

Now and Forever

My cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.
(Psalm 23:5-6)

The shepherd David views himself as a sheep in the care of the Great Shepherd. After considering all the care, provision, and protection of the Great Shepherd he can draw only one conclusion: My cup overflows.

While the word "cup" is often used in scripture to indicate trials, it is used here to describe the bountiful portion given by God. His cup was not merely filled with *enough*; his cup was not merely *full to the brim*; his cup *overflowed*, being unable to contain all the blessings being poured out by the Great Shepherd. Such was the condition of this sheep . . . for now.

The final verse in this beautiful psalm completes the picture by looking forward, even to eternity.

The word 'follow' more often describes the action of 'falling in behind someone in order to go where they lead.' Sheep *follow* their shepherd. However, in this verse it is not the sheep that is following. The sheep is being followed, or more accurately according to the Hebrew, it is being *pursued*.

With one other exception in the Psalms this term is used in reference to the enemies of David as they pursued him. Elsewhere it is used to describe the pursuit of the Egyptian army when Israel was delivered from slavery, or to describe other armies in pursuit of an enemy.

If you were to tell a shepherd that something or someone was in pursuit of his sheep, he would automatically assume wolves, mountain lions, or thieves. He would think of the natural enemy of the sheep *chasing after* or *pursuing* the sheep.

The greater danger is that the pursuit is continual. The enemy of the sheep will not give up until their hunger is satisfied. So it was with Pharaoh in his pursuit of Israel. King Saul could not overcome his impulse to launch yet another pursuit against David even though he saw David's righteousness.

An amazing contrast is seen in the life of the one whose shepherd is the Great Shepherd. The Psalmist describes a pursuit, but it is not an enemy that is chasing. Instead, the sheep of the Great Shepherd are chased by goodness and

lovingkindness. These two are in hot pursuit and will not give up until their hunger is satisfied.

To picture this scene in our mind becomes almost comical. It is not a wolf that is chasing a sheep to kill it to satisfy its hunger, but the embodiment of goodness in hot pursuit continually filling the cup of the sheep until overflowing.

Lovingkindness, a term more accurate than 'mercy,' describes the love of God that prompted him to make promises to Abraham. But it is also the guarantee that he will never break his promises. It is a steadfast love on which the sheep knows it can rely. And this love is in pursuit of the sheep!

The future outlook for the sheep in the flock of the Great Shepherd is one of supreme joy with unparalleled protection and provision and rest.

As if that is not enough the final statement conveys a scene that transcends the future as we know it. Words like infinity, endless, eternal, everlasting, and forever are easily used, yet we cannot possibly understand the concept beyond a trite acceptance of dictionary definitions.

It is beyond our comprehension to imagine endlessness. We can begin counting until we exhaust our language of words to name the next number. Yet the next number exists even if we cannot name it; it is one value beyond the last and there is always another. Eventually, we must simply turn our attention to something else having never reached the finality of endlessness. Perhaps as we meditate on this thought we would do well to leave off the period at the end of the psalm.

It is within this framework of endlessness that David describes his life in the presence of God. He will not live in a physical structure such as the tabernacle where God's presence comes. Rather, he will go to have permanent residence in the house of God ... and without end. Eternal rest; eyes open; in His presence ... forever.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever...