

The Now & The Not Yet

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Preacher: Calum Macmillan

[0 : 00] Well, please turn back with me if you have a Bible with you in Psalm 23. We're going to be focusing on the last verse of this psalm this morning.

Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. 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 very easy to read these words and think that David who wrote them must live in some kind of ivory tower, isn't it? We know that life is hard.

It's been a crazy year. And sometimes words like David writes here can seem so far removed from the reality that we're living in, particularly after this past week, Remembrance Sunday last week and Remembrance Day on Wednesday, when we think of experiences like our veterans went through. In the great wars in particular. And the horrors of these conflicts and the horrors of these situations. How do we hold on to the reality of these words? Goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.

[1 : 12] Well, it helps to remember who's seeing them. It's King David. And there are a couple of things we need to know about David. The first is that he was a warrior. He was such a renowned warrior that a song was made about him.

In 1 Samuel 18, it says, Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands. Here was someone who had been in conflict, who had experienced conflict, who experienced death and slaughter. And in his own life, we need to know that David did not have an easy life.

David is not writing from an ivory tower in which everything went well for him. When you read through the life story of David in the Bible, he had King Saul trying to kill him. He had to live rough in the mountains, living in caves for a while while he's been pursued for his life.

He suffered the loss of an infant son. He suffered the loss of his adult son, who'd rebelled against him, tried to steal his throne, and David again having to run and to live rough.

David's perhaps got some of the most emotive words in the whole Bible, as he grieved the death of his son Absalom. Oh, Absalom, my son, my son, would that I had died instead of you.

[2 : 22] Absalom, my son, my son. Words you can just feel the pain in. But like ourselves, he experienced a pandemic. While he was king, there was an outbreak of a disease in the nation, and tens of thousands of his countrymen died.

So the man who writes these words is a man who's seen the brutal realities of life. He's lived it. He's experienced it. Deep pain, real tears. A man who suffered, and yet, and he's probably an older man here looking back over his life.

This is the way he chooses to summarize his life. This is the way he characterizes his experiences. Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

So as we look at that verse, we're going to look at it with the two distinct perspectives that David uses, what we're going to call the now and the not yet. The now and the not yet. You see there he talks about his life in this world and time.

But then he also goes on to speak about eternity. So first of all, we'll look at the now. Given all the things that David's been through, one thing we can say at the start is what this verse doesn't mean.

[3 : 37] This verse doesn't mean that if we're trusting in Jesus, that life will be a bed of roses. It doesn't mean that if we're trusting in Jesus, everything will go smoothly and we'll never have any problems.

Because that clearly wasn't the experience of David. But what he is saying is that through all his turmoil, through his ups and through his downs, through his challenges, in his joys and in his

sorrows, he was aware of God's goodness and God's love in the midst of them.

In the midst of his struggles, God's goodness and love were present. As we think in the psalm, you know, he starts at saying the Lord is his shepherd. And in the ancient Near East, the shepherds would walk ahead of the flock.

So it's an image of the shepherd ahead, David following his shepherd and God's goodness and love, he says, are following. They're coming along behind. The shepherd's in front, David's eyes are on the shepherd and God's goodness and love are coming along behind him.

When it says God's goodness and love will follow him, it's, the word used there is probably a bit stronger. It's the idea of being pursued. And there's a bit more intensity to that, isn't there?

[4 : 47] Right? If you're being, hope no one's following you, but if you do get followed, that's one thing. But if someone's pursuing you, there's a real intensification there, isn't there? David's saying God's goodness and love will pursue me all the days of my life.

Through the psalm, it's been all about movement. He's being led beside quiet waters. He's guided in paths of righteousness. He's walking through valleys of the shadow, through the green pastures and the still waters, through the dark valleys.

He's saying God's goodness and love are pursuing him. And probably you can see in David's own life, through his own sin and his own folly and his own stupidity and the bad mistakes he makes, that God's goodness and love still pursue him.

They will not let him go. God's goodness and love pursue David. And the word used here for love is a very specific word.

It's *chesed*. It's this idea of God's covenant love. Now, you might ask the question, well, what does that mean? Well, the closest we can get to this idea of covenant love is the idea of a marriage vow.

[6 : 00] When we take marriage vows, we'll often say, until death us do part. It's a life and death pledge, though we know, sadly, because we live in a broken world, that not everyone who makes that vow will keep to it.

But God does. And God makes a promise to all who trust him. That he's going to be God to them and to their children and to their children's children. And God keeps his word.

And God does not change. In fact, there's a moment in the Old Testament where God walks through these pieces of dead animals that have been chopped in half. And it's in effect God saying, let me become like one of these dead animals if I break my promises.

God can no sooner break his promises to his people than he can cease to be God. God is committed to us. God does not flinch in his commitment to his people. And he is committed to all who trust in him through his son, Jesus Christ.

He will not waver. He will not stop. He will not let us go. His goodness and his covenant love will always pursue his people.

[7 : 10] God's committed to his people. And God's also committed to his world. He's committed to fixing this world, to redeeming this world, to renewing what is broken.

You know, our ultimate hope, I need to phrase this very carefully, is not to die and go to heaven. That's not what the Bible tells us our hope is to be.

The Bible tells us our hope is that when we die, our soul goes to heaven to be with the Lord. But then there's a day of resurrection. And then this world is renewed. And in our new bodies and renewed souls, we will live upon this new earth.

God is committed to his world. And he's committed to renewing it in perfection. But we might ask the question, well, how on earth can we hold and believe that God is good when we see such bad in the world?

It's a good question. We see God's goodness in the face of Jesus. Jesus is God. He's God the Son, and he comes into this broken world of pain, and he suffers himself.

[8 : 16] The God who made this world entered into this world. And he experienced the pain and the brokenness and the sufferings that this world brings.

And Jesus goes to the cross to pay the penalty for the sin of his people. He goes to the cross for people who rebel against him, who've rejected him.

And he goes to the cross to save us from our sins. And even as he's being crucified, what does Jesus say? He says, Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing.

We see God's goodness in the face of Jesus. That he would come to this world that hated him, rejected him, and through his love and sacrifice, turn his enemies into his people, into his friends.

You see, ultimately the big problem in our world and in our hearts is sin. But Jesus came into this world to atone for sin. To enable our sin to be forgiven if we will accept him as our king.

[9 : 22] God is good. And in Jesus we see exactly how good God is. That's why the hymn writer could say, Amazing love, how can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

Now one of the things that's been happening since the days in the Garden of Eden is that there's that little lie of the serpent that lurks in our hearts, isn't there? That little whisper, suggestion that God's not really good.

If he's really good, why is all this happening? That this doubt, this suggestion that God isn't good. That's the lie that lurks in our hearts.

But we don't judge God by our circumstances. We judge God by what he's shown himself to be in the person of Jesus. Think of Jesus himself.

If you looked at his life, would you ever go, well, there's the perfect man, the beloved son of God. His own family at one point tried to take him home by force because they think he's out of his mind.

[10 : 21] One of his best friends betrays him. He says the foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man's got nowhere to lay his head. And ultimately, though an innocent man, he dies naked upon a cross.

A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. If you just look at the circumstances of his life, would you ever go, there is the beloved one. But Jesus, from the moment of his baptism, remember how the Holy Spirit descended upon him.

This is my son, my beloved son, whom I love and whom I am well pleased. He could face his circumstances confident in the knowledge of God's goodness. Nahum 1 chapter 7 in the Old Testament says, The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble.

When we hold on to this reality that God is good, means we can run to him in the hard times. Run to him in the difficult times. And he becomes a stronghold and a shelter for our souls.

Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee. That was David's experience. But if I can just say this briefly as well, that was Jesus' experience as well.

[11 : 32] I wish we had more time to go into this, but Andrew Boner, one of the free church founders, one of the giants in the free church history, he has a wee commentary on the Psalms.

And he says a really challenging line. He says, The church of Christ has so appropriated this psalm for themselves that it's forgotten that their shepherd once needed it and was glad to use it. This is not just a psalm about Jesus.

This would have been a psalm that when Jesus lived in this world, he himself prayed. That he himself testified to. And I think there's a reason that this is written in a singular voice.

Because I think we are meant to hear Jesus speaking these words. Who writes the psalm? David, the king. Later on, the king says, He anoints my head with oil. It's the anointed king who is speaking.

And what's another word for an anointed king? He's speaking Christ. And doesn't that bring a different dimension to these words? Maybe words we've grown up with. To hear them through the voice of Jesus.

[12 : 35] As he lived in this world. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For you are with me. I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

This was David's testimony, but this was also Jesus' testimony. As one who endured hell literally upon the cross for his people. The Savior can still testify to his confidence in the goodness of God. His goodness and his love would follow him all the days of his life. And he would dwell in the house of the Lord forever. So David's confidence for his life is that God's goodness and love will be there. But now he goes on to the not yet. He says, I will dwell in the house of the Lord. Forever. He starts talking about eternity. He comes with a perspective that is really helpful for us.

A perspective that is necessary for us. It's not just about God's goodness and love in life. But it's about what goes beyond that. He talks about eternity.

[13 : 41] You know, there's no such thing as a mere mortal. Death is not the end. Death is not the end. Death is not the end. we will live forever, either in heaven or in hell.

Death is not the end. The Bible says there's going to be a resurrection of life for those who trust in Jesus and a resurrection of condemnation for those who have rejected Jesus. Death is not the end. There is an eternity that lies ahead of all of us. And the only way to life, the only way to heaven is having Jesus Christ as our shepherd, Jesus Christ as our Savior. And if we have that, these words

become our confidence as well.

His goodness and love in life dwelling in his house forever. You know, we really need to look beyond just this world and this life.

And there's a danger, isn't there, that even as Christians, even as a church, we can lose sense of that eternal perspective. But this eternal perspective can give us hope and it can sustain us in the hardest of times. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4 speaks about his body failing and wasting away. But he says, but I don't lose heart. Why does he not lose heart? This is what he says, for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. Since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. Can I ask you this morning, do you think on eternity?

How much does eternity weigh in our perspectives? Do you know where you'll spend eternity? You know, one of the dangers of reading Psalm 23 is we make it a wee bit too comfortable.

[15:40] Because when David said the Lord was his shepherd, the people in that time would have understood something that we maybe don't immediately think of. It was another way of saying Jesus is king. Back in those days, kings regarded themselves as the shepherds of their people.

And when David first wrote that, that association would have been clear. He's saying, the Lord is king. Jesus is king. And the Bible says we will all stand before that king one day to give an account of our life.

And as we think on eternity, how does that help us? Well, it helps us as we deal with sufferings in this world. As Paul reminded us, our light and momentary troubles, he's not saying that what he was going through was easy, but it's a comparison. They're light and momentary compared to the weight and the eternal significance of the glory that is coming.

As we suffer, as we go through hard times, and maybe specifically as we go through hard times for being Christians, we remember that this world is not forever.

And eternity is coming where all wrongs will be righted, all tears will be wiped away, where death, sorrow and sadness will be gone forever, and a new perfect world will exist for all eternity. And for David, that's his ultimate hope, that he will find rest in the house of the Lord.

[17:05] You know, we've said already it's been a psalm of movement. He's been walking through dark valleys, guided in paths of righteousness, led beside quiet waters. It's constant movement, but he comes to the end of the psalm, I will dwell.

He's not just visiting. He's going to be there forever. I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. And let's just think about that language for a moment.

The house of the Lord, what does that mean? Jesus uses that language, doesn't he, in John 14. He says to his disciples, In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you.

But what did it mean in David's world? What was the house of the Lord when David wrote? Well, it was the tabernacle, which would later become the temple built by David's son Solomon.

The tabernacle was where God lived. The tabernacle was like a tent, essentially. And inside the tent was broken into two rooms. There was the innermost room, the most holy place, which was like God's throne room.

[18:11] The Ark of the Covenant was in there. It was God's throne. And God's glory dwelt there, resided there, lived there. And out with that innermost room was called the holy place. And there was various items of furniture.

And only priests were allowed to go into this tent. And yet here David says, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. David wasn't allowed into the tabernacle.

He couldn't even pop in for a visit. And now he's saying, I will live there forever. What's he saying there? There's two things he's saying there. The first is that the barriers that blocked the way between God and the people would be taken away.

If you could have walked into the tabernacle, what would have blocked the way to the most holy place was a thick curtain. And onto that curtain was woven cherubim, angels. It was reminding them of Eden.

When they were kicked out of Eden and the way was blocked by a flaming sword that turned every which way and cherubim put to guard the way. It was still a barrier. There was still a wall they couldn't cross.

[19 : 17] And there was this wall that was dealt with by Jesus. Matthew tells us that when Jesus gave his life on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two. God was saying, the way is open.

The barriers are gone. Come in. David's hope is twofold. That the barriers between him and God, the barriers that sin had brought in would be taken away, which they have been in Jesus. But the code of his hope is simply this. He gets to be with God forever. That's really the heart of what he's saying. I will dwell in the house of the Lord. Psalm 27 as well, David says, that I may gaze upon the beauty of the Lord forever.

David's heart is that he gets to be with God. For all eternity that he gets to be in the presence of God. For the very first time, David will see his shepherd face to face and he will be like him.

To some people, the idea of heaven is boring. Some people, the idea of heaven, they think, oh, a never-ending church service. Oh. But if we're thinking like that, we've not really understood who God is.

[20 : 25] Heaven can't be boring because God is there. And God is a fountain of life and joy. He is a fountain of living water. In the book of Revelation, heaven is pictured with who at the very center?

Jesus. You know, if Jesus wasn't in heaven, it wouldn't be heaven. And the very heart of what makes heaven heaven for the people of God is that we get to be with God.

We get to experience his nearer presence. We get to experience unbroken fellowship with our creator. Because of Jesus, we can get God.

That is the gospel. That is the gospel. Because of the ultimate sacrifice of God's Son, Jesus, there is an eternity of joy and bliss made available to all of us if we will put our trust in Jesus.

This life is not all there is. Our present pain is not forever, but there is hope and there is eternity of glory set out for us in Jesus. Do you have Jesus as your shepherd?

[21 : 37] Is that hope yours? You know, this has implications for the way we present the gospel, doesn't it? You know, if we were to ask someone, do you want to go to heaven or hell?

I'm sure everyone would say heaven. But not everybody wants Jesus. That's quite a different thing. And our calling is to present Christ.

To present Jesus in his fullness and his glory. That the Holy Spirit, by his grace, would open people's eyes to see the beauty of Christ and be drawn to him. Because without Jesus, there is no heaven.

And maybe today, if this idea of Jesus as enjoyable, as desirable, as just a weird alien concept to you, I want to give you a challenge.

I want you to pray. Even if you've never done that before, pray. And ask God to open your eyes to see what Jesus is really like. Read one of the gospels. Say the gospel of Mark.

[22 : 34] Read through the gospel and pray as you read it that God would open your eyes to see Jesus. If you have a Christian friend, ask them to read through the gospel with you. Maybe help you answer some of your questions.

But pray to God and ask him to show you. Remember, some men came to the disciples and they said, Sirs, we would see Jesus. And that's a prayer I believe that God will answer.

If you want to see Jesus, he will show you Jesus in his glory. The ultimate rest is found in the arms of Jesus. Glory is coming. Make that hope yours.

That you will have hope for now and confidence for the not yet. It's the best news that there is. And it's found in Jesus. If the Lord is your shepherd, his goodness and love will follow you all the days of your life.

And you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen. Amen. Our last praise item.