

The Sufficiency of God in a Decaying World

Psalm 16

This morning we're taking a look at Psalm chapter 16. If you're just joining us this summer, we're now partway through a series entitled, "Walking with God in the Meantime: The Christian Life through the Lens of the Psalms." The Psalms are a collection of songs and hymns in the Old Testament of the Bible that give poetic expression to the reality of life in a fallen world, and at the same time help shape our perspective and fuel our hope as we try to live out our faith in this fallen world—a world that suffers from sin and brokenness. A world that doesn't work the way it's supposed to. A world given to decay.

There's something wrong with the decay of the fallen world around us. You don't have to be a Christian to notice that, or to have a problem with bodies aging—not working the way they should, troubled by disease, illness, or injury. Or to have a problem with financial decay—retirement funds or home equity worth half what they were five years ago. Or with relational decay. Think back to your three closest friends from high school. How many have you talked to in the last year? Five years? Twenty-five years? There may be natural explanations for that, but it's still kind of sad, when you think about how close you were, and now how far you are.

We have a problem with the decay we see going on in the world around us. And perhaps the most noticeable evidence of that is our culture's infatuation with preserving youth. We buy "age-defying" wrinkle creams, we shop at stores called "Forever 21," we push off commitments and decisions that mark responsible adulthood until the mid- to late-thirties, so we can spend our money on video games, barhopping, and the latest technology and fashion, playing the field with all the pleasure and none of the commitment—all the while scratching and clawing to preserve some semblance of the satisfying life we now enjoy, fighting against the decay, pretending that it's not there, trying to make today last for forever.

But you can't stop the decay. You can't wish it away. You can't hide it (not forever). Those grey hairs start showing up. You can only pretend so long. And then you're standing over the grave of someone you love; you're faced with a diagnosis that doesn't look good; the people you looked to for life and satisfaction walk away. This world is given to corruption and decay.

The problem is not our desire for preservation and satisfaction. In fact, God has wired us to desire eternal satisfaction—it'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 Psalm 16 speaks with fresh hope of God's sufficiency: that God alone is able to preserve and satisfy our lives, and that he does so ultimately through our resurrection in Christ. There is a lasting satisfaction that comes from treasuring God himself amid the decay,

and looking forward to how he will deal with the decay in the end through our future resurrection, and all this encourages us neither to cling hopelessly to something that's fading, nor to despair as though death and decay win in the end. God wins in the end, and life wins for his people, because he alone is able to preserve and satisfy our lives.

God alone is able to preserve and satisfy our lives, and he does so ultimately through our resurrection in Christ. I want you to notice first the language of **satisfaction** throughout Psalm 16. We want to enjoy life and delight in it and find pleasure—that's what this psalm is about: our satisfaction and pleasure:

- v. 2: "I have no *good* apart from you" (he 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: "you *fill me* with *joy* in your presence, with *eternal pleasures* at your right hand." (Pleasure—he's looking for pleasure)

Furthermore, we want that pleasure and satisfaction to be **preserved**—to last forever. Again, so does this psalm. Look at the first two verses: "Preserve me, O God [Keep me safe, protected, secure...Preserve me], for in you I take refuge. I said to the LORD, 'You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.'" His basic plea is that God would preserve him and satisfy him. He wants his joy to last forever. And look at the last line of the psalm in v. 11: "at your hand are pleasures *forevermore*" "*Eternal* pleasures." He wants pleasure that will last. The question is, what is the object of his pleasure? What is the object of his satisfaction and joy? He answers it in v. 2: "*You* are my Lord—my King. Apart from *you* I have no good thing." The object of his lasting joy is God himself. Not what God gives him—the gifts, 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 God's unique ability to preserve and satisfy his life.

Verse 3 is kind of difficult to understand, but the best sense I can make of it is that David is specifying who he's talking to here. This is the address: he is addressing the saints in the land, the noble or glorious ones in whom he delights, which is a colorful way of describing the people of God. The word "saints" means those who are set apart for worship or service to God. That word has come to refer to a special class of Christians in some religious circles; it *never* means that in the Bible. All who know God and trust in Christ have been set apart or made holy to him, and thus all God's people are described as "saints."

So David is addressing God's people. He wants the people of God, whom he enjoys and delights in, to know that their full joy and delight is found only in God himself. That is where we find lasting satisfaction. And he begins to make his point in v. 4 by setting up a contrast—that is, by comparing God and his sufficiency with the insufficiency of idols. Take a look at v. 4: "The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods." 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 concrete shape—literal idols. We've become more sophisticated in the West. We think we've grown out of

idolatry and the superstition of bowing down to a block of wood; yet in reality we've simply upgraded to a more sophisticated model. We're still looking for life and deliverance and escape and lasting joy in the things of this world, in created things; in things like money and material possession. 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 just have an intact family—well behaved kids, sports stars, good scholarships—that's all I need in life. Education, 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; they were tempted and pursued their desire to replace him as king and decide for themselves what a satisfying and lasting life should look like. And it was in direct consequence to their rebellion—what the Bible calls *sin*—that the world was given over to decay. Relationships were broken; bodies were broken; the ground, creation itself was broken. Humanity's relationship with God was broken. What was made good in the beginning was made subject to decay. That's what we mean by "fallen world." That's what we live with every day. And the idols—the false gods—can't do a blessed thing about it. And so the psalmist refuses to pay them homage—to pour out their blood libations (pagan sacrifices) or 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, for lasting satisfaction, but to trust in God himself.

Only God is able to preserve and satisfy life. Take a look at how vv. 5-6 describe this: God himself is our inheritance. Verse 5, and here I read the recently revised New International Version, which captures this better: "LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful 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 gold watch or a house or a corporate empire. Ancient Israel had an inheritance, too: each tribe had a portion of land in Palestine 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 object of our lasting satisfaction and joy. He is sufficient. He is enough. There is no greater pleasure in this world than to know and be known by our Creator and Savior. It's what we were made to do. I don't know if you've ever had that experience of discovering something that seems as if it you were made for it and it was made for you—the satisfaction and delight that comes with it. Perhaps it's taking hold of that particular golf club—it's as if it's an extension of my arm—we were made for each other. Or perhaps it's that shoe when you step into it, or that job that fits you perfectly. Or a spouse. Take that feeling, that satisfaction, and multiply by infinity and then stretch it across eternity, and you begin to get a sense of the pleasure God offers us in giving us himself.

This is the God who guides us. Verses 7-8: “I will praise the LORD, who *counsels* me; even at night [when I can’t see clearly] my heart instructs me [through him, his Spirit]. I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand [with me, in the midst of the trouble of this fallen world], I will not be shaken [I’ll stand secure].” This is the God who will deliver us from decay. Listen to the promises of vv. 9-10 (again, from the revised NIV): “Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body (or flesh) also will rest secure, *because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay.*” Think about what’s being said here. In v. 9, he rejoices knowing that his “flesh” or his “body dwells secure.” No wrong will befall it. Verse 10: his confidence is that God will not abandon him, *including his physical body*, 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—the very decay we’ve been lamenting, the decay that pervades this fallen world, will not affect his body. 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. So he is free to rejoice in God his inheritance, trusting in him and avoiding both the disappointment of idols and the despair of decay.

This is a massive promise—to defy death. And on first read, it doesn’t even make sense. We know by observation and science that this is not what happens when someone dies. Bodies turn to dirt in the grave, and nobody lives forever. Everybody faces decay—that’s what we’ve been arguing this morning. So what exactly is this psalm suggesting here? Is this merely wishful thinking? 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—so the promise that our bodies won’t decay is true of our souls in heaven, but not really true of our bodies. Because these promises, as thrilling and incredible as they are, don’t seem to actually stop the suffering in our lives or the processes of decay in our bodies or our world. In fact they can leave us quite frustrated and desperate, when they don’t come true, and we watch our lives fall apart. So what sense do we make of them? In what way does God finally show his sufficiency in preserving and satisfying our lives amid this decaying world? And how does that fuel our trust in him and perseverance amid life’s trials?

If we limit the scope of these promises and our desire for eternal satisfaction to this life, to this world, we will end our days in disappointment. But they were never meant to be limited to the scope of this world, because life itself is not limited to the scope of this world. Rather, the way God shows forth his sufficiency in preserving and satisfying our lives is through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and more specifically, through our resurrection *with Jesus* at the end of time. For if all this decay is the result of human sin, then that human sin needs to be dealt with. That’s precisely what Jesus came to do on the cross—to take the holy anger of his Father against our sin onto himself, paying the price we owed, in order to restore our relationship with our Creator and King. And yet, not only do we need someone who will deal with the cause of the decay, but with its effects as well. That’s what the resurrection is about. Death and decay don’t get the last word. Life gets the last word. Life through Jesus.

The word “resurrection” means to live again—to have been dead, and now to live again. Now, if you’re new to Christianity, then there’s a good chance you’re sitting there tweeting that the pastor just lost it—he’s talking about dead people living again. I thought I went to church, all of

a sudden I'm at a zombie movie. Hang with me. Hang with me and think about the decay and mess of this world; think about the possibility of an all powerful God, able to create life, and what it might look like for him to deal with the decay in life.

The way that God finally show his sufficiency in preserving and satisfying our lives amid this decaying world, is through resurrection. And to understand this and how it actual fuels our delight in God and deals with the decay of this world, I want to clarify four facts about resurrection in Scripture.

First, **resurrection is bodily**. Resurrection is bodily. We're not just talking about souls here. Jesus rose bodily. His body was buried in the grave, and he rose three days later. Same body, but now transformed. So the marks from the nails were still there (that's how some of the disciples identified him), but this body was no longer subject to the decay of this world. It was a renewed body, a resurrection body—a body fit for eternal existence in a new earth (what the Bible calls new creation, new heavens and new earth, as in Isaiah 65 or 2 Peter 3, or Revelation 21). And it is in this same body that Jesus now sits in heaven at the right God, waiting to return. If resurrection is not bodily, then death has not really been conquered. Death and decay really do get the last word. But resurrection is in fact bodily.

Second, **resurrection is for everyone**. When we hear the term, we think almost exclusively of Christ, but resurrection was the hope of *all ancient Israel and the early church*. In John chapter 11, when a man named Lazarus was sick, and his family had sent word to Jesus that he might come and heal him, Jesus intentionally delayed his trip, that he might show them that the resurrection they were all hoping for was available only through him. Lazarus dies before Jesus arrives, and when he arrives, Lazarus's sister Martha says to him: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again’” (11:21-23). Now listen to Martha's response: “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day” (11:24). What is she talking about? For ancient Israel and the early church, the resurrection was something all God's people were looking forward to. Jesus also affirms this in John 5:28-29: “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; cf. Dan. 12:2). The resurrection is for everyone. Martha understood this. What she didn't understand is how Jesus took something that was waiting for the end of time and broke into the present with it. And that's our third point.

Third, **in Christ we experience resurrection in part now, and fully when he returns**. In Christ, we experience the resurrection in part now, and fully when Jesus returns. Jesus says to Martha in John 11, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, *though he die, yet shall he live*, and everyone who *lives* and believes in me *shall never die*” (John 11:25-26). In Jesus, death is not the end of the story. Though we may face decay and death in this life, yet we shall live. And whoever already lives and believes in him, whoever already has eternal life, shall never die. The resurrection is already at work in us. When someone places their faith in Christ, something about them dies and something about them is born anew. They die to sin, to this world, to their old selves, and they are born again, given the Holy Spirit and new and eternal life in Christ. To be born again is resurrection language—to die and live again. According to 1 Peter

1:3 it is through the resurrection that we are born again into new life: God “has caused us to be *born again* to a living hope *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*” So the resurrection is already at work in us, to give us the eternal life with God that we’ll enjoy forever.

But it’s not yet complete. It’s not even complete when we die and go into the Lord’s presence in heaven. We’ll be there with God, enjoying his presence, gazing on him face to face in all his glory and majesty, but we’re still waiting for Christ’s return to earth to receive our resurrection bodies, like his. As Paul says in Philippians 3: “we eagerly await a Savior from [heaven], the Lord Jesus Christ, who . . . will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:20-21). In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul describes our future hope like this: “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.” (1 Cor. 15:21-23). The imagery of firstfruits there comes from the harvest. When harvest time came, ancient Israel would take the first batch of it to the temple as an offering, in anticipation of a greater harvest yet to come. Jesus’ resurrection was the firstfruits—that means there’s more to follow: all who are in Christ and will enjoy lasting satisfaction in God’s presence in a new heaven and new earth—a renewed creation fit for resurrected bodies and the very presence of God (cf. Rev. 21).

Therefore, fourth, **resurrection means that death and decay do not win.** It does not mean that they do no harm. That they are not real, that the pain and loss and suffering aren’t real. It does mean, that they will not prevail—not for those in Christ. God will keep his promises in Psalm 16—“for you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your holy one see decay.” He will show his sufficiency in preserving and satisfying our lives amid this decaying world. And the evidence of this is his eternal Son, Jesus Christ.

These very promises in Psalm 16 functioned as a prophecy of how God who preserve and satisfy Jesus’ life, *not by avoiding the grave*, but carrying him through it and raising him victoriously over it. In Acts 2, as the Apostle Peter says to the crowds:

[T]his Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.²⁵ 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;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.”²⁹ “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. (Acts 2:23-32)

God alone is able to preserve and satisfy our lives, and he does so ultimately through our resurrection in Jesus. And so in Jesus we find our model for perseverance amid the trouble and decay of this world. Hebrews 12:2 says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter

of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” It was *for the joy set before him*—lasting satisfaction in his Father—that he endured the pain and suffering of the cross. May we set our hope on the resurrection to come, trusting in Jesus to carry us through and raise us up with him on the last day. And may God himself be our greatest treasure, our sufficient inheritance in the meantime, and forevermore. Amen.