is dismal, depressing and frightening and the only thing that we have to cling to is the confidence that our Shepherd is with us and knows exactly where He's taking us—that and that alone is the kind of faith that is genuine and will sustain us during the most difficult experiences of life.

Since we're on the subject of faith—let me stop and talk about true biblical faith and exactly what it means.

"What is the definition of biblical faith?"

One author defines it this way—

"Faith is confidence in the trustworthiness of God. It is the conviction that what God says is true and that what He promises will come to pass."

Another puts it this way—

"Biblical faith is a confident expectation that grabs the future and drags in into the present so that it governs the way I think, live and view this life".

Oswald Chambers—

“Faith [true biblical faith] never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the One Who is leading.”

In other words, true faith doesn’t seek to control God, it seeks to be controlled by God—which is the complete opposite of what we hear from the mouths of Word of Faith teachers and TV evangelists today. (Comment)

True faith perseveres, it hangs in there and sees us through the difficulties of life.

In fact, biblical faith is so important to our Christian lives that between the principle *“the just shall live by faith”* at the end of Hebrews chapter 10, and the exhortation *“run with endurance the race set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith”* at the beginning of chapter 12—the Holy Spirit inserts an entire chapter (often referred to as the ‘hall of faith’) defining, explaining and illustrating what true faith is and what it looks like in the lives of those who possess it.

And one of the great lessons that Hebrews 11 teaches us is that just because a person has great faith doesn’t mean they won’t experience great adversities, persecutions or even death for their faith in Jesus.

And yet the point he makes is that true faith trusts God no matter what—as Job said, *“Though He slays me I will still trust Him.”*

What is faith?—The best definition of faith is the one that comes right out of Heb.11:1 the great Hall of Faith chapter—

Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV)

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Faith is always tied to *“things hoped for”* never to things that have already come to pass—even as Paul said in Romans 8—

Romans 8:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ ...hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?

Biblical hope is never a “*maybe hope*” or a “*hope so hope*”—it is always a certain hope, a settled fact, a sure thing kind of hope.

And the reason that biblical hope is a sure thing, a settled fact, is because it’s always tied to a promise of God (Who cannot lie) and therefore is absolutely guaranteed to come to pass—even as the writer proclaimed in Hebrews 6:19, “*This hope [based on God’s promises] is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls...*”

Look, God is gracious and will often give us things we ask for even if He hasn’t specifically promised those things to us—Christmas gifts for the kids when you’re out of work or a nice vacation for the family that we can’t afford but He graciously provides when we ask Him.

However, these things are not promised to us and therefore are not a ‘sure hope’—in other words, we can hope that God will answer us and give us what we’re asking for in our prayer—but it’s not guaranteed.

What He has promised us, what He has guaranteed us is the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of eternal life when we put our faith in Jesus.

Furthermore, once we have put our faith in Jesus, He has promised to provide our physical needs because He is our Father and we are His children.

Peter said that the Lord has given to His children “*many great and precious promises*”—encompassing everything we need for life and godliness.

And so, these promises become the focus of our faith and the certainty of our hope—that what God has promised He is able to perform.

But getting back to David's comments in Psalm 23:6.

As I said earlier, it could be that when David said, **“Only goodness and loving-kindness will follow me...”**—it's probable that he was looking back over his life at the many trials and adversities he had experienced—many of which were painful and undeserved (like when Saul pursued him for 10 years trying to kill him).

And yet as he reviewed the events of his life, many of which didn't make sense at the time, he concluded that—there wasn't a single dilemma or disaster that had befallen him that in the end didn't demonstrate in some way the goodness and loving-kindness of God toward him!

This in itself gave David hope, for as he looked at the past and how God had worked on his behalf (even in his adversities) he was confident that *goodness and mercy would continue to follow him all the days of his life.*

God's goodness and loving-kindness toward His children are a part of His character (Ex.34:5-7) and must be the foundation upon which your understanding of God is built.

This is critical when it comes to dealing with adversity in our lives that—no matter what happens in your life you'll be able to get through it, if you'll remember 2 things—that God is good; and that God is love.

If you will keep those 2 things in your heart and mind—you'll be able to face the blackest night and the darkest valleys of life with hope and confidence in your Shepherd.

Now with all this in mind we need to ask ourselves, *“Should all of this goodness and loving-kindness that the Lord pours out upon my life stay only with me and be hoarded—or should my life be a channel through which they can flow to bless others?”*

It could be that since God had been so good to him and had blessed him so much, that David purposed in his heart that wherever he went and whomever he came in contact with that he would leave behind him goodness and loving-kindness as well.

Just as God's goodness and mercy *flow to me* all the days of my life, so goodness and mercy should *flow from me* (be left behind me) as a witness and blessing to others wherever I go.

As we have said, in earlier studies, if mismanaged, sheep can destroy a piece of land.

Philipp Keller in his book 'A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23' comments on this,

"If not managed properly, sheep can be the most destructive creatures among all livestock. They can in a short time utterly ravage and ruin a piece of land almost beyond repair—however, on the other hand, they can be the most beneficial of all livestock if handled properly. Their manure is the best balanced of any produced by domestic livestock. When scattered over the pastures it provides enormous benefit to the soil. No other livestock consumes as wide a variety of herbage. Sheep eat all sorts of weeds and other undesirable plants which might otherwise invade a field. For example, sheep love the buds and tender tips of the Canadian thistle which if not controlled can quickly become a problem for a sheep rancher. In a few years a well-managed flock of sheep will clean up and restore a piece of ravaged land as no other creatures.

In ancient literature, sheep were referred to as 'those of the golden hooves' simply because they were regarded and esteemed so highly for their beneficial effect on the land. Where there had previously been badly damaged and devastated land, there would be rich flourishing pastures when sheep would be allowed to properly graze off the land. In other words, in the hands of a good shepherd, goodness and mercy would literally follow a flock. They would leave behind them something worthwhile, productive, beautiful and beneficial to other sheep that would come after them.

This question must be put to each one of us—is this true of our lives? Do I leave blessing or blight behind me? Do I leave a trail of sadness or of gladness behind me? Is my memory, in other people's minds, entwined with mercy and goodness, or would they rather forget me altogether?"

I have known many Christians who have left a lot of 'manure' behind them when they left our church, but it didn't bless and truth be told, I have tried hard to forget them altogether going forward.

Isaiah 52:7 (NKJV)

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good *things*...

Joel 2:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Who knows *if* He will turn and relent, And leave a blessing behind Him...

If you and I are following the Good Shepherd, we can't help but leave behind us goodness and loving-kindness.

Remember, the Bible sums up the life of Jesus in the simple yet profound statement, *“He went around doing good.” (Acts 10:38)*

In other words, there was a sweetness to Jesus that attracted the hardest and most vile sinners (tax-collectors and prostitutes)—while at the same time the sweetest and most innocent of children.

People loved to be around Jesus and He loved to be around them and as such wherever He went He left behind Him a trail of goodness and mercy.

Maybe sinners loved to be around Jesus so much because He always received them with love and compassion.

Even the most flagrant sinners found forgiveness with Him—where with the Scribes and Pharisees, they were looked down upon, criticized and condemned.

It begs the question—where do you and I fit in?

Do we fit more the character of Jesus or the attitude of the Pharisees toward others?

Do we put ourselves on a spiritual pedestal from which we look down in judgment upon others—or do we stoop down to help those that have fallen, extending to them compassion and love leaving behind us everywhere we go goodness and mercy even as Jesus did?

As one pastor put it—

“Do you see sinners with the compassion of Christ or with the critical eye of a Pharisee? Are you willing to overlook the faults and weaknesses in others, recognizing that you yourself are far from perfect, extending forgiveness to them even as God through Christ has forgiven you? The only real, practical measure of my appreciation for the goodness and mercy God has shown to me, is the extent to which I am prepared, in turn, to show goodness and mercy to others. If I am unforgiving, intolerant, critical and unloving then it is certain that I know little or nothing in a practical sense of Jesus’ forgiveness and mercy toward me.

It's the self-righteous, unloving attitudes among Christians today that have turned off so many people toward the Christian church and Jesus Christ. Remember, the Pharisees repelled sinners—Jesus attracted them!"

How can we say we love God when we don't love people made in His image?

If you want to show Jesus love—then show it to others.

If you want to bless the Lord—then bless others.

When I take the time to love others—I'm loving Him.

When I do for others, I'm doing for Him—as Jesus said, *"Whatever you do for the least of these, My brethren, you do for Me."* (Matt. 25:40)

As you walk behind the Lord picking up the blessings He so freely drops for you remember to let them drop as freely from your hand to those behind you—even as Jesus commanded us,

"Freely you have received, freely give." (Matt. 10:8)

So that you can purpose in your heart to say, **"Only goodness and loving-kindness shall follow me all the days of my life..."**