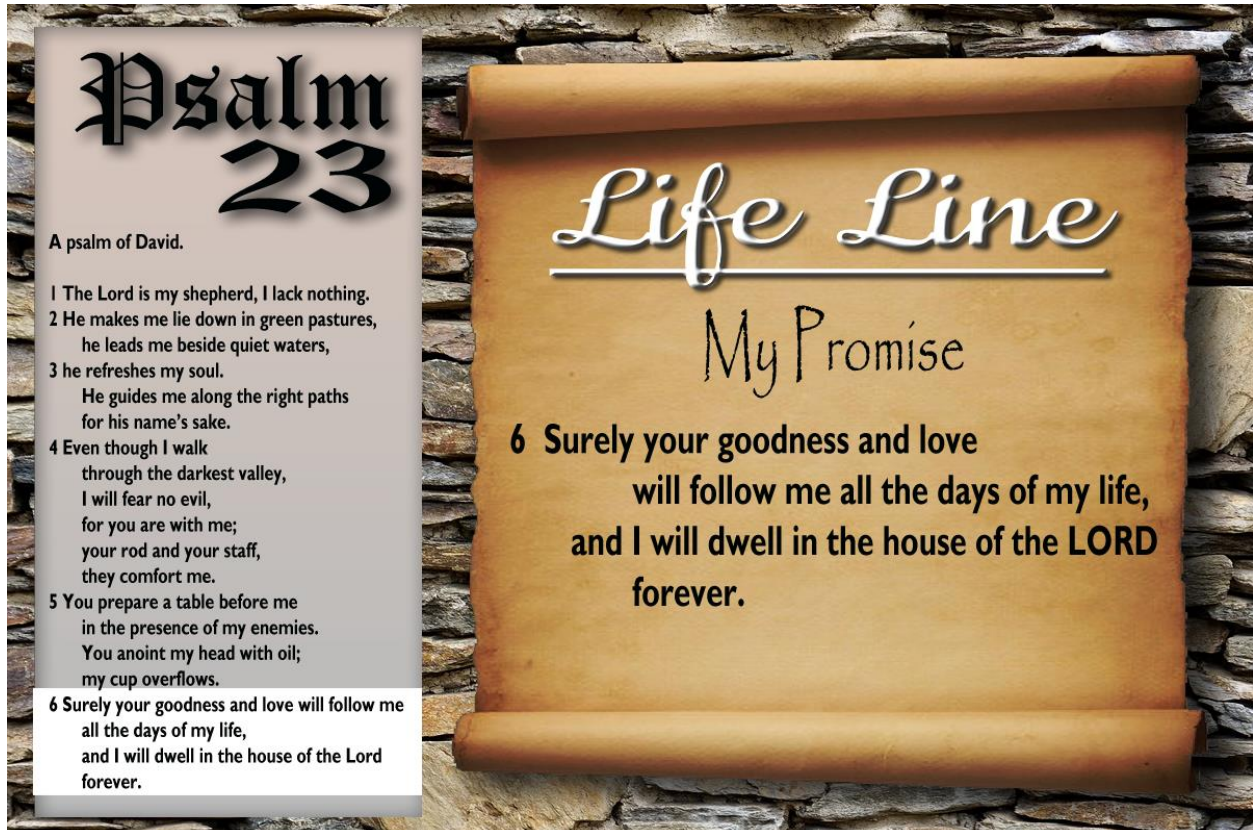


November 28, 2021

23rd Psalm

“My Promise”

Intro: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxwlnA5UvPc>



Psalm 23:6

**6 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.**

Special Music: Psalm 23

Bobby McFerrin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cn2zKKhhF3I>

Pillars of Stone

Pillars of stone.

Immovable.

Unshifting, Uplifting,

Protecting my flesh

And my bone

It is here upon truth

That I build my home

Placed on the pillars

Of God's promises

No longer anonymous

I am fixed to the firmament

Through love and through grace.

This foundation

Shall not waiver

Will never show favor

To lesser purposes.

It will not give way to

Humankind

Or the passions of nature.

Though the wind and the waves

Beg to make graves

Of my faith,

Their onslaught will fail

And God will prevail.

The foundation will not give away.

**When my time is come
And the sands of my life
Have run their course,
Without remorse
I will step into my new home
Prepared by my master
With pure alabaster
As unique as the creature
He made me to be.
One thing stands true
As I choose to pass through
Into new light and new home,
The promise remains,
As the domains of stone
Create promised lands
Crafted by hands
That belong to
My Savior, my Shepherd, my Lord.
The foundations of stone,
Which I make now my own,
Are mercy and grace
And shall not be moved
Or replaced,
As God opens the door
To my mansion of mercy
Built on pillars of truth,
And immovable stones.**

Harold Stevenson was a pilot. His eyes lit up every time someone asked him about his time in the air. He had been retired from the airlines for almost a decade, but he still had a small single engine Cessna parked in a hanger at the airport that he took out at least once a month. He still got as much joy flying on a Saturday afternoon as he did the first time he had stepped into a cockpit.

Harold's son, Thomas, had never had much interest in flying. His idea of excitement on an airplane was when he was forced to book a last-minute flight to a business meeting in New York and got caught in traffic trying getting to the airport. If it had been practical, he would have preferred just taking the train.

But Thomas' son, Thomas Jr., loved the thought of flying. He was tall for his fourteen years, with scrappy hair and just a nudge of whiskers. His birthday was coming up and his grandfather had promised to take him flying with him for his birthday. It would be his first time in an airplane. His mom and dad were not too thrilled about it. Grandpa Harold didn't see quite as well as he used to, and they really thought that he should probably give up the Cessna and become a couch pilot. Harold wasn't about to give up something that he loved so much. Besides, he had a promise to keep. And every time he reminded Thomas of that promise, he could see the boy get that same glimmer in his eye that he had gotten that day so many years ago with the anticipation of his first flight.

A week before Thomas' birthday, Harold suffered a major stroke and had to be hospitalized. Although he managed to still be able to speak, he did lose the motor functions for most of the left side of his body. Thomas was devastated. He hated to see what was happening to his grandfather. His parents took him to

visit his Harold in the hospital. It was so difficult to see him this way. His grandfather had always been a pillar of strength, never sick, always active. Thomas wanted to cry but braved it out while he sat and talked about odds and ends with this stalwart pillar in his life.

“I am so sorry, Thomas,” Harold told his grandson. “I may have to break my promise. Will you ever be able to forgive me?”

“I just want you to get well, grandpa,” said Thomas. “I don’t have to go flying. Besides, it probably wouldn’t be any fun without you. Being with you is really the best part of that promise.”

Thomas and his parents returned home. It was hard on him knowing that his grandfather was not going to be around to celebrate his birthday. Somehow, in all his years as a pilot, his grandfather had never missed even one of Thomas’ birthday celebrations. Not having his grandfather to celebrate was going to a letdown.

Thomas looked at his parents and said, “Would it be okay if we took my birthday cake up to granddad’s room at the hospital and celebrate my birthday there?”

“I don’t know, Tom,” his mother replied, “but I will call and ask.”

A couple of days later, his mother let him know that the hospital had told her that it was alright to celebrate at the hospital. So, together they made all the arrangements. When they arrived at the hospital, his grandfather had the nurses raise his bed up. Balloons had been tied to the bedrails, and the cake was

adorned with airplane décor. They had even brought in all of Thomas' presents so that he could open them there. When all the unwrapping was done and the cake had been eaten, they started to clean up.

A man that Thomas did not recognize entered the room from the hallway. He said hello to his parents and shook Harold's good hand. Then he turned to Thomas. "Tom, I hear this is your special day."

Thomas' grandfather spoke up. "Thomas, this Bill Ettenger, an old friend of mine. He has agreed to help me keep my promise. Bill is a great pilot, and he is going to take you flying this afternoon in my place."

"But grandpa, I really wanted to go flying with you."

"You will, my boy." Harold held up his cellphone and handed another one to Thomas. "Just another birthday present, Tom. When you get to the airport, call me on video chat at this number and I will be with you the whole time."

Thomas was beside himself. His grandfather had managed to keep his promise in spite of the fact that he was unable to leave the hospital. He seemed to have thought of everything. And with that, he showed his grandfather the glimmer in his eye.

**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.**

God's promises to us are sprinkled all through the Bible. From Noah and the Ark to Abraham and his children. From Joseph in Egypt to Moses and the Exodus. From the judges to the kings, the prophets to the wisemen, and the people to their shepherd. God is not afraid to make promises. God had always, ALWAYS kept his promises. They don't always come in the form that we expect, but in hindsight we can see how ever faithful God is in keeping His promises. We see how the Lord maneuvers our life's trajectories right through every promise that has been made to us by our Creator.

David knew this. God promised him places to rest. Not just any place, a place in green pastures and beside cool waters. A place where a feast has been prepared in the presence of his enemies. A feast where the bread is fragrant and unending and the wine overflows from his cup in abundance. David fully understands that this is the way God treats his children. This is how God loves us.

And we love our Creator back by bringing ourselves whole and unarmored to the table that been prepared; by nor only being in the presence of our enemies but serving them at the table that has been prepared. All of this for His name's sake, for the glorification of God and the fulfillment of our purpose.

There are two promises in this verse that we are looking at today. From his experiences with God's promises and the Lord's intervention in his life, David knows that these promises will be fulfilled. The first promise is this:

**Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,**

When we sit at God's table of grace, in God's presence, we know beyond doubt that this promise will be accomplished in our lives. Goodness and love will follow us. There is not suggestion in this passage that there won't be hard times, struggling, and pain. It simply states that goodness and love will follow us. Always. Good times and bad. Even when we aren't expecting it. It's like an old coat that we can't bring ourselves to give to good will. It's like that dress that we hang onto even though we will never be able to wear it again. It's like that scrawny puppy that follows us home and won't leave, no matter what we do. Goodness and love become an essential part of our nature because of God's presence in our lives. If we tried to get rid of it, it would be like trying to throw God away and God is just not going to let that happen.

By sitting at that table in the pasture by the water serving our enemies, we become entwined with the will and nature of God. Our perceptions change. We begin to see those souls around us the way Jesus sees them. Our empathy grows. Our desire to help, grows. Our grace toward others, grows. Our mercy, grows. And without a doubt, our love grows, both for those around us and for God. We find ourselves in that intermediary position reaching out our hand to

God, our Shepherd, Protector, Provider, while stretching out our other hand to those in need. Those who are sick. Those who are tired. Those who did not know that this table was here for them as well. We realize that the goodness and love that follows us everywhere is not only for us, but to allow us to serve others.

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

That's the second promise in this passage. It is a most glorious promise. But too often we want to just jump right to that promise and skip all the messy part; the part where Jesus expects for us to get involved with the needs of those around us. Involvement that goes way beyond our time and our money.

I know I pester you about these coins that I give you. But I want you to know that I give away 4 or 5 a week and I have yet to have anyone refuse them. Everyone that has received one has given me a smile. It's not about the money. It's about being seen. It's about being noticed. It is about acknowledging people where they are, devoid of judgement. When we give one of these coins to someone, it causes an interaction that goes beyond transaction, even if we just leave the coin on top of a tip or briefly catch someone's eye. For that moment, the world is a better place. And right now, this world needs those moments, from the homeless to the wealthy. From the disenfranchised to the greatest leaders. The coin isn't really meant to be a reward because someone does something nice. It is a moment when we acknowledge another person beyond the mundaneness of their jobs or their situations. People, all people want to be seen and acknowledged. So many people go through live these days in obscurity.

There is nothing on earth that is more unpleasant than to go unnoticed, when we feel invisible to the people around us. The coin is just a simple way to change that. It is a tool. A means of adding a bright spot in the lives that we encounter. It is a way of saying, “I see you.”

It is our interaction with our brothers and sisters, each one created by the same Master, that brings us ever closer to understanding the environment that we will be dwelling in when we take up residence in the House of the Lord. When we are called home, are we looking forward to hearing the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant?” Where God looks at us with a glimmer in His eye. Will God remember us for being the vessels that He crafted us to be, cups that overflow, bread of nourishment, water of life, baptism of spirit? Will the angels celebrate our presence? Or will it be more like “Well, God. I’m here. I believed. Where’s my room?”

The promise of heaven is real. While I do not pretend to understand the nature of actually living in heaven, I do know that God wants only the best for us, and God’s home is our home because we are his children.

These promises from God are neither empty nor shallow. They are full of grace, love, mercy, and truth.

**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 is God's way of telling us that our life does not end with these mortal vessels. When we cast off this flesh, we get to go home to be with our Lord. And not only do we get to go home to be with our Heavenly Father, but we are expected, that our presence is anticipated. That there's a party waiting for us.

We have spent this month taking a deeper look into Psalm 23. I pray that you found some new ways of looking at the Psalm and maybe a little insight into David's intent as he wrote it. Please join me now as we recite the Psalm together in the King James Version that we all grew up knowing.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul:

He leadeth 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.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

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

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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