

THE SHEPHERD PSALM

by

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CHAPTER SIX

"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." (Psalm 23:6)

The writer was once called to speak with a Scottish Presbyterian elder who was rapidly passing from this life. I had read to him this last verse of the Psalm, when, turning in his bed, he said to me in words that were almost his last, "Take my Bible and read that verse to me from *The Psalms in Metre*' in the back of my Bible." I took his Scotch Bible from a table close by and read:

"Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me,
And in GOD's house forevermore
My dwelling place shall be."

-- William Whittingham

Someone has well said that "goodness and mercy" are GOD's two collie dogs to preserve the Christian from all danger. Others have likened "**goodness and mercy**" to the Christian's footmen to wait upon him daily. "**The house of the LORD**" is doubtless here contrasted with the tent of the shepherd, just as the words "**dwelt forever**" are contrasted with the fact that the fugitive was allowed to stay in the shepherd's tent only a limited time.

This verse expresses the confidence of the Christian with regard to the future. It is the Christian's confidence that in the Father's house a mansion is prepared for him, and that when the earthly house of this tabernacle is taken down and dissolved by death he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. This is surely a grand provision for old age, a life insurance worthy of the name, a home for the winter of life, and a blessed assurance with regard to one's eternity. How poor indeed is that soul that cannot say, "**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil**"; for the grave is not the terminus but the passageway that leads to endless light and life, into the glory and beauty of the house of the Lord in which the believer shall "dwell forever." Beyond the night of death lies the perfect day; beyond the valley of the shadow lie the plains of peace.

One cannot help but wonder if you, reader, have such a confident hope with regard to your future life. Only those who are able to say "**The LORD is my shepherd**" are able to say "**I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.**"

A famous Scotch preacher tells us that a demented boy, who was in the habit of attending one of the classes in his Sunday school, was sick unto death. The minister was asked to go to see the boy. He went to the house, and in speaking with the lad and after reading the Scriptures he was about to leave, when this boy, with only half his reasoning power, demented and partly idiotic, asked the great preacher if he wouldn't kneel down and recite for him the Twenty-third Psalm. In obedience to the boy's request he knelt and repeated the Twenty-third Psalm, until he came to the last verse which, as you know, reads "**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**" But the preacher did not repeat this last verse, for he was saying to himself while on his knees, "This verse can hardly be true of this boy; surely goodness and mercy has not followed him all the days of his life, and further, what does he know about the determination of this verse -- to dwell in the house of the LORD forever?" And so the great preacher was rising from his knees, having omitted the last verse, when the boy reached out his hand and, placing it on the shoulder of the minister, pressed him again to his knees and repeated the last verse of the Psalm -- the verse the preacher had omitted, as it is written in the Scotch hymn book:

"Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me;
And in GOD's house for evermore
My dwelling place shall be."

This was a lesson the preacher never forgot. Can you, my reader, you with all your senses, your keenness of brain and intellect -- can you say what this idiotic boy could say; "**I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever**"?

I am reminded in this connection of one of Bunyan's characters in the *Pilgrim's Progress*. He is referred to as "Mr. Feeble Mind." This character is speaking of his immortal hope -- that hope which lies beyond the valley of the shadow of the grave -- expresses it in this way: "But this I am resolved on: to run when I can, to go when I cannot run, and to creep when I cannot go. As to the main, I thank Him that loved me. I am fixed. My way is before me. My mind is beyond the river that hath no bridge, though I am, as you see, but of a feeble mind." Mark that wonderful expression, will you --

My mind is beyond the river that hath no bridge.

Is yours? You -- man, woman, with all your senses, of strong and sound mind, can you give expression to an exclamation of faith like that?

There are some of my readers on whose head time has laid its hand and whitened their hair to the whiteness of that winter in which all their glory must fade. Their sun of life is going down beyond the hill of life. The young may die; the old must die. Oh, the pity of it, to see the old and gray with no eternal life insurance for the winter of life! The gray head is indeed a crown of glory if it be found in the way of life; otherwise it is a fool's cap. Reader, may your eventide be light, and may your path be as the path of the just that shineth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day!

Thus we see that the grave is not the end. We pass through the grave only in order that we may

place our last climbing footstep upon the threshold of our Father's house, to go out no more. Then we shall dwell forever there. Beyond the grave lie the Plains of Peace, the Homeland -- with all the loved who have gone before -- those whom we "have loved long since and lost awhile."

Is the way so dark, O wanderer,
Is the hillcrest wild and steep,
Far, so far, the vale beyond thee,
Where the homelights vigil keep?
Still the goal lies far before thee,
Soon will fall on thee the night;
Breast the path that takes thee onward,
Fight the storm with all thy might.

Tho' thy heart be faint and weary,
Tho' thy footsteps fain would cease,
Journey onward -- past the hillcrest
Lie for thee the Plains of Peace!

Is thy path so rough, O pilgrim,
Passing on thy way through life;
Deep the sorrows that beset thee,
Great the burden, wild the strife?
Tho' the hill of life be weary,
Tho' the goal of rest be far,
Set thy whole heart to endeavor,
Turn thy soul to yon bright star.

From the toiling, from the striving
There at last shall come release;
One shall bring thee past the hillcrest,
Home unto His Plains of Peace;
One shall bring thee past the hillcrest,
Home, Home, Home unto His Plains of Peace!

-- Clifton Bingham

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