“The Shepherd and His Sheep:

Pursued for His Presence”

**Psalm 23:6**

(notes based on the sermon by Pastor Steve Massey, Hayden Bible Church, 12/12/21)

 You know the 23rd Psalm; Do you know the Shepherd of this psalm? You live today at the brink of your eternity. Psalm 23 is a song for God’s chosen people. Jesus affirmed that He is our Good Shepherd. He laid down His life for us. He knows us and we know Him and follow Him. He gives us eternal life and NOTHING can ever snatch us out of His hand (John 10:11, 14, 27-28). Do you know this Good Shepherd?

 In the final verse of this psalm, His sheep approach the pastures of Home. The word “surely” denotes absolute certainty that His goodness and mercy are with you both now and forever. Do you live in confidence of Christ’s care for you in the midst of a world of uncertainty? For the believer, foreboding pessimism is not our song. Our certainty is in our Good Shepherd and His provision for us. (Q1)

 Pastor Steve told us of a Scottish shepherd who named his two sheepdogs “Goodness” and “Mercy”. Their job was to run after stray sheep and turn them back to their shepherd. The word “follow” in verse 6 can be translated “chase” or “pursue”. God is active and relentless in His pursuit of us. We are persistently pursued by goodness and mercy from our Shepherd King. God commits Himself to constantly benefit His people in all circumstances (Romans 8:28; James 1:17). God’s people are meant to live lives based on what we know about God, not based on how we feel in our circumstances. The word “goodness” implies “something being made complete”. You are a work in progress! The Lord is not done with you yet! Goodness comes from God pursuing His people, whether they’re aware of it or not. Right now, many of us, by human measure, are experiencing things that don’t feel very good. Affliction, misery, heartache- God is not the source of these, but He uses these. God works out all the details of life for His people for our good and His glory.

 The last 19 months of covid restrictions have caused many in the church to wrestle with Heb. 10: 24-25. It has led to new ways of reaching out and encouraging others. It has caused us to live by faith, not fear. We have learned to look for new ways to love our neighbors. God has been graciously sifting and strengthening His church. It is becoming a brighter reflection of Jesus here in the inland Northwest. God’s providence can use even temporary evils for His people’s lasting benefit. (Q2)

 To know God in Christ as Shepherd is to be in a relationship of reciprocal, loyal love (the Hebrew word “tesed”). God doesn’t just initiate this love and let us go; No, He keeps us and sustains us all through our lives. God pursues us and gives us 2nd chances. He pursues His own. He is loyal to His own. HIS GOODNESS AND MERCY FOLLOW ME! I don’t deserve it, but He keeps showering me with His mercy. Psalm 23 ends with a crescendo, with David’s heart overflowing with joy and gratitude. (Q3)

 The last word of this psalm is “forever”. There are only two kinds of people in this world, and they both will live forever:

* There are those who are His own. They have repented, believed, and chosen to follow Jesus. God’s saving goodness relentlessly pursues them. They are chased by His love and mercy FOREVER!
* And there are those who have spurned the gift of His Son. They will experience His wrath FOREVER (Rev. 14:11)

Only a fool lives as if this life is all there is. For the believer, our present is in Christ, and our future is with Christ. We are living right now on the brink of FOREVER (Rev. 11:15; 22:3-5). To have God as your Shepherd, you must have Christ as your Savior. I hope this fact prompts you to have this conversation with your unsaved friends and relatives. That will be the best Christmas present you could ever give them!

 For the believer, our best days are ahead of us. Verse 6 says we will “dwell” with Him forever. “Dwell” means settle in, be at rest (John 14:23). God opens the door to this kind of relationship through His Son, and only through His Son (John 14:6). God’s people are meant to look ahead to our future reality that has no pain, no weariness, no broken relationships, and no injustice. God’s people await an eternal home they have not yet seen. This home is ours because we belong to our Good Shepherd. There’s a coming day when this pilgrimage turns to permanent peace in Paradise. Amen to that! (Q4)

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Like others, I sometimes vacillate between confidence in God’s faithfulness and the depths of despair. What could help me not to vacillate? (one help is in Ps. 27: 13-14)
2. Besides the Sunday service and a Bible study, how else should Christians assemble together? How else can we encourage one another?
3. What expressions of God’s goodness and mercy are you experiencing right now in your life?
4. Who needs this salvation? Give everyone in your group the opportunity to share at least one name. Then pray together for these dear people.

 “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” (Wesley)

1 Hark! the herald angels sing,

"Glory to the newborn King:

peace on earth, and mercy mild,

God and sinners reconciled!"

Joyful, all ye nations, rise,

join the triumph of the skies;

with th'angelic hosts proclaim,

"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

Refrain:

Hark! the herald angels sing,

"Glory to the newborn King"