

The Lord is My Shepherd - Goodness and Mercy

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[0 : 00] We'll sing and then we'll look at this psalm together. Psalm 23. I did mean to ask. It was nice that Dorothy read this for us last week.

And I was going to do what Richard did, ask somebody else, but I forgot. And I don't want to pounce on anybody unless somebody wants to leg it up here quickly. You can do that.

No takers, no takers. You want to do it, Karen? Yay! Way to go, sister. Psalm 23. Very good. I'll just stand at the side here and you can read that.

That's great, Karen. Thanks for that. Okay, let's hear God's word. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

[0 : 56] Even 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.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen. That's great. Thank you very much, Karen. Maybe I should do that more often, just pounce and someday or just let anybody come up as they feel led.

That was great. Good to hear another voice. Great psalm. Great psalm of David. Am I going to look at this in a moment or two? Let's stand and we'll sing. This is in 23 in the passage we read earlier about the goodness and the grace of God, which was mentioned in that psalm there.

Let's come before God. Let's just ask for his help as we come to understand his word together. Our loving Father, we thank you for your word and we thank you, Father, for this psalm that we're about to consider.

[2 : 03] Lord, over recent weeks we have looked at each verse of the psalm. And, Lord, we come to look at the last verse that surely goodness and love or mercy or grace will follow me all the days of my life.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Lord, what a great verse. What great truths. So, Father, we pray that we would consider this together not as an academic exercise or something just that might interest us, but above all, something that will lift our hearts out of the mundane and place them, Lord, and cause them to rise heavenward to praise you and to thank you for all that you are, all that you have done for us in Jesus.

Lord, we began our time together by saying that he was chosen by God and is precious. Lord, we pray that after this sermon this evening that he would be even more precious to us as we consider his role as the good shepherd.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Tonight we're bringing this short series to a close. Six verses, six sermons on this. And we've been looking at the role of the good shepherd.

We don't have time to go back over everything that we've looked at, but this is for those who know Jesus as their Savior, who have come to Psalm 23 through Psalm 22, reminding ourselves of his sufferings.

[3 : 31] He suffered. He died for you. He laid down as the good shepherd his life for you, his life for me. We have heard his voice, Jesus said. We have followed him.

So, if that is you, then Psalm 23 is for you. As I said in one of the earlier sermons, it's often quoted and read at funerals, when really it's to do with life.

It's to do with this life, and how we prepare or how we understand the Lord will eventually take us into glory. So, we've looked at, first of all, you remember, times, aspects of our life where we

become weary in life.

Life is hard. We're often weary by many things. And verse 2 promises us rest and refreshment. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leaves me beside quiet waters. And that is one of the rules of the shepherd, to care for us. And Jesus does that. He doesn't just die for us.

[4 : 31] He cares for us. When we're weary, also when we wander, his job is to spiritually restore us. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

His desire is that we are holy. We are a holy people. And he will always lead us in that direction. And then we looked at verse 4. Even right up to physical death.

Even as we looked at Pilgrim's Progress, we have to cross that river into the celestial city. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil.

You are with me, your rod and your staff. They comfort me. He's with us during that final journey. He's with us. He has been before us. He has already died. He has risen again.

He died alone. That is not the lot of the Lord's people. We do not die alone. He is with us. Even in that darkest last journey. He is there to protect us.

[5 : 31] And last week, Richard was ministering to us from verse 5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

Here is the Lord preparing things for us. I won't go back over what Richard said, in case I misrepresent what he says. But he anoints our head. We are honored guests in that way.

My cup overflows. We lack nothing in so many ways. We are completely satisfied, blessed in him. Now we come to verse 6. We come to the last of these.

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. It's a great verse to finish with.

It almost is such an appropriate way to finish this psalm. It comes to us like a benediction.

Benedictions are really, you've heard the sermon, and a benediction is usually just a statement of fact.

[6 : 35] It's not so much a prayer. So usually when you, at the end of a service, we say, let's just finish with a benediction or a doxology. You don't really need to close your eyes during that. It's not so much a prayer.

You're just saying, the Lord bless you, and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you.

You're simply stating a statement of fact. And this finishes with these great thoughts that we've had in the first five verses.

It finishes like a benediction, a statement of fact to encourage us to go into the world and to live for him. Benedictions are number six.

The Lord bless you and keep you, and make his face shine upon you, be gracious to you, turn his face towards you, give you peace. Paul often ended some of his letters with a benediction.

After the teaching, he would say, may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times, in every way, the Lord be with all of you. That's Thessalonians 3 and 2, John 1, the apostle John, grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, be with us in truth and love.

[7 : 42] These statement of facts that cause us to go out, that's what verse 6 is. It finishes now. We've talked about life and the hard, the difficulty of life, and in that point of facing death.

And now it finishes with this great truth. Surely, goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

It comes back full circle. It began by saying, the Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing. And it finishes with that same theme, you will lack nothing between now and glory.

And it begins by mentioning all the days of my life. Verse 6. Will follow me all the days. It's all-encompassing.

It's fully comprehensive. During the good days, during the bad days, goodness and love will follow you. And we're going to unpack this in a minute or two. But here is confidence.

[8 : 43] It's on October the 22nd, for October the 23rd, and the 24th, and the 25th. For whatever days you have left, surely goodness and love will follow you.

And that's what we're going to look at just now. Here's an image. C.H. Spurgeon called these two attributes of God the Lord's sheep dogs.

I'm sure you've heard that before. It's a great image, isn't it? That as we go through life, and the shepherd is there, and we are the sheep. This image of two sheep dogs that hem us in, that lead us and guide us.

I don't know about you, but I love watching, was it one man and his dog? I could just watch that all the time. And when we were in Derbyshire, you could see it for real, and in Scotland as well, of course, but we used to see it quite a few times in Derbyshire.

Some guy blowing a whistle, and off they go, and they just know what they're doing, and they're able to hem you in. As you go through life, it's a great image, isn't it, that C.H. Spurgeon paints for us.

[9 : 44] Surely goodness and love will follow us all the days of our life. These are the two sheep dogs that the Lord has in your life, that lead you and guide you.

And that's what we're going to look at just now. I've called this sermon, Goodness and Grace, and that's what we're going to look at just now. Let's look at the second of those first.

Let's look at the love of God, the mercy of God, or the grace of God, depending on what version you're using. We'll look at goodness in a minute. But surely love, goodness and love, my version says, will follow me.

Some folk have, I think that my version is the 2011 version of the NIV. If you're using the 1984 version, I think that has mercy. Other versions might have something else.

The actual word that's used here, surely goodness and love, the word for love is a very well-known Old Testament word. It's not an obscure word.

[10 : 46] It's used 240 times in the Old Testament. So it's a very common word in the Old Testament. And it's packed with theological importance that sometimes might just be missed.

It's saying some versions, that's why it's quite difficult to translate. Some versions say that it's goodness and mercy will follow me. And mercy usually means that we don't get what we deserve. We are, judgment is suspended on us. We get mercy instead of judgment. But the verse says a lot more than that. It's more than mercy that you're getting.

And it's often translated love. But a better translation is even found in the Old Testament in the phrase, steadfast love or loving kindness.

It is that if you have a concordance and you look up the word grace, and you pump that in, you will find grace mentioned many times in the New Testament. We love the word grace.

[11 : 49] We are saved by grace. You don't find that word so much in the Old Testament. You think, wow, this is strange. The equivalent of that is loving kindness or steadfast love.

That's what it means. It's more than just mercy. And it's more than just love. It's God's lavish love, His undeserved love that is given to us.

And that's what's promised here. That's why I've called this goodness and grace. Love, mercy, it's all of these things rolled into one. It's getting not just what we don't deserve, but getting what we do, what we don't deserve in terms of good things as well.

It's how we all begin the Christian life, saving grace. We are saved by grace. Titus says this, at one time, or Paul says to Titus, at one time, you too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.

We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God, our Savior, appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.

[13 : 05] We are saved by grace. We mentioned the verse this morning, once you were not the people of God, now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, now you have received mercy.

Mercy and grace are very closely linked to love of God. We began the Christian life by grace, saving grace. But we need grace to sustain us, not just to save us.

We need this grace which is fresh every day, sustaining grace. Because of the sin that it says in Hebrews, that easily entangles us.

And if not for the grace of God, the continuing grace of God, then we would all suffer. Paul said, John says, if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But if we confess our sin, He is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness. We very much focused on righteousness this morning.

[14:08] But we've got a habit of being unrighteous in terms of our moral behavior. We are pronounced righteous, that's a legal standing, but in actual fact, we can sin against God.

Our sins are forgiven, past, present, and future. But to know the peace of God, we confess those sins before Him. And He is faithful and just to do this. I don't know about you, but sometimes I think, Lord, why don't you intervene?

If you're praying for many things, maybe even this week, you've got an answer to prayer that you would love to see. Maybe it's a doctor's appointment, it's a job interview, whatever that is. Maybe there's something in your life, there's a logjam, and you think, I wish the Lord just acted quicker. I've been praying for this for a long time. And sometimes we can get frustrated. Isn't it great to think that the Lord doesn't punish us for every sin also that we commit?

He is long-suffering and not wanting anyone to perish, but each to come to a knowledge of the truth. I've not read a lot of the Puritans, but I remember as a young Christian, I bought Stephen Charnock's two-volume Attributes of God, thinking, I must be clever, I've got these books.

[15:20] And it was all the attributes of God. And I only really read one attribute of God. I just chose one. I could have chosen the love of God or His faithfulness or whatever. I chose long-suffering, the long-suffering of God.

Do you ever think of the long-suffering of God? That He's pure and holy, but He suffers long. He looks at our world. He looks at Israel.

He looks at Ukraine. He looks at every house that the roof has taken off. He sees the anger, the pride, the jealousy, the conflict, that say, every day He has to witness this.

I mean, there are some programs on the TV you just can't watch. I mean, you get a warning, don't you, just to let you know there's something here that might upset you in the news. You're getting this all the time. But the Lord sees this.

Him whose eyes are too pure to look upon sin, and yet He's long-suffering towards us. It's an amazing attribute of God how He suffers in that way.

[16:20] He is long-suffering. One time, He will roll the earth up and He'll say, enough is enough, and the Savior will come back. But until that day, every time the sun comes up, He's giving people the opportunity to repent and believe.

And so it is with us to confess our sin, and He's quick to forgive us. He is a gracious God, not only saving us, but this same grace that we need every day.

Paul often begins or ends his letter with this. 1 Timothy 1, grace, mercy, and peace from God, the Father, and Jesus Christ, our Lord.

We need this, grace and mercy every day. And we get this in the Good Shepherd. Surely, your love, your grace, will follow me all the days of my life.

If you need anything on Monday and tonight, you will need the grace of God. We always need the grace of God. Saved by grace, kept by grace. Secondly, the goodness of God.

[17:29] Another aspect of the good news is we don't just get grace. God is good to us. He is a good God. He is a God who not only forgives us, but blesses us.

He leads us, He guides us, He provides for us. Not that long ago, we had a Thanksgiving harvest service, reminding ourselves of God's goodness to us. goodness is an essential attribute of God.

We often think about His love and His mercy and His grace and His faithfulness. But God is good. Remember, Jesus was asked, why do you call me good?

No one is good except God alone. Our Anglo-Saxon word for God is basically a shortened version of good. God is good.

He is the good one. It's who He is. You are good, Psalm 119, and what you do is good. James tells us every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows.

[18:39] That is why when God punishes the wicked, it's called His strange work. Theologians call it it's a weird thing because it doesn't quite match up with a God who is good.

How could He punish? He's also just, of course. But this whole attribute of the goodness of God is really something to grasp. And that's very humbling that not only do you get salvation and are you saved and it's well with your soul, to think that not only every day God is gracious to you, forgiving you, on top of that, He's good to you.

He does good things for you. We sometimes see an answer to prayer more as relief. Well, I'm glad I never, that never turned out as bad as I thought. And we don't often stop to just rejoice and say,

isn't it great?

Things could have been an awful lot worse and yet, I've not got what I deserved. I've got the goodness of God and the grace of God. The goodness of God is something, as you go through life, that will keep you in an even keel, it's ballast in your tank.

That, I think I said to you once when Lucille had miscarried, we were expecting our first child and we rejoiced, we were waiting our living years and it never, then it finally happened and we announced it to the world and we never seen the miscarries coming.

[20 : 06] And two attributes of God preserved us, our sanity. A God who's too wise to make mistakes, a God who's too good to be unkind, that he wasn't punishing us, he wasn't unkind.

God is a God who's good. If you, if there may be that attribute of God you need to just embrace this evening, wherever you are, whatever you're going through, remember, he is good and what he does is good.

He's never out to harm us. He wants to be good to us. Those of you who read Douglas Macmillan's wee book, which reminds me, I think you've got that, Richard? Good man, I'll pick that up after you. If you want to take that away, you can take it away, but basically, this whole series, I've sucked a life out of the book.

You've got the whole book, really. You hardly need to read it. There is a part in the book where he talks about a sad time when a fisherman guy came to see his brother-in-law.

Let me just read to you the text here. And he mentions how the goodness of God really stabilizes us when things do it, during the difficult times.

[21 : 13] He says, Some of these days are dark and difficult days. I remember being on holiday once in Tobermorey, where my sister and her husband lived. There were boats down from Orkney, fishing for shellfish, out in the Sound of Mull.

An old Orcadian had come over to my brother-in-law's garage to have something done to the engine of his boat. He got talking with Duncan. They discovered they were both Christians and got to know one another.

Duncan said to him, How are things going? Well, he said, I have come through the most severe testing my faith has ever had. I had never sailed from home for any fishing ground without, first of all, committing myself and my crew to God.

Just recently, a lovely young fellow of 16 was converted in our town. He came to me and asked for a job in the boat. I was needing someone, and what better than to have a lovely young fellow like that.

He went on his very first trip with us. We went out setting nets for a heavy swell, and something happened that has never happened to me in 40 years at sea. A net broke loose, and his feet got caught in it, and he was over the side, and before we got him back, he was drowned.

[22 : 27] Duncan, it's been dark. Why did God permit it? I thought Duncan gave him a very wise answer. He says, George, you will never really understand.

Though we can say this, he has gone home, and it's far better for him, and it may be that God was saving him from trials that you and I will not be spared from. We don't know, but we know this, that God doeth all things well, and his goodness and his mercy will follow us all the days of our life.

Paul says something similar, doesn't he? We know that in all things, God works together for good to those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

I'm sure you can appreciate the importance, the necessity of the grace of God and the goodness of God from this day till that day when we meet him in glory, and we need that.

We need these two sheepdogs to keep us in place. So, thirdly, the Christian's confidence. These two escorts, these two inescapable escorts, will follow you.

[23 : 41] Note that. They're not just there, they will follow you. The word follow in English usually means bringing up the rear.

It's like your kids following you and you're saying, come on, hurry up, and you're constantly hounding them to kind of, come on, follow me, we're going this way. But in the Hebrew, the actual word follow me is active.

It's not passive. It's a chasing after. Here are two images of sheepdogs chasing the sheep. I just love watching them. They're focused on the sheep.

Nothing else matters. They listen for the whistle and they are focused on the sheep. They are, that's all they see at that time. And they'll creep around the side or whatever.

There's four sheep, members of Westerhales Baptist Church. You can decide which sheep are you. There you are. And to think of these sheep, even if it's just you, goodness and mercy following you. [24 : 42] They track you. It's what they do. Let me use another illustration. Here is a more modern one about a car. I remember years ago getting a car with cruise control.

When cruise control came out, I thought, this is great. I could travel down the M6 or whatever. I just set the speed off a go and you just, you could take it off the accelerator, set it for 70 miles an hour or whatever and off you go.

The only problem with cruise control is in those days was it will go through a brick wall. If the car in front of you stops, you're just going to plow straight into the back of them. whereas adaptive cruise control, which is a wee bit more modern now, you set that, you set the speed, I'm at the right speed, I'll set that, and you can also set the distance away from the car in front of you.

My car has this and maybe some of your cars have this as well. Where you can set that and if the car in front speeds up and you have set yours to go faster, it will go faster keeping the same distance and if it slows down, you will slow down.

I remember when this first came out a good number of years ago on Top Gear, Jeremy Clarkson, I remember him, I remember him driving this, testing this, I think it was introduced in an Audi first of all and he drove up to the set of traffic lights, he was just demonstrating how this worked and he got to the traffic lights in true Jeremy Clarkson fashion, he just got out of the car and he says, I'm not needed and then just walked away.

[26 : 13] But that is the whole point you're not needed in that sense. These sheepdogs will keep you on the straight and narrow. The goodness of God, the grace of God.

Those are two amazing sheepdogs and they will track you, they'll track you tonight when you go home, they'll track you next week, they'll track you for the rest of your life and 20 years from now if you're in a hospital and things don't look great and you're worried about the future, the goodness of God is still there.

The grace of God, the grace that you will need is still there. And if you just keep telling yourself that, if ever anything happens, you could get this, I keep talking about tattooing verses on yourself, you could tattoo this verse on yourself.

I don't think you have much skin left, the amount of verses I've got you to tattoo on yourself. What a verse! Because this will sustain you no matter what comes your way.

The goodness of God and the grace of God. When things don't make sense, reaffirm to your heart, God is good. When you feel unloved or you wonder what's happening, God will give grace, not just to forgive, but the grace that you need.

[27 : 24] My grace is sufficient for you. It will never lack in any way. When you say, Lord, why don't you do this? The Lord may just come along and say, remember verse 6, my grace is sufficient and it's tracking you.

The goodness of God is there. I love you. I care for you. It's quite something. So, that is our confidence. And lastly, the Christian's certainty.

Verse 6, the very first word, surely. Surely, goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life. Why is David so confident?

Why does he finish this so confidently? Well, he reaffirms reaffirms the first five verses how the Lord has dealt with him. It's, he can rely only on the character of God, but also the experience of God. David's had loads of experiences of God. It's a great character study, studying David. That's a series for another time. But he's known the goodness of God, protecting him against lions and bears.

[28 : 33] Remember Goliath, who is this uncircumcised Philistine that dares to stand against the armies of the living God. He had supreme confidence in God who would be good and give him the grace that he needs, even when he's hunted by Saul.

God was still good and gracious to him. The victory over his enemies, God's gracious provision. God was good to him, making him king. He could testify. Where are you getting this surely from David?

David could say, well, let me tell you, this is my testimony. Even of the grace of God, David and Bathsheba, killing when he basically put to death Uriah, Bathsheba's husband.

His life wasn't all a bed of roses. He got things wrong, but he knew the grace of God. He knew the cleansing. Though my sins be as scarlet, they will be as white as snow.

As you go through life, you have already known the grace of God and his sustaining grace, not just his saving grace. You've also known the goodness of God. And if I brought you up here one by one and said to you, talk to us for five minutes about the goodness and grace of God, you would be able to do that.

[29 : 45] Your knees might be knocking, you might be stuttering and stammering, but you could say, and then this happened, and that happened, and this happened. You've already proved this. I'm not telling you something new that, well, I've never known that.

I'll leave and see if it comes real. You already know, surely, goodness and grace, goodness and love, goodness and mercy, will follow me all the days of my life.

That's why you can go back to verse one. The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing. It is an amazing psalm. You can order your whole life.

The comfort you get from this is quite something. So here are two sheepdogs, grace and goodness. Grace of God, the goodness of God, our confidence is that they will follow us.

These attributes of God will follow us all the days of our life. The good, the bad days, they help us make sense of life, and they will follow us, and surely, we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

[30 : 48] Let me just finish with another psalm, and then we'll sing. Psalm 73. It says, Yet I am always with you. You hold me by my right hand.

You guide me with your counsel, and afterwards you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire beside you.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. A great, great truth. Let's stand, and we'll sing.

I can't believe I've not sung this until now. The King of love, my shepherd, is whose goodness faileth never. So let's really worship the Lord as we sing this together.

I instructions on the Bible G B you