

Experiencing the Shepherd's Place

Psalm 23:6

Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

Take your Bible and open it to Psalm 23.

In the book "Six Hours One Friday," Max Lucado wrote of a friend named Joy who taught a Sunday school class in an underprivileged area. Joy had in her class a timid, nine-year-old girl named Barbara. Max writes:

[Barbara's] difficult home life had left her afraid and insecure. For the weeks that my friend was teaching the class, Barbara never spoke. Never. While the other children talked, she sat. While the others sang, she was silent. While the others giggled, she was quiet.

Always present. Always listening. Always speechless.

Until the day Joy [taught] a class on heaven. Joy talked about seeing God. She talked about tearless eyes and deathless lives.

Barbara was fascinated. She wouldn't release Joy from her stare. She listened with hunger. Then she raised her hand. "Mrs. Joy?" Joy was stunned. Barbara had never asked a question. "Yes, Barbara?"

"Is heaven for girls like me?"

Barbara, heaven is for girls like you. And boys like you [point to congregation] and for men like you and women like you.

Psalm 23:6 is about heaven and about you. Let's take a look at it. [Read Psalm 23].

Over the past several weeks we have been going through Psalm 23.

- In verse 1 we saw God's *power* and how to live within it.
- In verse 2 we saw God's *peace* and how to experience it.
- In verse 3 we saw God's *path* and how to stay on it.
- In verse 4 we saw God's *protection* and how to be under it.
- In verse 5 we saw God's *preparation* and how to be filled by it.
- Today in verse 6 we will see God's *place* and how to get in it.

There is something I want you to notice before we take a look at the Shepherd's place. In **verse 6** we read, "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life." Someone once said, "God's goodness takes care of my *steps* and God's love takes care of my *stumbles*."

The Bible tells us that God's goodness and love "follows" us. That word "follow" does not mean to follow around like a puppy would follow a child. It means to pursue, to chase down. It means to follow something in order to overtake something. God is telling you that His goodness and His love will follow you in order to overtake you. You see, sometimes you and I run from God's goodness and run from God's love by disobeying God and wandering away from the right path and His will for our lives. But God is a good God and God is a loving God and He will pursue you in order to overtake you so that He can put you back on the right path for your life. He cares more about you, than you do.

And when your life is all said and done, if you are a follower of Christ, you will be able to live "in the house of the Lord forever." "The house of the Lord" is called Heaven. The last part of verse 6 tells us three things about Heaven. We need to look at those three truths. If you already know them, then let them encourage you and bring you assurance and hope. But if these are new to you, then listen carefully because I believe God may want to do something great in your life today. Let's take a look at heaven, God's place.

1. The Certainty of Heaven

First of all, we see the certainty of heaven. This tells me heaven is real. I like the way David ends **verse 6** with total assurance. He says, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." He doesn't say, "I might dwell," or "I hope to dwell," but "I will dwell." There was no question mark about David's future when His life ended.

Let me ask you a question, “Can you say with confidence that you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever?” Can you say with complete assurance that you will go to heaven when you die? If you can’t I want to encourage you to give your life to Christ today. At the end of the message you will have an opportunity to accept Jesus Christ into your heart. Between now and then try to come up with one good reason why you should not accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior today? While you are thinking about that, listen to this.

Heaven is a real place. I want to share with you several thoughts about the certainty of heaven.

Number one, heaven is a present place. Heaven is in the here and now. When a believer dies, he or she steps right into heaven. Jesus said to the thief hanging on the cross beside Him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Today, not tomorrow, not next year, but today. As a Christian, when you take your last breathe your next one will be in heaven.

Number two, heaven is a perfect place. Revelation 21:4 says, “[God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” We will be in the very presence of all that is good and will celebrate the absence of all that is evil. That’s perfection. No more doubts. No more rejection. No more loneliness. No more worry. No more pain. No more fear. No more hurt. No more sin. Complete perfection.

Number three, heaven is a purchased place. Your place in heaven has been bought by the blood of Jesus. 1 Corinthians 6 says, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; (20) you were bought at a price” (19-20). What was that price? The death of Jesus on the cross for your sins and mine. We have a place in heaven because Jesus bought a place for us with His blood.

In 1994 Northwest Airlines offered some unusual round-trip passages aboard one of their airplanes. Fifty-nine dollars bought a “**Mystery Fare**” ticket that provided a one day trip to an unknown American city. Buyers didn’t find out where they were heading until they arrived at the airport the day of the flight. Still, the airline had plenty of takers. In Indianapolis fifteen hundred people crowded the airline

counter to buy the Mystery tickets that were sold on a first-come, first-served basis.

Not surprisingly, when buyers learned their destination, not all were thrilled. One buyer who was hoping for New Orleans but found he had a ticket for Minneapolis walked through the airport terminal yelling, "I've got one ticket to the Mall of America. I'll trade for anything."

Mystery tickets may be a fun surprise for a weekend vacation, but the one time you never want a Mystery ticket is on the day of your death. You don't want to face eternity uncertain about whether you will go to heaven or hell.

I want you to be certain that when you die, you know where you are going. Jesus has already bought your ticket to heaven through His blood. You pick up that ticket through grace and faith in Him. Heaven is a real place. Are you headed there?

2. The Company of Heaven

Not only do we see the certainty of heaven, **but now I want you to see the company of heaven**. Notice David writes in **verse 6**, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Every child of God is a part of the household of God. Listen carefully to **Ephesians 2:19**, "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household."

We will one day be in the presence of God surrounded by the hosts of heaven and the saints of old. Everyone in the household of God will be there. Moses will be there. David will be there. Paul. Jacob. Mary. Abraham. Esther. Ruth. All the people of God you have heard about and all those you haven't heard about. They will all be there. Imagine the scene of all those throughout the generations and the history of the world who claimed Christ as the Lord of their life. They will all be there.

There is a great company of believers in heaven. As a matter of fact **Revelation 7:9** gives us a glimpse of this, "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."

The amazing thing about that verse is it is written about a worship that is yet to happen. That verse is about the future. If you are a Christian that verse is about you. You are a part of that worship service. When you are a part of the kingdom of God you are a part of a great company.

So the question you need to ask yourself is, “Am I a child of God?” Have I been saved? Am I one of His? Am I a part of the household of God? If not, then you need to give your heart and life to Christ today.

3. The Constancy of Heaven

Not only do we see the certainty of heaven and the company of heaven, but we also **the constancy of heaven**. Heaven is constant. For those in heaven, heaven will be ceaseless, without end. Look again at **verse 6**, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” This word “forever,” had a precious meaning to shepherds who lived semi nomadic lifestyles, moving with their flock to wherever pastures were green and waters were still. There temporary homes were simply sheepfolds. When the grass withered and the water became muddy, they would pick up, move out, and travel on. Without question, this nomadic existence was a trial. The wandering of the shepherd is a helpful picture of the life of believers on earth. This world is not our home. We are simply passing through as messengers and ambassadors of the Good News of Jesus Christ. If you sometimes feel out of place, without roots, detached for whatever reason in the world, take heart—that’s how home sickness feels!

When we get to heaven, homesickness is over. Heaven is forever. **1 Peter 5:4** says, “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” Once you are in heaven, you will be there forever. You don’t get kicked out.

Conclusion

You remember the little girl Barbara from the beginning of the message, she asked her Sunday School teacher, “Is heaven for girls like me?” That is a good question. Heaven is for me, for you and for anyone who would accept Jesus Christ into their hearts. Is heaven for someone like you? Yes. [Lead them to Christ]