

I Shall Not Want For Eternity

Psalm 23:6

Pastor John Miller

This is the last time we're going to read together Psalm 23. I had one of our ushers come up to me after first service, and he said, "I've memorized Psalm 23," and he recited it for me. What a blessing that is to have God's Word hidden in your heart. I trust that you've done the same; that as we've gone through, you've meditated on this psalm and put it to memory. Let's read it out loud together as a congregation.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

No doubt you've heard the familiar expression, "The best is yet to come" or the expression, "He saved the best for last." In John 2, when Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding of Canaan, the host of the wedding actually said, "Most people serve the good wine first, and when that's gone, they give them the bad wine at the end, because they can't tell the difference by then." But with astonishment, he said, "You served the best wine at the end. You've saved the best for last." That's a picture of what God does in our lives. God saves the best 'till the end.

When we come to the end of this psalm in verse 6, we see that perhaps it is the best part of the whole psalm. It speaks about the best part of the Christian life. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life..."—and here's God saving the best 'till the last—"...and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." So David is certain that at the end of his long pilgrimage—at the end of his life—he looks back and sees goodness and mercy. He looks ahead and sees the Father's house. He sees the house of the Lord. The Christian life starts with "The Lord is my shepherd" in verse 1, and it ends in verse 6 with "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

The famous American evangelist D. L. Moody pointed out that "In Psalm 23, with me is the Lord, beneath me are green pastures, beside me are still waters, before me is a table, around me are my enemies, after me are goodness and mercy and ahead of me is the house of the Lord forever." What a beautiful picture that is of the Christian life. The Christian life is a pilgrimage; it begins with "'The Lord is my shepherd.' I shall surrender, by faith to Jesus Christ. I take Him as my personal Lord and Savior." And then He leads me and He guides me and He protects me and provides for me. He gives me rest and restoration and righteous paths. "He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies. He anoints my head with oil. My cup runs over." It flows right into that last verse: "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," and at the end, when I'm at death's door, the door swings open and God invites me to

come to dwell in his house forever. What a beautiful picture this is of the Christian life: "The Lord is my shepherd" and ends with me and the Lord in His house forever.

There are two main points I want to share with you from verse 6. The first is that the Christian life is filled with "goodness and mercy." David said, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." I want you to know the assurance that David had; he uses the word "surely." He says "shall follow me..."—not "may follow me"—"...all the days of my life. David here is expressing his assurance that the Good Shepherd's care will be unremitting all the days of his life.

As I stop right there and think about God's goodness, I'm overwhelmed. I think about the family I was born into. I think about my mom and dad. I think about my sisters. I think about my family. I've been so blessed with my family. And then the blessed wife God has given me. We're coming up on our fortieth anniversary. God has put us together. We're rejoicing in God's goodness. And the children that God has given me. And the grandchildren that God has given me. One is coming any day now; number four is on the way. Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life. I can't do anything but say, "Lord, You are good! I thank You for all of Your rich and marvelous blessings."

But I can't help but believe that it's because I've surrendered my life to Jesus as my Savior and my shepherd. I'll never forget the day that I opened my heart and invited Jesus to come in, and He forgave my sins and He made me His child and He began to shepherd my life. And for all these years, goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life.

The word "surely" could also be translated from the Hebrew "only." Some translations render it that way. Some translations have "Only goodness and mercy." The word "mercy," by the way, in the Hebrew is actually "loving kindness." So "Only goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life."

I think that David is looking back over his life at all the ups, all the downs, all the ins, all the outs, all the pain. Even through the valley of darkness, verse 4, he realized that God was good and that God was with him and God was merciful. Even in those dark, difficult times of David's life when he was hiding in the cave; even in those difficult times when his son, Absalom, rebelled against him, and he had to run for his life; even during those dark, difficult days when the child that was born to Bathsheba died, and he grieved over the loss of this baby, David said, "All my life, God, You have been good and You have been merciful to me."

Remember when Joseph was sold by his brothers? He got a job in Egypt, was lied about, thrown in prison, and finally he is brought out and exalted. His brothers stood before him, and he said, "You meant it for evil, but God intended it for good." I believe with all my heart, when you've surrendered your life to Jesus Christ, even the pain and the sorrows and the dark times and the difficult times you can look back over and say, "Lord, You meant it for my good, and for Your glory."

I believe that Psalm 23:6 has an equivalent in the New Testament. It's Romans 8:28: "And we know..."—"we're certain"—"...that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." "And we know"; "we are certain." Now notice in Romans 8:28, he didn't say "all things are good." Some of us have had bad things happen in our past. But he said they "work together for good" to a specific group—to those who "love God" and to those "who are called according to His purpose." So if the Lord is your shepherd, you have everything you need. You don't have to be afraid. Even the deep, dark valleys God will use for your good and for His glory. So "all things work together for good."

I think of that like baking a cake. I don't bake. I don't cook. I barely make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. When my wife leaves, she has to have all my food set out for me so I know what to eat. Either that or I just eat donuts. But today they have instant cakes; you just put a little bit of water in it and then you pop it into the microwave. You zap it and it comes out like a Nerf cake, like a piece of rubber. Bounce it off the wall before you eat it.

How good is a homemade cake in which all the ingredients are mixed together and blended together and baked in the oven. Aah! Hallelujah! It makes me want to speak in tongues. Just to think about that warm cake coming out of the oven. But all the ingredients left to themselves—if you just ate raw egg or flour, it would be terrible. It would not be considered a good thing. But if you mix all them together, bake it in the oven, then out comes a marvelous cake. So it is with our own lives: Individual experiences may be bad in themselves, but God mixes them together, and so to speak, He bakes us in the oven and we come out a finished product. God has a good and perfect plan for our lives.

God sends both goodness and mercy. Why are there two mentioned here? By the way, I've always thought it would be cool to get two dogs—one "goodness" and the other one "mercy"—and teach them to follow you everywhere you go. Goodness and mercy following you everywhere.

Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, said that goodness and mercy were the two footmen riding on the back of the coach, and everywhere we go, they open the door, they prepare the way, they smooth the road ahead of us; they are there to serve the child of God.

Goodness and mercy. Why is it goodness and mercy? Why not just goodness? Why not just mercy? Someone said, "His goodness is for my steps. His mercy is for my stumbles." I love that. Goodness, to provide; mercy, to pardon. Goodness, because God knows we need it; and mercy, because God knows we need forgiveness. And that's what really crowns our lives as God's people. Mercy is His loving kindness.

Often Christians doubt God's goodness and His loving kindness or mercy. "Why did God let this happen to me? Why did God let that happen to me? Or why did God allow me to get cancer? Or why did God let my marriage struggle? Why did my kids rebel? Why did I lose my job? Why did I get laid off? Where was God in that? Where's the goodness and mercy?"

In Psalm 73:1-2, Asaph said that “Truly God is good to Israel....But as for me...I almost slipped.” “I almost fell. I almost stumbled.” He tells us why in that psalm. He says, “I began to get my eyes off God, and I began to look at the foolish, wicked man and how he prospered. And in my good, godly lifestyle, I was suffering. I go to church. I pray. I live for the Lord. I love Jesus. I do the things that are right, and I have nothing but sorrow and suffering. My heathen neighbor doesn’t go to church. He doesn’t even believe in God. As a matter of fact, he’s an atheist. Yet they have nothing but prosperity.”

Then Asaph said, “I went to church one day. I went to the house of the Lord. And I began to think about eternity. I began to think about the brevity of life and the certainty of death. Then I realized that these wicked individuals, who I had been jealous and envious of, are on a slippery path. They are going to wake up as one does from a dream some day and be destroyed.” He said, “I began to realize how good You’ve been to me, God. How You’ve been with me and You guide me, and afterwards, You’re going to receive me into heaven. And I realize how foolish I’ve been.” So writing that psalm, he realized how good God had been to Israel, “even to such as are of a clean heart.”

It’s taken years of walking with the Lord for me to be able to look back and see that even some of the difficult times in my life God was good, and God was with me and God protected me. And then God used it to humble me and make me what I am today, to give me a stronger faith and to wean me from the world and to make me long for heaven.

You might be sick today. You might have been diagnosed with some terminal disease. You’ll be thinking about heaven a lot more. That’s a good thing. Sooner or later we’re all going to face death, and the sooner we start thinking about where we are going to spend eternity—What happens after I die? Am I ready to meet God? Will I spend eternity in heaven?—the better off we will be.

Like David, who had his share of stumblings and suffering, we can look back and see God’s goodness and God’s mercy. Surely that will continue all our life long. In Philippians 1:6, Paul says, “Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Isn’t that great? That’s kind of a New Testament version of this passage, as well. He has this good work begun in you. He’s able to complete it all the way until you reach death’s door, all the way into eternity.

The famous hymn writer, Fanny Crosby, wrote these words:

“All the way my Savior leads me,

What have I to ask besides?

Can I doubt His tender mercy,

Who through life has been my guide?”

What beautiful words.

How about you? Can you look back over your life and say, “Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life”? That word “follow,” by the way, carries the idea of “pursue after.” Goodness and mercy are pursuing you and following after you.

The second point I want to make from verse 6 is that the Christian life ends forever with the Lord. It is a life of goodness and mercy, or loving kindness, and at the end of the road—at the end of my pilgrimage—as a child of God, I will be ushered into the presence of the Lord, and, verse 6, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” A life of God’s goodness and loving kindness and eternity with God in heaven—all this and heaven too. God saves the best ‘till last.

If you’re not a Christian, enjoy right now, because this is the closest you’ll ever get to heaven. If you are a Christian, realize this: This is the closest you’ll ever get to hell. You’re on your way to heaven. And it gets brighter and brighter and brighter and brighter as the day approaches. What a blessing that is. So all of this—goodness and mercy—and heaven too. When the Lord is your shepherd, you shall not want for time and you shall not want for eternity; for life or for death.

David is not talking about the temple in Jerusalem. Kings did not live in the temple. And besides, David said, “I will live forever.” I’m so glad that word is included in that sixth verse. “I will dwell in the house of the Lord...”—for how long? For a week? For a month? For a couple of years?—“...forever.”

I love the words to Amazing Grace. That stanza that says,

“When we’ve been there ten thousand years,

Bright shining as the sun,

We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise

Then when we first begun.”

Isn’t that amazing? Ten thousand years worshipping God, and then we conclude, “Wow! Let’s go another ten thousand years!” “We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise then when we first begun.” We shall forever be with the Lord.

Now David is talking about heaven; I want to make it perfectly clear. I have no question in my mind as to the imagery, the concept “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” He’s not talking about the temple or his palace; he’s talking about heaven. This terminology or description is of heaven. David had absolute assurance that he would go to heaven when he died. He didn’t say, “I hope to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” He didn’t say, “I might dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” He said, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” I believe that we, as Christians, can have absolute assurance—know beyond any doubt—that

when we die, we will go to heaven.

And I believe, as Christians, we should think more about heaven. We should sing more about heaven. We should talk more about heaven. We should preach more about heaven. That's why I'm preaching this verse now. I believe we should "put our affections on things above, not on things of this earth." Since we are going to heaven and will spend eternity in heaven, I want to look forward to that day. That doesn't mean that we're so heavenly minded that we're no earthly good. Heaven is not only a destination; it's a present motivation. And it should motivate us to live for eternity, to live for God. That our contact with the world should be as light as possible. Not be all enamored or all wrapped up in the things of this world, but to have God stamp eternity on our eyes as we live for Him.

I believe that heaven is a real place. In John 14:1-3, Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me." And then Jesus said this: "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare this place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, you may be also." So heaven is a real place. Heaven is a prepared place, and heaven is where Jesus is. One day, as His people, we will "be caught up to meet the Lord in the air." It's an actual place; it's not a figment of our imagination. It's not some concoction of preachers to keep people wanting to live good lives.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:2 that he was "caught up..."—and here's the expression he used—"...to the third heaven." You ask, "Well, what's the 'third heaven'?" He goes on in verse 4 to explain it: "...that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." It doesn't mean that there are three levels in heaven. It means that the air above the earth is heaven, the outer space is heaven and heaven is the actual dwelling place of God. Someone said, "We see the first heaven by day, we see the second heaven by night and we see the third heaven by faith." I love that.

When you leave church today, I want you to do something: I want you to look into the sky to see the beautiful blue sky and the clouds. That's the first heaven. Then tonight, after the sun goes down, I want you to go outside, turn the lights off in the house and on the porch and I want you to look up into the sky. I want you to see the second heaven. And then before you go to bed tonight, I want you to open your Bible, I want you to read the last chapter of the book of Revelation and, by faith, I want you to see the third heaven. Those are the three heavens. And one day we are going to be with the Lord. So it's a real place.

I heard the story of a little boy who was walking on a dark, starry night with his daddy holding his hand. And he looked up and saw all the stars filling the sky. He said, "Daddy, if the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful, can you imagine what the right side looks like?" We're looking at the wrong side of heaven. Can you imagine the glory and the splendor?

Another thing I would say about heaven is that heaven is a present place. Jesus said in Luke 23:43, "Truly I say unto you, 'Today you will be with Me in paradise.'" Jesus turned to the thief

on the cross, who was dying for crimes he had committed; he hadn't lived a good life. But in his last dying breath, he turned to the Savior and said, "I believe. Remember me when You enter Your kingdom." Oh, what precious words! He said, "Lord, remember me when You enter Your kingdom," and Jesus said, "Today you will be with Me in paradise." It's a place. It's a prepared place. And it's also a present place.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:8, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." You know what happens when a Christian dies? They go immediately, instantly into the presence of God in heaven. Is that good or what? That's pretty cool; right? That's why the Bible says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of the saints."

And that's why Paul said in Philippians 1:23, "I desire to depart." He used the word "exodus." "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." When you die, you're just moving out. You're moving out of a tent. You're moving into a permanent building "not made with hands, eternal in the heaven." You're moving out of this old, decrepit, can't-hardly-move body. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:2, "We groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house..."—or "body"—"...which is from heaven." I groan every morning; it's Biblical. I groan because I'm waiting for my new body, which will be free from pain and free from hindrance. What a glorious day that will be!

It's an actual place that we go to. When Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was being stoned, and the stones were pelting his body, he looked up and he saw heaven open." It's a place. It's a real place. It's a prepared place. It's a present place. And Stephen said, "Lord Jesus, lay not this sin to their charge." Seeing heaven helps you to be nicer to people on earth. "I'm going to heaven, so lay not this sin to their charge." The more heavenly minded you are, the more earthly good you become. And then he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," and the Bible tells us that Jesus stood to welcome Stephen. The first Christian martyr's name was Stephen, which is Stefanos, and it means "crown." He was the first to wear the martyr's crown. And he's caught up immediately to meet Jesus. Can you imagine heaven being open and Jesus with His arms wide saying, "Come home"?! Yeah. I'm ready!

The Bible says Enoch in the Old Testament used to walk with God every day in the cool of the afternoon. And it says one day Enoch was not, because God took him. Someone humorous said that they took a long walk one day, and at the end of the walk, God said, "Enoch, we're closer to My house than yours. Why don't you come home with Me?" I love it. "I'm ready, Lord!" Just caught him right up into the presence of the Lord. That's going to happen some day for every one of us. Walking with the Lord, some day He's going to say, "We're closer to My house than yours. Come home with Me 'to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.'"

Fourthly, heaven is a perfect place. I sometimes meet people who say, "Ah, I don't know if I want to go to heaven. I'm not sure I want to go there." Check this out: In Revelation 21:3-5, John says, "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be

with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.' And He that sat upon the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' And He said unto me, 'Write, for these words are true and faithful.'"

Heaven is with God forever. Heaven is God wiping away all tears from our eyes. Heaven has no death. Heaven is God bringing no sorrow, no crying, no pain, no sin, no suffering, no more Satan. And it will be perpetual daytime. No night there. Streets of gold, gates of pearl, river of life, cherubim and seraphim, heavenly choirs, saints throughout all the ages. You can meet Moses, David and Elijah and all the prophets of God. Can you imagine saying, "Hi, Mr. Elijah. My name's John Miller. I lived in Menifee." Can you imagine how cool that will be? Just think; as a Christian, you get to spend eternity with God!

The Bible says more about what's not in heaven than what is in heaven: no more crying, no more death, no more sin, no more cancer, no more drugs, no more prisons, no more hospitals, no more ambulances. All the former things will be passed away.

Here's my last point about heaven: Heaven is a purposeful place. What will we do in heaven? Some people think we're going to be bored. "I've seen the pictures. You sit on a cloud, play a harp. I don't want to go to heaven and just sit on a cloud and strum a harp for all eternity." "What's your option? You want to go to hell?" You only have two options: heaven or hell.

What do we do in heaven? Well, one thing, you won't be bored. It'll be eternal bliss. "In His presence is fullness of joy, and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore." In Revelation 4 and 5, it says we're actually going to sing when we get to heaven. Some people come to church with a sour look on their faces and say, "You sing too much at Revival. I don't like all the music. You just sing too much." Then you're not going to be very happy in heaven, because we're going to be rockin' out in heaven! David's going to lead worship on his harp. It's going to be plugged into a Fender amp. Can you imagine drums in heaven? "Oh, no. I'm in heaven and they've got those horrid drums!" We're going to be singing. Read Revelation 4 and 5.

I love John Newton's song Amazing Grace. That one stanza says,

"When we've been there ten thousand years,

Bright shining as the sun,

We've no less days to sing God's praise

Then when we first begun."

What an amazing thought! God's amazing mercy and grace and kindness. We'll be worshipping.

I believe that we'll have understanding; we'll know even as we're known. All of our questions

will be answered. All your questions will be answered instantly. When you see the face of God, all your doubts, all your fears, all your sorrows, all your pain will just melt away. It's the place of eternal rest, Revelation 14:13. It's a place of service, Revelation 7:15, where we will serve God before His throne.

And one of the great truths about heaven is that heaven is a place of reunion. The end of this last week, my wife and I had to go down to the city of Placentia to Placentia-Linda Hospital where my oldest cousin, Maureen Miller, was on life support. About 10 years ago, she gave me end-of-life instructions as her executor. She's not to be on life support. She's not to be sustained. She's been battling cancer for years. We had to make that painful but—for her, because she knew the Lord—joyous decision to take her off life support and let God take her home. Just as I was getting ready to leave the house for church this morning—7:20—I got a text from another cousin saying Maureen has entered eternity. She's with the Lord.

This is really fresh to me. This is really potent and powerful in my own heart; to realize someone you've known and loved, a family member, has died and gone to be with the Lord. That we will be reunited. Maureen is with her mom and dad and her sister and our grandmother Miller. She's together with my mom and other family members. She's reunited there with them forever with the Lord.

So we sorrow, but we don't sorrow as others do who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even those who have fallen asleep or have died in Jesus—and, by the way, death for the Christian is falling asleep. You fall asleep and wake up in eternity in the presence of the Lord. And "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds...and so shall we forever be with the Lord," 1 Thessalonians 4:17. There is going to be a meeting in the air; a mother, a father, a brother, a sister, a child. The pain of bearing a little child—or going through a miscarriage, but knowing you have a little child waiting for you in heaven that you get to hold, to hug, to see and to be with. How can you not long for heaven? How can you not desire heaven?

And to think it's not some concoction that Christianity has invented; that it's a true thing. Jesus said, "If it were not so, I would have told you." He died and rose from the dead, ascended back to heaven and He's waiting, preparing a place for us, 'till we get there.

I do believe that when we get to heaven, they'll be some surprises. We'll be surprised about who's there. We'll be surprised about who's not there. Someone put it in a little poem:

"When you get to heaven,

You will doubtless view

Many whose presence there

Will be a shock to you.

Do not look around.

Do not even stare.

Doubtless they'll be many

Surprised that you are there."

It's going to be freaky when you get to heaven and people come up to you and go [with mouth wide open in astonishment]. They can't believe you got there. And what are you going to say? "The grace of God!" God's grace and God's mercy; amen? It's so wonderful. The Bible says it's not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to His mercy that He has saved us. No one is going to be in heaven because they deserve to be in heaven. We will be in heaven because Jesus died for us and rose again.

Do you know that Jesus is the Good Shepherd? He said, "I give My life for the sheep." It's interesting that in the Old Testament, the sheep died for the shepherd. In the New Testament, the shepherd dies for the sheep. In the New Testament, Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd, and I give My life for the sheep. And My sheep know My voice. My sheep hear My voice." And Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door of your heart, and I knock. If you hear My voice and open the door, I will come in and I will have fellowship with you."

I believe that if you hear God speaking to you today—that "still small voice"—there is a door to your heart that has a knob only on the inside, and only you can open that door. If you open that door, Jesus will come in and will forgive your sins, make you His child and give you not only "goodness and mercy all the days of your life," but He'll take you to heaven when you die.

You don't go to heaven because you go to church. You don't go to heaven because you've been baptized. You don't go to heaven because you reformed and changed the way you live. You go to heaven because you've trusted in Jesus Christ. You've reached out and trusted Him.

If you've done that—if the Lord is your shepherd—you have everything you need; not only in life, but in death. When the Lord is your shepherd, you'll fear no evil, because He'll be with you. When the Lord is your shepherd, you won't even fear death, because you'll dwell in His house forever. And when the Lord is your shepherd, some day you will knock on the door of heaven, and Jesus will open the door and He'll say, "Come in." What a blessed truth.

Let's pray.