Psalm 23:6 *Walking With the Shepherd: All the Days of My Life*

***What is It?***When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, it did not take long for the people to begin complaining. Even though they had recently seen incredible displays of God’s power—10 mighty plagues on the Egyptians and the parting of the Red Sea--they quickly became fearful that their journey into the desert was a suicide mission.

In many ways, it’s hard to blame them. The number of Israelites who walked out of Egypt was somewhere in the neighborhood of 2 million people. That’s a good size city even by modern standards. And they walked away from what passed as civilization into a desert. All those people needed water to drink, food to eat, shelter and latrines and so on.

Imagine, if you would, if the entire population of Spencer—about 10,000 people—moved to Scharnberg. And imagine if you were responsible for making sure all those people were fed and sheltered and kept healthy. Even granting all of our modern conveniences like cars and cell phones and the existence of three grocery stores here in Spencer some 7 miles away, can you imagine what a logistical nightmare it would be to arrange transportation of enough food from here to there, getting it distributed fairly, and seeing to all the other needs like fresh water and sanitation and so on?

Now imagine being one of 2 million people in a literal desert!

So shortly after the Red Sea, the people started complaining. It didn’t take them long to start pining for Egypt. They got selective memory about sitting around “pots of meat” and eating “all the food we wanted” (Ex. 16:3). They turned against Moses and Aaron and accused them of bringing them out to the desert to starve.

But, of course, God provided. One morning they woke to discover a layer of dew covering the camp. As they looked closer, they saw “thin flakes like frost on the ground” all over the desert floor. The Israelites looked at each other and said “What is it?” (Ex. 16:13-15)

Then one brave soul picked up one of the flakes and put it in his mouth. He was surprised to find that it tasted good. It “tasted like wafers made with honey.” It was nutritious like bread. The Israelites called it “manna”, which sounds a lot like the Hebrew word for “What is it?” (Ex. 16:31)

The LORD was providing, and in a big way. There was enough of the stuff on the ground for every Israelite to get a portion. And by the time the sun grew hot, that which was left on the ground melted away (Ex. 16:21)

But the manna also came with instructions. When the Israelites went out to gather it each morning, they were told to take only what they needed for that day. They were told not to store up any for the next day. Instead, they would need faith that God would provide tomorrow what was needed for tomorrow.

Some of the Israelites had a hard time with that. They were fearful about what tomorrow would bring. And so, when they saw plenty of manna on the ground today, they gathered double and triple portions. But the next day, when they arose from their beds, they found that what they had saved from yesterday had grown bad. Already it was infested with maggots and had begun to stink. (Ex. 16:20)

They needed to trust that God’s blessings would renew every morning (cf. Lam. 3:23). They needed to have faith that God would provide future grace.

***Future Grace***Today we come to the end of our series on Psalm 23. For the past month and a half we have been going through the famous “Shepherd Psalm” verse by verse. We have seen God’s commitment to care for and protect His flock. We have seen that even when we walk through the darkest valleys, the Shepherd is with us. We’ve been reminded that we are guests at the Lord’s banqueting table. And now, today, we are going to see that the God who was faithful yesterday, and who walks with us today, also promises to be good to us in the future.

**Let’s read the Psalm**. As we have each of the past weeks, we will read it together:

**1**The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
**2**    He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
**3**    he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
    for his name’s sake.
**4**Even though I walk
    through the darkest valley,
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 overflows.
**6**Surely your goodness and love will follow me
    all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
    forever.

Our verse for today is the last one. **Psalm 23:6**. This is a verse about future grace.

**6**Surely your goodness and love will follow me
    all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
    forever.

This is a future grace verse. This is a verse that tells us God is not done being good to us. This is a verse that believes God has more grace to give us. Just like with the Israelites in the desert who had to learn that the God who provided daily bread today would also provide it tomorrow, this verse promises there are more blessings from God in our future.

I’ll put it like this, this is the big idea for the sermon today:

**Our confidence that God will be gracious to us tomorrow allows us to live committed to Him today.**

Our motivation for living for Jesus, the strength that allows us to say no to sin and live in sacrificial obedience to God, comes from knowing that God promises to be good to us all the days of our life. Grace isn’t just something that happened yesterday or today, it is a promise for tomorrow as well.

I’ve used a phrase a couple of times already today that I want to talk about a little more: *Future Grace*. That’s the title of a book by John Piper. It’s a book that will be 25 years old next year.

And the idea behind the book is that we have a tendency, in Christianity, to live with a mindset that thinks of all of God’s grace to us as something that happened in the past. We have a tendency to celebrate the cross of Jesus—as we well should—as the place where our forgiveness was earned and God’s grace poured out. So we tend to spend a lot of time looking backwards to the cross, and singing about what happened at the cross, and talking about the cross as the place where grace was given to us.

But one of the unintended consequences of that is we begin to think of grace only in the past tense. We think of grace as something that happened in the past, and so we begin see the purpose of our lives going forward as a response to that past grace.

There are a couple of problems with that mindset.

For one thing, it leads to what Piper calls the “debtor’s ethic.” The debtor’s ethic is the idea we must “pay back” what God has done for us in Jesus. It’s the mindset that says Jesus has done so much for me at the cross that I am now going to live the rest of my life in an effort to make it up to Him. This eliminates the grace of God as a gift and makes it more into a loan. It’s a way of thinking that says God is lending me forgiveness, and every good deed or act of obedience is a mortgage payment I am making against that loan.

The other problem with locating grace entirely in the past is that it turns grace into a one-time thing. We think of grace only as something that happened, back then, when Jesus died on the cross. And we lose sight of all of God’s promises to continue to be gracious to us in the future.

We need to see grace as something that continues to happen, and will continue to happen. We do not live in the past. All the days we have left to live are in our future. And so, if we are to continue to live in a way that honors and pleases God, we are going to be dependent on new and fresh outpourings of grace. Piper writes this:

This grace is there in the future to be trusted and lived on. It is there to give the motivation and power for our obedience. This infinite overflow of God’s grace is dishonored when we fail to appropriate it by faith in future grace…Past grace is glorified by intense and joyful gratitude. Future grace is glorified by intense and joyful confidence. (p. 47)

Just like the Israelites in the desert needed to lay their heads on their pillows at night confident that there would be more manna in the morning; so we need to love and serve the Lord confident that He will bless us with what we need with each new day.

And that’s why I say that **Psalm 23:6** is a future grace verse. This is a verse that looks to the future with full confidence in God’s ongoing supply of grace. There are two promises of future grace in this verse:

***Pursued by Grace***First is what I am going to call a **Godly Entourage.** The Psalmist is confident that as he moves into the future he will be accompanied by God’s blessing. This is **the first line** of verse 6:

Surely your goodness and love will follow me
    all the days of my life,

As I wrote in last months newsletter, the English translation of “follow me” is a little weak here. To “follow” may imply that goodness and love are always trailing behind me, one or two steps back, never quite able to catch up. That wouldn’t be all that encouraging: “Surely goodness and love will lag behind me all my days.” That doesn’t sound all that hopeful.

But the word David uses here in the original language is actually much more vigorous than that. It’s a word that could be translated as “pursue” or even “chase down.” The idea is not that God’s goodness and love are always scrambling to catch up, but rather that God’s goodness and love are actively stalking me. That I am always in the crosshairs of God’s goodness and love.

That’s why I chose the word “entourage.” To me, the picture here is one where David is like the President, and God’s goodness and love are like his Secret Service bodyguards. I have this picture of the Psalmist moving through life with these large guys in suits and sunglasses with the earpieces in constantly hovering around him and vigilant against any threats. And the name tags on those bodyguards say “Agent Goodness” and “Agent Love.” These blessings from God are literally shadowing David.

Or, if you want to stick with the Shepherd metaphor, I saw several sermons this week that referred to “goodness” and “love” as God’s sheepdogs. Wherever the sheep go, these two sheepdogs of the Lord’s are constantly present.

And David’s confidence here is that whatever his future days bring, God’s goodness and love will be present. So what does that mean?

Both “goodness” and “love” are significant Old Testament words.

The word translated as “goodness” is the Hebrew word *tob*. It is a word that means beauty, perfection, plenty, and beneficence. It’s the kind of word you would use to describe something that is, objectively, good.

And goodness is one of the attributes of God, as well as a description of His very essence. God, by nature, is inherently good. And God, because of Who He is, defines what is good. He is the foundation of goodness and all true goodness in the world ultimately derives from Him.

And the promise, here, is that goodness will be the constant companion of those who belong to the shepherd. That doesn’t mean that everything that happens to us will be objectively good—we were just talking two verses ago about passing through the valley of the shadow of death and the verse just before this one talks about the presence of our enemies—it doesn’t mean that all of our experiences will be good; but it is a promise that whatever we experience can be turned—by God—to our good.

The New Testament parallel to this line is probably **Romans 8:28** which says:

**28**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Goodness will follow me all the days of my life. In all things God works for the good of those who love him. We can have confidence in God’s ongoing, future grace because we know that no matter what happens, God is constantly working for our good.

The other word, **translated here** as “love,” is also a major Old Testament word. In the original Hebrew it is the word *hesed.* It’s one of the most important words in the Old Testament for describing how God loves us. It could be translated as “loving-kindness” or “loyal-love.” Early Greek translations tended to use the word for “mercy,” which explains why the King James Version of Psalm 23:5 says: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”

Lois Tverberg, in a book called “Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus” writes this:

Hebrew has a word for love that is richer and deeper than English has ever conceived of—*hesed* (HEH-sed). Based in a covenantal relationship, *hesed* is a steadfast, rock-solid faithfulness that endures to eternity… *Hesed* is a love that is so enduring that it persists beyond any sin or betrayal to mend brokenness and graciously extend forgiveness…

*Hesed* is to love as God loves. When God’s presence passed by Moses on Mt. Sinai and revealed his very essence, God proclaimed his great *hesed*. (Exodus 34:6) In his book *The Bible Among the Myths*, biblical scholar John Oswalt describes it this way:

The word hesed…[is] the descriptor par excellence of God in the Old Testament. The word speaks of a completely undeserved kindness and generosity done by a person who is in a position of power. This was the Israelites’ experience of God. He revealed himself to them when they were not looking for him, and he kept his covenant with them long after their persistent breaking of it had destroyed any reason for his continued keeping of it. …Unlike humans, this deity was not fickle, undependable, self-serving, and grasping. Instead he was faithful, true, upright, and generous—always.

Like other Hebrew verbs, *hesed* is not just a feeling but an action. It intervenes on behalf of loved ones and comes to their rescue…Because *hesed* is often active, it’s translated as “mercy” or “loving-kindness,” but neither of these words fully convey that *hesed* acts out of unswerving loyalty even to the most undeserving. [Excerpt from Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus (Zondervan, 2012)]

There’s a story told about the former Mayor of New York City, Fiorello LaGuardia—the guy the airport is named after—that illustrates this word:

One winter's night in 1935, Fiorello LaGuardia, the irrepressible mayor of New York, showed up at a night court in the poorest ward of the city. He dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench. That night a tattered woman, charged with stealing a loaf of bread, was brought before him. She defended herself by saying, "My daughter's husband has deserted her. She is sick, and her children are starving."

The shopkeeper refused to drop the charges, saying, "It's a bad neighborhood, your honor, and she's got to be punished to teach other people a lesson."

LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the old woman and said, "I've got to punish you; the law makes no exceptions. Ten dollars or ten days in jail." However, even while pronouncing sentence, LaGuardia reached into his pocket, took out a ten-dollar bill, and threw it into his hat with these famous words: "Here's the ten-dollar fine, which I now remit, and furthermore, I'm going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant."

The following day, a New York newspaper reported: "Forty-seven dollars and fifty cents was turned over to a bewildered old grandmother who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren. Making forced donations were a red-faced storekeeper, seventy petty criminals, and a few New York policemen."

Sometimes we get what we don't deserve. That old grandmother, by the letter of the law, deserved punishment. But she didn't get it. She deserved justice, but she got mercy. She deserved a stay in the city jail, but she got to go back home. She deserved the accompaniment of criminals, but she found herself in the presence of her family. <https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/sermon-blessings-cup-overflows-goodness-mercy-psalm-23>

The confidence of David is that for the rest of his days, he is going to be accompanied by a Godly Entourage of goodness and love. The *tob* and *hesed* of God will be his daily, future companions.

***Housed by Grace***There’s a second promise of future grace in Psalm 23:6, and it’s found in the second line. I’m going to call it a **Godly Home.** The Psalmist is confident as he moves into the future that he has an eternal place by the Shepherd’s side. Look at the final line of **the Psalm**:

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
    forever.

The house of the Lord is likely a reference to the place where God was said to dwell in the Old Testament: that is the tabernacle or the temple. So this could be read as David saying that he intends to take up residence in the tabernacle. **Psalm 27:4** says something similar:

**4**One thing I ask from the Lord,
    this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
    all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
    and to seek him in his temple.

No humans actually lived in the tabernacle though. “Dwelling in the house of the Lord”, then, is best thought of as being symbolic for being in relationship with God. The tabernacle represents God’s presence in the midst of Israel, and dwelling in the house of the Lord is being in the presence of God. It picks up on the image of the Generous Host and the Honored Guest from verse 5.

The word translated as “forever” in **Psalm 23:6** is probably meant to be parallel to the phrase “all the days of my life” in the first line. It is not necessarily a reference to what happens after we die, but an expression of confidence that God’s presence will be with David for all the days he has left on this earth.

And yet, I do think there may be some reference to the afterlife as well. The choice by the translators to use the word “forever” is not by accident. And that is in no small part due to the New Testament equivalent to Psalm 23: John 10.

I’ve made reference to John 10 in each sermon in this series. John 10 is known as the Good Shepherd discourse, where Jesus makes the connection between the Shepherd Psalm and Himself. And the Good Shepherd discourse ends like this, **John 10:27-28**:

**27**My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. **28**I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

“I give them eternal life.” “They will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” This is a reference to heaven. It is the promise that, when you belong to the Shepherd, no matter what befalls you in this life, there is an eternal reward still to come.

And there’s another New Testament reference we should pay attention to as well. It comes from the book of Revelation, **Revelation7:15-17:**

**15**Therefore,

“they are before the throne of God
    and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne
    will shelter them with his presence.
**16**‘Never again will they hunger;
    never again will they thirst.
The sun will not beat down on them,’
    nor any scorching heat.
**17**For the Lamb at the center of the throne
    will be their shepherd;
‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’
    ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

This is one of the best pictures the Bible gives of what heaven looks like right now. It’s a picture of a “great multitude that no on could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:9). They are the ones who “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:14). And they are engaged in worship before the throne, waiving palm branches and singing “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” (Rev. 6:10)

And what I want you to notice is the references to Psalm 23 in these verses: “The Lamb… will be their shepherd.” “He will lead them to springs of living water.” “He will shelter them with his presence.”

This is the ultimate promise of future grace: a day is coming when all who belong to Jesus will find themselves gathered around the throne. There will be no more hunger or thirst. There will be shelter from the blazing sun. God will wipe every tear from our eyes. Whatever we face, whatever sacrifice we are called to make, whatever momentary satisfaction of sin we turn away from, we know it will all pale in comparison to the glory to be revealed when at last we are called home to the Savior’s house forever.

Last week during communion, Bryan sang the old hymn “All the Way My Savior Leads Me.” I love the third verse, it is a great promise of future grace:

All the way my Savior leads me:
Oh, the fullness of His love!
Perfect rest to me is promised
In my Father’s house above:
When my spirit clothed immortal,
Wings its flight to realms of day
This my song thru endless ages
Jesus Led me all the way

God’s grace to us in the past is precious and perfect. If we boast in anything, we should boast in the cross of Christ, for that is where all our blessings have been purchased.

But God hasn’t just apportioned His grace to us in the past. It’s not a one-time transaction when we put our faith in Him.

Rather, God promises us future grace. And it is our confidence that God will be gracious to us tomorrow that allows us to live committed to Him today. As we move into the future, we know that we are shadowed by a Godly entourage of goodness and love. We know that we have waiting for us a Godly home.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
 and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.