

October 31, 2021

THE JOY OF HOPING FULLY IN THE LORD

Psalm 16

*(6 of 11 in a series of selected Psalms)*

Have you ever read a book that—even years later—that you can look at and remember how you felt reading it? One book like that for me was *A Quest for Godliness*, written by J. I. Packer on the puritans. I read that book in the late nineties. I can't remember precisely what year it was. I was a college student, having arrived at Union with a belief that the Lord was calling me to pursue pastoral ministry and clueless as to what that meant. Those four years at the university were an exciting time, but perhaps ironically, I remember some books I read outside of class as much—if not more—than anything I remember happening in class. And reading Packer's book was one of those memories. It captured my imagination unlike most anything else I'd picked up and taken the time to read. The easiest way to describe what that book did for me was it held up for me something I wanted to pursue, a way of life that I wanted to be mine. What Packer pictured in those pages felt so foreign to what I knew and had seen and yet was so utterly desirable.

Packer wrote of the Puritans, "The Puritans exemplified maturity; we don't. We are spiritual dwarfs . . . man-centered, manipulative, success-oriented, self-indulgent. . . . The Puritans, by contrast, as a body were giants. They were great souls serving a great God. In them clear-headed passion and warm-hearted compassion combined. . . . In their heavenly-minded ardour, the Puritans became men and women of order, matter-of-fact and down-to-earth, prayerful, purposeful, practice. . . . They lived by . . . a rule of life . . . planning and proportioning their time with care, not so much to keep bad things out as to make sure that they got all good and important things in—necessary wisdom, then as now, for busy people! We today, who tend to live unplanned lives at random in a series of non-communicating compartments and . . . feel swamped and distracted most of the time, would learn much from the Puritans at this point."<sup>1</sup>

As I looked back over that book a bit this week, it was surprisingly hard to find one quote, necessarily that gripped me, that summed up why I felt as I did reading that book nearly twenty-five years ago now. But I remember the imagery Packer used, describing the Puritans as Redwoods, reflecting "mature holiness and seasoned fortitude," which rose above the stature of so much of what I'd known in my own upbringing.<sup>2</sup> And I remember what I can best describe now as an attractive aroma, the aroma of Christ that their lives seemed to give off. And I wanted it. As I've mentioned. My imagination was captured reading those pages.

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<sup>1</sup> J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 22-24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

But I think it's fair to say that as glorious as reading those pages were as a young man in those days, it may well also have spoken to my ignorance of the Scriptures. By that, I don't mean that Packer was saying anything in the pages of that book that contradicted Scripture or that Scripture would have corrected had I known God's Word better. I mean it revealed my ignorance of the Scriptures because had I known the Bible well, I would have realized that I didn't need to pick up a book about the Puritans to see a model of God-centered, Christ-exalting, spiritual maturity that I breathed in while reading those pages. I could have turned simply to a text of Scripture like the one that we're looking at this morning, Psalm 16.

After all, it was meditating on Psalm 16 this week that triggered my mind to remember those days on Union's campus reading Packer's work. And the reason I was drawn to that memory is because Psalm 16 provides the same thing for anyone who opens the Bible and takes in what David provides for us in this psalm. I had to look it up, but after working through the psalm this week, I found that I'd preached this psalm nearly thirteen years ago. In that sermon I'd argued that Psalm 16 gave us a picture of a God-centered life. And I'll admit that it was somewhat comforting to think that I was seeing the same thing all these years later. Because I'm convinced that this is what Psalm 16 does. It gives us a picture of what Christ maturity looks like. David lets us in on his life so that we might breathe in the aroma of what it looks like to be a child of God, to know what it means to glory in our Lord, and to seek to love him with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And my prayer for us this morning is that as we meditate on this psalm, we'll find our hearts and minds captured by a picture that we want to imitate in our own lives as we seek to become more like our Lord, Jesus Christ.

I want to walk through the psalm in three sections this morning, highlighting David's devotion to the Lord (vv. 1-4), David's satisfaction in the Lord (vv. 5-7), and David's trust in the Lord (vv. 8-11). And as we do, I think we'll see a picture of what it looks like to be one who fully hopes in the Lord our God. So, first, David's devotion to the Lord.

### **David's devotion to the Lord**

David begins the psalm by asking the Lord to preserve him. He begins by saying, "Preserve me, O God" (v. 1). And typically when you see a psalm begin that way, it's going to be followed by a description of David's struggles. For example, just a few psalms back, in Psalm 12 David begins, "Save, O Lord" (very similar to "preserve me"), and then he mentions all the reasons he needs saving: the godly are gone, everyone utters lies, the poor are plundered, etc. Here, you find none of that. David begins with, "Preserve me, O God," but then what follows isn't David's reasons why he needs preserving. Rather, it is David outlining his utter devotion to the Lord as the basis for why God should preserve him.

That is, he asks God to preserve him *because* he has utterly devoted himself to the Lord. He tells the Lord that it is in him that David takes refuge. He sees God as his Lord, and realizes that God is his only hope, writing, "I have no good apart from you." This isn't a picture of David saying, "I'm hoping in the Lord, but just in case the Lord fails me, I'm hedging my bets by worshipping

Baal and putting up some idols to other gods.” No, it is in God alone that he hopes, and he makes that clear.

Not only that, but he recognizes that any good that he has is from the Lord. He says, “I have no good apart from you” (v. 2). He looks to God for his hope. He credits God as the source for everything good that comes his way. If something good happens in David’s life, he knows that God is to be thanked for that.

But his devotion to the Lord also shows in his relationships with others. First, he loves the saints. He says in verse 3, “As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.” Now, notice here that David understands that his devotion to the Lord must show itself in his affection for and delight in believers. In fact, this is—in David’s mind—a piece of evidence that he really is devoted to the Lord. It’s as if he’s saying, “Lord, see how devoted to you I am: I love your people.”

And the flip side to that is that he doesn’t delight in evildoers. Thus, he writes in verse 4, “The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips.” Not only does David not want to join in the actions of the wicked, he doesn’t even want to speak their names. He is one who wants to be utterly devoted to the Lord. This is a picture of devotion to the Lord. We hope in him fully, see all good as coming from him, love his people, and runs from wickedness.

But as beautiful as that is, I think it’s also something each of us can struggle with. On the one hand, perhaps we understand that coming to faith in Christ requires us to hope in God solely. You might compare faith in Christ at times to climbing up a thirty-foot extension ladder. When you are at the top of that ladder, your only hope is that the ladder works. If it fails, there’s no backup plan. There’s no safe landing. You’re minimally getting quite injured if it doesn’t hold. It’s the same with faith in Christ. We don’t place our hope in Christ for our righteous standing before God while thinking, “And I’ll do my bit of righteousness to contribute too. I’ll provide a bit of a backup plan, resting on what I can do.” It’s either all of Christ or none of Christ, all of grace or all of works. Although we can struggle with that, I think we get that.

However, when we go to live our lives, we sometimes don’t want to keep that same principle in our lives. We might say we want to trust wholly in the Lord who has proven himself good and faithful only to fill our lives with fretting and anxiety at how things out of our control are going to turn out. Aren’t these moments an opportunity for us to say, “Lord, this is in your hands. I trust you. You’re good. You’ve never been anything other than faithful. So, I’m going to obey you, pray, and trust you”? Or in worse moments, we make the decision to sin because we don’t trust that the Lord can provide for our joy quite as much as the sinful option in front of us. But what David shows is devotion. The believer trusts in the Lord, sees all good as from the Lord’s hand, obeys the Lord, loves his people, and runs from wickedness. That is a picture of what should be our devotion to the Lord and something we can meditate on and seek to imitate. But building on that, in verses 5-7 we see David’s satisfaction with the Lord.

## David's satisfaction in the Lord

David writes in verses 5-6, "The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance." Now, what could be lost on us is that David is picking up the reality of the Levites. You may remember that when the Lord brought the Israelites into the land and gave the inheritance of land to each of the tribes, the Levites weren't apportioned an inheritance in the land. Rather, they were told in Numbers 18:20, "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."

That is, God was saying, "You may not have an inheritance, but I'll be for you all that you need." David is picking that up and saying that this is true of him. He has what he needs in the Lord, and his lot (i.e. whatever life circumstance comes to him) is held in God's hands. And so he adds, "The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance" (v. 6). But I'm not sure this is because David is looking at his life and saying, "Whew, everything turned out just as I desired." Rather, he seems to be affirming that 1) because he has the Lord, everything is beautiful, and 2) because the Lord directs his life (i.e. holds his lot) then whatever comes to him comes through the hands of the Lord and is good for him. He finds satisfaction in the Lord and in the Lord's rule of his life. That, to David, is beautiful.

And so we can say as well that whatever our lot—whatever the Lord has chosen for us—the lines have fallen for us in pleasant places because we have the Lord and because he rules over our lives. If indeed we experience blessings in this world, these are kind gifts from the Lord. If we experience suffering in this world, we experience suffering as those who have the Lord and whose deepest needs have been met in him and those who know God is working all for our good. David could take his refuge in the Lord in whatever circumstance because David knows that whatever comes his way, nothing can take away that which he has in the Lord or thwart what God has purposed for him.

But, it's not merely a passive life David leads. Rather, he says in verse 7, "I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me." I think this is a reference to the counsel David gets from God's Word. After all, in Psalm 1 we are told that the blessed man is the one who meditates on God's law day and night. I think this is what David is referring to. It is as he meditates on God's Word in the night and hides God's Word in his heart that he gets counsel and continuing instruction.

Consequently, the picture isn't of David passively saying, "God, I'm just here to passively wait and receive whatever you have, knowing you are enough." It is of David actively obeying God's Word, knowing God's instruction, applying it and obeying it as guidance from God in this world, and then trusting God with whatever lot he chooses for David. That is to say David finds satisfaction in the Lord and in what the Lord has for him. Why would he be anxiously desiring something other than what the God who loves him and guides him has for him? So, the mature believer is both devoted to the Lord and finds satisfaction in the Lord and in the Lord's purposes and plans. And finally, we see David's trust in the Lord.

## David's trust in the Lord

Of course it makes sense that if David's hope is in the Lord and he's satisfied with the Lord and what the Lord has for him, then he trusts the Lord. But verses 8-11 make that explicit. David knows that his future is secure because of his hope and trust in the Lord. He writes in verse 8, "I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken." In battle, soldiers would carry their shields on their left arms so that they would fight with their right hand, but one might note that they weren't shielded on their right hand.<sup>3</sup> However, David notes that because the Lord is at his right hand, he is protected. He is not shaken.

Now, of course, this doesn't mean that he won't face suffering or adversity or trouble in life. Of course he will (and he did!). But he knows that ultimately he is protected by the Lord. He is in the Lord's care and ultimate protection. "Therefore," David notes in verse 9, "my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure." That is, he is able to rest in this life and rejoice in all things. After all, all things come to him under the Lord's protection, oversight, and care. But that last line is also interesting. What does David mean by "my flesh also dwells secure?"

It seems that David is saying that even death will not snatch him away from the security he has in the Lord. We can say this because David follows this declaration in verse 9 by saying in verse 10, "For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol." God will not simply let David die, go to the grave, and that be it. Death will not separate David from the Lord. Rather, he will dwell with the Lord forever (v. 11).

Consider then the comfort David has in the Lord. God is at his right hand, protecting him so that nothing makes shipwreck of David's faith and God's plan and purpose for him. David therefore is free to rest, be glad in heart, and rejoice in all things. And he even knows that when death comes, death will not have the last word because he'll simply be with the Lord. In fact, according to verse 11, he'll have life, and will enjoy the pleasure of being in God's presence forever. How could David fret in that situation?

And yet, that's our situation, isn't it? The Lord has told us that death will not separate us from his love. He's told us that nothing and no one can pluck us from his hand. He's told us that he watches over us, even numbering the hairs on our head. Why would we fret? David has nothing on us. And yet David's confidence is rooted in something I've not mentioned yet. It's a phrase at the end of verse 10. David says that the Lord will not "let your holy one see corruption."

Now, typically the way that most prophecy happens in the OT is that though there are some direct, verbal prophecies (like Micah 5:2 about the Messiah being born in Bethlehem), most

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<sup>3</sup> So notes Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: 1-41*, Kregel Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 408.

prophecies are given to us in more indirect ways with types, pictures, and shadows. So, for example, there is no direct verbal prophecy on the night of the Passover whereby Moses tells the Israelites, “The Messiah will one day shed his blood just like the lamb’s blood we’re putting over our doorposts to protect us from God’s judgment.” It’s simply pictured for us, and it is pictured beautifully. And often that happens in David’s life. David is overlooked but becomes king just like Jesus is the stone the builders rejected but becomes the cornerstone. David is betrayed by his friends just as Jesus is betrayed by his. And we could go on and on.

And you could be tempted to say the same thing here. David knows that God won’t abandon him in death, but instead he’ll live with the Lord and this text prophesies in the sense that it’s a picture of what will happen with Jesus in a greater way—he’ll be raised from the dead on the third day. But actually there’s a problem with saying that David was thinking of his own experience only. And the problem is that Peter says otherwise in his sermon in Acts 2.

In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter quotes this psalm, and he then makes the point that David couldn’t have been speaking about himself explicitly when he said “you will not . . . let your holy one see corruption.” After all, as Peter points out, you can go over to David’s tomb right now, look inside, and you’ll certainly see corruption. Rather, Peter declares, “Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:29-31).

In other words, what Peter is saying is that David considered that the Lord promised that he would set one of his descendants on the throne to reign forever, and David recognized that the Lord would do that by raising this promised Davidic king (i.e. the Messiah) from the dead to live and reign forever. But is there anything in Psalm 16 that shows that—in addition to the fact that David is a picture of Christ? I think there might be. Ironically the language throughout the psalm is first person. David says, “I take refuge . . . my delight . . . my lips . . . my chosen portion . . . my cup and my lot . . . I shall not be shaken . . . my heart . . . my flesh . . . my soul.”<sup>4</sup> It’s this way literally in every verse of this psalm as David speaks in first person. The only exception is when he says, “You will not . . . let your holy one see corruption” (v. 10). Now, that could be simply some poetic diversity of language. But, could it be that this is the insight the Spirit gave to Peter about this psalm? David was always signaling that he was speaking ultimately of another. And it was because he knew the Christ would be raised not to see corruption that he had such hope for himself. After all, if the Lord was going to send the Messiah, save his people, raise him from the dead, and enthrone him to live forever, then why would David think he is hopeless after death? Or because of Christ’s work, why would we think we can’t trust our Lord, or be satisfied in him, or be fully devoted to him? Of course we can. And so David devoted himself wholeheartedly to the Lord. He found all he needed in his God. And he trusted him through everything. And Christ has been raised for us no less than for David. Therefore, may our response be the same. Let us

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<sup>4</sup> Dale Ralph Davis has made this observation: *Slogging Along in the Paths of Righteousness: Psalms 13-24* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2014), 65.

devote ourselves to our Lord, be satisfied in and with him, and trust him as we obey his word and look to eternity. Amen.