

Main Idea: Psalm 16 is the psalm of the empty tomb. Specifically, Psalm 16:8-11 revealed one thousand years ahead of time the truth that the Messiah would indeed conquer death. We’re going to look at the psalm this Easter morning by asking three questions.

- I. What did Psalm 16 mean to David?
 - A. It grew out of a crisis (1-7).
 - B. It led to a commitment (8).
 - C. It resulted in this confidence (9-11).
 1. Death was not the end for David.
 2. Death would not be the end for God’s Holy One.
- II. What did Psalm 16 mean to Jesus’ followers?
 - A. Peter tells us in Acts 2:25-31.
 1. He tells about Jesus’ works.
 2. He tells about Jesus’ death.
 3. He tells about Jesus’ resurrection.
 4. He tells that David predicted it.
 - B. Paul tells us in Acts 13:35.
 1. He preached Jesus.
 2. He focused on the resurrection.
 3. He supported it by quoting Psalm 16.
- III. What should Psalm 16 mean for us?
 - A. It says we have a common foe.
 - B. It says we can have a certain expectation.

Make It Personal: Do you know for certain what will happen to you after you die?

Scripture Reading: Luke 24:1-12

We have just gone through Passion week. On these days each year we rehearse the great events surrounding the last week in the life of our Lord and Savior, His entry into Jerusalem amidst the cheers of the crowd, His confrontation with the religious leaders in the temple, His final instructions with His disciples, His betrayal by Judas, His condemnation by the Sanhedrin, His execution by ruthless Roman soldiers, His burial by Joseph of Arimethea, and then the climax, His resurrection from the dead!

These events were not coincidental. They were ordained by God. In fact, they were spelled out in the God-breathed Scriptures centuries before they occurred.

Last Sunday we were humbled as we gazed at "The Psalm of the Cross," Psalm 22. Psalm 22 predicts the pain and gain of the cross of Jesus Christ. David penned the inspired words one thousand years before the event, recording in graphic detail the crucifixion of God's anointed.

Psalm 22 takes us right to the foot of Jesus’ cross. We see the anguish of His physical suffering, the abandonment of His emotional suffering, and the alienation of His spiritual suffering. That was last week’s message. That was Good Friday.

But there’s more to the story, and the Old Testament Scriptures predicted that too. If there were *not* more to the story, to borrow from Paul, "We are of all men most miserable!" (I Cor 15:19)

The cross was not the end. It couldn’t be! Why not? Because ten centuries ahead of time, Psalm 16 said so.

This morning, I invite you to turn to the Psalm of the Empty Tomb, Psalm 16. My friend, the resurrection of Jesus makes all the difference. Consider three reasons.

^{**} Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This message is adapted from a message preached at WBC in April 1992.

First, lots of great, influential leaders have impacted the world scene. Some left an indelible impression upon humanity. But they all had one thing in common. They all died. Alexander the Great. Aristotle. Plato. Julius Caesar. Constantine. Napoleon Bonapart. They all impacted the world, and they all *died*. They're gone. Their influence was limited.

But Jesus not only impacted the world and died. He conquered death and continues to influence the universe. Indeed, He has all authority over it, and all things exist by Him, through Him, and for Him (Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:16).

Secondly, if Jesus Christ is not alive right now, then Christianity would be dead. There's no explanation for how Jesus' followers have spread throughout the world preaching the message of a risen Savior, and dying for that message, were it not true.

Thirdly, if the resurrection of Jesus Christ did not occur, we have no hope. If He didn't rise, then neither will we, even though He said we would. If this life is all there is, we are of all men most miserable, as Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 15.

But of course, Jesus did defeat death and walk out of His tomb. He is alive, is seated at His Father's right hand ruling the universe, and will return one day to judge the world and establish His eternal kingdom.

We know He's alive because there's eyewitness account in the New Testament. But we also know it because God, who cannot lie, predicted it would be so in the prophetic text of Psalm 16.

We're going to learn about the resurrection this Easter morning by looking at Psalm 16 and answering three simple and straightforward questions.

- I. What did Psalm 16 mean to David?
- II. What did Psalm 16 mean to Jesus' followers?
- III. What should Psalm 16 mean for us?

I. What did Psalm 16 mean to David?

Look at the heading over Psalm 16. Who wrote this psalm? It's called a "Michtam." Michtam is a Hebrew word. We don't know what it means, apparently some kind of musical or literary term to aid in Israel's public worship.

But notice the name. A Michtam of David. David wrote this psalm.

But why did David write Psalm 16? As we read it we'll discover three things.

A. It grew out of a crisis (1-7). In Psalm 16 David is describing an experience he faced in his life. It's a psalm of confidence, yet it's a confidence that grew out of a crisis.

Apparently, David has in mind a brush with death. Of course he had many in his life. For example, his showdown with Goliath; multiple incidents with King Saul, such as the time Saul thrust his spear at him, another when Saul hunted him as if he were a dangerous criminal; and of course many life and death encounters with enemy armies.

And in each of those dangerous encounters, what did David learn about his God? He tells us right here, two lessons he'd learned through the challenges of life. I'll tell you what they are, and then we'll read it in the text.

According to verses 1-7, David learned that one, the most confident people in the world are those who trust in the Lord God (1-3, 5-7); and two, the most unstable people in the world are those who trust in themselves (4).

That's the message of verses 1-7. God is trustworthy, dependable. He wants us to place our confidence in Him, no matter how great the problem. And that's exactly what David chose to do.

Now listen to David in verses 1-7.

“Keep me safe, my God,

for in you I take refuge.

² I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord;
apart from you I have no good thing.”

³ I say of the holy people who are in the land,
“They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight.”

⁴ Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more.
I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods
or take up their names on my lips.

⁵ Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.

⁶ The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.

⁷ I will praise the Lord, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.

So there's David's crisis, and there's what he learned in the crisis. The confident are those who trust in the Lord. The unstable are those who trust in themselves.

That brings us to a second discovery. First, Psalm 16 grew out of a crisis.

B. It led to a commitment (8). David's crisis cemented something in his heart and mind, which he shares in verse 8.

I love Psalm 16:8. I have a cross-stitch wall hanging of it in my study that my mother made for me decades ago. Psalm 16:8 is my life verse, and has been ever since I heard Don Jennings share it in a devotional with the Cedarville basketball team in 1980.

This was David's commitment, and by God's grace, I want it to be mine.

Verse 8 (AV) “I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.”

What does that mean? Let's look at David's commitment word by word.

"I"--David made a decision. A personal resolve. Not made by his parents

"have set"--His commitment had to do with his priorities. What was his number one aim in life? What passion consumed David's attention day by day? His job? No. His family? No. Pleasure? No. Having a good time in life? No. What was David's "summum bonum" in life? What was his top priority?

"the LORD"--Notice this particular name of God, all capital letters. This is God's covenant name. It's the name by which He revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush. Yahweh. Jehovah. This name describes God not as Creator (Elohim), but as redeemer.

There's David's commitment in life--"I will give My redeemer first place in my life." How often?

"always"--In every decision, in every choice, as long as I live

"before me"--David lived with this picture in his mind. The One who redeemed me is always right in front of me. Not off to the side, not an appendage nor add on, but front and center.

Would it make a difference in your life if you lived as though the Lord is with you wherever you go? Well, He is. So let's make sure we give Him center stage. Put Him in front. Follow Him wherever He leads.

This was David's commitment. What would this commitment mean practically for us this week? When I choose to set the Lord always before me, it means I make Jesus Christ the priority in every decision, in every pursuit.

Several years ago I heard of a Christian couple that met with their pastor. They were having marriage problems. The wife spoke up and said, "My husband makes \$80,000 a year, but each week when the offering plate is passed, he puts in a 5 dollar bill..."

Not so David. David was consumed with a passion, a commitment in life. He resolved day by day to give the Lord first place in his life!

What happens when a person makes that kind of commitment? It produces something according to the end of verse 8. "Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved (NIV 'shaken')."

Keep in mind, David had faced a crisis. But since he responded with the commitment to put the Lord always before him, he experienced great confidence, not in himself, but in the Lord.

Because I put him *before me*, He is at *my right hand*, my dominant hand, the one I use all the time, in battle, and for everyday activities.

What are the things that "move" us in life? The things bigger than us, right? The things we cannot control.

And what's the number one thing that is out of our control in life? It's death. David knows that all it takes is one javelin thrust, and he just moved from this life into eternity.

Many people fear death. The fear of death "moves" them. Why? It's out of their control.

But watch this. It did not move David. He had confidence even in the face of death because he knew that the things out of his control were not out of the LORD'S control.

Which brings us to a third discovery. Psalm 16 grew out of a crisis, led to a commitment, and thirdly...

C. It resulted in this confidence (9-11). Instead of giving way to fear in the face of a crisis, what did David do? Notice verse 9, "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure..."

Have you ever noticed the differences in the way people handle death? Have you ever wondered why it is that those who love and live for Jesus Christ face death with such confidence? Here's the answer.

Notice carefully the last phrase in verse 9. As the AV puts it, "my flesh shall rest in hope." Those who put their confidence in the Lord have hope.

And what is this hope? David spells it out in verses 10-11. I'll start in verse 9. "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;

my body also will rest secure,
¹⁰ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead²,
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

² AV, "For thou wilt not leave my soul in sheol..."

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

Keep in mind that Psalm 16 grew out of an experience David faced in his life, a crisis, which led to a commitment, which resulted in this affirmation of confidence. How could David be confident? He says it's because he knew two things for sure when he thought of death.

1. *Death was not the end for David.* Why not? According to verse 10, “because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead.” In the AV, “For thou wilt not leave my soul in sheol.”

In David's day Sheol, the Hebrew word, was viewed as the "underworld," called Hades in the Greek NT. It was viewed as the place of the dead, the separate state of souls after leaving this life. It was the invisible world of souls. The doctrine of the afterlife was not fully developed in David's day (he did not have 2 Cor 4:8, or 1 Cor 15).

But he did know this. Death would not be the end for him. The Lord would not abandon him to the realm of the dead after he died. In other word, he would continue to live in the life to come.

He talks about this future hope in verse 11, “You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

That's what is coming for me, says David. Yet there's something else David says he knew for sure, and it's why we're celebrating today.

2. *Death would not be the end for God's Holy One.* The end of verse 10, “Nor will you let your Holy One see decay.”

Who is God's "Holy One"? The Hebrew word appears 32 times in the OT, 25 times in the Psalms. It usually refers to God's people, the saints. Obviously, in part, that's what David has in mind here. "I know that You LORD will not permit me, as one of your saints, to see corruption."

But I'm convinced David is alluding to another person here as well.

In Mark 1:24 Jesus cast a demon out of a man at the synagogue in Capernaum. Remember what the demon said about Jesus? “I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”

How was it that David could have such confidence in the face of death? For this reason. The Spirit of God guided David's eye and pen as he wrote Psalm 16. He looked ahead, down the corridors of time. And who did He see? He saw his own seed, the coming king whose reign would never end. He saw *the* Holy One of God, the coming Messiah.

And what did David declare would happen to the coming Messiah? God would not allow Him to see decay. What does that indicate? That the Messiah would die, but not remain in the realm of the dead long enough for decay to begin.

It indicates that the Messiah would defeat man's greatest enemy. By God's help David had defeated a lot of enemies himself. Goliath, the Philistines, etc. But there was an enemy he could not defeat, man's ultimate foe. Death.

Yet David had confidence as he faced this foe. Because He looked ahead to the One who would conquer it. He looked to and put his trust in Jesus.

So what did Psalm 16 mean to David? It meant that in the crisis he made a commitment that resulted in this confidence. Death will not be the end for me, because it will not be the end for the coming Messiah.

Now a second question...

II. What did Psalm 16 mean to Jesus' followers?

Did you realize that the NT gives us commentary on the importance of Psalm 16? It does. The followers of Jesus believed that Psalm 16 pointed to Jesus, that Jesus fulfilled it. Consider two examples.

A. Peter tells us in Acts 2:25-31.

When we turn to Acts 2 we're turning to an event that happened less than two months after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. The risen Messiah has ascended back to heaven, and in Acts 2 He fulfills the promise He made in Acts 1:8. "And you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."

This is the Day of Pentecost, according to 2:1, the day when the Holy Spirit given to the followers of Jesus, and the church began.

The Jews in Jerusalem accused Jesus' followers of being drunk, so Peter responded by preaching to the crowd in. What did he tell them? To put it simply, he told them about Jesus! Just scan through it and you'll see.

1. *He tells about Jesus' works.* Hear him in verse 22, "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know."

2. *He tells about Jesus' death.* In verse 23, "This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."

3. *He tells about Jesus' resurrection.* That's verse 24, "God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."

This is the gospel. Peter tells the audience what Jesus did, and how He died, and how He defeated death. And how did Peter drive home this point to his audience?

4. *He tells that David predicted it.* Notice verses 25-28, "David said about him: 'I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope,²⁷ because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.'"

Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-11. He specifically says that David was talking about Jesus. He explains the resurrection by citing, "... Because thou wilt not allow Thine Holy One to see corruption."³

So what's the point? Why did Peter quote Psalm 16? He tells them in verses 29-36, "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day.³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.³¹ Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay.³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.³³ Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.³⁴ For David did not

³ It's worth noting which Bible Peter quoted here, not the Hebrew Scriptures, but the LXX, a Greek translation of the original Hebrew.

ascend to heaven, and yet he said [quoting this time from Psalm 110:1], ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand ³⁵ until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”’
³⁶Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

So what's Peter saying? Remember he's talking to many of the same people who had rejected Jesus and called for His execution just weeks before. Peter gets right to the point. David is dead and gone. You can go see his tomb if you want. If you open it up, you'll find his bones. And you can go see Jesus' tomb as well, if you like. But there's one big difference. Jesus tomb is *empty* because Jesus left His grave alive.

Just like David said He would.

And that cut the crowd to the core. “What shall we do?” they asked (34).

To which Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Notice, *this promise is for you*. And three thousand believed the promise that day and placed their faith in Christ.

Let's see another example of what Psalm 16 meant to Jesus' followers.

B. Paul tells us in Acts 13:35.

When we come to Acts 13, we see Paul on his first missionary journey. He's preaching to Jews in a synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. What was his message? Like Peter...

1. *He preached Jesus*. Using the Old Testament. And...

2. *He focused on the resurrection*. Notice verses 26-31, “Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. ²⁷The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. ²⁸Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. ²⁹When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, ³¹and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.”

There is the gospel again. He told the people about Jesus' death, and how God raised Him from the dead. And again, as did Peter...

3. *He supported it by quoting Psalm 16*. Notice verses 32-37, “We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors ³³he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: ‘You are my son; today I have become your father.’ ³⁴God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said, ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’ ³⁵So it is also stated elsewhere: ‘You will not let your Holy One see decay.’ Now when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. ³⁷But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.”

Same point. David died and his body decayed. But God raised Jesus from the dead. He did not see decay, which is why I can share this invitation.

“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.³⁹ Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.⁴⁰

And that brings us to a third question we need to ask.

III. What should Psalm 16 mean for us?

It boils down to two realities.

A. It says we have a common foe. “You will not abandon me to the grave (9),” says David in verse 9. But the grave is coming.

Death is our common foe. Indeed, “It is appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment (Hebrews 9:27).”

So many people live as though death is not coming, coasting along as if there was no heaven to gain and hell to avoid. But this is a certain reality, as Psalm 16 makes clear. We do have a common foe.

Thankfully, Psalm 16 makes this clear too.

B. It says we can have a certain expectation. We can face death with confidence, as David did. We can anticipate joy in God’s presence, “with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

How? By doing what David did. He looked ahead to the One who would conquer death. We must look too, not ahead but backwards, to Him who conquered death, Jesus the Christ.

Listen to the New Testament as it proclaims what Jesus did and can do.

Hebrews 2:14-15 “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

2 Timothy 1:10 “Christ Jesus...has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

1 Corinthians 15:20-26 “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.²³ But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

Psalm 16 is an evangelistic text. Both Peter and Paul used Psalm 16 in evangelistic messages. That makes this perfectly clear. The resurrection of Jesus Christ must be at the heart of the gospel we believe and preach. We do not call men and women to believe in a dead religion starter, but in the Risen Savior and Lord.

Make It Personal: Do you know for certain what will happen to you after you die?

Do you have the confidence you've seen David express today as you face the inevitable prospect of dying? I cannot improve on the two diagnostic questions:

1. If you died today, are you sure you'd go to heaven?

2. If you died today and stood before God Himself, who asked you, “Why should I let you into my heaven?”, what would you say?