

GOD'S ANTIDOTE TO FEAR OF THE FUTURE

Today we're going to conclude our series on Psalm 23 called Stressbusters. We're going to look at God's antidote to Fear of the Future. A lot of people spend their lives worrying about tomorrow. They never enjoy today because they're worrying about tomorrow. Why? Because we don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. Yet David, as he concludes this Psalm, is not worried.

Psalm 23:6 *"Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

No anxiety, fear of the future, worry about tomorrow. He's confident -- *"surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life."*

Where do you get that kind of confidence? If you're a believer, there are three reasons why you don't need to fear the future and that is the subject of my message today. One thing we can be sure of, God is a good God. God is good? All the time?

The first reason why you don't have to fear the future is because

I. God is Watching Over Me

Psalm 145 *"The Lord watches over all who love him..."* God cares about the details of your life. Like a father, He will provide for you in the future. We don't know what the future holds but we do know Who holds it. We know God is in control and God loves you and wants to help you. He says, I will be like a Father and will watch over you.

"Surely goodness will follow..." What does he mean by that? Obviously David had disappointments in life. Not everything good happened to him. He's not saying, Surely, only good things are going to happen to me. That's not true. Bad things happen to good people. He's not saying only good things are going to happen. He's saying only goodness will follow. Good things will always come out of whatever happens even the bad, the evil, the difficult. God will insure that good will come out -- it will follow whatever happens to David.

The great promise that God has given to believers is in Romans 8:28, *"We know that all that happens to us is working for our good! IF we love God and are fitting into his plans."* This is not a promise for everybody. All things do not work together for good for everybody in the world. Things work together for bad for people who are not trying to go the way God wants them to go, who are not following his path. But if you're a believer, the Bible says all things are

working together for good -- not all things are good -- but working together for good. That's what it means "goodness will follow me". There is no difficulty, dilemma, defeat, disaster in the life of a Christian that ultimately God won't bring good out of. Eventually, He'll bring good out of it. Somehow.

Often it's difficult to see God's goodness when you're going through a tragedy. There are times when you don't feel like God is good. You don't feel His mercy. Sometimes you feel like God's goodness is hidden. Even Jesus, on the cross said, "My God, my God, Why?" We go through those experiences sometimes in life -- Why? And we don't see goodness in the situation. It's only later, looking back, that we see God's goodness and how He was working for good. This does not mean only good things will happen to you, because bad things will happen to you, but God will bring good out of them.

Paul was put falsely in prison in Rome. Was that good? No. He was kept as a prisoner in Rome. While he was there, he wrote some books that we now call the New Testament. Goodness followed after his imprisonment. Today we're benefiting from Paul's problem, pain, difficulty. Goodness follows.

God says, I will watch over you. How does God watch over believers? Ps. 91:11, *"He will order his angels to protect you wherever you go."* God uses angels to watch over you.

Angels are real. They are invisible helpers. The Bible says one of the reasons God has created them is to watch over and protect believers. You don't talk to them or see them, but they are there working on your behalf all the time.

The Bible narrates some examples of God's followers who were protected by angels. For example, there was Daniel. In Daniel 6, Daniel was in the lions' den and the lions were very hungry. But God sent His angels and they kept those lions away from Daniel. The angels protected Daniel from harm. Then, there's also the story of Elijah and his servant in 2 Kings. They were surrounded by a hostile army that is getting ready to move in on them. Elijah is not worried a bit. He knows that God's angels are there but the servant is petrified. Elijah prays to God, *"Lord, open his eyes that he can see."* At that moment this servant saw angels surround them, hundreds of them. No longer was he worried. And the story of Paul too in Acts 27, where Paul is on a ship with a bunch of other men. This ship encounters a tremendous hurricane. From all outward appearances it looks as if the ship is going to sink and everybody is going to die. An angel appears to Paul and says, *"Don't worry. You're not going to die and nobody on this ship is*

going to die. You're going to be safe."

Now, in modern times, God continues to use angels to rescue his people. Let me show you a video about how one man was saved by angels from sure death.

Video

So, angels can protect us in dangerous circumstances. Now, just because we have a guardian angel doesn't mean that we're exempt from bad things happening to us. Sometimes bad things do happen. David had angels guarding him and bad things happened to him. The apostle Paul had angels guarding him, but bad things happened to him. We do know that God has a purpose why he allows some tragedies to happen.

One thing you can count on: God will always be with you through adversity. He doesn't exempt you from adversity but walks with you through the adversity. Not only that, God can bring good out of evil.

Now, another thing why you don't have to fear the future is that

II. GRACE IS WORKING IN ME!

Not only goodness will follow you but *"...mercy will follow me all the days of my life."*

Isaiah 60:10 *"I will have mercy on you through my grace."* What is grace? Grace is God's Riches At Christ's Expense. GRACE. It's all God's able to do for us because of Christ. Grace is the fact that God gives you what you need, not what you deserve. Aren't you glad God doesn't give you what you deserve? The Bible says, God is gracious and gives us what we need, not what we deserve. What is mercy? Mercy is grace in action. Why do we need mercy? Because we're imperfect. We stumble and fall, blow it, make mistakes. In the future you're going to sin! So in the future, you need not only God's goodness, you need His mercy. You need His forgiveness, pardon, healing.

When you really understand God's grace and mercy, you'd know that God isn't out there trying to get even with you. So when a bad thing happens you don't have to think God's getting even with you. That he's punishing you. God doesn't "get even" for things that have already been paid for on the cross. That's grace, mercy. When you understand God's grace and mercy then you have no need to fear the future.

Ps. 103 *"I will... not forget the glorious things God does for me. He forgives all my sins. He heals me. He ransoms me from hell. He surrounds me with loving-kindness... He fills my life with good things ... He is merciful and tender toward those who don't deserve it; He is slow to get*

angry... He never bears a grudge ... He has not punished us as we deserve for our sins for His mercy is as great as the height of the heavens. ... He is like a father to us, tender and sympathetic to those who reverence him."

Mercy means that when I'm going through a tough time, a valley, a difficulty -- even one that I've brought on myself -- God is there to help me out. The Bible says, "*...we can come before God's throne where we can receive mercy and grace to help us when we need it.*" God has a 24 hour drop in service where we can go to God asking for help. In His mercy, He can help because of what Jesus has done.

Mercy, like goodness, follows us in life. Picture a parent following a little child around picking up after them. God is constantly picking up your messes. Things that you blow, things that you make a mistake, things you get out of. God is behind you, picking it all up and putting it back together, That's mercy. He's picking up behind you, cleaning up your messes.

"Mercy will follow all the days of my life" -- not some of the days, but all the days. God doesn't turn His goodness and His mercy on and off. He doesn't treat you nice one day and the next day treat you badly. All the days of my life, I'll have God's goodness and God's mercy. The Bible says that his mercies are new every morning.

You're going to experience many different kinds of days in life. Happy, sad, sick, depressing, lonely, difficult -- that's why we fear the future -- we don't know what's going to happen. But you will never face a day without God's goodness and mercy with you if you've given your life to Jesus Christ. He will be with you all the time. Some days you won't feel it, some days you won't see God's mercy and grace and it may be hard to determine. But surely, certainly, without a doubt God's goodness and mercy are going to be there even in the tough times in the future.

Those of you who are married, one day one of you will die. The other will have to face life without your mate. But surely, goodness and mercy will be with you. God will be with you. God's goodness will take care of the good days, God's mercy takes care of the bad days -- all of the seasons of life.

How can you be sure? Because God does not lie. He cannot tell an untruth or be inconsistent. He never changes. He never breaks a promise. If He says, "surely goodness and mercy will be with you all the days of your life", they will! We get so worked up and worried about the future because we start "what if"-ing -- "just suppose..." There is no supposing in the

Bible. It says surely! Christians go to the future not with a question mark but with an exclamation point. Stop supposing and start reposing. Relax, trust. God will be with you no matter what happens. He will help you out. God's goodness will provide and protect. God's mercy will pardon and forgive. God's goodness will supply. God's mercy will sooth. God's goodness will help me. God's mercy will heal me.

Goodness is the fact that God gives us good things in life that we don't deserve. Mercy is that God holds back the condemnation that we do deserve. You need them both in life.

This is a psalm about shepherding -- "The Lord is my shepherd". You lead sheep, but you drive cattle. The difference is that sheep are led from the front. The shepherd is in front of the flock. He leads and they follow. Cows are driven from behind to keep them moving. If you were to go to the Middle East and see a shepherd leading a flock of sheep, you'll see a shepherd at the front and one or two sheep dogs at the rear, keeping them in line. Goodness and mercy are like divine sheep dogs in life. They are following behind, nipping at your tail, keeping you in line, keeping you safe so you won't get lost. Once you're in the flock you don't get out of it because those sheep dogs keep you in it. Goodness and mercy keep you in the flock. When you have goodness and mercy in your life you don't have need to fear anything.

Goodness and mercy ought to be enough to get us into the future.

And finally, I don't have to fear the future because

III. HEAVEN IS WAITING FOR ME

"... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." That's one of the most important little connections we see in the Bible. It connects yesterday and today with tomorrow. God says, "I've got this great life planned for you and surely goodness and mercy will follow you through it, BUT that's not the end! I've got something else at the end!" He builds it to a crescendo. David ends this Psalm by saying "We're going to heaven!" Jesus saves the best until last. With God it just keeps getting better and better. The best is yet to come.

2 Cor. 5:1 *"We know that our body will be destroyed. But when that happens, God will have a house for us. It will not be a house made by human hands; instead, it will be a home in heaven that will last forever."* How long is forever going to last? Forever! Someday your body is going to die, but you aren't. Your body is going to end but that's not going to be the end of you.

The other night, while I was driving, Ally asked, "Daddy, how many lives do we have?" And I said, "Why do you ask?" She answered, "Because mommy said we have only one." "She's

right,” I said. Then, she asked again, “Why only one? Not three?” I answered, “Because God designed it that way.” Then, I said, “But you’re going to heaven, right?” She nodded. “In heaven, you will have a life that will not end. Although there’s only one, it will be forever and forever.” And she said, “Oh!”

I dread the day she grows up and asks, “Daddy, why are some people elected for salvation and some people are not?”

So, you're going to live forever, in one of two places -- heaven or hell. They are both real places. You will spend eternity in heaven or hell. Your body is going to die but you're not going to die. We were made to last forever. And if you have placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ you are going to spend eternity in heaven with Him.

Jesus said, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* (John 14:1-3 NIV)

Why are Christians the most confident people about the future? Why? Because death, for a Christian, is a transfer, a promotion. It's on to better things. No more problems. No more pain. No more suffering. No more disease. No more depression. No more loneliness. No more fear. No more tears. No more death! If you have accepted Christ as your Savior that is what awaits you.

Listen to how Revelation 21:4 (LB) puts it, *"He will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain. All of that has gone forever."* Doesn't that make you a little homesick for heaven?

I Peter 1:4-6 (LB) says, *"God has reserved for his children the priceless gift of eternal life; it is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God, in his mighty power, will make sure that you get there safely to receive it because you are trusting him... So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though the going is rough for a while down here."*

The problem is that even most Christians act like that all there is to life is going on here and now. That's all that matters. No! This is just preparation for where you're going to spend all of eternity.

Don't act as if everything that matters is what is here and now. It's only temporary. Don't invest your life for things. Getting things is not the goal of life. Getting prepared for heaven is.

Don't buy into the world's system. Don't live on a superficial level. Live in light of eternity. Realize you're not going to be here forever. You're going to be in eternity forever. Don't waste your whole life trying to get a bunch of things for right now that you're not going to keep anyway. Live in light of eternity.

How do I know I'm going to heaven? If you were to die tonight are you sure you would go to heaven? I don't have an ounce of doubt in my mind that I would. Not because I deserve it, but because I've done what the Bible says to get ready.

Jesus said, "*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.....*" John 10:27-28a (NIV) How do I know I'm going to heaven? Two things: Jesus says, "My sheep listen to me and they follow me."

Are you doing that? Are you listening to what God says to do with your life? Are you following Jesus Christ? Is He your Shepherd and your Savior? If you say, Yes, I'm listening to God and I'm trying to let Him lead my life, letting Jesus Christ be my Savior. Then you can say with absolute confidence, Surely I know I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

I will dwell. Not I might or I wonder. I know I'm going to heaven, because I've done what the Bible says. When you face the future, what do you see? Do you look at it with eyes of doubt? With eyes of cynicism? With eyes of expecting the worse? You have two choices in life: You can either face the future as a cynic, a doubter, with negative thoughts, expecting the worse. Or you can face the future expecting God to be with you and His goodness and His mercy to follow you all the days of your life. It is amazing how much better life gets when you start to actively look for God's goodness and God's mercy in every experience. It'll change your life.

As we conclude this series this morning over these last weeks we have seen in Psalm 23 how much God loves you. We've seen how much God cares for you, how He says "I want to be your shepherd." What's the bottom line of these seven weeks? What have we learned? If I summed it up in one sentence it's this: Jesus is all you need. The good shepherd provides protection, provision, peace, providence, companionship, and paradise. What more could you want? What more do you need? That covers it all. Jesus is all you need.