

September 17, 2017
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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THE LORD'S LINES ARE PLEASANT Psalm 16

Psalm 16 is a Messianic psalm. It points ahead to certain truths about Jesus Christ. At the same time, in this psalm David boldly opens his heart to us which allows us to identify with his love for God and his desire to be wholly committed to his Master. It is one of those psalms in which God breathed out what David should write even while David wrote from the perspective of his own circumstances and relationship with God. While David spoke of his own circumstances, God used His words to prophecy about the work and person of Christ.

That being true, we are not very surprised to discover that Peter preached Christ to the Jews in Jerusalem from this text on Pentecost. He quoted it when he preached, *“For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence’”* (Acts 2:25-28).

Peter was not the only preacher recorded in Scripture who preached from this text. Paul also preached Christ to the Jews in Antioch from this text. He preached, *“And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’”* (Acts 13:32-33). Then Paul appealed to Psalm 16: *“Therefore he says also in another psalm, ‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation,*

fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption” (Acts 13:35-37).

In many ways throughout his life, God used David as a type of Christ. In similar fashion here, David revealing his own heart gives us insight into the confidence God the Son had in God the Father’s plan to secure Him through the trial of atoning for our sins. Therefore, when David uses the personal pronouns, he does indeed tell us how he felt and does express His confidence in the LORD. But at the same time, he was pointing ahead to the thoughts and feelings of Christ.

But even more important to us is the fact that what David experienced and what our Savior experienced is the same kind of confidence we can experience. Therefore, when we read this psalm and apply it to ourselves, we can clearly fulfill the Apostle Paul’s instruction to us when he wrote, *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 2:5). What would Jesus do? When nearly the whole world around Him had abandoned the true God, Jesus stood His ground, completely committed to doing that which brought glory to the Father. He stood fast because He was fully confident of the Father’s care.

We can and must stand fast in a godless age for the same reason. God’s promise to care for us, yea, even to bless us through life into eternity is sufficient to give us confidence in our circumstances. How we order our lives ought to plainly show the world that we know we are distinct and that we are happy to be distinct—just like Jesus was.

A Single-Minded Commitment (vv.1-5).

People who have their minds committed to God appeal to God as their refuge (vv.1-2). In the first verse David prayed (or sang), *Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge* (v.1). See this picture of David, the brave young man who killed the giant, running to God like a child afraid of the neighbor’s dog running into the arms of Daddy. David, the warrior king, who was valiant in battle killing his “tens of thousands” crouches behind God for protection like a soldier crouches behind his shield. David, who experienced fleeing to the rocks to find refuge, ran to God.

But David is not the only one who ever found refuge in God the Father. Jesus, the Creator of all things, found refuge in the loving heavenly Father while He was tempted like we are in His human body.

And we are privileged to run to the same God and cry out for preservation even in the physical realm. Sometimes it does seem like the circumstances of life are about to overwhelm us. When such situations develop, the natural thing is to run to other people and find comfort in their embrace. But the better choice is to learn how to run to God.

We are wise to run to God because God is our source of good. *I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you"* (v.2). This is full commitment. Notice how David stated, "I say to *Yahweh*" (the eternally self-existent God) "You are my *Adonai*" (owner, master). This is the spirit of him who has died to self. Self is our natural Lord and too easily becomes our God. When I am god to myself, all that matters is how I feel and what it takes to preserve myself.

In contrast to ultimate self-centeredness, idolatry of the worst kind, the wise person has learned that serving self is slavery. To escape from the slavery of serving self and to flee to our true Master is to find good. The good we find is that which is always beneficial, pleasant, and right. It is found with God alone. In fact, apart from God there is no source of that which is truly good. James Johnston put it like this: "There is no good gift that doesn't come from God. Not one. Satan tempts us to think that we can find something good and satisfying that is not from God. The essence of sin is looking for good outside of God's provision and his will." (James Johnston) This means that when I analyze any sin in my life honestly, I will discover that I am trying to find something good from the wrong source, outside God's will, and that is idolatry.

In this kind of commitment to God, there is no plan "B." At this point of commitment, I depend on God and God alone to care for me. This attitude concludes that if God fails me, I am doomed. It's all or nothing. This is a conclusion much like Luther's famous, "Here I stand. I can do no other." We choose to be committed like that to the true God or we choose commitment to a lesser god. But the amazing

thing is why we choose to commit. We will look at that truth in a moment.

Another thing we choose is to fellowship with saints. We love the saints. David wrote, *As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight* (v.3). "Saints" is a good word to refer to the holy people. But even using the word holy to describe a person almost sounds pietistic, insincere, or irrelevant to real life. We have lost the sense of a people group that God has separated out from the rest of the world's population. God makes His people distinct through His miracle of salvation. We maintain that distinction through daily fellowship with God who is holy. If nothing else, we ought to think that by living in fellowship with the holy God some of that holiness would rub off on us.

In contrast to the normal people of the world, God's set-apart people are excellent. The Hebrew word is rare (probably from Phoenician language) and means majestic, mighty. In Hebrew poetry it really does connote "superior." There is no way to temper or mollify this truth. The people who God sets apart for His own purposes and glory are majestic, partly because we are taking on the character of God who is majestic. For God's chosen people to take on God's character is expected. Peter wrote that we are to live, *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy"* (1 Peter 1:14-16).

We whom God has set apart to Himself delight in other people whom God has set apart to Himself. We feel great favor toward them. Our high pleasure is to be in fellowship with them. I think that Christians who live in unusual "Christian" sub-cultures (specifically around Christian colleges in the Bible belt) miss out on this delight. Instead of taking great joy in being with other Christians, we can virtually wish to be apart from them. It is almost as though familiarity breeds contempt. Or as Solomon put it: *Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you* (Proverbs 25:17). When we are surrounded by those who run after false gods (as we shall consider next), we long for Christian fellowship—even with Christians who are not exactly of our chosen persuasion!

When we love the saints, because they too love God, we are not very comfortable hanging out with people who serve lesser gods. Like David then, we reject lesser gods. We have learned that those who run after false gods multiply their sorrows. *The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply (v.4a)*. The sad reality is sadder because of the fact that running after other gods is the natural thing. Some people might say they believe God. But in conflict with their claims, they live like they are betting on someone else to provide and protect. Generally that someone else is self. That self is the real competitor to the true God is obvious in that our man-made gods look, act, and think very much like us.

The result of forsaking the true God brings multiplied sorrows. Kate Millett died Wednesday, September 6 at age 82. She was a leader in the Feminist movement having written the groundbreaking bestseller, *Sexual Politics*, in 1970. Millett taught that religion, especially Christianity, must be abolished because it creates patriarchal societies. Not surprisingly, she was a notoriously sad and angry woman who her family had committed to mental health institutions on various occasions. Maybe as a response to those committals, she became an activist in the anti-psychiatry movement. In 1998 Millett wrote a piece for the Guardian, *The Feminist Time Forgot*, in which she said: "I have no saleable skill, for all my supposed accomplishments. I am unemployable. Frightening, this future. What poverty ahead, what mortification, what distant bag-lady horrors, when my savings are gone?" Kate Millett learned that God makes the rules and God never lies.

We who are committed to the LORD reject false gods. *Their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips (v.4b)*. In other words, we do not worship the false gods. The statement about pouring out drink offerings of blood is a reference to worship. Worship is a matter of exalting a false god, of obeying a false god, of sacrificing for a false god. We are not tempted by many lifeless idols to engage in that kind of activity. However, we are continually bombarded with allurements to give our time and energy to all manner of passing stuff that competes with God. Because the pleasures of life are passing, the worship of such things inevitably leads to sorrow.

Furthermore, we do not name the false gods. To name a god is to be identified with it. Identification is a big deal. It is expected in our culture that we will find our identity in someone, something, some organization. We who are committed to the Lord need to find our identity in Christ. We need to be known as more than a fan but a follower of Jesus. That is what David did.

David was identified in the LORD and there he found satisfaction in the LORD. *He confessed, The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup (v.5a)*. While others find their purpose in passing stuff, the child of God is delighted with the LORD. He is our chosen portion in that God determines that we shall have Him. The words in this statement are the same as those that describe God's portioning out of the Promised Land to each tribe. We are happy that the LORD has chosen for us to have Himself. Think about that idea a second! Too often we think the choice was ours. It was God's choice for Him to be our Heavenly Father.

He is our complete satisfaction, our sustenance, the cup picturing provision of the meal. Therefore, we also agree with David when he acknowledged, *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows (Psalm 23:5)*.

Satisfaction with God indicates that we have confidence in the LORD's care. David could say with all confidence, *You hold my lot (v.5b)*. God determines what He shall allot to us. We are satisfied with His choice. Who ever expressed greater satisfaction with the "lot" the Father determined for Him than Jesus? Who was more committed to God the Father than God the Son? He placed His life in the Father's care against all human hope and desire. He was determined to do and experience the Father's will regardless of what He suffered because He who loves us holds us fast. Jesus illustrated for us not only full, complete commitment but the incomprehensible results of that commitment.

Commitment to the LORD Results in Astonishing Blessings.

Because we are committed to the LORD, we inherit pleasantness. A key phrase in this psalm states that the lines of life just seem to fall right. More exactly David wrote: *The lines have fallen for me in*

pleasant places (v.6a). This statement is a clear reference to God's allotments to each tribe in the Promised Land. Thinking about each portion of land that God gave each tribe, we cannot help but see a contrast. On one hand, the tribe of Dan ultimately was displeased with what God had given and went looking for greener pastures. On the other hand, there were Joshua and Caleb who were delighted with God's provision.

Most important though we need to consider God's "lines" for the Levites. God gave them no land to pass on to their posterity. Wow! They could certainly complain that the lines have not fallen for them in pleasant places at all. That would be a weak and sinful human conclusion. In reality, the Levites got the best deal of all. It is true that God gave them no physical boundaries to which they could point and say, "This is mine." But their lines were more pleasant than all the other tribes because God gave the Levites Himself. Here was God's plan: *And the LORD said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel" (Numbers 18:20)*.

Likewise, our most pleasant lines in life fall within the LORD Himself. Maturity is learning that passing stuff is passing stuff, and the LORD Himself is sufficient. Our goal, our desire must always be to find all that matters to be wrapped up in God. Our driving ambition must be to experience the pleasantness of having God alone. Our aim should be to confess with Asaph, "*Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:25-26)*.

Our pleasant line of belonging to God allows us to acknowledge our superior inheritance. In verse six David declared, *Indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance*. Fallen human nature would consider an inheritance of a few million dollars to be a beautiful inheritance. The child of God should count such an inheritance as temporal at best and a huge burden at worst. The most beautiful inheritance is God Himself. Those who have received Him as their portion are marked off as unique from the rest of the world. To inherit the LORD is to be marked off with a boundary line that exceeds the finite human imagination.

When you take an honest and long look at the real you, do you discover that your identity is in God first? Is your purpose for living God's glory? Do the boundary lines of your life reveal that you are God's possession?

When that is true we praise the LORD. We agree with David who concluded, *I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me (v7)*. The LORD gives counsel and instruction. Counsel is useful, practical advice. It is what Jethro gave to Moses regarding the judging of the people. That advice was practical and helpful. In a negative illustration of the idea, the commander of the Assyrian army mocked Hezekiah telling him that all the careful planning and good counsel for war would not help him win the battle (2 Kings 18:20).

God gives His children useful, practical advice through His Word. He might use human counselors and advisors to share and explain that counsel, but it came from His Word first. Human wisdom is finite; God's counsel is boundless in wisdom. If we believe that, we will be found reading the Bible. Then having read the Bible, in the evening when our hearts are at rest (not distracted), we can sit down and meditate. In the evening, think about the principles you read in the Bible. Rehearse how those principles were played out during the day.

Meditating on the truths God teaches us brings us to the conclusion that the LORD is worthy of blessing. So, like David, we offer blessing to the LORD. This simply means to attribute to God the glory, the praise, the assessment that is due Him. How sad that most of the conversations God's children have with Him are requests. If we understand the good advice He gives us, we should be quick to tell Him how wonderful He is.

Because of God's many blessings, it is only sensible that our focus should be on the LORD. *I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken (v.8)*. If I set the LORD before me my focus is on Him. It means that in all matters, at all times, the LORD is my focus. My eyes are fixed on Him because I adore Him. My eyes are on Him because I know that the distractions of circumstances will cause me fear and doubt. I see God the Almighty Father as my representative, my helper who stands at my right hand.

If the God of all power and eternity stands with me, what shall I fear? David answered that question by saying, *I shall not be shaken*. This is not arrogance or unsubstantiated bravado. It is certain confidence. And the Lord rewards our confidence in Him. He gives us reasons to rejoice in security. *Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure (v.9)*. By this we mean that our intellect, will, and emotions are characterized by gladness. My whole being, the real me, my eternal soul rejoices. And in this passing body, subject to sin though it is, I am secure in God.

Confidence in God's care leads to rejoicing in Him, which also leads to a deep confidence about eternity. *For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption (v.10)*. This was the central verse of Peter's sermon at the birth of the Church (Acts 2:27). Jesus Christ was fully confident that He would rise from the grave. David was confident He would rise from the grave. Job was confident He would rise and see his Redeemer. If we have that certain confidence, what can we possibly fear? Even death does not cause us to fear.

Instead of living in fear every day, we enjoy current blessings. We know God's will. *You make known to me the path of life (v.11a)*. If we really desire to please God, knowing His will is a blessing. If our plan is to learn God's will and then decide whether to do His will or our will, we will know nothing of blessing. We rejoice in God's presence. Do we confess with David, *In your presence there is fullness of joy (v.11b)*? Or does the thought of God being present make you uncomfortable? If so, you are likely sinning.

We who are committed to God find pleasure in God. We have learned *at your right hand are pleasures forevermore (v.11c)*. We have learned that God is not a harsh taskmaster. He is the loving Heavenly Father. If we are truly His children, we will truly enjoy being around Him.

This psalm paints a very simple and practical picture of the confidence a child of God should have. We should be delighted to know Him. We should be delighted to belong to Him. We should be delighted to have Him not only show us the path He desires for us to walk, but to walk beside us in the way.