

The Twenty Third Psalm
(Study # 11)

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Introduction

1. Verse 6: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."
2. The world could spare large libraries far better than it could spare this little psalm.
3. The book of Psalms:
 - (1) Israel's prayer book.
 - (2) Israel's praise book.
 - (3) Israel's hymn book.
 - (4) Israel's hope book.
 - (5) The number one accomplishment of Israel's golden age.
 - (6) One-hundred and fifty poems set to music.
 - (7) For private devotion and public worship.
 - (8) Of the 283 New Testament quotations from the Old Testament, 116 are from the Psalms.
 - (9) Perhaps the best-loved book in the Old Testament.
 - (10) Perhaps the most-used book in the Old Testament.
4. Psalm 23 is impossible to date:
 - (1) From it, we receive a few hints and suggestions:
 - (2) David was old enough to have experienced spiritual poverty, needs and wants. (v-1)
 - (3) He was acquainted with emotional and spiritual depression. (v-2)
 - (4) He was mature enough to recognize and confess that this soul had been damaged. (v-3)
 - (5) He had wandered outside the paths of righteousness. (v-3)
 - (6) He had walked through many dark valleys. (v-4)
 - (7) He had faced many dangers in life, and had meditated on death. (v-4)

- (8) He had found peace in the presence of evil and death. (v-4)
- (9) He had felt the personal presence of God: "Thou art with me." (v-4)
- (10) He had felt the chastisement of God's rod and staff. (v-4)
- (11) He had received the strength of divine comfort. (v-4)
- (12) He had been the guest of honor at God's great spiritual banquet table. (v-5)
- (13) He had attracted and enraged many enemies. (v-5)
- (14) Through many long journeys, he had felt the presence of goodness and mercy. (v-6)
- (15) He had been filled with overflowing gratitude to God. (v-6)

5. In this psalm, we learn:

- (1) Life is not only journey and effort and rest; it is also conflict.
- (2) The end of the fray is the beginning of the feast.
- (3) The soul can be so completely at rest in God that it has nothing more to ask from the world.
- (4) The never-departing presence of God's goodness and mercy.

6. How David proclaimed it:

- (1) Calmly, confidently, positively!
- (2) "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

7. Now: The main emphases of this verse.

I. The Celestial Escorts

1. "Goodness and mercy."

2. Some other biblical twins, or duos:

- (1) Two sons: Jacob and Esau. (Gen. 25:24)
- (2) Two angels: Those God sent to Sodom to warn Lot. (Gen. 19:1)

- (3) Two cherubims: On the mercy seat of the tabernacle in the wilderness. (Exo. 25:18)
- (4) Two cherubims: With widespread wings in Solomon's temple (I K. 6:23-28)
- (5) Two Old Testament saints: Moses and Elijah at the Mount of Transfiguration. (Luke 9:30)
- (6) Two thieves: One on each side of Jesus. (Mat. 27:38)
- (7) Two angels: At Christ's empty tomb. (John 20:12)
- (8) Two angels: On the Mount of Ascension. (Acts 1:10)
- (9) Two signs: Castor and Pollux on Paul's prison ship to Rome. (Acts 28:11)
- (10) Two celestial escorts: Goodness and mercy. (Psa. 23:6)

3. Goodness and mercy have been called:

- (1) The celestial escorts.
- (2) The never-tiring twins.
- (3) The ever-present scouts.
- (4) The divinely appointed attendants.
- (5) The silent sentinels.
- (6) The wayfaring watchmen.
- (7) The marching monitors.
- (8) Our constant companions.
- (9) Our fellow pilgrims.
- (10) Our guardian angels.

4. "Goodness and mercy shall follow:"

- (1) They followed Abraham all the way from Ur of the Chaldees down into the land of Canaan. (Gen. 11:31 through 12:5)
- (2) They followed Joseph down into the dark land of Egypt. (Gen. 37:1-36)
- (3) They followed Moses through the Sinai wilderness, and up to his grave on Mount Pisgah. (Deu. 34:1-6)
- (4) They followed Elijah to the top of Mount Carmel, and into the chariot of fire. (I K. 18-38-46) (II K. 2:11)

- (5) They followed the prodigal son into the far country, and back to his home again. (Lk. 15:11-24)
- (6) They followed David "All the days of his life." (Psa. 23:6)
- (7) They have followed you and me from our cradle to this hour.

5. A special word from the psalms:

- (1) "Selah."
- (2) The Hebrew word "selah" is scattered across the Psalms 70 times.
- (3) It is placed immediately following great truths which the psalmists thought worthy of special emphases.
- (4) A scholarly definition of "selah" is difficult to find.
- (5) A simple definition could be: "Pause, think about that for a moment, and then go on."

6. With this in mind, I say unto you:

- (1) "Selah."
- (2) Remember how goodness and mercy have followed us in the past.
- (3) Remember how goodness and mercy still follow us in the present.
- (4) Remember that goodness and mercy shall stand by our deathbeds as we draw the last breath of our life.

7. Paul for a moment and think about that, and then go on!

II. The Double Blessing

1. "Goodness and mercy:"

- (1) "Goodness" appears in the Psalms 48 times.
- (2) Mercy" appears 253 times.
- (3) But the phrase "goodness and mercy" is found only one time in the Psalms. (Psa. 23:6)

2. The double blessing:

- (1) "Goodness and mercy."
- (2) Not goodness alone, for we all need mercy.
- (3) Not mercy alone, for we all need God's goodness.
- (4) We need God's goodness to provide for us, and to keep us.
- (5) We need God's mercy to forgive our sins and redeem our souls.
- (6) We need the goodness that is stored in the vast reservoirs of God's love.
- (7) "Mercy" which the psalmists describe as: "Great, good, abundant, plenteous, forever, everlasting, enduring forever, the source of joy, the basis of hope, the inspirer of song, the companion of truth, and the paths of the Lord."

3. Hand in hand, they follow us:

- (1) They follow us when we are following God.
- (2) The shepherd always walked in front of the flock.
- (3) The shepherd dogs followed behind the flock.
- (4) Jesus, the Good Shepherd, always goes before us.
- (5) And God's goodness and mercy follow behind us.

4. "All the days of my life:"

- (1) Bright days, and dark days.
- (2) Feast days, and fast days.
- (3) Spring days, and summer days.
- (4) Fall days, and winter days.
- (5) Sowing days, and harvest days.
- (6) Birth days, and marriage days.
- (7) Life days, and death days.

5. A phrase from John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" expresses it well; they follow us: "Across the river that has no bridge," and into our eternal home.

III. The Positive Promise

1. Contained in David's words:

- (1) "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."
- (2) Surely! Certainly! Absolutely! Positively!

2. Confirmed by the nature of God:

- (1) Again and again, the psalmists declare:
- (2) God is faithful.
- (3) God is unchangeable.
- (4) God is eternal.

3. Confirmed by the promises of God:

- (1) "The Lord thy God will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."
(Deu. 31:6)
- (2) "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee: I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Joshua 1:5)
- (3) "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and will not forsake them." (Isa. 42:16)
- (4) "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."
(Mat. 28:20)
- (5) "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Heb. 13:5)

4. Confirmed by the actions of God:

- (1) At the Red Sea. (Exo. 14:21-31)
- (2) At the Jordan River. (Josh. 3:14-17)
- (3) At the walls of Jericho. (Josh. 6:11-20)
- (4) At the fiery furnace. (Dan. 3:1-27)
- (5) At the Bethlehem manger. (Lk. 2:1-16)
- (6) At the cross. (John 19:17-30)
- (7) At the empty tomb. (Mat. 28:1-7)

5. Confirmed by the servants of God:

- (1) "There has not failed one word of God's promise." (I K. 8:56)
- (2) "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." (II K. 6:16)
- (3) "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever." (Isa. 40:8)

6. Confirmed by our personal experience:

- (1) In our salvation.
- (2) In our sense of God's presence.
- (3) In our answered prayers.
- (4) In reading God's word.
- (5) In trusting God's promises.
- (6) In obeying God's commandments.
- (7) In responding to God's call.

7. Listen to the memorable words of the songwriter, Ira Standphill: "Many things about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand; but I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand."

Conclusion

"Surely goodness and mercy
shall follow me all the days of my life."



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