**“My Shepherd and His Pursuit**”Psalm 23:6a

**Good Morning Beloved,**

* John Bunyan - 1684
* In Part Two of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christiana and her companions spent a happy month in the Porter's Lodge where they rested and received spiritual instruction.[[1]](#footnote-1)
  + As the pilgrims were leaving the lodge, they heard the birds in the grove singing to them from Sternhold's and Hopkins's version of Psalm 23 (an early metrical Psalter).
    - Through all my life thy favour is
    - So frankly show'd to me,
    - That in thy house for evermore
    - My dwelling-place shall be.
    - For why? The Lord our God is good,
    - His mercy is forever sure;
    - His truth at all times firmly stood,
    - And shall from age to age endure.

Reading of God’s Word

***23****A Psalm of David.*

***1*** *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

***2*** *He makes me lie down in green pastures.*

*He leads me beside still waters.*

***3*** *He restores my soul.*

*He leads me in paths of righteousness*

*for his name’s sake.*

***4*** *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.*

***5*** *You prepare a table before me*

*in the presence of my enemies;*

*you anoint my head with oil;*

*my cup overflows.*

***6*** *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me*

*all the days of my life,*

*and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord*

*forever. [[2]](#footnote-2)*

**Preaching God’s Word**

1. *…goodness and mercy...*
   1. Some say these two words are:
      1. #1 – Sheep dogs… the Good Shepherd is up front… and “Goodness” and his buddy “Mercy” are like the “great guardian angels” (Spurgeon) who act as guard rails that keep the sheep in the right path (vs. 3).
         1. For fretful sheep… there is a tenacious protector who is committed to your well-being so that sheep can say “I will fear no evil” (vs. 4)
            1. In learning vocabulary… the most basic words… *tov* (good) and *rah* (bad).

POINT: In the midst of evil… there is GOODNESS.

* + - 1. For sinful sheep… there is a delivering protector who is diligent to care for you even when you fail.
         1. The most important word in the Bible to express our relationship with God is in this word, *hesed*, translated “mercy”.

Point: In the midst of sin… there is MERCY

* + - 1. Summary: F.B. Meyer – “in God there is goodness to supply every want, mercy to forgive every sin; goodness to provide, mercy to pardon.”
    1. #2 – God himself[[3]](#footnote-3)… the Good Shepherd… is described in two ways…
       1. Goodness and mercy
          1. Psalm 119:66ff – ***66****Teach me good judgment and knowledge,  
                 for I believe in your commandments.****67****Before I was afflicted I went astray,  
                 but now I keep your word.****68****You are good and do good;  
                 teach me your statutes.****69****The insolent smear me with lies,  
                 but with my whole heart I keep your precepts;****70****their heart is unfeeling like fat,  
                 but I delight in your law.****71****It is good for me that I was afflicted,  
                 that I might learn your statutes.*

God does not have goodness… God is good.

His judgments are good (vs. 66).

His leadership in your life... even in affliction… is good (vs. 71).

BECAUSE He is good (vs. 68)

* + - * 1. Ex. 34:6-7 -  ***6****The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,****7****keeping steadfast love for thousands,*

In the high point of the OT revelation of God to his people brought out of Egypt… He is described in the inner most parts… to use a human image… in “his bowels”… God is mercy… steadfast love (*hesed).*

* + 1. Illustration: Video of sheep stuck in the ditch only to immediately jump in the ditch AGAIN…
  1. Pause… Do you know this God?
     1. Do you know God as perfectly good and holy in mercy?
        1. Tim Keller described marriage as a place that could be horrific of heaven when he writes[[4]](#footnote-4)…
           1. “To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.”
     2. He was drawing on a picture of who God is to help couples relate in marriage.
        1. The only way sheep become “more than conquerors” is knowing that the Shepherd is both good and merciful.
           1. As Matthew Henry says…

“All the streams of mercy flow from the fountain: pardoning mercy, protecting mercy, sustaining mercy, supplying mercy.”

1. *... shall follow me...* 
   1. If we stay with the sheep dog image… “goodness” and “mercy” are like the rear guards.
      1. This would provide a wonderful contrast with idolatry and Christianity.
         1. The Bible describes idolatry with one phrase…
            1. “I want…”

And if you can add… “Has God really said…”

* + - * 1. Then days are spent saying to something in creation…

Ed Welch[[5]](#footnote-5) – “Addictive substances become “a refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1).”

Examples include: stimulants, cocaine, narcotics, opioids, sedatives, and alcohol… Food—especially “comfort food”— Sex

Social media and video games

* + - 1. Christianity has the wonderful contrast… instead of us pursuing idols… we are pursued by God.
         1. In Psalm 83:15 – the Bible teaches how God’s judgments will overtake the wicked…
         2. Similarly,… Beloved Sheep… you will be followed… pursued… overtaken by the mercy and goodness of God.
    1. Martin Bucer – “People pursue happiness, but happiness pursues the saints and those who entrust themselves to God himself.”
  1. If we take “goodness” and “mercy” as descriptions of God himself, it says something about out God.
     1. IMAGE #2 - PICTURE of Shepherd with sheep.
        1. Note the Shepherd is in the front… leading the sheep.
           1. *He leads me beside still waters.*
           2. *He leads me in paths of righteousness*

Story of a group of tourists in Israel… from Dr. Witmer[[6]](#footnote-6)

The story is told about a group of tourists in Israel who had been informed by their Israeli tour guide, after observing a flock and their shepherd, that shepherds always lead their flocks from the front. He told his attentive listeners that they never “drive” the sheep from behind.

A short time later they drove past a flock along the road where the shepherd was walking behind them. The tourists quickly called this to their guide’s attention and he stopped the bus to step out and have a word with the “shepherd.”

As he boarded the bus he had a sheepish grin on his face and announced to his eager listeners, “that wasn’t the shepherd, that was the butcher!

* + - 1. Based on that story… who would be in the rear… a butcher.
    1. Yet it is not someone who threatens the life of God’s sheep… but GOD himself who encircles HIS Sheep.
       1. Vs. 2 – He leads me – Front
       2. Vs. 4 – You are with me – Beside
       3. Vs. 6 – follow me – Behind
          1. As David would say in Psalm 139…

***139****O Lord, you have searched me and known me!****2****You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
    you discern my thoughts from afar.****3****You search out my path and my lying down  
    and are acquainted with all my ways.****4****Even before a word is on my tongue,  
    behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.****5****You hem me in, behind and before,  
    and lay your hand upon me.****6****Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
    it is high; I cannot attain it.*

***7****Where shall I go from your Spirit?  
    Or where shall I flee from your presence?****8****If I ascend to heaven, you are there!  
    If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!****9****If I take the wings of the morning  
    and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,****10****even there your hand shall lead me,  
    and your right hand shall hold me.*

* 1. Transtion: This knowledge of God enable you to say something about HIS pursuit.

1. *…Surely… all the days of my life,*
   1. The ESV has a little footnote after the word *Surely…* it can mean only.
      1. David Gibson notes…
         1. If it is “*Surely”* it means it is a confident intensifier.
            1. What do you mean?

It means You can say… the end of your journey (which will be filled with sorrows and sins) will result in Glory to God and Good for you.

* + - * 1. Joseph experienced severe difficulties and shrapnel in his relationships…

Yet he did not give way to bitterness and spewing wrath…

Gen. 50:20 - *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*

* + - * 1. POINT: Yes… things are hard… but this will definitely happen.
      1. If it is “*Only”* it is a clarifying restriction.
         1. It means that in every bit of your journey… GOD has related to you in ONLY one way… goodness and mercy.

Psalm 136 summarizes the history of God’s people throughout generations… and in every verse there is one conclusion…

*“For his steadfast love endures forever…”*

* + - * 1. In every circumstance…

Green pasture…

Still water…

Valley of the Shadow of death…

Birthdays…. Holidays… Family Reunions… Graduation…

Funerals… divorce… betrayal… cancer treatments…

* + - 1. Gibson – “… life full of evil, pain, and suffering, never indicate a bad GOD.”
         1. Dear Beloved Sheep, your Shepherd never has off-days… gets “hangry”… or does good for others sheep at your expense.

All the days of your life… He has shown you ONLY goodness and mercy.

* + 1. In *A Horse and His Boy,* C.S. Lewis…
       1. There is a Boy named Shasta who envying what others seem to have… and summarizes his life as “unfortunate”.
          1. Then there is this wonderful summary from Aslan…

*“I do not call you unfortunate,” said the Large Voice.*

*“Don’t you think it was bad luck to meet so many lions?” said Shasta.*

*“There was only one lion,” said the Voice… “I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the Horses new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you.*

* + - 1. In the fiction… the Boy is confronted with the facts of Aslan’s clarifying restriction… he has only ever been the object of another’s goodness and love.

1. Conclusion
   1. For you, Beloved saints,
      1. God himself has not delegated your care to another being…
         1. Boldly the Word of God declares…
            1. Romans 8:28 - ***28****And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*
   2. For the pursuing and overtaking… the intensive and the restrictive… goodness and love of God is most clearly seen in this… the gospel of JESUS.
      1. 1 John 4:9 -  ***9****In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.*
   3. Or to say it another way…
      1. *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,*

1. As quoted in *A Sheep Remembers* by David. B. Calhoun, 147-148. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/esv?ref=BibleESV.Ps23.title&off=24&ctx=Lord+Is+My+Shepherd%0a~23%C2%A0A+Psalm+of+David.) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 23:title–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. David Gibson, *The Lord of Psalm 23*, 126-127. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Timothy Keller, The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/addictions-and-idolatry [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* (P&R, 2010), 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)