

## Psalm 16

Psalm 16 is one of those psalms in which David, who wrote the psalm, fades so far into the background that you can hardly see him; and Jesus Christ, who is the sweet psalmist of Israel, comes so far to the foreground that he is all you can see in the psalm. That is not our interpretation of Psalm 16, but that is Peter's and Paul's interpretation of this psalm. In Acts 2, at the occasion of Pentecost, when Peter stood up to preach a sermon and explain what was happening in the pouring out of the Holy Ghost, he described the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and proved to all of the people who were assembled in Jerusalem that Jesus actually rose from the dead. And when Peter quoted scripture to prove that Jesus rose from the dead, he quoted Psalm 16. "For David speaketh concerning him [Jesus], I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance" (Acts 2:25–28). And then Peter continued, "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (vv. 29–32).

When the apostle Paul was preaching in Antioch in Pisidia, he also quoted Psalm 16. "Wherefore he [God] saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 13:35). He continued, "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: but he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption" (vv. 36–37). Both Peter and Paul told everyone in their sermons that David, who wrote this psalm, was dead and buried and had not been raised from the dead yet. That means that in Psalm 16 David recedes so far into the background and Jesus Christ comes so far into the foreground that the whole psalm is very obviously and plainly a psalm about Jesus Christ.

And what is Psalm 16 about, this psalm of our Lord, the sweet psalmist? These are Jesus' meditations concerning his death and burial and his resurrection from the dead and going into heaven. Before our Lord died, he thought about his death. Before he was buried in the tomb, he thought about his burial. And as he meditated on his burial, he was filled with joy. "My heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope" (v. 9).

That is a remarkable thing regarding our Lord's thoughts of his own death and burial. Why is it so remarkable? Because Jesus' death and burial were awful. It was a more awful death than we could ever imagine and than we will ever go through. Jesus even indicates how awful his death and burial were going to be when he begins the psalm, "Preserve me, O God." He cries out, "Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust." Why was Jesus' death going to be so awful? Because it had the purpose of bearing our sins. And he refers to that too. That is in the verses that can be a little bit difficult to understand, verses 2–3: "O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee; but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight." Jesus is saying that what he was going to do in his death would not add anything to God. Jesus is there speaking to the triune God. "My soul said unto Jehovah"—that's LORD in small caps—"thou art my sovereign; thou art my king; thou art my Lord; and what I am about to do is not to add anything to thee. My goodness extendeth not to thee. But what I am about to do is for the saints in the earth. They

are my delight.” Jesus there is talking about his death on the cross and his suffering the curse for the sins of his people. It was going to be an awful death.

Jesus also speaks about his burial, and that too was going to be awful. Jesus mentions that when he speaks of the grave using the word “hell.” “For thou wilt not leave my soul in *hell*” (v. 10)—and that is the word that is often used in the Old Testament to mean *the grave*. Thou wilt not leave me in the grave. “Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (v. 10). The grave is the place of corruption. The grave is the place where the body is broken down and becomes dust. Jesus contemplated his burial in the tomb, where corruption happens.

But as Jesus contemplated his death and burial, he was filled with joy. Why? Because he was accomplishing the purpose of the Lord. What was happening in Jesus’ death and burial was not his defeat but was his victory and the victory of God and God’s counsel.

Jesus speaks of God’s counsel when he speaks in verses 5–6 of the Lord’s being the portion of his inheritance and of his cup, the one who maintained his lot so that the lines were fallen unto him in pleasant places. There Jesus is making an allusion to the practice of dividing up the land of Canaan by lot, so that the lines of one’s property fell to him by lot; and Jesus says about his own lot, which is all of heaven and all of the blessing of God, “Thou maintainest my lot [or my inheritance]. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places.” Jesus is saying, “What thou hast determined should be done through my death and resurrection is wonderful: it is the glorious inheritance of heaven.”

Jesus penetrates right to the heart of that inheritance when he says, “The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup” (v. 5). The inheritance of Jesus Christ is not only a place—heaven—but it is also Jehovah himself.

There was no other God who could give that to Jesus, which he refers to as well in verse 4: “Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips.”

As the Lord Jesus Christ contemplated what God was doing through Jesus’ death and burial, in bringing him through that death and burial and raising him from that death, he was very glad. “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (vv. 10–11).

There was a path right through that grave and right through that death, which path went into heaven. That path led to God’s right hand, where Jesus Christ would sit down with glory, where there were pleasures forevermore and the fullness of joy in the presence of God. And that path of life God showed Jesus by raising him from the dead.

And now this psalm of Jesus is given to you by God as your psalm that you may sing with your Lord and with all the joy of your Lord, as you contemplate your own death and burial and resurrection. And with great joy this may be your confession: “Thou wilt shew me the path of life.” There is a path that goes right through your death and right through your grave into heaven, and that path is Jesus himself. He is the path of life, so that on that path into heaven there is fullness of joy in God’s presence and pleasures at God’s right hand, where Jesus sits, forevermore.