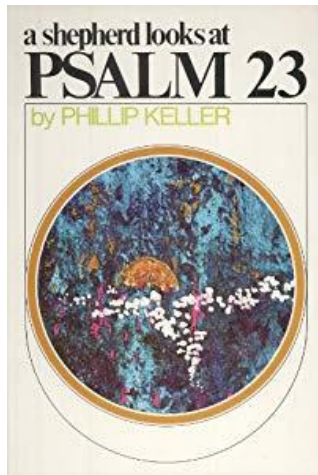


20200314 Psalm 23 Surely Goodness And Mercy Shall Follow Me All The Days Of My Life And I Will Dwell In The House Of The Lord Forever

PSALM 23 - SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER



Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life; AND I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. We've looked at each and every facet of how a shepherd takes care of his sheep. We've discussed at length the provisions that the shepherd makes for a good food source, a water source, protection from predators, protection from pests, and even the way this is all done even with the enemy in sight. This is summed up in the phrase to be studied this morning: "Surely GOODNESS and MERCY shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever".

The sheep with such a shepherd can be perfectly assured that he/she is under sound, intelligent sympathetic ownership. It is a BOLD statement. How many Christians really feel this way about their Lord? Do you and I feel like we are cared for by a loving shepherd if our health is not good, our finances are stretched, or if we seem to get out of kilter with everyone around us. Sure, it's easy to say and boast "the Lord is my shepherd" when all is coming up roses, but it takes an extra measure of grace and faith to boldly say, "The Lord is my Shepherd" in the midsts of trials and tribulations. When the wheels are coming off, can you boast that He is your shepherd? What do I say when my body breaks down? What is my reaction when the job ends and there's no money to meet the bills? What do I say when friends turn against me? These are the times when our faith is tested, and our faith in Jesus comes under the fire. It can sometimes get really hard to say with real belief, "The Lord is my shepherd. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life."

Is it just nonsense to say, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life"? I know that I personally have gone through times of deep darkness and despair. I have been so worried I've made myself sick. I have wondered if I would ever again find hope or light at the end of the tunnel. I remember one time, falling on my face in my living room and just saying, "God, you can have it all; please just let me keep my good name." Have you ever felt this way?

Somehow in the midst of that darkness I could only get comfort in quoting poor old Job (sometimes almost shouting at God), saying, "Even if you slay me I will not stop loving you!" It somehow gave me comfort to know that I would not give up on God and I would vindicate myself going to the grave by believing in Him. It may sound melodramatic, but sometimes it gets so bad you can only hope that someday you'll again walk among the living. It's like when I told God that it was HIS reputation and not mine at stake if the music continued like it had for the first 7 months of my ministry at Union Grove. He made provision for all of us when He sent

us Larry. It was just hard in those times to say with belief in my heart, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

In the end, all of this waiting turns out for our benefit. We don't always understand God's management of our lives. It was hard to assume that God really knew what was going on. I had the strange notion that I could just do it better on my own. In spite of that bad attitude, He has proved again and again that He has picked me up and brought me back from the brink with great tenderness. Eventually, good always comes out of the chaos that we feel ourselves going through. His mercies are renewed every morning. Great is His faithfulness. We have to proclaim even when we don't feel it, "His goodness and His mercy WILL follow me all the days of my life."

The essence of all that has gone on before in the psalm is that all of His provision is born out of His love for me, His sheep. Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, than that he lay down his life for his friend." Jesus did EXACTLY that. Goodness and mercy should also be what I leave behind me when I am gone from this world. Sheep without a shepherd can ruin and ravage land beyond remedy. But if properly managed, they can leave great good and benefit behind them. They leave the best nutrients with their manure. They turn weeds and undesirable plants into good fertilizer. Well managed sheep can clean up a piece of property beautifully when they are managed by a good manager.

Where they are left untended they leave destruction behind. Where they are well managed, they are a blessing to their shepherd and to the land. The question then comes.....is this true of my life? Is this true of your life? Is this true of our lives? What you leave behind will depend on how well you let God manage your life. Will you leave a blessing in your wake? Or, will you leave chaos and destruction. Unto whom are you leaving the management of your life? I remember when a particular country singer died, I was so taken with his music and his life that I almost went to his funeral service. It is only when I began to study his life that I learned of the pain, misery, and chaos he left behind with his abandoned wives and illegitimate children. He sang the old gospel songs, but he didn't live them in any manner shape or form. He never let God take management of his life and in the end it was a mess. Let's choose today to not leave a mess behind. You and I can choose today to leave a wonderful legacy if we will just put the management of our lives in God's hands.

I want goodness and mercy to follow me all the days of my life, and the only way I can be sure of that is to let God have the full management position of my life. What do you leave behind when you visit others? Is my memory in other people's mind a blessing? Ask yourself simple questions: Do I leave behind gossip of other people's shortcomings, or do I live behind messages of hope? Do I point out the strong points of others, or do I leave behind lowered reputations of those I talk about? Do I point out the deficiencies of others' work? (not talking about employees) Do I leave good feelings behind or do I leave hurts and scars? Is my life a pleasure to people or a pain? Do I leave behind contentment or conflict? Do I leave flowers of joy or frustration? Some leave such a sorry mess behind them they just want to cover their tracks. It is often better to say nothing than to say something just to be included or hear

yourself talk. Leave a legacy of encouragement and cheer others on to be the best version of themselves. How will you be remembered when you are gone? Will people say, "Wow.... my life is better because he or she helped me to know God better"? Will they say, "No one has ever loved me like fill in your name here." This was the loftiest noblest person I ever met. His good and kind acts were always mixed with compassion and mercy!

Sometimes we try to help others and we're really just condemning them. Do I look with contempt on my contemporaries. Give mercy. Give compassion. Do I see the faults in others and forgive like God has forgiven me of my own shortcomings. If I cannot forgive others, then I really don't understand God's forgiveness of me. Some come to church to find affection and they only find criticism. What will be my legacy? What will be your legacy? What is the benefit you can bring to Him? His goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and He longs for me to love others in the same way leaving goodness and mercy behind me.

The psalm now closes with the statement, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." This sheep is so delighted to be in the care of the shepherd that it never wants to leave the care of the shepherd. The shepherd will never get rid of profitable sheep. And the sheep that understands the shepherd's care doesn't want to be anywhere other than in the flock of a good shepherd. The word "house" here means something much broader than the "temple" of the Lord. It goes way beyond that. David is talking about "ownership". That sheep is boasting of its owner. We should be proud to belong to Christ. We should be glad to look back and tell others of the amazing things He has done for us and our welfare.

We should be bold in telling the world that we are SO GLAD that we are His. We should be ready and willing to shout it from the housetops that our shepherd is like none other. The sheep that are in the world are outside of the care of the loving shepherd. They are managed by Satan who desires to make them miserable. He is a liar and a thief. He is a heartless owner. He is a tyrant who starves sheep who are desperate for something real. John 10:9 tells us that Jesus is the door into the sheepfold. He is the way. (Matt 6:33) He wants all to come in and sup with him and He with them. (Rev 3:20)

Perhaps this study has made you more aware of the fullness of your relationship with Jesus. Think on Him. Meditate on Him. Start seeing Him as your Good Shepherd. Many mornings before my feet hit the floor at the side of my bed, I now recite the Shepherd's psalm in my mind. I challenge you to do the same. Feast on the words that David wrote to describe the abundant life that Jesus promises each of us. You will find you love yourself more, and you'll find you love Him more, and THAT my friend is the most wonderful thing of all. You will be able to say with total boldness.

**THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD..... I TRULY HAVE ALL THAT I NEED IN HIM!**

AMEN