

FACING THE FUTURE

Sterling UMC
February 21, 2010
Psalm 23:6

A lot of people spend their lives worrying about tomorrow. They never enjoy today because they're worrying about tomorrow. They have great fear when it comes to facing the future. Why? Because we don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. It can be a pretty scary thing. And yet David, as he concludes Psalm 23, is not worried.

In Psalm 23:6 he says, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

No anxiety, no fear of the future, no worry about tomorrow. Why? Because He knows the Good Shepherd. He's confident -- "surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life."

Where do you get that kind of confidence? If you're a believer, you get it from the Lord, our Good Shepherd.

This morning as we conclude this series on the 23rd psalm I want to share with you three reasons why you can face the future with confidence.

1. BECAUSE GOD IS WATCHING OVER ME.

Psalm 145:20 (NIV), "The Lord watches over all who love him..." Friends, God cares about the details of your life. Like a father, He will provide for you in the future. We don't know what the future holds but we do know Who holds it. We know God is in control and God loves you and wants to help you. He says, I will be like a Father and will watch over you.

David says, "Surely goodness will follow me..." What does he mean by that? Obviously David had disappointments in life. Not everything that happened to him was good. He's not saying, "Surely, only good things are going to happen to me." That's not true. Bad things happen to good people. He's not saying only good things are going to happen. He's saying only goodness will follow. Good things will always come out of whatever happens even the bad, the evil, the difficult. God will insure that good will come out -- it will follow whatever happens to David.

That's the great promise that God has given to believers. We hear it again in Romans 8:28 (LB), "We know that all that happens to us is working for our good! IF we love God and are fitting into his plans." If you're a believer, the Bible says all things are working together for good -- not all things are good -- but working together for good. That's what it means "goodness will follow me". There is no difficulty, dilemma, defeat, disaster in

the life of a Christian that ultimately God won't bring good out of. Eventually, He'll bring good out of it. Somehow.

Often it's difficult to see God's goodness when you're going through a tragedy. There are times when you don't feel like God is good. You don't feel His mercy. Sometimes you feel like God's goodness is hidden. Even Jesus, on the cross, said, "My God, my God, Why?" We go through those experiences sometimes in life -- Why? And we don't see goodness in the situation. It's only later, looking back, that we see God's goodness and how He was working for good.

One thing you can count on: God will always be with you through adversity. He doesn't exempt you from adversity but walks with you through the adversity. Not only that, God can bring good out of evil. That's exciting.

II. BECAUSE GRACE IS WORKING IN ME

Not only goodness will follow me but "...mercy will follow me all the days of my life."

Isaiah 60:10 (LB) "I will have mercy on you through my grace." What is grace? Grace is God's Riches At Christ's Expense. GRACE. It's all God's able to do for us because of Christ. Grace is the fact that God gives you what you need, not what you deserve. Aren't you glad God doesn't give you what you deserve? The Bible says, God is gracious and gives us what we need, not what we deserve. What is mercy? Mercy is grace in action. Why do we need mercy? Because we're imperfect. We stumble and fall, we blow it, we make mistakes. So we need not only God's goodness, we need His mercy. We need His forgiveness, pardon, and healing.

When you really understand God's grace and mercy, that God isn't out there trying to get even with you, if you've given your life to Jesus Christ, Jesus has taken the penalty for everything you've ever done wrong or will do wrong, on the cross. He paid for it, you don't. So when a bad thing happens you don't have to think God's getting even with you. God doesn't "get even" for things that have already been paid for on the cross. That's grace, mercy.

When you understand God's grace and mercy then you have no need to fear the future.

Listen to these words from Psalm 103 (vs. 2-11 LB), "I will... not forget the glorious things God does for me. He forgives all my sins. He heals me. He ransoms me from hell. He surrounds me with loving-kindness... He fills my life with good things ... He is merciful and tender toward those who don't deserve it; He is slow to get angry... He never bears a grudge ... He has not punished us as we deserve for our sins for His mercy is as great as the height of the heavens. ... He is like a father to us, tender and sympathetic to those who reverence him."

When you understand mercy, that God is not only being good to you, but He's being merciful to you in handling your mistakes, your sins, your faults, then you don't have any reason to fear the future.

Mercy means that when I'm going through a tough time, a valley, a difficulty -- even one that I've brought on myself -- God is there to help me out. As Hebrews 4:16 (NCV) says, "...we can come before God's throne where we can receive mercy and grace to help us when we need it."

Mercy, like goodness, follows us in life. Picture a parent following a little child around picking up after them.

God is constantly picking up your messes. God is behind you, picking it all up, putting it back together, working it all out, taking care of the messes. That's mercy.

And when does this happen? It says, "Mercy will follow all the days of my life" -- not some of the days, but all the days. God doesn't turn His goodness and His mercy on and off. He doesn't treat you nice one day and the next day treat you badly. All the days of my life, I'll have God's goodness and God's mercy.

You're going to experience many different kinds of days in life. Happy, sad, sick, depressing, lonely, difficult -- that's why we fear the future -- we don't know what's going to happen. But you will never face a day without God's goodness and mercy with you if you've given your life to Jesus Christ. He will be with you all the time. Some days you won't feel it, some days you won't see God's mercy and grace and it may be hard to determine. But surely, certainly, without a doubt God's goodness and mercy are going to be there even in the tough times in the future.

The Goodness and mercy of our Good Shepherd ought to be enough to help us face the future, but there is one more thing. I can face the future with confidence because...

III. HEAVEN IS WAITING FOR ME

David says, "... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." That's one of the most important little connections we see in the Bible. It connects yesterday and today with tomorrow. God says, "I've got this great life planned for you and surely goodness and mercy will follow you through it, BUT that's not the end! I've got something else at the end!"

He builds it to a crescendo. David ends this Psalm by saying "We're going to heaven!" Jesus saves the best until last. With God it just keeps getting better and better. The best is yet to come.

2 Corinthians 5:1 (NCV) says, "We know that our body will be destroyed. But when that happens, God will have a house for us. It will not be a house made by human hands; instead, it will be a home in heaven that will last forever." How long is forever going to last? *Forever!* Someday your body is going to die, but you aren't. Your body is going to

end but that's not going to be the end of you. And if you have placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ you are going to spend eternity in heaven with Him.

Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:1-3 NIV)

Why are Christians the most confident people about the future? Why? Because death, for a Christian, is a transfer, a promotion. It's on to better things. No more problems. No more pain. No more suffering. No more disease. No more depression. No more loneliness. No more fear. No more tears. No more death! If you have accepted Christ as your Savior that is what awaits you.

Listen to how Revelation 21:4 (LB) puts it, "He will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain. All of that has gone forever." Doesn't that make you a little homesick for heaven?

1 Peter 1:4-6 (LB) says, "God has reserved for his children the priceless gift of eternal life; it is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God, in his mighty power, will make sure that you get there safely to receive it because you are trusting him... So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though the going is rough for a while down here."

The problem is that even most Christians act like that all there is to life is going on here and now. That's all that matters. No! This is just preparation for where you're going to spend all of eternity.

Don't act as if everything that matters is what is here and now. It's only temporary. Don't invest your life for things. Getting things is not the goal of life. Getting prepared for heaven is. Don't buy into the world's system. Don't live on a superficial level. Live in light of eternity. Realize you're not going to be here forever. You're going to be in eternity forever. Don't waste your whole life trying to get a bunch of things for right now that you're not going to keep anyway. Live in light of eternity.

How do I know I'm going to heaven? If you were to die tonight are you sure you would go to heaven? I don't have an ounce of doubt in my mind that I would. Not because I deserve it, but because I've done what the Bible says to get ready.

Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish....." John 10:27-28a (NIV) How do I know I'm going to heaven? Two things: Jesus says, "My sheep listen to me and they follow me." Are you doing that? Are you listening to what God says to do with your life? Are you following Jesus Christ? Is He your Shepherd and your Savior? If you say, Yes, I'm listening to God and I'm trying to let Him lead my life, letting Jesus Christ be my Savior. Then you can say with absolute confidence, Surely I know I will dwell in the house of the

Lord forever. I *will* dwell. Not I *might* or I *wonder*. I *know* I'm going to heaven, because I've done what the Bible says.

When you face the future, what do you see? Do you look at it with eyes of doubt? With eyes of cynicism? With eyes of expecting the worse? You have two choices in life: You can either face the future as a cynic, a doubter, with negative thoughts, expecting the worse. Or you can face the future expecting God to be with you and His goodness and His mercy to follow you all the days of your life. It is amazing how much better life gets when you start to actively look for God's goodness and God's mercy in every experience. It'll change your life.

As we conclude this series this morning over these last weeks we have seen in Psalm 23 how much God loves you. We've seen how much God cares for you, how He says "I want to be your shepherd." What's the bottom line of these seven weeks? What have we learned? If I summed it up in one sentence it's this: Jesus is all you need. The good shepherd provides protection, provision, peace, providence, companionship, and paradise. What more could you want? What more do you need? That covers it all. Jesus is all you need.