

Text: Psalm 16 (NIV)

Tuesday 28th April 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

In tonight's sermon I'm going to focus much more on the remaining verses of the psalm, then come back to some of what I shared on Sunday because the all age message focused very much on verses 1, 2 and 7. **Nevertheless**, the theme of trusting God, even in the 'dark nights' (Psalm 16:7 EEV), will be the core of our reflecting tonight, because this psalm is all about trusting God, beginning in v1 and then detailing that through the other ten verses.

I think what this psalm teaches us, through the life and experience of David, is that trusting is having our identity in God, v3-6; trusting is also having our hope in God,...

v8-11; and finally, trusting is living consciously before God, as we saw on Sunday.

So, let's turn to v3-6, trusting is having our identity in God. This psalm is identified as a *miktam*, a form of prayer, and most of these have a description that tells us they were written whilst David was fleeing as a fugitive from Saul. So, it's highly likely that this psalm too was written during this period of David's life, a time when he had to live in the wilderness, far from home, far from the land of his forefathers.

Now, every Israelite clan was secure in their possession of a portion of land, with clear boundary lines determined by the throwing of the lot, and this was seen as their

inheritance in the Promised Land. As such, we need to be mindful of this when we hear verses 5 and 6, which said:

**‘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.’**

So, the language here would normally be understood in terms of the land and how it was apportioned and valued. But, remember the circumstances David finds himself in here – he is without land, without home, driven away. Normally, this should lead an Israelite to be mournful, destitute, feeling cast adrift and uncertain of their life and value because theirs was an identity tied to the land, much more than any affiliation we might have in our day to our land, whatever our nationality.

Yet, that is not what we see of David. Instead, we see someone who now sees the Lord as his portion; the Lord is his inheritance, and in this, in God, David delights, because trusting is having our identity in God. It is by losing that which would normally be of greatest value to an Israelite, that David is enabled to come into a deeper place with God, to have a greater depth of trust.

As such, we read of David's resolve to trust only in the **Lord, for he said:**

**'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.'** (v4)

What 'suffering' David mentions is unclear, though it could refer to realising that these other 'gods' are impotent and unable to fulfil the wishful hopes of their followers.

Nevertheless, David's resolve is to worship, to trust, only the Lord. He will not participate in the ritual pouring and drinking of sacrificial blood within the false worship of these other gods, neither will he call upon their names in prayer, ritual or rites. Instead, it is the name of the Lord, Yahweh, that will be upon David's lips alone, even though, at this time of his life, those around him encourage otherwise. We read about this **in 1st Samuel: 'They have driven me today from my share in the Lord's inheritance and have said, "Go, serve other gods."' (1 Samuel 26:19)**

But David will have none of this, for he trusts in the Lord alone, and in the journey of loosing his inheritance, this refugee, finds in the Lord a greater refuge and inheritance than he ever knew before.

In my devotions last week, the Lectio 365 app **said this:**
‘God’s greatest gift is always, ultimately, simply himself.’
(repeat) I wonder, is God so real to us, like He was to David, that we can affirm this notion, and so say with David, ‘Lord, You alone are my portion and my cup’, or as our version on Sunday said, ‘You, Lord, are all that I need...[You are my greatest gift].’ Have we come to that place, where trusting in God means we have found our identity in Him, that He is our truest and best inheritance?

This idea is echoed in the words of Robert Murray McCheyne who said: ‘what a man is on his knees before God, that he is and nothing more.’ McCheyne knew that this life is fleeting, what we have is here today and gone tomorrow, and so like David, he also knew that it is what we have in God that lasts and is of eternal value, we are what we are in that secret place before God. So, are we a people who have our identity in God? Is He our portion and our inheritance? Do we find our security in the Lord, or is our security dependant on things and circumstances? The words of David in this psalm testify that even at the most unstable and threatening moments of our lives – when all other forms of security fail and leave us without defence – even then, the Lord is still our portion, our cup, our future.

And in case that sounds a bit hard to believe, in case that sounds trite or fanciful, or a notion based on a comfortable Western, middle class life, then I encourage you to dig into the life and writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a Protestant Lutheran Pastor and theologian during the Second World War.

Due to his opposition to the Nazi regime, Bonhoeffer was arrested and executed in a concentration camp in the last month of the war. It is said of Bonhoeffer, that ‘even during the privations of the concentration camp, [he] retained a deep spirituality which was evident to other prisoners. Bonhoeffer continued to minister to his fellow prisoners. Payne Best, a fellow inmate and officer of the British Army, wrote this observation of him: “Bonhoeffer was different, just quite calm and normal, seemingly

perfectly at his ease...his soul really shone in the dark desperation of our prison. He was one of the very few men I have ever met to whom God was real and ever close to him.””

<https://www.biographyonline.net/spiritual/dietrich-bonhoeffer.html>

Bonhoeffer and David, trusted the Lord and part of that was finding their identity, their security, in the Lord, even in the most desperate of times, and so they would not turn from Him, though advice or circumstance might encourage otherwise. Because although their inheritance was unseen, it was not insecure, and though their portion was intangible, it was not unreal.

The Apostle Paul says something quite akin to this in his writings to **the Philippians, he said:**

‘What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ...’ (Philippians 3:8)

Friends, may we so grow in our trust of God, maybe especially in these times, these ‘dark nights’, that we too can reach that place with Paul, with David, with Bonhoeffer, that we also realise the worth, the inheritance, we have in knowing Christ Jesus, and so through that trust find our identity, our security, in Him.

Secondly, this example of trusting God involves having our hope in God. David wrote:

‘I keep my eyes always on the Lord.

With him at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

**Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body 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.**

**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.’ (v8-11)**

Trusting God is having our hope in God, maybe especially in the face of death. David speaks of ‘the realm of the dead’, in some translations this phrase is given its technical name from the Hebrew, Sheol. It sounds strange to us, but that’s because we may not realise that Israel’s understanding of what happened after death...

was slowly revealed by God over time, there was progressive revelation.

Nevertheless they knew, even in David's time, that death is the opposite of life, and God is the source of life, and so to die, they thought, was to lose God, to lose His presence and the pleasures of His presence; death wasn't simply about losing our present existence. The Hebrew understanding of death and its aftermath held out little or no hope of resurrection into new life, regardless of whether they were judged righteous or wicked. That's part of the reason why the Sadducees in Jesus' day held to the idea that there was no resurrection, but Jesus put them right **when He said, that** '[God] is not the God of the dead but of the living.' (Matthew 22:32)

Yet, here, is one of those signs that God by His Spirit was revealing something through David, was inspiring hope of a future beyond death. This allows David to speak of knowing the Lord at his own right hand during his earthly life, and so not being shaken and knowing deep gladness and contentment. What is more, in the same psalm, David speaks of a hope of knowing God beyond death, by being at God's right hand for eternity, and so of knowing His presence and pleasures. Trusting is having hope in God, especially in the face of death.

It was a trust also echoed in Jesus, **who said with His last breath, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' (Luke 23:46) It is a trust found in the writings of Paul, **who again said to the Philippians**, 'For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.' (Philippians 1:21) To live now is to know Christ**

by His Spirit, but to die is to go and be with Christ in person.

This hope is only secure because of Jesus. The early church recognised that the language used in Psalm 16 had to point beyond David, because Peter, in his first great sermon recounted to his fellow **Israelites these words:**

'I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. 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. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.'**

(Acts 2:29-32)

Jesus alone was not left in Sheol; by His resurrection, He alone was saved the corruption of His body. As such, Jesus our Lord, is preserved by God, given an eternal inheritance, and so He will never be moved nor shaken, for He is secured from death, and ushered into the presence of the Father where there is fullness of joy.

But because of Easter, through faith in Jesus, we too can share in the victory of Jesus, and so, the hope of Psalm 16 becomes our hope as well through Jesus, because trusting is having our hope in God.

This psalm is a really powerful, challenging prayer, spoken by a man under the influence of the Spirit, amidst uncertain times, dark nights, and yet it is infused with confidence and joy, because David has learnt that

trusting God is having our identity in God, and it is having our hope in God as well.

But how do we cultivate and sustain that kind of trust? Well, clearly this psalm doesn't have all the answers, yet as we saw on Sunday morning, it does give us some important ideas, which I'd like to draw on again tonight.

In the all-age message, I spoke of how thankfulness and praise help to keep our horizon filled with God, because as we realise all that we have from our good heavenly Father, and realise who He is and appreciate all that we have through Jesus, then with thankfulness and praise, we keep our focus on God and sustain our trusting in Him.

One commentator said this: 'trust is not merely a warm feeling or a passing impulse in a time of trouble...it is a structure of acts and experiences that open one's consciousness to the Lord as the supreme reality of life.'

(James L. Mays, *Psalms: Interpretation*)

That's a bit of a weighty statement, but a meaty statement to feed our minds and build our faith. 'Trust...is a structure of acts and experiences that open one's consciousness' – and we might say, keep open one's consciousness. As we said on Sunday, thankfulness and praise keep God at the centre, they keep Him in focus, by keeping us open to Him and conscious of Him. The great and terrible deception of the enemy is to turn our minds from God, to darken them, and make us believe in no god, or that God is distant and uncaring...

But with thankfulness and praise we keep that from happening, we open and keep open our consciousness to God, so that we live consciously before Him and with Him, rather than God being an after thought or put in His box and kept for Sunday.

In the introduction to the reading on Sunday, I spoke of how Google searches for prayer are up significantly since the start of the pandemic. It would be good to pray that in the midst of this, people's consciousness of God would open such that they find Him and come to trust in Him. Yet, let's also pray, that their consciousness stays open, that they go on to live consciously with God for the rest of their lives, bearing a great harvest to His glory.

And let's take note of that for ourselves as well, that we might be doers of the word and not only hear it, for thankfulness and praise are only a few ways given, to us by God, to help sustain this consciousness of God and keep Him at the centre of our horizon and outlook. **If you're looking for more ideas, you might want to review the sermon and material from 17th March last year, it's still on our website by the way. In that service I spoke on spiritual temperaments, and if you review the material then you can figure out which temperaments match you, because each one of us will have ways that help us meet with God and keep us open to Him and centred upon Him. I would also encourage you though to try out the other temperaments, just in case you find a surprising new way of building your trust in God by living consciously before Him.**

In all of this, it's worth noting that David's difficulties did not vanish as he said this prayer. The insecurities of everyday life still remained for him, and they do for us as well. Yet, as we weave in thankfulness and praise, to strengthen and deepen our trust in God, living consciously before Him, we are then empowered through Him to find the path of life, both within and through these painful times, even when we seem to approach the very gates of Sheol itself. I pray that we will be a people who keep trusting in these days, by having our identity and our hope in God as we weave a rhythm of thankfulness and praise into our lives.

May it be so. Amen.