

Resurrection Hope in a Decaying World

Psalm 16

What does Easter have to do with today? Is the Easter holiday simply a good excuse dress up, have a nice meal, spend time with family? Is it mainly an important religious activity, something good for us to stay in touch with God? Or is there something more? Does Easter actually address one of our deepest fears and most fundamental human problems—the fact that we live in a world given to decay?

That this is a fundamental problem is an inescapable fact. Our world is given to decay. We see it everywhere around us. I feel it every morning when I wake up. My body isn't as limber as it used to be. My children regularly update me on the increasing population of grey hairs on my chin. Getting old is not nearly as fun as you thought it would be.

Now some of you young people are thinking 'I can't wait to grow up!' And that's great; that's fine; that is a wonderful place to be. *Enjoy that.* Because some day it will happen: you'll hit 18 or 21 or 25 and you'll decide, 'This is it; I've arrived', and you will spend the rest of your life trying to hold onto that youth, as if to thwart the decay process. You'll be 35 and still shopping at a store called "Forever 21"—just hoping they don't check your ID at the door.

We try to cling to our youth. Americans spend [62 billion dollars a year](#) a year on cosmetics. The number of cosmetic surgery procedures in the U.S. has risen by [115%](#) since 2000. We push off commitments and decisions that mark responsible adulthood until the mid- to late-thirties, so we can spend our money on hobbies and technology and fashion. **We** fight to preserve some semblance of the satisfying life we now enjoy, resisting the decay, pretending that it's not there, trying to make today last for forever.

But you can't do it. It doesn't work. Our bodies get old and slow down. **Our** minds slow down. We get sick. We get injured. Eventually we all die. And it's not just our bodies or our minds; this whole world is given to decay. Relationships break down, economies fall, cultures deteriorate. These lovely Easter lilies will be in the trash next week.

But the problem is *not* our desire for preservation and satisfaction—the longing to hang onto life and enjoy it as much as possible. In fact, God has wired us to desire eternal satisfaction—that's part of our DNA as humans made in God's image. The problem is *our tendency to look for it in things that are just as prone to decay as we are.* And it's into this decaying world that Easter meets us with a word of hope—*resurrection hope.* And I want us to hear that word of hope this morning as we look together at Psalm 16, which show us that God alone is able to preserve and satisfy our lives, and that he does so ultimately through our resurrection in Christ.

Psalm 16 is a prayer to God from King David—perhaps ancient Israel's most famous king. It's an honest expression of both David's desires and his confidence in the Lord. And I want you to notice first the similarity between what David desires in this psalm, and what all of us desire in

life. Specifically, notice the language of *satisfaction* throughout the psalm. We want to enjoy life and delight in it and find pleasure, and that's what David talks about: satisfaction and pleasure.

- v. 2: "I have no *good* apart from you" (David wants what's good)
- v. 6: "the lines have fallen for me in *pleasant* places . . . I have a *beautiful* inheritance" (the picture of land and property in abundance and of good quality, enjoyable)
- v. 9: "my heart is *glad*, my whole being *rejoices*" (delight, satisfaction, joy)
- v. 11: "in your presence there is *fullness of joy*; at your right hand are *pleasures forevermore*." (Pleasure—he's looking for pleasure and happiness)

David wants what all of us want—satisfaction, pleasure, joy. More than that, he wants that pleasure and satisfaction to be *preserved*—to last forever. Just like us. Look at the first two verses: "Preserve me, O God [Keep me safe, protected, secure . . . Preserve me], for in you I take refuge. I say to the LORD, 'You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you'" (16:1-2). His essential request is that God would preserve him and satisfy him. He wants the good he has to last forever. And look at the last line of the psalm in v. 11: "at your hand are pleasures *forevermore*." Eternal pleasures, pleasure that will last.

So we're not that crazy in our desire to hold onto our life and youth against the decaying process. But the question is, what kind of pleasure or joy is actually capable of withstanding the decay of this fallen world? What's the object of David's pleasure? To what is he looking for joy and satisfaction and good?

He answers it in v. 2: "I say to the LORD [Yahweh, the God of Israel], 'You are my Lord [my King]. Apart from *you* I have no good thing.'" The object of David's lasting joy is *God himself*. Not what God gives him—the gifts, the crown, the life experiences, friends, family, success, and so on—but God himself. That's his plea in vv. 1-2. And in vv. 3-8 he goes on to describe why God alone is able to preserve and satisfy his life.

In vv. 3-4, he addresses the people of God, "the saints in the land," his fellow Israelites in whom he delights,¹ to warn them that no other god can provide the lasting life and joy they're looking for. Look at v. 4: "The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply . . ." The point is simple: If you look to something other than God to find lasting joy, you will find *increasing sorrow* instead. Why? Because you're asking a created thing to act like a Creator. You're asking a decaying thing to act like a Savior.

In the ancient world, these false gods took very concrete forms—statues made of wood, stone, or cast metal, and in many parts of the world they still take that shape—literal idols. In the West, we also have idols; they just look different. We too look for life and deliverance and escape and lasting joy in the things of this world, in created things; in things like money or education or career or achievements or relationships or material possessions. If I just have the car, or the house, or the summer house, then I will have all I need for a long, lasting, and satisfying life. If I

¹ I think the alternate translation of v. 3 noted in the margin of the ESV is preferable given the context: "*To the saints in the land, the excellent in whom is all my delight, I say:*"

just have an intact family—well behaved kids, sports stars, good scholarships—that’s all I need in life. Beauty, success, entertainment, the list goes on.

But again, there’s no stopping the decay. The things of this world make bad gods, because they are *created*, not the Creator. And as part of creation they’re all subject to the same decay we face. A decay and corruption that stretches clear back to the beginning of time. The world didn’t always work this way. It wasn’t always decaying. When God created this world and the first humans, Adam and Eve—there was a beautiful relationship of trust and joy in a whole and wholesome world. But it was human rebellion that set things awry. Adam and Eve were not content with God being king over his creation. Through the serpent’s temptation, they decided that they would make better kings. They would do a better job of deciding what is good and what is evil, and what a full and lasting life should look like. And so they rebelled—what the Bible calls *sin*—and as a result of their rebellion, the world was given over to decay. Relationships were broken; bodies were broken; the ground, creation itself was broken. Most tragically, humanity’s relationship with God was broken. And we live with the results of that fall every day. And there’s not a blessed thing that any idol—any false god or created thing—can do about it.

And so the psalmist refuses to pay them homage—to pour out their drink offerings of blood, to make sacrifices to them, or even to mention them, to take up their name on his lips. And he encourages us to do likewise—to not trust in created things, the things of this world that decay and disappoint us, but to trust in God himself.

Because only God is able to preserve and satisfy life. And look at how he describes this in vv. 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.” This is language of *inheritance* and *land*: portion, cup, lot, boundary lines. We talk about an inheritance today when someone dies—we inherit their stuff, whether it’s a family heirloom or a house or even a business. Ancient Israel had an inheritance, too: each tribe had a portion of land in ancient Canaan that was given to them by God. But the psalmist isn’t talking about being satisfied by actual land or stuff; he’s using the imagery of land and inheritance to describe the satisfaction we have in *God himself*. He is our portion, our cup, our beautiful inheritance. He is the prize, the treasure, the object of our lasting satisfaction and joy. He is sufficient. He is enough. There is no greater pleasure, no deeper security, no fuller satisfaction in this world than to *know* and *be known* by our Creator and Savior. It’s what we were made for.

And if we have him, and if our satisfaction and pleasure are in him, we have one who is able to guide us through the decay that surrounds us. Whatever darkness we face in this decaying world, David praises God in vv. 7-8 for his counsel, for his presence, and for the confidence it brings that this decaying world will not shake him. He will not be destroyed.

And so he rejoices in vv. 9-11. And look at the remarkable confidence of his joy. “Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol [to the realm of the dead], or let your holy one see corruption [or decay]” (vv.9-10).

Think about he’s saying here. He’s not just confident that God will guide him safely through this decaying world; he’s confident that through God, he will be *victorious over it*. That the very

decay we've been lamenting, the decay that touches every part of this fallen world, will not affect him. His flesh—his body—dwells *secure*, safe. God will not abandon him to the grave, to the realm of the dead. God won't let his flesh—his skin and bone and sinew and tissue—see decay and corruption. Death will not ultimately overtake him; the grave will not win. Rather, v. 11, he will find true and lasting life in God's path, true joy in his presence, and pleasures that last *forever*. God will preserve and satisfy his life—the *whole thing*, body and all. He rejoices in God that in him, he will avoid both the disappointment of idols and the despair of decay.

Is David crazy? It's one thing to find comfort in God's presence amid the decay. But to claim victory over the grave? To rejoice in God that he won't face decay? That sound's crazy. Everybody faces decay—that's what we've been arguing this morning. And it's an indisputable fact that David's body lies in a grave somewhere near Jerusalem, his bones probably turned to dust.

So what exactly is this psalm suggesting here? Is this merely wishful thinking? A pitiful coping mechanism? Is it an exaggeration, meant to illustrate the quality of whatever life you do get, as long as you spend it following God? Is it meant to be spiritualized away—as though the promise that our bodies won't decay is true of our souls in heaven, but not really true of our bodies on earth? Because that seems to fall pretty far short of what this psalm describes. And it falls pretty far short of the problems and pain we deal with in this broken world.

If we limit the scope of these promises and our desire for eternal satisfaction to this world, to this life which invariably leads to the grave, we will end our days in disappointment. But what if this psalm and these promises were never meant to be limited to this life, or to David's life, but always had something bigger and more substantial in mind?

In the book of Acts in the New Testament, ch.2, we find the first sermon Peter gave publically, on the day of Pentecost. So Jesus has been crucified and risen, he appeared to his disciples for forty days, and now ten days later (so 50 days after the first Easter), the Holy Spirit falls upon Jesus' followers, empowering them to preach the gospel of Jesus. And Peter begins preaching in that very moment to the crowds who are gathered in Jerusalem for the Pentecost festival. And listen to what he says. Acts 2:22:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know- this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” (Acts 2:22-23)

That's what happened on Good Friday—Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son, who lived a perfect, righteous life in our place, was subject to a corrupt trial, falsely sentenced to death, was rejected by his own people, publically humiliated, and then crucified—nailed to a Roman cross—not because he deserved it, but in order to pay the penalty for our sin. To take the punishment every single one of us deserves for our rebellion against God. Remember how death is a result of sin, going all the way back to Adam and Eve's rebellion? So Christ, who was sinless, died for our sins. He was crucified and was buried, placed in the grave where all flesh ultimately faces corruption and decay.

But, v. 24: “God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.” Think about it: if death is the punishment for sin, but Christ never sinned, then

death has no jurisdiction over him. It has no authority to keep him in the grave. It's not possible for him to be held by it.

Peter knows this is true because he has seen the risen Lord (cf. Acts 1:1-11). But how does he make sense of it? How does he explain it to others? *Psalm 16*. That's what he quotes in his sermon—our psalm. Acts 2:25:

“For David says concerning [Jesus], [then he quotes Psalm 16:8-11] ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; ²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. ²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’” (2:25-28)

Peter quotes Psalm 16 and then he explains it like this:

“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ 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, ³¹ he foresaw and spoke about *the resurrection of the Christ*, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.” (2:29-32)

The promises God made to David, that he alone is able to preserve and satisfy his life, and will do so by not letting his people see corruption or decay—the promises we read earlier—God fulfills them by raising Jesus Christ from the dead. Not by protecting Jesus from the grave, but carrying him *through* the grave and raising him victoriously *over it*. And because Christ is raised from the dead, all who belong to Christ have that same hope of resurrection and victory over the decay.

So often we think of the resurrection (if we think of it at all) only as something that happened to Jesus a long time ago. We don't realize that for ancient Israel and the early church, resurrection was something all God's people were looking forward to in the end. God promised it in Daniel 12, and Jesus himself said in John 5: “an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear [God's] voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29). The resurrection is for everyone.

And what God promised to do for all his people in the end, he has already begun to accomplish in advance through his Son Jesus. So that through faith in Jesus, our hearts are already given new and eternal life. We are “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3). Resurrection life, eternal life is already at work in the Christian. Our souls are raised from spiritual death to enjoy life and relationship with God during our days on earth, and afterward, in his very presence in heaven. Which means, as Lina shared earlier, we don't have to fear death. We have Jesus, and he is life.

But more than that, when Christ returns, the resurrection power that has already raised our souls will raise our bodies as well, to be made new just like Christ's. Freed from the grave, fit for God's new creation, never to decay again. As the apostle Paul puts in in Philippians 3:20-21: “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will

transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20-26).

So in Jesus, because of Easter and the resurrection, we have hope—*real hope*—in a decaying world. Because of Easter, death and decay do not win. That doesn’t mean they do no harm. That they’re not real, or that the pain and loss don’t hurt. They do. But it does mean that they will not win—not for those in Christ. God will keep his promises in Psalm 16—“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption” (Ps. 16:10). He’s already done it for Jesus, and through Jesus, he will do it for us. God alone is able to preserve and satisfy our lives in this decaying world, and he does so ultimately through our resurrection in Christ.

So what do we do with this? How do we respond to what we’ve heard and seen this morning? Look at the response to Peter’s sermon in Acts 2. Peter concluded:

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”³⁸ And Peter said to them, “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.³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” (Acts 2:36-39)

If you want to find forgiveness for your sins and hope amid the decay that surrounds you—hope for a satisfaction and pleasure that outlasts the grave—put your hope in Jesus. Talk to a friend who is a Christian. Talk to me or one of the pastors after the service. Join me next week for the Life Explored class. However it looks like, whatever it takes, find your way to Jesus. There is no greater treasure. There is no hope more secure. He is the path of life, the fullness of joy; at his right hand are pleasures forevermore.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Opening Question

1. In what way do you feel the weight of this fallen world most acutely right now? What is it in life that most reminds you that this world is currently not the way it’s supposed to be?

Questions for Study and Understanding

2. What does the author seem to be emphasizing in this psalm? Look specifically for what kind of imagery he uses, repetition of words or ideas, etc.
3. What does David ask God to do for him?
4. What is David trusting God to do for him?
5. In what other parts of the Bible does this psalm come up (check your cross references)? How is it used there?

6. How would you summarize the main point of Psalm 16?

Questions for Reflection and Application

7. What do you think about the promises contained in Psalm 16 (the things David is trusting God to do for him)? Do you find them appealing, hopeful, trite, foolish? (Think about your honest reaction, not just what you know to be the 'right' answer).
8. If Psalm 16 is true, how ought that to affect our life and faith?
9. How is the resurrection of Christ connected to this psalm?
10. What is one thing you want to begin praying for based on what you've seen or experienced in this psalm?