

OUR GOD TO THE END

by Ron Harvey

For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.

Psalm 48:14

The first half of this verse teaches us that God is our God for all eternity. God will never forsake us for one minute in time. He will never blink and leave us unattended. There will never be one moment when he shall not be our God. And, God will never leave us unattended for all the minutes of eternity. The Psalmist says, God is our God for ever and ever. To say forever would suggest eternity. But to say, forever and ever is to emphasize the never ending character of God toward us. He is our God forever and ever.

This is a comforting verse to any of God's children. God will be with us forever. Let our little children rejoice, for God will never leave them nor forsake them.

But if you look at the second half of the verse, you will note that God's care for us is defined in finite terms. As far as the years of our life are concerned, that segment of time when we are here on the earth, he will be our guide even unto death.

And I think that this half of the verse is a special comfort to the old man, that old saint, who has only a short while left until death. And this verse clearly comforts the elderly and teaches that God is not only the God of little children, but he is also the God of the aged. For, *he will be our guide even unto death.*

Now this morning I will refer at times to those that are old. And I want you to know that it is an honorable reference and not derogatory at all. I love our older men in this church and the older women as well. And I'm sure that our congregation loves them also and esteems them highly. And besides, I don't see any usefulness in tiptoeing around the fact that some of our members are old.

Example: Now some of you women are in your forties and you are still trying to convince others that you just turned 29. But let me just say, there is no dishonor in growing older, in fact there is an honor in it.

And we are told in our text this morning that *God is our guide even unto death.*

Now it is true that as to this world, we may lose our usefulness as we get old. Our backs become weak, we teeter and wobble here and there, our minds are not as clear as they once were. And others may forsake us when we are of no use. But, God will never ever forsake us. *He will be our guide even unto death.*

I would like to suggest that inherent in our text this morning, perhaps not on the surface, but underlying it all, are two very important doctrines. That is, that God never changes. And, God's dealings with us never changes.

Let's look first at the basic doctrine that,

I. God never changes.

A. Nature teaches that God does not change.

God made this vast universe and it serves mankind day after day after day and never wears out. And I say this is a picture of the unchangeableness of God. Just consider the sun. When God placed it in the heavens it was 93,000,000 miles from the earth. And today, it is still 93,000,000 miles from the earth. The same sun that warmed Adam and Eve in the garden still warms us today.

And God hung the planets in space, and they still hang there. You would think something eventually would go awry in the universe and all the elements would fly away or crash into each other or burn up. But no, God's universe holds together and is the same day after day. And this is a picture of the unchangeableness of God.

The rains still water our crops and the winds still blow. The harvests come at their appointed times. And all of this is a testimony to the unchanging nature of our God.

Example: Now I know that Al Gore is all excited about global warming as though the earth is going to gradually become uninhabitable due to global warming. But, I've got news for Al Gore. God made this universe and furthermore, his power holds it together, and He knew when he made it that we would be driving vehicles with poor emission controls. And this universe is not fragile enough to be too concerned about the coming and goings of mankind. The Bible says that the earth will ultimately be dissolved, but it won't be by a gradual global warming. It will be cataclysmic and sudden and the earth will be dissolved in fervent heat and it won't be from a slow simmer.

So, you learn from the creation of God that God is unchanging, because his creation is unchanging through the years. And if what God created is stable and unchanging, then how much more is He who created these things?

If that is not enough to prove that God is unchanging, I refer you to the permanent nature of the Scriptures. If God were a changing God, then we would need new Scriptures from day to day. If God ever changed his mind, then the promises that he made would be void. But the same Scriptures that have served all the saints in all ages, still serve us well today. So, we see that,

B. The permanency of the Scriptures teaches that God does not change.

Example: Now my law books need to be updated month by month as the law changes. And when new laws are passed, more updates are on the way.

But, there are never any updates to our Bible, because, God never changes. The Bible that you read as a child, is the same Bible that you read today and just as true and just as relevant.

Example: I remember when I first became interested in the Scriptures. My grandmother gave me a Bible. It was the first one I ever had with chain references. And, I took it to my bedroom and began reading the gospel of Matthew. And I made it to Matthew 24 and I spent hours and many days trying to figure that chapter out. And it's almost 50 years later and I'm still trying to figure it out.

Example: The same Bible that Anna reads is the same one that Mr. Coleman read as a child and still reads today.

You see, the Bible never changes and there is no need for new Scriptures, because God never changes. What God hath said, shall forever be true. He has no need to revise his thinking.

He knew the end from the beginning. And he has created an authoritative record in the Scriptures which shall be authoritative forever, because God never changes.

He had full understanding from the beginning, and therefore, he never changes.

God was omnipotent from the beginning, that is, he was as strong as he possibly could be. Therefore, the only change possible would be that He would become weaker, and this is impossible. God shall always be omnipotent. And he gave us Scriptures which are immaculate in their perfections.

And so, the permanency of the Scriptures teaches us of the immutability of God.

But we have other proofs of the unchanging nature of God.

C. We learn from our own experience that God is unchanging. And we have found that what he was to us in our youth, he still is to us in our old age.

When he saved us in our childhood, he was altogether lovely. And when we are old we find that He is still altogether lovely.

When we were young he preserved us with a strong arm. And when we are old He carries us with those same arms.

He forgave us a thousand sins in our youth and a thousand more in our old age.

He was longsuffering to us 50 years ago, and he still suffers long with our weaknesses.

He was merciful to us in our youth, and His mercy has never run dry in all the years of our life.

His grace has never run empty, from the cradle to the death bed.

From all of this, we conclude that God never changes. He was impeccable in his perfections from all eternity, and he can never change.

But we also gather from our text that,

II. The way God deals with us never changes.

- A. God has never been impressed with the self-righteous, but He always has loved penitent sinners, and he still saves them. All one has to do is cry out, Lord, be merciful to me a sinner and God saves. He has always been like that. God saved the first sinner, Adam, and God has saved sinners throughout history. He has always been like that and he always will be. He has never changed.
- B. God has always been tender toward the poor and the helpless. He always has been and he always will be, because he never changes.
- C. God has always been especially mindful of children and widows because he is tenderhearted. He always has been and he always will be.
- D. God has never, ever forsaken one of his sheep. Not in the Old Testament, not in the New Testament. He carried them when they were young, and he carried them when they were old. Not one sheep has ever been plucked out of his hand. He has always held them carefully and he always will.
 - 1. God called Abraham and made great and lofty promises to him and God said,
 - a. I will make you a great nation, and He did.
 - b. I will bless thee, and He did with lands and riches and spiritual blessings;
 - c. I will make thy name great, and we are talking about Abraham 4,000 years later.

And God never forsook Abraham in his old age. In fact, God gave Abraham his son Isaac when Abraham was over a hundred years old. And God blessed Abraham and his wife with a long life and old age. Sarah, lived with Abraham until she was 127 years old and she died. And Abraham buried his wife in the cave of Machpelah.

And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things.

Genesis 24:1

2. God was with Isaac and Jacob and Joseph. And at least in the case of Jacob, it is clear that God was with him even in the womb. Do you remember that while they were in the womb, God chose Jacob over Esau. And God was with Jacob through it all. And he was with Jacob until he died of old age. You see, God was with Jacob from the womb to the tomb.

3. God was with Moses when he was a baby in a basket in the Nile river. And the providence of God protected him and made him prince of Egypt. And God made Moses a great deliverer and he led Israel out of Egypt by God's power. And Moses did great and mighty things by the power of God during his lifetime. Now Moses wasn't perfect by any means. Moses sinned at times when he was young and Moses even sinned when he was old by disobeying God and striking the rock. And for this reason, Moses was not allowed to go into the land of Canaan. But God never forsook Moses. When Moses was old and near death, God personally walked with Moses to the top of mount Nebo and there, with no other person around, Moses died in his arms of God. And, God personally buried the body of Moses.

Time fails to recount all the men and women of God to whom God has been faithful even to death. But this just confirms the truth of our text which says,

For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.
Psalm 48:14

Example: I could ask any number of you old men here this morning if God has been faithful to you from beginning to end, and I'm sure you would all say he has been faithful. I could ask all of you if he has guided you during your life and I'm sure you would say he has. His providence has carried you all along the way. Sometimes you were aware of it and sometimes you were unaware. But the Scriptures teach that He was there for you from the moment of your conception and for the whole way.

And our text tells us that he never stops being there for you. For David says,

He will be our guide even unto death.

Now we have people in this church who are in their sixties and some are in their seventies and some are in their eighties. And, we even have one whom God has blessed with long life and he is 94. And I say to all of you who are old that God is the same today as he was when you were born long ago. Though 94 years seems long to us, it is a blink of the eye to God and he hasn't changed in 94 years. When Mr. Coleman was born, he found that the sun rose in the east every morning and it set in the west every evening. And it has done so for 94 years. And so has God cared for him every day for 94 years. And God will never stop caring for him, even unto death.

Now, I want to preach to all of you here this morning, but especially to those who are old -- all of you who once were little children, but now you are white headed or bald headed and nearing the end of the journey. You once were far off from the threshold of eternity, but now you are near. And I would encourage you by telling you this morning of some of the specialness of being old. First of all,

I. Old age is a special time of reflection.

When you were young you barely had time to think. You were too busy with your plans and your ambitions and you looked forward more than you looked backward. But now, when this old house which is your body is wearing out and crumbling brick by brick, and you are too feeble to do much work, you have much more time for reflection on the past. And I say, it is good for us to look back and to reflect and to remember that the Lord is good.

A. Look back and remember how many joys you have had.

Now Mr. Coleman was born on April 2, 1917. When Mr. Coleman went to bed last night the sun had come up and gone down 34,340 times during his life. And the sun came up again this morning for number 34, 341. Now some of you, like Frank Maccarino and Jack Ray are relative youngsters and have only lived some 29,000 days. But you get the idea. Let me ask,

1. How many days has your house been blessed with plenty?
2. How many hearty laughs have you enjoyed with those you love?
3. How many times have you gathered your children and your grand children around you and endured their shouting and their playing and have rejoiced with them?
4. How many times has joy and blessedness filled your heart?
5. How many wonderful times have you enjoyed with your best friends?
6. How many times did you wake up in the morning with a twinkle in your eye and delight in your heart because of all the countless blessings of the Lord?
7. How many joyful hymns have you sung?
8. How many prayers has God answered in your life?

I tell you, when you look back, you can string God's mercies together by the thousands. And, even though you have had many troubles, you can testify that David's saying is true. For David in his relative youth said, "Surely goodness and mercy **shall** follow me all the days of my life." But now, after a full lifetime, you can say, "Surely goodness and mercy **has** followed me all the days of my life."

But, don't just look back on the joys, but,

B. Look back also on the griefs you have had. For, these were the times when God was surely by your side.

1. How many times have you laid on your sickbed?
2. How many times have your knees buckled under the weight of sorrow?
3. How many hardships have you been called on to endure?
4. How many times have you been to the graveside of loved ones whose day of appointment preceded your own?
5. How many tears have rolled down your cheeks in all these years?
6. How many disappointments?
7. How many plans fell through?

But when you remember all these, remember as well that He was there to guide you. And perhaps you were even more aware of His comfort during times of grief than in times of joy. Remember how you fell on your knees during these times of grief and how he carried you along. And remember how he restored your soul thousands of times so that you could once again laugh and your heart could be merry again.

So, look back on your joys and also look back on your many sorrows and remember how the Lord guided you through them all. And then,

C. Look back also on all the times you wrestled against temptations, all the times the enemy pursued you, all the times your heart was near to falling away with doubts and fears. Look back on all the trials of life and marvel, I tell you marvel how God has caused you to persevere through it all. Had it not been for his mercy your faith would have been swallowed by doubt and unbelief. Have you not been kept by the power of God through all these years?

Yes. That's why our text says,

For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.

But, we're not through looking back just yet. There is one more **sad** reflection that we must mention. And I would ask you this morning to,

D. Look back on all the sins you have committed.

No matter whether you are the weakest or the strongest of Christians you must look back and say, "I have sinned. I have sinned in my youth. I have sinned in middle age. And I have sinned in my old age. There have been times when all you can say is, "I forsook my God." Why did I forsake him? Why was I so prone to wander from Him? Why did I doubt my God, when I had no reason to doubt Him?

And when you remember all these sins that you have committed against your God, you will have a better understanding of the depth of the grace of God who, out of sheer mercy to you, chose not to count your sins against you.

Why do you sin and yet go free? It is the grace of God my old friend, and only the grace of God. By his grace He has forgiven ten thousand times ten thousand sins.

And you will remember the words of Jesus who said, He that has been forgiven little, loves little.” (Luke 7:47) And by implication, he that has been forgiven much, loves much.

I tell you that it is good to remember that you were a sinner through and through. And it is good to remember that you were a sinner from beginning to end. But then remember also that your sins by the thousands were laid on Jesus and he stretched out his hands and feet on the cross and suffered so that you could go free.

Example: When a person dies, we usually put up a headstone with some writing on it to be a permanent reminder of that person – presumably so that we never forget.

And now, I say, especially to you old men and women, after all these years, even while you are alive, you have become a lasting monument. You are a monument to the unconditional grace of your God. For how many thousands of times has he forgiven you? And others can look at your life and remember that God is truly gracious.

And when you finally come to those pearly gates your song shall be,

*“Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling.*

And so, we have seen that old age is a special time of reflection. But also,

II. Old age is a special time of hope.

Now when we are young our hopes are often centered on worldly things. We wish for a house, a car, a good business, a wife or a husband, children and money in the bank.

But the old man has a diminishing interest in this world. He’s not interested in fancy things or worldly things anymore. He’s not interested so much in houses and lands. After all, he is about to leave all this behind.

But, he has one overriding hope and it is the hope of being accepted in Christ.

When he was young, he **professed** that the ground of his hope was the blood of Christ and nothing else. But that hope was mingled with all his other worldly cares and desires. But now, with the cares of the world fleeting, his trust in the blood of Christ is his pure desire. He doesn't hope to be saved by his long service nor by his good works. But he hopes only in the blood of the Lord Jesus.

Now that he is old, his hope is only that Jesus will save him to the end and that when he crosses that eternal portal that Jesus will greet him and stretch his hands out and say, these nail prints were for you, my son. Welcome home.

And so, we see that old age is a special time of hope. But also,

III. Old age is a special time of anticipation.

Example: When I was young, my parents moved to California. And every so often, we would come back to Memphis to visit. And our whole family, Mom, Dad and six children, would climb in the car and cross the country (some 2000 miles). And the trip was so much fun – for about an hour. And then, everyone got on each other's nerves and we were cramped in our used station wagon. This was far worse than what you have seen with Chevy Chase in National Lampoon Vacation. Our air conditioner would go out every time when we crossed the desert. We would have all kinds of disasters. One time we left my little brother at a gas station and didn't notice it for several miles. Before we were ever out of California, we all began asking, "Are we there yet." But I remember how excited we were when after days of travel, we finally saw that Mississippi River bridge approaching. Oh how we shouted with sheer joy to be arriving in Memphis. Then, it seemed like the trip was worth it all.

And this is how it is for the aged saint who has been on a long journey. And now, though there have been many trials and many mishaps along the way, the bridge from this world to the next is in sight.

And oh, what a wonderful sight it is! As he gets near, the old man says, Look, I think I see the pearly gates approaching. And I believe I see a city foursquare and the walls of the city are coming into view. And what is that glistening below, is it the streets of gold? Yes, I believe it is.

And as he gets even closer, the old saint begins to make out the form of those who are there to welcome him. There is Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And there is Moses and Elijah and John the Baptist. And there is his dear father and mother and brothers and sisters. And there is a great multitude waiting there.

But wait. There is One there whose glory far exceeds the rest. And, I believe this is the Savior himself. And his beauty is like nothing the old saint has ever seen before.

You see, the old saint is arriving at that final destination and the last few miles are not miserable miles, but exciting ones and full of anticipation.

Now, I would like to remind you that old age is not only a special time of reflection and a special time of hope and a special time of anticipation, but also a special time of duty.

Remember, you have not arrived just yet. There are a few miles left to go and while there are a few miles left to go, there are a few duties that remain.

A. There is the duty to testify of what the Lord has done for you in your lifetime. There is something very special about the testimony of an old person who has experienced every trouble and every temptation and every grace of God. He can truly testify that God was good in his youth and God was good in his old age. His testimony is convincing when he tells us that God never changes, because he has seen it personally for 90 years.

B. There is a duty to teach and comfort young believers. And I have found that old men and women are very gentle in their treatment of younger believers. They are not so quick to condemn, because they have experienced their own failures for a lifetime. And they are apt to be gracious and kind and loving in their treatment of the young.

C. There is a duty to pray for others. Oftentimes older people have difficulty sleeping and they wake up early in the morning while younger people are still asleep. And they get their coffee and in these quiet hours it might be a good time to pray for the lost and to pray for grandchildren and to pray for others in the church.

And before we finish, let me offer one last encouragement to you grandfathers and great grandfathers. If you have experienced the goodness of God in your life and if the mercy of God has followed you and if you can count your blessings by the thousands and if your hope of heaven is right around the corner, don't indulge yourself in constant sadness. Try not to sit around grumbling and growling in your infirmities, but as much as you can, go around cheerfully and joyfully and everyone will look at you and think how blessed it is to be a Christian. But, if you are surly and mean, they will think the Lord has forsaken you.

Example: A child will run away from a mean, hateful old man. But there is not a child in the world who doesn't love a grandpa who is happy and cheerful. And they will run to him and sit on his knee and hug him and listen to his stories about the Lord and his goodness.

My encouragement to the elderly this morning is to let joy ring from your heart. Let your children and grand children hear the melody of your heart and let it shine on your face as a testimony to your children and to the people of God and your testimony to them will be,

For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.

Psalm 48:14