

Sermon
Lanier Christian Church
February 14, 2010

Facing The Future In Faith

Psalm 23:6

This past week more pictures were released that showed the tragedy of September 11th. This time from the view of a helicopter looking down on that horrible scene in New York. How many of you remember what you were doing on the morning of September 11, 2001? What about the days after.

That day I opened up the sanctuary here for those who wanted to come and pray.

Wednesday night we had a special prayer and devotional time that was well attended. For months afterward our attendance climbed as people returned to church and to a closer connection with God. On the one year anniversary, we had a moving service to remember all those who had died and the rescuers who had sacrificed their lives in an attempt to save others.

People were frightened. There was fear about what would happen next. War was on the horizon. Terrorism had been brought to our doorstep. It was a time for fear or faith.

A lot of people spend their lives worrying about tomorrow. Will I be safe? Will I have enough money for retirement? Will my health be good enough to enjoy my later years? Will I get the new job? Will I find the perfect man – or woman? Some are so wrapped up with tomorrow that they never enjoy today because they fear what the future may bring. Let's look at Psalm 23:6.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever. Psalms 23:6 (NKJV)*

*Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life; and I
will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (NIV)*

In the 23rd Psalm there is no fear of the future. There is no anxiety – no worry about tomorrow. The psalmist, David, has confidence. He has hope. You too can be free from anxiety, fear and worry. You too can live in confidence. Why? Let me give you three reasons:

1. God is watching OVER YOU.

When we have a personal relationship with God, we have a God who is concerned about us. He wants the best for us. He loves us. These are facts that you can find throughout the Bible. Most of you know Romans 8:28.....

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. - Romans 8:28

Why are all things working for our good? Because God cares for us. Because God protects us. Because God watches over us. Now let me say this as plainly as I can – this promise is not for all people. In fact the verse says that this promise is only intended for: *those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

The Good Shepherd takes care of His own sheep. All things don't work together for good for all the people in the world. That is not what this verse says. What it does say is that God watches out for His own. If you're a believer, the Bible says, all things are working for your good. Not everything is good – but God is able to cause all things to work for your good. Bad things happen to believers just as much as they happen to non-believers – but God is able to make good come out of it.

The greatest illustration about this fact is the crucifixion of Jesus.

God took one of the worst days in history – the day that Jesus Christ was crucified and made good come out of it. He took the execution of an innocent man – and brought us salvation by it. Look at what it says in Isaiah 53 (from the Message paraphrase):

3 He was looked down on and passed over, a man who suffered,

who knew pain firsthand. One look at him and people turned away. We looked down on him, thought he was scum. 4 But the fact is, it was our pains he carried— our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us. We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures. 5 But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins! He took the punishment, and that made us whole. Through his bruises we get healed. Isaiah 53:3-5 (MSG)

God was able to take an awful day – and turn it into a glorious day. This shows how big our God is. He can take the worst and make it the best. God watches over us – but that’s not all. If you know Jesus as your savior:

2. God is working IN YOU.

When you become a Christian – God Himself comes to live with you. He comes to live inside you. Look at what it says in Romans 8:

⁹You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. – Romans 8:9

One of the clear signs of being a Christian is that the Holy Spirit – God’s Spirit – has come to live with you.

Many of you know that a group from LCC went to Bethsean Mission in Mexico to spend a week in ministry with Cris Garcia. I knew a little about her work and ministry before we went. After spending a week there we all learned a whole lot more and today feel very connected to her ministry...both in prayer and understanding of what is taking place there. We grew closer by spending a week together.

That’s how it is when the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in you. He is there so you can get to know God better. He is there to influence your life. Do you know how He influences your life – with goodness and love and mercy. Look at Psalm 23 again.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.
Psalms 23:6 (NKJV) ...or NIV...Surely goodness and love shall follow
me.*

Let's talk just a minute about Shepherding. Did you know there is a difference between a rancher and a shepherd? A rancher drives cattle – a shepherd leads sheep. The rancher is behind the cows – the shepherd is in the front. If you were in the Middle East you would see shepherds out on the hills leading their sheep. You would also see sheep dogs coming up behind the sheep helping to keep them in the flock. Goodness and mercy are like those sheep dogs. They follow behind keeping the sheep in line. Keeping the sheep safe so they don't get lost.

We dwell with the Shepherd – actually He dwells in us. And goodness and mercy are there to help us from straying. To provide comfort. To provide reassurance. To provide healing soothing help when we are stressed.

The third point I want to talk about this morning is that you don't have to fear the future because.

3. God has prepared a place FOR YOU.

If you are a Christian three things have changed in your life. Your sins have been forgiven, you have a purpose for living, and you have a home in Heaven. Look at the 23rd Psalm again.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever. Psalms 23:6 (NKJV)

This is one of the most important connections we see in the Bible. It connects the present with the future. It connects today with tomorrow. I just don't have today – I have forever. Look at 2 Corinthians 5:1:

¹Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. – 2 Corinthians 5:1 NIV

I want you to notice two words. The first is "tent" and the second is "building." Paul is talking about the physical body. That which we dwell in now is a "tent". What is a tent? – it is a temporary structure. It is designed to be lived in for a short period of time. When I was a Boy Scout I lived in tents a number of weekends in my young teens. But the tent was designed as a temporary shelter. A building is not.

Paul is saying that what we have right now is a temporary shelter – but God has a permanent home for us. It will be a home not made with human hands it will be an eternal home in heaven.

We're going to be released from pain, from sorrow, from suffering, from depression, from fear. The Bible says He will wipe away all the tears from our eyes, and there will be no more pain, no sorrow, no crying, not even any more death. Isn't that good news? This earthly body will be replaced with a heavenly body. This tent will be replaced with a home. Look with me at Philippians 1:21:

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. - Philippians 1:21

To die is gain. What a great thought! Only a Christian can say that. There are four things that a Christian gains when they die – they are all blessings.

Blessing #1: We Gain AN INCREDIBLE LIFE.

In this present body we are subject to disappointments of life. We are subject to the growing process of life as well as the aging process. Sometimes we are healthy; sometimes we get sick. Sometimes we feel pleasure; sometimes we feel pain. Sometimes we are happy; sometimes there is sorrow. When we get to heaven it will not be that way. Revelation 21:4 says...

"He 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 no longer experience life as we once knew it. We will be different than anything we experience here. Can you imagine how fantastic our heavenly life will be without sickness and hospitals and heartache and funeral homes?

Blessing #2: We Gain AN ETERNAL LIFE.

All of us live in a world where family relationships change. Mother is gone or Father is gone. Uncles and Aunts – Grandparents – they all grow older and die. But that does not happen in Heaven. There is no aging process. There is no death. We live forever. Most of us know John 3:16 – but how often do we really trust in the last phrase of that verse?

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
John 3:16 (NKJV)*

Blessing #3: We Gain PERFECTION.

How can I say this? Because the Bible teaches that we “Become Just Like Christ” when we go to heaven with Him and see Him face to face. What is Christ like? He is perfect.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. – 1 John 3:2

Blessing #4: We Gain A GLORIOUS HOME.

No matter how beautiful and elaborate your home may be in this world, it is nothing compared with the home God has prepared for us. John 14:1-3

¹*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.*

²*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. ³And 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.*

We shall see Him in all of His perfection. We shall see Him in all of His glory. We shall become like Him.

Conclusion

Billy Graham tells of an experience when he was traveling in the Middle East with President Reagan.

They arrived on Air Force One in style and were greeted by the Israeli Prime minister waiting at the edge of the red carpet at the bottom of the stairs. With all the fan fare and 100's of cameras flashing Billy Graham gets pushed way back behind the President and then Reagan turns and shouts out, "He's with me"!

The next day they fly to Jordan and are guests of King Husain for dinner in the Royal Palace. Glitter is everywhere and there's a waiter for each guest in the room. The place settings are all made of gold, the glasses are made from the finest crystal and the 3 chandeliers hanging over the dining room table are made from chipped diamonds – they looked as big as football fields hanging with such a brilliant sparkle.

That night each are personally escorted to their rooms for the night – not just any rooms but royal rooms from a story book palace we can only read about. The king says to the Preacher, "You will not have to pay for anything while you are my guest in my palace." Later that night Billy is getting hungry and looks at the menu and for a moment he thought to himself, "There's no way I can afford this." But then he remembers, "Wait, I'm a guest of the king!"

Later on he calls Ruth all the way in North Carolina and talks to her for over an hour! He explains the palace, the diamonds, and the gold and says to Ruth, "Do you think this is what heavens like?" Ruth responds, "Billy, it's going to even better!"

Folks, when a child of God stands in front of the gates of heaven Jesus will say to us: "He's with me!" And when we enter the gates, it will be even better than anything we could have imagined!

There will be no greater day for the Christian than that day when we
"dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Psalm 23 (NIV)

¹ *The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.*

² *He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,*

³ *he restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.*

⁴ *Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death, ^[a]
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*

⁵ *You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

⁶ *Surely goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.*