

Our Source of Certainty in Uncertain Times (Part 5): The Lord Takes Care of Us

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[0 : 00] Country music legend Ronnie Millsap is coming to Pickens next May for the Blue Ridge Fest.

He was supposed to come this year, but he's coming back next year, right? Right. Okay. One of his hit songs was Please Don't Tell Me How the Story Ends.

If you don't know it, come up to me afterwards and I'll sing it for you and let you hear the good stuff. That song describes a man's fear that the story of him and his girlfriend might not end well.

If you're a Christian, you never have to worry how the story of your life will end. You never have to worry.

It will be a good ending if you're a Christian. Now, there are chapters in our lives that do not end well. Everybody has difficult times.

[1 : 11] We talked last week from Psalm 23, verse 4 about dark valleys in life. But those are chapters. We have assurance from Psalm 23, the most well-known chapter in the Bible that our lives, if we're Christians, will end well.

We will live in the house of the Lord forever. Last verse of Psalm 23. For the past four weeks, this is what we've been looking at. This most loved psalm.

David has been describing how God is our good and faithful shepherd who takes care of us, his needy sheep, and provides everything that we need always.

Well, today, we're going to begin in verse 5 and see that David makes a change in the way that he describes God and us. Now he pictures our heavenly father as a gracious host, a king who is hosting us as his special people at a great banquet.

But the point of verse, or the point of chapter of the 23rd Psalm remains the same whether God is a shepherd or a great host. He always takes care of us, his people.

[2 : 36] Let's read it one more time. We're going to finish it up today. Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I'll 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. In these verses, David is describing how the Lord takes care of his people now, our life here on earth, and forever.

In the world to come, in heaven as Christians. That's why we never have to worry how the story of our life is going to end.

[3 : 43] Let me add to that if we know Jesus is our Lord and Savior and God is our Heavenly Father. Let's look at it. The Lord takes care of us now. That's what he's talking about in verse 5 and the first part of verse 6.

The Lord takes care of us graciously. Let's look at that in verse 5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

David is describing the Lord in terms of a gracious king who is hosting a banquet for us as his honored guests.

There's three things that the Lord does or provides at this banquet. Look at it. You prepare a table before me. A king would prepare a great feast, wouldn't he?

That's the idea. The next one's not as, it's not something we would think about. You've anoint my head with oil. Many commentators say this was a common act of hospitality in ancient days.

[4 : 46] The idea was that a host would provide perfumed oil for a guest. Because living in the Middle East and those arid places, when they came in, their skin's going to be wind and sunburned.

And so the oil was for their face and forehead. It was soothing. And it was perfumed. And don't you know in a day with no deodorant and not taking showers regularly, that was appreciated more than anything by the guests.

Third, my cup overflows. All they could drink was provided. The gracious host. Talking about his provision. How it's abundant.

It's special. It's just gracious. Note that David says, the Lord did this in the presence of my enemies. That's something we need to make note of.

He doesn't just provide for us, but he provides for us in the very presence of those who oppose us. What was David thinking?

[5 : 54] Maybe he was picturing a victory banquet where his enemies had been defeated and they were forced to watch this great banquet like prisoners of war.

Or it could be that David is thinking about some of the people sitting around the table who just pretend to be his friends. But in time, they're going to be shown to be enemies.

You know, that happened in David's life. There were people who were his friends, even family members, even sons who turned against him at various times. Either way, the point is that our Lord graciously takes care of us even in the presence of anyone or anything that we would consider our enemy.

In other words, no enemy can ever stop God from doing what he wants to do in our life. No enemy can ever stop God from accomplishing his good plan, Romans 8, 28, that he is working out in our lives.

And that includes every kind of enemy. No spiritual enemies, even the devil. The devil is powerful, but he is always, always under the hand of God.

[7 : 15] You can only do what God allows. We have human enemies, don't we? Now what we're talking about here would be people who oppose us because we are Christians and believe God's word and seek to live by it.

That would be the idea here. And we're not talking about just an enemy who doesn't like you for various reasons. We're talking about enemies who would oppose us as God's people. No other kind of enemy can thwart God's plan.

Think of things like sickness. That's an enemy. Depression, fear, or even death. Nothing can stop God from working out his good plan in your life, in this world even.

This is a good place to note, if we are Christians, we should have enemies. If you say, I have no enemies, that's not good. That must mean that you're sort of a nothing in this world, never taking a stand, never believing anything, standing on any truth.

Charles Spurgeon said, even if the good man has enemies, he would not be like his Lord if he did not. Spurgeon got that from Jesus.

[8 : 39] Here's an example from John 15. Jesus said, if you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Remember the word that I said to you. A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. Think about this.

If we believe and obey God's word, we're going to be opposed by those who don't believe it. And just reject it as true and right.

We see that happening more and more in our country, don't we? Think about it. Issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, gender identity.

If we call sin what God calls sin, we're going to have many enemies. There's going to be times it could be costly.

[9 : 52] You know what our response should be? So be it. And Lord help me. Help me to be faithful.

Help me to speak the truth in love. Help me not to become like the world. Help me not to compromise.

Help me to stay true to you. And never be ashamed. Here in verse 5, David is picturing God as a gracious king and host who provides so much more than the basics for us.

He's describing God as providing abundantly for us, his people. This picture of God's graciousness is pictured in various ways throughout the whole Bible.

Haddon Robinson, I think, does a great job in explaining this. And if you're a Bible reader, you'll see exactly what he's talking about.

[10:58] He says, talking about God, with him, the calf is always the fatted calf. The robe is always the best robe. That comes from the story of the prodigal son.

The joy is unspeakable and the peace passes understanding. There is no grudging in God's goodness. He does not measure his goodness by drops like a druggist filling a prescription. It comes to us in floods. If only we recognize the lavish abundance of his gifts. What a difference it would make in our lives.

God is being pictured here as someone who doesn't hold back in providing for us his gifts at his house at a great banquet.

Now, it is important that we understand this is not all the Bible says about how God works in our lives. David is not saying life's always a party. David is certainly not saying that we always have a super abundance.

[12:10] We're always treated like we're the special guests of honor at a party. Last week, in verse 4, we saw, talked about how God sometimes leads us through dark valleys.

There are times in life that we are not experiencing life as an honored guest at a great banquet. There are times that we struggle and stumble through dark valley experiences. So understand, there's a lot of different things that we experience in life, and Psalm 23 even points it out.

But here, in verse 5, he's talking about how God does graciously bless us with good things. And when you know that, when you experience that, you need to acknowledge this is a gift from God. God is showing his grace to me. God is blessing me. Be thankful. Enjoy his good gifts.

[13:23] But at the same time, enjoy him, the giver of those good gifts. Now, let's just pause here and think about.

What do we usually dwell on? Think about. Talk about. It's just a general rule of life.

Do you make it a point to regularly count your blessings and think about the gifts that God has given you graciously?

You didn't deserve it, but he's blessed you that way anyway. Do you stop and think more often than not about what all God has graciously done for you?

Out of his mercy and love and goodness? And just thank him and enjoy him and what he's given you? Or do you spend more time thinking about what you don't have?

[14:38] About how bad life is? And complain about what's going on? And gripe about how unhappy you are.

What do you? Which is you? Ask your spouse. Ask your children. Ask your parents. Which is you? Which do you want to be known as?

Well, that's a decision you make. We can go through life counting our blessings. Enjoying them.

Talking about God in this kind of positive way. Giving us what we don't deserve. Or we can go around being negative, critical, never even acknowledging the good things kind of person.

If we're Christians, it should be obvious that even though we go through times of dark valleys, the Lord does take care of us.

[15:47] And he does it graciously. He doesn't have to. We don't deserve it. David also makes clear that he always will. Look at this. The Lord takes care of us continuously. He says, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

Mercy is often translated love or loving kindness or steadfast love. It's there in some of your translations. One commentator describes God's goodness as giving us what we do not deserve. That's like grace. And mercy as withholding what we do deserve. Several commentators really try to emphasize that the word follow doesn't mean sort of passively, you know, dragging along.

But the word follow actually means to pursue, to chase, to run after. That makes a difference to think about it that way. Stephen Lawsley explains it in a real good way.

Look at this. These two attributes of God, goodness and loving kindness, actually represent God himself who is continually pursuing David.

[16:57] It is the figure of speech known as personification, which assigns human-like qualities to inanimate objects. To be sure, these two attributes represent God, who is personally following David and caring for his every need.

The idea is, this is how God pursues us. Here's an illustration of how God follows us, pursues us out of his goodness and mercy.

Imagine yourself driving down the interstate. Not much traffic. You're just cruising along. And all of a sudden, you glance up in your rearview mirror and there's that blue light right on your tail.

You think to yourself, what is going on? And as soon as you see that blue light, you glance down at your speedometer and it's on 90 miles an hour. You didn't mean to go that fast.

There wasn't much traffic. The road was straight. The weather was clear. The car just sort of floated. 90 miles an hour and the blue light flashing. Your heart sinks.

[18:08] Because this is not the first time you've done 90 miles an hour on the interstate. In fact, truth is, you've had so many tickets that if you get one more, you're going to lose your driver's license.

And in these seconds, all this is going through your mind and you think, I'm going to lose my license. And I'm not going to be able to take my spouse on that special vacation anytime soon that I promised we will go to Hilton Head this year.

Well, you pull over. You're sick at your stomach. The patrolman walks up to your window. But then he says something that just puts you in total shock.

He looks at you and says, that motel you just left, I was there as well. Well, they asked me to catch up with you if I can and give you your wallet that you left on the counter.

They also asked me to let you know that the drawing that you entered last night when you checked in, Well, they've had it this morning and you have won a free trip for two to Hilton Head.

[19:27] The patrolman pursued with good news. The patrolman pursued and was merciful and didn't give you the ticket that you deserved.

That's the idea of how God pursues us. His people. And he promises, look at the passage, to do it all the days of our lives. Think about that.

God pursues us with goodness and mercy or goodness and love, goodness and steadfast love.

Now, we've got to look at the big picture.

Sometimes God's steadfast love compels him to exercise tough love and discipline him, discipline us because we won't listen to him.

That's what the writer of the Hebrews is describing in Hebrews 12. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves. Sometimes one of the ways that God pursues us, because we're hard-headed, bull-headed, we won't listen, we won't cooperate.

[20:34] Sometimes he pursues us out of love to discipline us. Think about that. That's not God's preferred way.

Think about it as a parent. As a parent, you want to be able to speak to your child kindly, nicely, and let them know what they need to do with the hope that they'll listen and they'll obey and there's no conflict.

There's no frustration. There's no sticks involved. But if you're a good parent, if they don't listen to the kind words, you're not going to let them get by.

You love them too much. So you're going to be more stern. You may need to bring out the stick.

You may need to discipline very firmly.

But the preferred way is the grace and mercy and things like that. That's God's preferred way. I want you to look at a passage in Romans chapter 2. It's in the context, beginning in Romans 1, 18 through about chapter 3, verse 20.

[21:57] Paul is describing how all people are guilty of sin against God and all people are without excuse. But in the context of describing people's sinfulness and things like that, look at what he says.

God works in us like the psalmist is talking here.

Goodness. Mercifully. Wanting to teach us.

Lead us. Correct us. He does this. His preferred way is way of love. I think one of the best descriptions of how our Heavenly Father pursues us with goodness and mercy is found in the story of the prodigal son.

Chuck Swindoll describes this very well. Look at this. He says, I am convinced that one of the reasons the prodigal son came to himself and finally returned home was because of the kind of father he had.

[23 : 12] And I know this is Father's Day. This is the ideal father here. There is no magnet with a stronger pull than genuine love.

Love has drawn back more wanderers and softened more hearts than this world will ever know. It is fitting then that you and I are followed all the days of our lives by goodness and loving kindness. God knows what will best do the job. Mark it down, my friend. God knows how to deal with his children. More specifically, he knows how to deal with you. His dealings follow you all the days of your life.

Your circumstances right now are part of his plan for you. How is God dealing with you right now? Today.

This period of time in your life. Is he pursuing you with goodness and love? Or respond to him likewise.

[24 : 16] And keep in mind that Jesus said, the way you express your love is through obedience. Look at what Jesus said in John 14. Jesus answered him, if anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him.

God can exercise tough love. He knows how. We've all experienced it at various times. So we can exercise tough love if necessary and discipline us.

But we can avoid some of God's discipline by willingly responding to his goodness and mercy with obedience.

A good attitude. Loving him in return. If we belong to the Lord, he promises to take care of us now. All the days of our life. But that's not the final word of this psalm. Look at this. The Lord takes care of us forever. The last part of verse six. And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

[25 : 30] David found comfort in the thought of living in the house of the Lord forever. Forever. Forever. What was he talking about? Well, I think Jesus has the best commentary on what David's talking about in John chapter 14.

Look at this. Jesus said, Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself. that where I am, you may be also. You see the source of the comfort that both David and Jesus describes in terms of the house of the Lord or the Father's house?

It's not a real structure, a building. It's all about who is in the house that makes it special.

What makes my house special is the fact that Lisa lives with me. What makes my house special is that my children and grandchildren come there every Sunday and we eat lunch together.

[26 : 49] That's what makes your house special. The people. It has nothing to do with the building materials, the layout, without the design.

What makes a home special are the people who are there. What makes heaven special is the presence of Jesus first and foremost.

But there will also be Christians in heaven that we know and love who've died and got there before we did. That's comforting to me.

You know, every single one of us in this room, we're going to die and we don't know when it's going to be. I don't want it to be today. But if it is, I'm not really afraid.

I don't want to hurt. You know, I don't want it to be bad when it happens. I don't know what it'll be like. But whenever it happens, I am confident based on the Word of God that when I close my eyes to life in this world, I'm going to open them immediately in the presence of the Lord Jesus Himself and family members and friends that I know and love who've gone to heaven before me, you can have that same confidence, assurance.

[28 : 26] The 23rd Psalm is one of the most comforting passages in Scripture. If you know the Lord as you're a good shepherd and gracious host. And the only way that that can ever be is if Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord.

In fact, Jesus is the way to a right relationship with the Father. On in John 14 that we read from a moment ago, Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

No one earns heaven. No one does good and gets heaven. The only way to heaven is to admit we don't deserve it.

We cannot earn it. That we are sinners and we've separated ourselves from God by our sin. And we hate that. So we repent of that.

We change our minds about living that way. And we put our trust in Jesus and he's done everything necessary to make us right with God. He paid the penalty for our sins when he died on the cross. He lived a perfect life and that is credited to us as well.

[29 : 30] If you don't know Christ as your Lord and Savior, call upon him to save you now. That is the only way you can be right with God and live with him forever. Make sure you know him now.

Make sure you are close to him now. Make sure you are expressing your love to him in the way that he said it must be expressed by obeying him.

Let's pray together. Father, show us now how we need to respond that we might be able to read the 23rd Psalm and really experience your presence and your comfort and your assurance that we'll live for you, we'll live with you forever.

Father, if there's Christians in this room who have drifted away or rebelled, help them to know that if they really belong to you, you won't let them go.

You will exercise tough love and discipline them. But Lord, help every Christian in this room to understand that's not your preferred way.

[30 : 50] You prefer to love us, show us mercy and grace, and bless us in those ways.

Father, we need your help to know the truth. We need your enablement to respond to the truth, to live it, even to desire it.

Give it to us. Help us. Let's just be still and quiet and prayerful and respond to the Lord as he's speaking during this time. if the Lord will good and España do and help us know, a retractable means that we deliver it to the Lord and they come ali to God and irrump it.

Tell us he said a evil Emer dopee ever ■ ago in Indiana and there's just that he's going to do for