

## Reflections on Psalm 16

### Read Psalm 16:1-11

Psalm 16, which is attributed to David, is another Psalm of lament of the individual, but this psalm is more restful than most of the laments; here David ponders what anchors him, rather than what alarms him. As with most psalms, we do not know the specific situation that David faced as he wrote this psalm, but it appears that his life was in danger, the threat of death was imminent. But he is confident that in this situation God would deliver him from the clutches of death. He would live and not die. Yet, we know that David the king would eventually die, and therefore his words and confidence in God's deliverance expressed in this psalm go far beyond David's present situation. *The major thrust of this psalm is the believer's unshakable confidence in times of distress that the Lord will bring him through life and death to full and everlasting pleasure because God is his refuge and inheritance.* Another timely psalm for our situation!

But there is more. In this psalm, David ultimately speaks of his greater son, the Lord Jesus and His resurrection from the dead. Jesus is the ultimate singer of this psalm! There is a sense in which all the psalms are messianic—they ultimately point forward to Jesus in His humanity, His righteousness, His unjust suffering and death, His reign and role as the Davidic King, His judgment of God's enemies, and, as in this case, His resurrection. It was after His resurrection that Jesus told His disciples "that all the things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). Some psalms are directly prophetic (e.g. Psalm 110), but in most psalms the experience of the psalmist typifies the experience of Jesus, so that the words of the psalm speak more specifically and uniquely of Christ. Psalm 16 is a combination of the two—David's experience speaks more uniquely of Jesus' experience and David ends up speaking prophetically of the Messiah.

Psalm 16 is a very appropriate psalm for Easter. It combines the truth of the resurrection of Christ with the believer's unshakable confidence in times of distress; indeed, the first is the ground for the second. Let's first enjoy the psalm as David's own experience representing all believers, and then see its fulfillment in Christ.

*Observe the three movements of this psalm:*

#### **1. David's unwavering commitment to the Lord in a time of distress (v. 1-4)**

David's opening cry for the Lord to "preserve" him (the only expression of lament in the psalm) is based in his unwavering commitment to the Lord has his refuge; a commitment to yield submission to the Lord as his supreme good. David confesses that Yahweh is his "exalted lord" (*adonai*; his boss!) and his supreme treasure ("I have no good apart from You"). All other goods are good because they give more of God. This commitment then spills over into a commitment

to find satisfaction in the people of God. The ones who give David pleasure are the holy or godly ones because they reflect God, who is David's supreme good. Like in the New Testament, this psalm assumes that if you delight in God you will delight in His people. Godless people do not give David delight in their godless ways, so he adds yet another commitment: he will not dare to run after the gods of idolaters, he rejects the lure of paganism. He reminds himself that to "exchange" God for another so-called god will result in multiplied sorrows. It is sheer folly to turn away from the all-satisfying God only to embrace gods that leave you sorrowful in the end. David's commitment to Yahweh is an exclusive commitment that repudiates all other worship.

*Questions for Reflection:*

What does it mean that we have "no good apart from God?"

Does your delight in God lead to a delight in God's people? Why might this be difficult?

How are we tempted to exchange God for various idols?

## **2. David's underlying contentment in the Lord in a time of distress (v. 5-8)**

Much of the interest of the people of Israel in the Old Testament was on their inheritance in the land of promise, which was the Lord's gracious gift to them. Here David employs the language of dividing up the land (*inheritance, lot, measuring line, heritage*) to speak of a much greater inheritance—the Lord Himself ("Yahweh is my true inheritance!"). This is an inheritance of unsurpassed value and beauty and can never be taken away regardless of circumstances. As the Lord portioned out the land of Canaan to the various tribes, David uses these terms in grateful acknowledgement of Yahweh's providence in ordering, marking out and settling the circumstances of his life, in spite of its present danger.

But David's contentment also comes from the counsel he has received from the Lord. How does the Lord give him counsel? Through His written word (see Psalm 1:1-2; 119:24). David's mind is so saturated with the counsel of God's word, that even in the darkness of night (when fears often arise), his mind instructs him. This counsel is a gift of God for which David praises Yahweh. This is no doubt at least one way David "set the Lord continually before him." In fact, he is doing this very thing in this psalm by rehearsing and exulting in all that God is for him (his refuge, his sovereign, his treasure, his inheritance, his counselor). Like a protecting shield on one's most vulnerable side in battle, the Lord is at his right hand. David's petition (v.1 "preserve me") now turns to a confident declaration, "I will not be shaken!" I'm reminded of the words to one of the great hymns of our faith:

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;  
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art  
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night;  
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light;  
Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise;  
Thou mine Inheritance, now and always  
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart;  
High King of Heaven, my Treasure Thou art

*Questions for Reflection:*

What are ways that we keep the Lord “continually before us?”

How does knowing the Lord is our inheritance bring contentment in every situation?

**3. David’s unshakable confidence in the Lord’s deliverance from his distress (v.9-11)**

In this present distress David’s heart is glad and can rejoice, even his physical being (“my flesh”) can dwell securely. Why? David is confident of the Lord’s deliverance; he will not die (“you will not abandon my soul to sheol”, i.e. the grave), but instead he will know the “path of life.” Yet one day David would die and see corruption, a fact he knew very well. Therefore, these words go beyond David’s present situation to a greater deliverance experienced by God’s people. In the poetic imagery of “sheol” and “corruption,” death is pictured as a ravenous monster, never satisfied, with ever gaping jaws. David is confident that the Lord will not ultimately “abandon” him to this dark enemy. This deliverance has its fulfillment in the resurrection of believers from the grave. In Christ, death had been “de-fanged”; it has lost its sting. Though we will die physically, God will not abandon us to this ravenous darkness of His judgment, but will deliver us by resurrection to newness of life. We will know the path of unending life and will experience the immediate presence of God where there are pleasures forever (notice David’s use of “eternal” language). Therefore, in the midst of any distress and danger, we can dwell securely and rejoice ultimately (even in our grief) because our final deliverance and unending pleasures are certain and secure in Christ.

*Fulfillment by Christ:*

This psalm, however, speaks more precisely and wonderfully of Jesus. David’s experience, both as one in danger and as God’s anointed king, typify more exactly the experience of Jesus. Read the psalm again and think of these words on the lips of Jesus as he moves toward the cross or prays in the garden the night before His death. As he faces the agony of death on a cross, He knew God would not abandon Him to the grave or allow him to undergo corruption. As God’s Messiah and Son, he must rise again to fullness of joy in fulfillment of this psalm. Look closer at the words of v.10 and notice the unexpected change in reference: throughout the psalm David has spoken of himself in the first person (“my”, “me”), but suddenly he says “You will not allow your holy one to undergo decay.” While this description was true of David in a relative sense, it is true in an absolute sense of one distinct from David. David would experience corruption in the grave, but His greater Son, the Holy One, never would. Ultimately, because Messiah is raised, we can fully experience the contentment and deliverance of Psalm 16.

Pastor Mark

*Application and Further Reflection:*

This psalm becomes a foundational text for the apostolic preaching of the gospel and its central declaration that Messiah must and has risen from the dead.

Look at **Acts 2:22-36** and **Acts 13:26-41** and observe how Peter and Paul used Psalm 16 in preaching gospel.

- How do they reason from Psalm 16 that David was speaking of the Messiah? How is it connected to 2 Samuel 7:12-13?
- Why is the resurrection of Jesus so central to the apostolic preaching of the gospel?
- How does the resurrection of Jesus speak to our present situation of the fears and uncertainties surrounding the coronavirus? How does it provide you contentment?