

A PSALM OF CONFIDENCE

Psalm 16

Dr. George O. Wood

The title that I'm going to use for this psalm is "A Psalm of Confidence."

"Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge. I said to the LORD, 'You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.' As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight. The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods. I will not pour out their libations of blood or take up their names on my lips. LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Psalm 16:1–11, NIV).

This is a psalm which focuses on the riches that David has in his fellowship with God. We ought to note again it's a Davidic psalm. A psalm written by David.

This particular psalm has been placed in a category of psalms of trust. There are about six psalms that join Psalm 16 in similar tenor. Totally different words and sometimes different situations but a psalm which says, "My real hope is not in anything I have, it's not in the friends I have, any external security. My real trust and hope is in God." Psalms 4, 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 131. Those are the psalms of trust.

A PSALM OF CONFIDENCE

Psalm 16

That's not to say the other psalms aren't also psalms of trust but these psalms seem to cleave together in similar emphasis. The dominant feature of each of those psalms is a quiet confidence in God as the source of life's highest satisfaction.

This psalm is a *miktam* of David. We don't know what a *miktam* is. I could tell you what the guesses are and you can take which one you like. There are four guesses what *miktam* means.

One—it means the “Golden Psalm” from the Hebrew word *ketem*. *Ketem* means gold. But most commentators don't feel that's the case. But if you come to a moment in your life when you especially need this psalm it is a golden word.

Another possible meaning is “to cover.” That derives from a word in another language that means to cover. That it describes a covering, one's lips are covered or sealed in secrecy. The idea behind that is that this psalm is really a silent prayer, a quiet psalm of confidence.

Another possibility is that this is a mystery poem in the sense that it treats the mysterious issues of life, the deep mystic relationship a person has with God which is not based on any outward evidence of prosperity or any tangible things that would say this person is a particular blessed person of God but a mysterious poem that the person finds his or her real roots in the personal relationship with God.

Finally that it means an inscription or a writing. The Hebrew words “to write” and “to inscribe” are closely related. If this is a psalm of inscription it means something which is written which cannot be erased or washed away. So what is written is there, inscribed, like chiseling into granite. The words are going to last.

All Scripture is that way. It is meant to be there permanently for us to see and get a hold of. It will never been washed away or wiped away. I like the last meaning. That this psalm is etched into the very fabric of life and once this psalm is in your soul it cannot be erased or washed out.

A PSALM OF CONFIDENCE

Psalm 16

The setting we're not told. We're left to reading between the lines. We don't know what in David's life this psalm would relate to. But we do discover that David is contending with those Hebrews who are worshipping other gods. He is taking his stand as a person who is not doing this.

If you go back to the historical part of the Old Testament which gives us the life of David there is one time in David's life when the themes of this psalm come together. It may be that this psalm was written in association with that particular event. David as a young man who has been fleeing from King Saul, 1 Samuel 26:18–19. The setting is this is the second time David has the encounter with Saul. Once in a cave and now Saul is sleeping with his spear right next to him and David refuses to slay him (1 Samuel 26:7–11). But then David goes off a ways and has this conversation across the valley with Saul. David says, "Why is my lord pursuing his servant? What have I done, and what wrong am I guilty of? Now let my lord the king listen to his servant's words. If the LORD has incited you against me, then may he accept an offering. If, however, men have done it, may they be cursed before the LORD! They have now driven me from my share in the LORD's inheritance and have said, 'Go, serve other gods'" (1 Samuel 26:18–19, NIV).

That phrase "They have driven me from my share in my inheritance" would suggest that part of the consequence of David having to run for his life from Saul is that he was disenfranchised. He lost his property, wiped out.

Along with that they were saying, "You don't worship Jehovah God when you're in rebellion against the king so you might as well go serve other gods." Both those themes are addressed in this particular psalm—Psalm 16. If I were a guessing person I would say that it's perhaps possible to tie Psalm 16 into a period of David's life when he's relatively young rather than it

A PSALM OF CONFIDENCE

Psalm 16

being an old man's psalm. Although many people use this as a psalm of retirement and approaching death. It seems almost to look back on life saying, "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places" (Psalm 16:6). But it may have been the psalm of a relatively young man.

The psalm itself easily divides into two different parts. The first 6 verses we could head "the Faithful Servant." Then verses 7–11 we could head "the Faithful Lord."

I. The faithful servant.

In the first 6 verses, the faithful servant, David reflects a single-mindedness that he has sought the Lord and the Lord alone to meet his needs in five very key areas of his life. We find here David has single-mindedly sought the Lord to fulfill these needs.

A. His need for security, verse 1. "Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge" (NIV). There's really no place on earth that is safe. David, if he writes this as a young man, was in a very vulnerable position. There is possibility of imminent assassination and he's been hiding in caves, using the Judean wilderness to get away. But when it all comes down to it he says, "My safety is not in my cunning skill to avoid Saul, it's not in my knowledge of the terrain, it's not in the fact that I can get in a place where I'm surrounded by four hundred men. My real security is in You. In You I have hidden. My safety is in You. There is no safe place but in God." That's one thing right away he celebrates. God meets our safety needs.

B. The second thing he is delighted in with God is his welfare or well-being. The meaning of welfare has almost changed in the last twenty-five years in America. He says in verse 2, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing" (NIV). He's saying there is no happiness for me apart from You. God is not just one god among many gods. Or not simply the best god among all gods. God is the only God. All the rest of life is lived within His goodness. It flows

A PSALM OF CONFIDENCE

Psalm 16

out of His goodness. Nothing is good of its own self. It all comes out of the loving care of God who makes life good.

Does the Lord dominate my life? Is He everything to me? Is my life fixed on Him or the things I feel are important? To David the most important thing was His relationship with the Lord. So he's saying "Lord, You've met the deepest need in me for well-being. Everything could be going wrong externally, but when I'm with You and right with You, things are well." So he's single-minded in his relationship with God; his well-being.

C. The third thing he found satisfaction with was the choice of his friends. Verses 3–4 make a contrast between the saints who are in the land and who are God's glorious ones and people who are syncretistic, who say there's value in every religion: "I'll put the religions together and live a good, moral, ethical life." David has people he has known that have gone this way, who worshiped Yahweh but would not forget all the other gods out there: "Let's give offerings to all gods!"

David is saying those who don't have an exclusive loyalty to Yahweh, their sorrows will increase. "But as for me I'm not going to pour out libations nor will I name their names [his friends' names or the gods they were calling upon]; those names won't be on my lips" (verse 4). Exclusive loyalty to God.

The Hebrew word for saints in verse 3 is a fascinating term historically. It is the word *hasidim*. That word has a tremendous history in Israel. It was the *hasidim* two centuries before Christ who resisted the attempts to pollute the religion of Israel by pagan customs and who stood up against the Assyrian leader and rebelled. The *hasidim* were called the holy ones. It literally means loyal ones, pure ones, highest ones. That's the idea of saints. The word *hasidim* occurs all through the psalms. The *hasidim* led the resistance and out of the *hasidim* came the Pharisees, who said, "We

A PSALM OF CONFIDENCE

Psalm 16

will resist anything which is impious, impure, disloyal to God. We will be holy in this world.”

They start out with right intentions but they got focused on externals after a while and forgot why God called them into being.

What this psalm is saying to *hasidim*, is that those who are loyal to God are those who cause brightness to be in the land.

The situation between what is talked about in Psalm 16 between the saints and the syncretist, the *hasidim* and the impure still goes on today. It goes on in the church and it goes on in the country of Israel among the Jews themselves.

D. David refuses to participate in the practices of those who name other gods. He chooses to be a *hasidim*, an observer, one whose heart is set upon God. That determines his loyalty, who he’s loyal to. Who he’s going to have associations with. He’s not going to be involved in any syncretistic worship.

E. The fifth thing he says is even his ambitions have demonstrated a loyalty to God, verses 5–6.

“LORD, you’ve assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Surely I have a delightful inheritance” (NIV). If this particular psalm is written at the time that 1 Samuel 26 describes when he has been fleeing from Saul it means that the inheritance David is talking about is totally nonmaterial. It doesn’t have a thing to do with property because he doesn’t have any. When it says “The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places,” that simply means when you’re staking out a claim, you’re surveying what property belongs to you, and the lines falling in pleasant places means you’ve got the good part.

In actual fact if it’s written early in his career he has no property. I think that even makes this psalm more significant because David is saying what really counts is what God has given me as

A PSALM OF CONFIDENCE

Psalm 16

a portion of life. Whatever that is I will accept it as the best for me. I don't need anything physical or material to back it up.

“Cup” describes participation like the Lord did in the Last Supper. You get a good quantity when you've passed the cup, not just a little bit. David is saying, “What counts in life? What do we really have by way of what God has given us as an inheritance in life? Nothing is external, but things internal.”

Paul picks up on this theme in Philippians. He's at the end of his ministerial career. He's in prison. He has no property, no money, no retirement fund. He says “For me to live is Christ, to die is gain” (1:21). He says in 3:7–8, “Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss. If I owned anything before I was a Christian it was a loss, not a profit at all. I count it loss for the sake of Christ. What's more I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may be in Christ.” I think that's exactly what David is focusing in on. He who has Christ is the richest of all. He who has not Christ may have everything but is the poorest of all. “The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places” (Psalm 16:6).

That's the faithful servant.

II. Then the last five verses, 7–11, speak of the second part of the psalm, the faithful Lord.

There are some benefits that the Lord himself gives. Four benefits are described here.

A. Guidance, verse 7: “I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me” (NIV). David finds that God is indeed speaking to him. He may not speak in an audible voice but you know He's impressing on you certain actions and certain life responses. David is saying God counsels rather than coerces. Even the nighttime which in the psalms can be a time of fretting and worrying and tears, in this particular psalm the nighttime becomes a time of

A PSALM OF CONFIDENCE

Psalm 16

insight and instruction. Even in the night, David is saying, God is giving me wisdom and guidance.

B. God gives stability, verse 8. “I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken” (NIV). God’s at his right hand. He is secure. In the Scripture, the bride and the bridegroom form a model both in the Old Testament and the New for God’s people in relationship to himself. God’s people are pictured as the bride and God is pictured as the Groom, and there is stability in the relationship that comes out of the bride looking to the groom for her protection. Stability.

C. The third benefit the Lord provides is resurrection, verses 9–10. “Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave [Hebrew *Sheol*], nor will you let your Holy One see decay” (NIV). This is an incredible statement. David’s confidence in the Lord is so extreme that he launches out in this statement which we look at and say, what a bold statement. How could that be? The reason why God allowed David to say this we find in the New Testament. Two of the greatest passages in the Early Church are in Acts 2 and 13.

Acts 2 is the first sermon Peter ever preached. And Acts 13 is the first recorded sermon Paul preached. Both Peter and Paul in their first recorded sermons take Psalm 16 as their text and say, David died. And his body saw corruption. Therefore he must have been talking about someone else.

Paul says, “So it is stated elsewhere, ‘You will not let your Holy One see decay.’ For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay”

A PSALM OF CONFIDENCE

Psalm 16

(Acts 13:35–37, NIV). Peter says in Acts 2:31, “David, seeing what was ahead, spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah that he was not abandoned the grave nor did his body see decay.”

There’s only one person in all of human history who could ever say this psalm with absolute confidence. If you read it as a prayer of Jesus, where was Jesus’ security? In His relationship with the Father. Where was Jesus’ well-being? It was in His relationship with the Father. Where was His loyalty? It was to those whom His Father had given Him, who are safe in the Father’s hand. What did Jesus have as His inheritance? He had nothing—no earthly possession. But yet He could look at life and say, “The lines have fallen for Me in pleasant places.” We’ve become His inheritance. His exclusive object of worship was the Lord, the Father. What are the benefits? To Him are counsel and security and resurrection.

D. Benefits. Three we’ve looked at. Guidance. Security. Resurrection. The last benefit that’s mentioned, verse 11, the glorious future. “You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (NIV).

What is past the grave? What does the future hold for God’s saints? David says it holds three things. It holds the path of life. God will make it known to us. Not known intellectually, but know experientially. After life’s candle is snuffed out we do not see death but life. That’s where the saint’s hope is.

Then joy in God’s presence and eternal pleasure at His right hand. These joys and pleasures are wholly satisfying because it describes us as being filled with joy. To be filled means there is no part of us left empty. Therefore the joys that God has set before us are both His presence, the joy of His face, and what He does for us, the gifts that come from His right hand.

A PSALM OF CONFIDENCE

Psalm 16

So David has come full circle in this psalm. A psalm which began with David being a refugee—

“O Lord in Thee I have taken refuge”—ends up with his being an heir. From refugee to heir.

From being hunted to having all things. It stems out of the security of his relationship with God.