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Sermon preached at Shaw's Corner, Redhill, by Mr. J. Raven  
on Sunday evening, July, 23rd, 1950

'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. v.6

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We read a wonderfully sweet chapter for our lesson (2 Samuel 7.)  
in which, not only is David reminded by the Lord of the way in which  
He has led him in the years past, but David being reminded, was pouring  
out his soul in gratitude to God, and in believing confidence in His  
faithfulness and His goodness, in the truth of His Word. And being  
strengthened by the word that God had spoken to him by Nathan the  
prophet, he was enabled to rest in the assurance expressed in the  
portion read. Again in our text "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." David's heart rests in the Lord and is satisfied  
with the prospect before him.

The goodness of God appeared very attractive to him, the promises  
that God spoke to him appeared in his eyes to be so very desirable;  
his heart went out to them, and when God makes Himself over to you in  
a promise your heart will go out to Him in that promise, in faith and  
love and gratitude. If you know what it is to get a promise from God,  
a word of grace from His lips, it will stir you up to real gratitude  
of heart and cause you to pour out the love and adoring worship of  
your heart before Him.

Well, this psalm was not written in a time of ease. The season  
referred to in our lesson was a time when David was at peace and at  
rest from his enemies round about, but at the time of writing this  
psalm, I judge, it was not thus with him. It was a time when he was  
still in the path of affliction, and yet in that path he realised the  
shepherding care of his Lord. Indeed, I believe the people of God get  
some of their sweetest comforts in the path of affliction. "As one  
whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be  
comforted in Jerusalem". David's path seemed to be so strange, so  
different from his natural expectations, seeing he had received the  
anointing to the kingship, and since he had such a promise from God,  
the path seemed so inconsistent. Instead of having a straight course  
to the fulfilment of the promise, he had to go a trying and devious  
course to it. It often was so with God's people; they got a promise  
from God, a promise of blessing, a promise of peace, a promise that

they should be favoured to partake of His goodness and His grace, and instead of having a straight course to the fulfilment of the promise, they had to have a very in-and-out course, they had to wander long in the wilderness "in a solitary way: they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them". That is the way the Lord takes, but He leads them in a right way, the way that His wisdom sees to be best suited to them for their good, and for the glory of His name in it. So David was to go by a devious way, a way marked by many afflictions and dangers and perplexities, by much casting down. His heart was often much discouraged and his enemies were often very triumphant. They thought that they were sure of bringing David to his end, but in the midst of it all he was favoured to realise the peace of God. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee". Sweet is the peace with which God favours His people as He enables them to trust in Him in the furnace of affliction, in the path of adversity. So David could say, "The Lord is my shepherd" - Jehovah is one shepherding me - "I shall not want." There appeared every prospect of his wanting, and his own fears ran high. "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul". "There is but a step between me and death". But here he was enabled to say, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters." And when one is in a pathway of tribulation, a wilderness way, O how welcome and how sweet are these refreshments which the Lord sometimes brings into the soul. As Bunyan says, "The bitter makes the sweet all the sweeter." "To the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet", says the Scripture, and so when David got a little reviving in the midst of his bondage, a little help in his troubles, a deliverance from imminent danger, how sweet it was to him, and especially sweet because it was the work of his God; it was to him the token of the mindfulness of his God, that God cared for him. And I can tell you that they are sweet deliverances that come with this, as it were, written on them, "I care for you, I care for you". There have been times with me when certain things have occurred in my experience, in which God has seemed to speak and say, "You see, I do care for you, you are my servant". David found it sweet to lie down in green pastures and to be led by the still waters. "He restoreth my soul". O, often his soul was ready to faint. We read of one occasion when Ziklag was burned with fire and his own men spoke of stoning him because their hearts were so grieved for the loss they

had suffered, but "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God". "He restoreth my soul". And the Lord strengthens his people with strength in their souls, He grants a little reviving in their bondage. When they are faint He gives them a cordial, a gospel cordial, a suitable promise, a gracious declaration. "He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake". Ah, then David thought all was right. 'The path in which I am walking that seems so strange to me is right because He is leading me in it.' "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake". The Lord has regard for His great name, for the honour of His name in leading His people, and so whatever they come into, whatever great and sore troubles He may afflict them with, His paths are right; though His way "is in the sea and his path in the great waters", they are right.

"What though we can't his goings see,  
Nor all his footsteps find?  
Too wise to be mistaken, He,  
Too good to be unkind".

But then the psalmist goes yet further and says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil". Though dangers and deaths beset me, I will fear no evil, though the shadow of death is evidently hovering over me, I will fear no evil. He knew what it was to be walking in the valley of the shadow of death when Saul was seeking for his life, but "I will fear no evil: for thou art with me". The hymn writer says

"I fear no foe with thee at hand to bless".

You see, that makes all the difference, "With thee at hand to bless". His realised presence forbids fear. When He is at hand, when He says, "I am with thee", when He says, "I am thy God", then the soul can say, "I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me". O, the power of God, His ability and His faithfulness to defend His sheep is sweet comfort. "No man can pluck them", says Christ, "out of my hand". Almighty power is engaged for their defence. "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me". The rod and the staff are the instruments used by the shepherd for the defence and the guidance of his sheep, sometimes for their correction. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies". David found that when he was in need God prepared a table before him. He saw to it that His servant did not want, and did not perish for want of anything needful. Even when churlish Nabal refused his request for food and refreshment for him and his men, God sent it by Abigail the wife of Nabal. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies", and

sometimes God's people have to prove this, that they have enemies about them who would cut off the very bread from their mouths if they could. They may have those about them who would ruin their business if they could manage it, and yet they are maintained. He said, "Thou maintainest my lot". "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies". The Lord says to His people, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou has been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life", and sometimes the Lord very solemnly removes out of time into an awful eternity some enemy of one of His people, that His poor child may have bread and means of livelihood. O, He cares much for His sheep. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil". He looked back here to that occasion when Samuel came and anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord as the future king of Israel. "Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over", my cup is a "cup of fulness". He saw it to be a rich portion that God had promised him. My cup is a cup of fulness. O, the blessing of the Lord it maketh rich and He addeth no sorrow with it. If you get His blessing upon you, His blessing in providence and in grace, and more especially in grace, O how rich they are! Even if providences may be adverse, if you get His blessing upon you in that providence, you are rich indeed. "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it". "Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over", "my cup is a cup of fulness". David was satisfied with it, he found satisfaction in that which God had promised him. It is a wonderful thing to be enabled to rest in the promise of God, to say,

"Enough my gracious God,  
Let faith triumphant cry;  
My heart can on this promise live;  
Can on this promise die".

O, he that gets a promise from God, gets God in the promise, God acknowledged to be his God. "My cup runneth over". Nothing makes the cup run over like the assurance that God is our God. You have often heard me speak of a godly woman who had a word, "I am thy God". It made her cup run over. She had been very, very full of sorrow and anxiety, wondering what was going to happen to her now that her husband was gone and with him his pension, how was she going to live, and how should she bear the loneliness, when that word came. I shall never forget as long as memory holds its seat, that season spent in her little cottage where the savour of the Lord's presence was

manifestly felt. Her cup ran over; she was sweetly satisfied, having God to be her God she had all she needed and all she desired. Her cup was a cup of fulness.

Well then, the psalmist having considered the Lord's ways towards him, what the Lord was to him, said "Surely". And there is a sweet note of certainty here, and it is wonderful when you can attain by the grace of God to a note of certainty in things, isn't it? "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life".

"He who has helped me hitherto,  
Will help me all my journey through;  
And give me daily cause to raise  
New Ebenezers to his praise".

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life". David knew that the future would hold very many things for him, possibly many dangers, that the Lord might yet shew to him great and sore troubles, and that he would need the Lord's presence to be with him, the Lord's goodness and mercy to attend him. I think I shall never forget, many years ago, nearly 50 years ago I suppose, when I was in a very tried state, things seemed to be all against me as to health and providence too. I went to Zion Chapel, Leicester one evening and heard a sermon by the late minister at St. Ives, Mr. Haynes, and this was his text. I remember how he spoke of goodness and mercy being the Lord's footmen, whom he commanded to attend his people all their days. I shall never forget what the hearing of that sermon did for me, it lifted me right out of my destitution. Everything that had appeared so dark now appeared wonderfully bright, my heart was filled with hope, hope for the future. O, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" and I was enabled to believe it. The singular thing is that some years afterwards I read that sermon which had been reported by a friend, but in reading it I experienced nothing of what I felt in hearing it, it did not seem like the same, indeed it seemed to be rather a poor sermon. You will think that was strange, but you see one thing was lacking, and that was the power. It is the power that makes all the difference. What is in itself a very ordinary sort of sermon, if the power of God attend it to a poor sinners' soul, it is a great sermon then.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life". David realised that his need in future would be as great as in the past, that he would be as dependent upon his God in all the days that lay before him as he had been in the past, and he was enabled to rest here, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me". He needed the goodness of

God, he needed the goodness of God's temporal provision, the goodness of God's delivering hand, His wonderful preserving care. He needed the goodness of God in all that he had experienced and he needed goodness and mercy still, he needed mercy as a sinner. It seems to me that David could not bear to think of the future without thinking of the mercy of God. As he had needed mercy all his days, so he would need mercy to the end of his life, mercy manifested to a sinner, mercy in forgiving iniquities, mercy in subduing sin, mercy in healing the soul when wounded by sin and guilt, mercy when beset by satanic temptations and when the lusts of the heart arise with terrifying force and threaten to thrust the soul down to hell. O, mercy is needed, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me", and David being a well instructed man in the things of God, knew a good deal of the significance of those sacrifices and ceremonies of the Old Testament dispensation. He knew, for instance, that those sacrifices that were offered daily and the sacrifices on the great day of atonement were but a setting forth of that wonderful channel of mercy that was to be more fully revealed at the coming of the Messiah. The mercy of God can only come through the channel of atoning blood, the mercy of God can only come through the Mediator.

"Twas Jesus my friend, when He hung on the tree,  
Who opened the channel of mercy for me"

And how sweet mercy is when it is viewed as coming through such a channel! How it engages the affections of a believer when he is enabled to view it as flowing through the wounds and blood of the precious Christ of God! He loves mercy. O how suitable and sufficient this mercy is! Mercy through the atoning blood of the Christ of God. I say, how suitable and sufficient it is! Pardoning mercy flows through this channel, sin-subduing mercy, preserving mercy, restoring mercy, strengthening mercy; the rich, the manifold mercy of a merciful and gracious God flows through this channel. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me". Mercy can never be at the expense of justice, If mercy is to reach poor sinners, it must come hand in hand with justice, and it is a wonderful device that God has devised whereby all His beauties and perfections appear in the sweetest harmony as He shows mercy to a sinner. I like the expression that I found in the writings of one of the Scotch Divines, who was speaking of God's device for saving sinners. "How it beseemeth Him well!" Yes, this wonderful device of the Lord of saving sinners by Jesus Christ well becomes Him.

"Would we view his brightest glory,  
Here it shines in Jesus' face;  
Sing and tell the pleasing story,  
O ye sinners saved by grace;  
And with pleasure,  
Bid the guilty him embrace.

"Surely goodness and mercy" - this mercy of God flowing through a precious Christ - "shall follow me all the days of my life" - mercy reigning over the guilty, mercy delivering a poor sinner from the dominion of sin, from the reigning power of sin, mercy healing his soul, and mercy upholding him when he stumbles lifting him up when he falls.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life", all the days. Can you bear to think of a single day of your life in which the goodness and mercy of God did not attend you? The Psalmist says, "all the days of my life", and that goes down to the very last of all his days; His mercy endureth for ever and His goodness endureth to all generations. He saw that when once goodness and mercy takes in hand the concerns of a poor needy sinner, goodness and mercy will never forsake that sinner but will attend him all his days, until at last he is landed safe in everlasting bliss. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life". You remember the psalmist in the 103rd Psalm speaks like this, "Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies". There is something wonderfully sweet in that phrase "who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies". David had, as we have said, great and sore troubles to pass through. "Thou which hast shewed me great and sore troubles", but the Lord put the crown of His lovingkindness and tender mercy upon all of them. There was not one trouble that David had that lacked this crown, this crown of tender loving kindness and tender mercy. The hymn-writer says,

"He crowns thy life with love,  
When ransomed from the grave;  
He that redeemed my soul from hell  
Has sovereign power to save".

Let a poor child of God be never so afflicted, yet this will be true of him, that the Lord will crown his life with love, crown him with loving kindness and tender mercies, and upon every trouble that he experiences this crown shall be put. "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose". "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life", the dark days as well as the bright days. One says, "Days of darkness and distress are my portion here below", but goodness

and mercy still attend them, goodness and mercy never forsake them. "All the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever". What a prospect! I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever", and I believe David not only meant that he should have the privilege of being in the tabernacle of God and worshipping Him where he loved to worship, but he looked forward beyond death to eternity when he says, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever". "With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought " as we read in the 45th Psalm, "The virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace". "The virgins her companions that follow her"; you may feel that you are not like one of God's people - there is in you so much that is quite different from what you can see in the people of God - but are you one of those who follow after the people of God as Ruth followed after Naomi? "The virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace". "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever". In the book of Revelation we read, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out". Here below it is often dark to the people of God, though sometimes they may be favoured to go into the sanctuary of God and see light in God's light, and rejoice in His goodness and His grace. But then come days of darkness and desertion, what they saw is lost to sight; as Bunyan says, sometimes he could not bring to his mind even the image of that by which he had been refreshed. Darkness comes and confusion, and doubts arise and fears beset, so that it is 'in-and-out' work, but there are no days of darkness in heaven, "for the Lord God giveth them light". The Lamb is the light of the new Jerusalem, there is no night there, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever". O, it means what the Lord promised to the thief on the cross, "Thou shalt be with Me in paradise". There seems something inexpressibly sweet in that word "with Me". The Apostle speaks of it when he says, "to be with Christ, which is far better", "absent from the body, present with the Lord". "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever", and what makes the house of the Lord, what makes heaven so attractive to His people, is that the Lord is there. "They shall see His face and His name shall be in their foreheads", and again John says, "it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is". That is the attraction of it, "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty, they shall behold the land that is very far off". One says,

"Not all the harps above,  
Can make a heavenly place,  
If God his residence remove,  
Or but conceal His face".

No, it is the presence of God and of the Lamb that makes heaven to be the place of bliss that it will ever be to the people of God. "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever". What a prospect! "An inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation", and who are convoyed by this goodness and mercy of the Lord. "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever".

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