

Sermon 20, The Path of Resurrection Life, Psalm 16

Proposition: Psalm 16 teaches us that Yahweh is enough, for He is our inheritance and He will overcome death.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, Psalm 16 has been one of my favorites for a long time. In this, I can say somewhat modestly, I am in good company, for both Peter and Paul chose this psalm as their text when they preached to the crowds about the resurrection of Jesus (in Acts 2 & 13). That the holy apostles saw no man but Jesus only in this psalm is a glorious thing, and I certainly hope to lead your eyes there this evening as well. But I must confess that the reason I have loved this psalm so long is rather less noble. This psalm is one of the few places that Scripture refers to pleasure and promises it to the faithful. Let me just give you a few of the other verses that reference "pleasures":

- NAS Luke 8:14 "And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.
- NAS Titus 3:3 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.
- NAS Hebrews 11:25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin;

- NAS James 4:1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? . . . You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

In other words, most of what you read about pleasure in Scripture contrasts it with the sober, righteous, and godly life to which we Christ-followers are called. But here, Ps 16 specifically says “You want pleasure, real pleasure? Then go to heaven, for the pleasures at God’s right hand are unending.” Of course, as we will see, though that is the promise with which this psalm ends, it is far from the only lesson that the King teaches us in this beautiful song of his. The King confesses where his delight is: in his church family, the saints in the land. He speaks of Yahweh as his inheritance, and he speaks of settling down in safety because God will show the path of life. As one of the commentators pointed out, in every line this psalm proclaims the sufficiency of Yahweh. He is enough, for He is our inheritance and He will overcome death.

I. The King’s Prayer: Preserve Me, v. 1

Like Ps 7, this psalm begins with a similar prayer for preservation. The psalm ends with an open statement of assurance that God can deliver from death, that He has power over Sheol and corruption. Because of that assurance, the king calls on God (and teaches us to call on God) to save from death. Preserve me, O God! The king is in a pickle, and he wants to be preserved. Bad pun. Sorry. The king is in grave danger, because he is up against some ferocious enemies. This psalm does not speak directly of the enemies, just as the previous one did not speak directly of the enemies. After all, we just had a long series from Pss 9-14 describing the disgusting and evil behavior of those attacking the king. Now, after hearing about who is fit to ascend Yahweh’s mountain, we hear the confession of faith from that one who walks in integrity and works righteousness. To be good in an evil world is to be in grave danger. Thus the prayer of the king to be preserved, and a direct reference to the last enemy — death. Sheol and corruption stand ready to swallow up the king, even without any direct intervention from the wicked who play such a starring role in Pss 9-14 and again in Pss 17-18.

You may or may not feel keenly just how much enmity the world, flesh, and devil have toward Christians. Some members of this church are hyper-aware of the threat posed by these entities; others are perhaps too forgetful of the war that’s going on between the flesh and the Spirit. But regardless of where you are on that spectrum, you need to know that a grave is waiting for you. You may have literally purchased a plot at our Gillette cemetery downtown, but whether you own a gravesite or not, death and corruption are ready to swallow you up at a moment’s notice. Hence the need to pray for preservation. “Be with us now and at the hour of our death” is not a bad prayer to keep in your mind, for the Grim Reaper stands ready. Are you ready for him? Have you taken refuge in God to the point where Sheol and corruption have no more terrors for you?

Even to sing these words teaches you something about your king. These are His words. He has taken refuge in God, and by His example and by His song He teaches you to do the same. Pray this prayer. Take this refuge. There is no other refuge, no other place to hide from the Grim Reaper. He can come through locked doors and into deep caves; indeed, many people fear

meeting him in those places more than they would fear him under the open sky or on the wide prairie. Strong rooms and hospice rooms alike are no strangers to Death's presence. And so, brothers and sisters, I urge you to listen to the king and to follow his example. Take refuge in the Almighty this evening.

II. The King's Confession, vv. 2-6

You know how you talk to some guys and they begin every anecdote with "I said to the wife"? Well, the king tells us here how he spoke to God. This is a confession of faith; it is the king's prayer, recounted here for your edification so that you can know how the king prays and learn to pray like him.

A. Yahweh Is Lord (I am Servant), v. 2a

What did the king (speaking to his soul as "you" but essentially telling us what he said to the LORD from his inmost being) say to the deity? He said "You are my Lord."

As in Ps 110, where both Yahweh and "my Lord" appear, so here. Yahweh is the king's Lord, the one who has the right to command him. To say to Yahweh "You are my Lord" is to say "I am your servant." The Lord is the boss, and you are the bossed. The Lord is the one with the plan, and you are the one who follows the plan. The Lord is the homeowner, and you are the housemaid.

I know that most of you in this room have said to Yahweh "You are my Lord." And since He is your Lord, you need to be His servant. The church exists in part to teach you to obey everything Jesus commanded. You are here to do His will. That's what holiness means. You are here to learn and keep the Ten Commandments because you are the servant of Yahweh.

Do you have this firmly fixed in your identity? We all know that death and corruption are looming threats. But to take refuge in God carries a cost with it — the cost of obedience. You can't hide from death without submitting to God and doing what He says. To take refuge in Christ, to accept Him as Savior, is also to submit to Christ and accept Him as Lord. One of the dumbest debates ever to rile Christian folk took place back in the 1980s over this concept. Some people actually said that they didn't believe in "Lordship salvation," that they had Jesus as Savior but not as Lord. Brothers and sisters, that is folly and blasphemy. If you want to be saved from Sheol, then you must accept Yahweh as your Lord too.

B. Yahweh Is Enough, vv. 2b-6

And if He is your Lord, then He is enough. The king teaches us some things about Yahweh being enough. The biggest one that sums up the rest is the statement in the back half of v. 2: "I have no good apart from you." The beauty of sun and moon, of the seashore on a July afternoon, the faces of your sleeping children — none of these goods exist or could exist apart from the divine goodness. Every earthly good is just a tiny fragment of God's overwhelming, overflowing goodness. If Yahweh is not your Lord, you don't have deliverance from death. Nor do you even have earthly goods. Oh, God is good enough that He lets nonbelievers enjoy some of His borrowed goodness for a time, but it is not theirs to keep. It will be snatched away from them in a moment. Earth is not theirs, and even while they walk on it and breathe its air, most of them feel alienated. They can tell that the world is against them, that they are trespassers east of Eden. Ask

any non-Christian, particularly one from a non-Christian culture. They know the world is not theirs. Some take it to extremes, as in China today, where there is no private ownership of land because all land belongs to the state. You want a reminder that the world is not yours? Move to China. But anyway, in China and America alike, you have no good apart from God. The better you know Him and His goodness, the more deeply you'll recognize that truth.

Where is God's goodness manifested in the king's life — and where should it be manifested in yours?

1. I Love the Saints, v. 3

The first place that the king finds God's goodness is in the saints in the land. He loves God's holy ones! He regards his fellow Christians as majestic ones. The word is the same word from Ps 8, "How majestic is your name!" God on high is majestic — and so are the saints in the land!

Now, this is not primarily talking about physical appearance. C.S. Lewis gives a great account of how underwhelming church can be. You learn all this glorious theology and read the Bible, the greatest book ever written — and then you show up to hear a few ugly people singing poorly written hymns, and singing them badly, before a very strange man gets up in the pulpit and utters a boatload of silliness for half an hour or even longer. You don't come in here and think "Wow, did I arrive at the Academy Awards? Everyone is magnificent as a god; this is like a scene out of Homer or at least from a beauty pageant!" No. You come in here and think "Wow. A bunch of ordinary people, just like me." And so we are. But we are majestic too. God has crowned us with glory and honor, and when He looks at us He sees it. When the king looks at God's people, he sees it. And if your heart is in tune with the king's, then you will see it too. You will love the saints. You will say, "They are majestic, and all of my delight is in them." Some people go to national parks to see the glory of what God has made. I go to church. I'm serious! You will look in vain through scripture for a celebration of the beauty of terrestrial nature as we so often think of it. "When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers" — yes, that's there. But where is the paean to the mountains, to the lakes and woods? Where does the author of Joshua step back and take a few moments to wax lyrical about the beauty of the river in flood? Where does Jesus speak to the glory of the mount of Olives, or sit by the sea and open His mouth to say "Isn't the lake of Galilee beautiful today"? The answer, brothers and sisters, is that He is enthralled with something more wonderful: us.

The romantics waxed so lyrical about the beauty of nature:

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,
To mingle with the Universe, and feel

What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.¹

Imagine those lines appearing anywhere in the Psalms. Yeah right. “There is society where none intrudes.” That is not a Christian vision, brothers and sisters. *All* the king’s delight is in the saints. His favorite thing to do is to go church and be with the saints, and if he can’t go to his own church because he’s away from home, he loves going to another church and meeting more saints.

What role do the saints play in your life? Are they a necessary evil? A bother up with which you’d rather not put? Can you truly say that they are the source of all your delight?

2. I Reject Idols, v. 4

The king adds further that he rejects idols. Again, this psalm is the psalm of pleasure, the psalm of delight. You want pleasure and delight? Then worship Yahweh, not idols. The idols multiply sorrows. Those who follow them know a lot of suffering. Those who turn away from the truth get more suffering and misery than they bargained for. The king specifically rejects giving a penny to idols. He won’t pour out blood for them as a drink offering, and he won’t even deign to name them. The king does not encourage us to say “By Jove” or to throw around the names of Odin and Shiva.

How might we sacrifice to idols? In our country, most people worship the idol of personal peace and prosperity. We worship the idol of convenience, the idol of choice, the idol of individual autonomy. How do we sacrifice to these idols? By yelling at our children when they make life inconvenient for us. By working on the sabbath day instead of making the day holy by resting. By looking to stuff or experiences to satisfy us instead of looking to the living God. By seeking respectability in the world at the cost of integrity in the church. Brothers and sisters, take refuge in Yahweh. Reject idols.

3. Yahweh Is my Inheritance, v. 5

Indeed, know that you have pleasure and delight, fullness and sufficiency, in Christ! Yahweh is your portion, your inheritance, your cup. The psalmist is referring to the division of the land. God gave a portion to each tribe and family. But better than that earthly inheritance of inalienable land is the heavenly inheritance of God Himself. We talked about this recently in Hebrews 9, where God says that Jesus died to give us the eternal inheritance. Only God is eternal. In Christ, the Father and Spirit are ours.

If God is your inheritance, what could you possibly need? More money? More friends? A nicer car? Obviously, we still have earthly needs. God is your inheritance, but you need to eat about 2000 calories today. But if you don’t get that food today, or tomorrow, if by the ill-will of bad men you starve to death, God is still your inheritance. He is everything you need. Eating 2000 calories per day will only stave off death for a century at most. But God is your eternal inheritance. He is yours through the death of Christ.

¹ Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto 4, Stanza 178

4. I Love my Inheritance, v. 6

And, of course, the king adds that he loves his inheritance. To have God is the sum total of all that we could possibly desire as human beings. Yes, this may be the comment that I was looking for a moment ago, celebrating the beauty of a patch of earthly ground. But though the king's inheritance is beautiful to him, based on the context — the previous verse — we must acknowledge that he is primarily talking about inheriting God. The all-beautiful, all-good One is the king's inheritance, and yours too.

Do you love your inheritance? Is God Almighty enough for you, or are you mad that you have to live in what you consider to be a dumpy house? Is God Almighty enough for you, or are you mad that you can't afford to pay your childrens' college tuition? Is God Almighty enough for you, or do you resent that you can only afford a steak dinner a few times a year?

III. The King's Response, vv. 7-11

The LORD has done all these things for the king. He has given him everything, up to and including Himself. How does the king respond? Remember, his response tells us how we should respond.

A. To Bless Yahweh, v. 7

He responds in worship, that's what. Not only does he find all his delight in the saints; he cries out a blessing on the God who gave him all this pleasure and delight. He specifically thanks God for the counsel he has received, even at night. The blessed man does not walk in the counsel of the wicked; the blessed man is blessed because he listens to God's counsel.

God counsels you to flee idolatry. Listen to that counsel. He counsels you to seek pleasure in heaven at His right hand, not on earth in a bag of Cheetos or a bottle of whiskey. God counsels you to delight in the saints.

Most of us don't care much for unsolicited advice. The king actually blesses the LORD for giving him unsolicited advice. That's how joyous his worship is.

B. To Remain in Yahweh's Presence, v. 8

His second response is to live before the face of God. Everything he does, he does as though God is watching him because he is always watching God. God is in front of him. Everywhere he looks, everything he does, he sees God and remembers him. What is man that you remember him? That's what the king asked in Ps 8. There's no need to ask what God is that you remember Him. The wonder is that you and I so easily forget Him! How many times while writing this very sermon have I been distracted, has my heart turned away from beholding the LORD always before me?

If you take refuge in God, hiding from Sheol and corruption, then you need to always remember that He is right in front of you. You need to set Him before your face. Remaining in His presence is one of our greatest privileges.

Furthermore, the king says that God is at his right hand. Paired with Ps 110, this is one of the best verses on literal interpretation that you can find. I used to puzzle myself over this conundrum: If Christ sits at the Father's right hand, then the Father sits at Christ's left hand. But here the Father is said to be at Christ's right hand. Wouldn't that put Christ on the Father's left

hand? So does the Son switch sides of the throne with His Father from time to time? What's the deal here?

The deal, for those who don't approach this with a literalistic hermeneutic, is simply that God and His Son are inseparable. It probably doesn't even make sense to be on the right side or the left side of an omnipresent spirit being. Rather, God is everywhere, and His Son is right by Him. The Father is at the Son's right hand, just as the Son is at the Father's right hand, because space is all relative to God.

The truth that the Father is at your hand has a deeper significance. It means not only that God is a Spirit without a physical location (could there be such a thing as a 'spiritual location?'), but that this Almighty God is with you to protect you. Preserve me, O God, for I take refuge in you! Forget the Secret Service or the Spetsnaz. The Divine Warrior is at your right hand, protecting you in every situation. You may like the idea of a guardian angel; this verse teaches the truth of a guardian God.

He is at your right hand, and so you can't be shaken. This truth, spoken of the large-scale church in Ps 45 (though the mountains are cast into the heart of the sea, Jerusalem cannot be shaken), is here applied to the individual king and thus to the individual Christian. God is at your right hand, and the wicked cannot take you down into wickedness.

C. To Joyfully Settle Down in Security, vv. 9-11

Because Yahweh is the king's refuge, the king can and does joyfully settle down in security. This concept of home, of settling down and dwelling, is one that recurs again and again Scripture. There may be nothing about the sublimity of the mountains, but there is plenty about this longing that every heart has for a home. The king responds to God's sufficiency by saying "I will rest in you. I will joyfully settle down with my Lord."

1. A Merry Heart, v. 9

The joy is real: the king's heart is glad, and his glory (his entire being) rejoices. Is there more to life than happiness? Most of us don't think so — and the king does not live without happiness or teach us to live without it either. My flesh will dwell in hope, and therefore my heart is glad. Did you catch the tenses? We are not yet in our forever home, but we are already rejoicing.

Do you live this way? Are you an Eeyore Christian, a Puddleglum Christian, a thundercloud Christian? Or do your friends know that your heart is glad and your whole being rejoices? The king's heart is glad, and yours can and should be too.

2. An Unforgotten Soul, v. 10a

In addition to his merry heart and secure flesh, his soul is forgotten. He asked for deliverance from the last enemy, from death. And here he claims God's promise of life beyond death. God will not let the king's soul rot in the place of the dead. He won't let yours rot there either. In fact, this remembering of the king's soul takes a specific physical form.

3. A Resurrected Body, vv. 9c-11a

That form is the resurrection of the body. The forgotten soul is remembered, and it's remembered in this way: by letting the flesh dwell in hope, by keeping the body from rotting, and by showing the path of life. The reference to the resurrection of the flesh is the only realistic

interpretation here — either that or a deliverance from death altogether, such that the king never has to die at all. That is what Peter and Paul pick up on in their sermons on this text. In the Resurrection, God showed the path of life to His Son. That path is not just the law, though the law does sum up the path of life. The path begins with the gift of life from God Himself, and it is rebegun with another gift of life from God — the gift of life after death.

4. A Place of Eternal Bliss, v. 11bc

The king looks forward not just to eternal life, but to eternal bliss. He wants pleasures forevermore at the right hand of the Father, and he is not afraid to mention their existence with evident relish. The pleasures are not separate from the Father and His presence; rather, they are part and parcel of that presence. Where God is, joy is. The king will dwell securely in anticipation of the resurrection of the dead and the highly pleasant life of the world to come.

The next psalm contrasts these pleasures at God's right hand with the pleasure of accumulating worldly goods and passing them down to your children. Guess which one is better? Nowhere on earth are there pleasures forevermore. Disneyland may be "the happiest place on earth," but no one would dare to say to Mickey Mouse "at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." There may be some fun in the Magic Kingdom, but there is hardly fullness of joy there. But if you allow God to be in front of you and at your right hand, you will follow the path of life through death, past the resurrection, and into heaven itself, there to find the fullness of all joy and delight with Him. Journey with Him, arrive with Him, dwell with Him. Your refuge will be secure. Amen.